

...But Does It Pay to Be Honest?

Anyone who truly wants success must learn to be honest—even in this dishonest world!

EVERYONE, it seems, agrees that honesty is an ideal to live by. Every major religion teaches honesty. Civil laws exist to enforce it. Individuals and governments claim to want to practice it.

But how many people are really committed to dealing honestly as an ongoing, constant way of life? Examples from around the world are not encouraging:

- A civil servant in a major nation in Southeast Asia has a friend who would also like to work for the government. The civil servant has access to the tests the government used to screen people who apply for jobs. So he “helps” his friend by giving him the answers.

- A certain South American country assumes most of its citizens will cheat on their taxes. So the government raises taxes to excessive levels to gain the minimum funds it requires to function. Honest citizens cannot pay what the government says they owe and still stay solvent.

- In a West African nation, dozens of government officials siphon off tax moneys for personal use. Bribery is common. It is nearly impossible for citizens to obtain even basic services from the government without first paying someone off.

- In a Latin American country citizens accept *la mordida*—the

bite—as a part of life. Most have paid bribes to avoid traffic tickets, to get government documents or to speed service from government agencies.

- The United States, which prides itself on being a “Christian” nation, is again rocked by scandals in government. A poll shows that Americans do not think it possible to have a government free of corruption. And Wall Street investors are accused of illegally using inside information to make millions of dollars on the stock market.

Is it possible to be honest and succeed in a world that is rife with dishonesty? Should we be concerned with being honest anyway?

Yes! Read on.

Flawed Reasoning

Honesty is a crucial factor in personal and national success. Honesty is one of the basic laws of almighty God.

A famous business consultant who taught seminars around the world polled his audiences on the factors it took to succeed. One of the qualities listed by every single group was honesty.

Yet *dishonesty* is rampant in the world! Why? Because people often act dishonestly *without thinking about it*.

The toughest problem to beat is the one we don't see. That is, if we

don't realize it is a problem, we will never think of changing it.

Unfortunately, dishonesty often is an ingrained aspect of culture. It becomes so natural to fail to practice honesty that millions don't stop to think about what they are doing! They fail to see the ultimate consequences of their dishonesty, as opposed to the apparent short-term benefits.



The civil servant who gives his friend test answers is not really helping. The friend ends up frustrated in a job for which he is not qualified, and government effectiveness as a whole suffers because of an incompetent bureaucracy. The civil servant himself may lose his job for unethical conduct.

Governments that thrive on unfair taxes, official corruption and bribery alienate their citizens, cripple national progress and inject a dangerous air of cynicism into their countries' affairs as a whole. Revolution or foreign intervention may ultimately result.

Government scandals in the United States place the nation in the role of a hypocrite when it tries to tell others how to run their internal affairs.

Intelligent people who thoughtfully look at the long-term effects of honesty and dishonesty must come to the conclusion that honesty is the only way that ultimately pays off in success.

And there is a spiritual

dimension to this aspect of success!

The Source of Success

The great God who laid down the Ninth Commandment, the one against lying (Exodus 20:16), is the ultimate source of all true success. Every good and perfect gift comes from him (James 1:17).

God owns the earth and everything in it (Psalms 24:1), and it is God who gives humans the power to acquire prosperity (Deuteronomy 8:18). God's law governs all human efforts, rewarding both now and in the future those who deal honestly and cursing those who deal otherwise.

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unbridled self-interest can sometimes appear to win for the moment. Some who have great natural ability and who cheat in this physical world may gain some small measure of physical success, though even that is by no means assured.

But only by following all of God's laws can anyone hope to enjoy true, complete and lasting success, now and in the long run. God's way is the only course that works for sure in this world!

Dozens of Bible examples show how people who obeyed God's laws about honesty, along with other revealed laws and statutes, succeeded in spite of giant odds against them. Look up and read the stories of Joseph, of David, of Esther, of Paul and of Jesus Christ

himself. Honesty paid for them!

More modern evidence adds further proof.

Simon Bolivar, for instance, who was called the "Liberator of South America," refused to use government money to provide benefits for himself and avoided using power to gain personal influence or advantage. He wrote, "There is no human power that can oblige me to accept a gift that my conscience refuses."

Some 10,000 people were thronging a Chinese department store in the northeastern city of Changchun when the lights went out. Nothing was stolen! People holding goods when the blackout occurred handed them back to staff members. Others lit candles or volunteered to help keep order. Bank notes totaling the equivalent of US\$80,000 were lying out in a bank branch in the store, but not one was taken. Store employees commented, "The store was blacked out, but the customers were a shining example of honesty."

Said the head of a Mexican company that imports industrial machinery: "In my 30 years of business life, in which we have sold the government millions and millions of dollars of equipment, I have never once paid a bribe to make a sale. It is possible for an honest person in Mexico to do business honestly."

Indeed, it is always possible to follow God's law. And it always succeeds! It is the only intelligent course to follow.

Ultimately, in God's soon-to-be-established government over all nations, honesty will be the only policy: "Truth shall spring out of the earth" (Psalms 85:11). Outside that kingdom—in the lake of fire!—will be "whoever loves and practices a lie" (Revelation 22:15; 21:8).

Anyone who truly wants success must learn to be honest, even in this dishonest world. It can be done. And children must be taught to be totally honest. It is a basic key to coming out on top in life.

