

Proverbs 20:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD.

Analysis

Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD. This proverb addresses commercial ethics with stark clarity, condemning dishonest business practices that defraud others through manipulated measurements. The Hebrew *even va'even* (אֶבֶן וְאֶבֶן) literally means "stone and stone," referring to the practice of carrying two sets of weights—heavier ones for buying and lighter ones for selling, thereby cheating both suppliers and customers.

"Divers" means different, varied, or duplicitous—not the honest variety of legitimate trade but deceptive variance designed to exploit. Ancient merchants used stone weights on balance scales to measure grain, precious metals, and other commodities. Unscrupulous traders kept multiple weights: heavy stones to shortchange sellers when purchasing goods, and light stones to overcharge buyers when selling. This systematic deception represented more than occasional dishonesty; it corrupted the entire economic system.

"Abomination to the LORD" (to'avat Yahweh, תוֹעֵבַת יְהוָה) uses the strongest possible language of divine disgust. To'evah describes what is morally repugnant, detestable, utterly offensive to God's character. The same term describes idolatry (Deuteronomy 7:25), sexual immorality (Leviticus 18:22), and other grave sins. Significantly, God doesn't merely disapprove of commercial dishonesty—He finds it abominable, placing it in the same category as the most serious covenant violations.

The principle extends beyond literal weights to all forms of deception in business: false advertising, predatory lending, exploitative contracts, insider trading, accounting fraud, or any practice that uses superior knowledge or position to defraud others. God's law demands absolute integrity in all transactions because economic relationships reflect our relationship with Him. The marketplace becomes a testing ground for genuine righteousness, revealing whether we love neighbor as ourselves or exploit them for personal gain.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern commerce relied heavily on weights and measures since coined money was not yet widespread. Archaeological excavations throughout Israel and surrounding regions have uncovered numerous stone weights, some deliberately altered to different standards. The Law of Moses explicitly condemned this practice: "Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small" (Deuteronomy 25:13-14). The parallel passage continues: "But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened" (v.15), connecting commercial integrity with covenant blessing.

Prophets repeatedly condemned economic injustice. Amos denounced merchants who "make the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit" (Amos 8:5), exploiting the poor through manipulated measurements. Micah 6:11 asks rhetorically: "Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?" Hosea 12:7 describes Canaan as using "the balances of deceit" and loving to oppress.

This concern for economic justice distinguished Israel from surrounding cultures where caveat emptor ruled and exploitation of the vulnerable was accepted. God's law protected the powerless—widows, orphans, foreigners, the poor—who lacked resources to verify measurements or contest fraud. Commercial integrity wasn't merely pragmatic advice but covenant obligation, reflecting God's just character and establishing equitable society.

In the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament, the same issues persisted. James condemned rich oppressors who defrauded laborers (James 5:4). Paul commanded believers to provide "things honest in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:17). Early Christian witness included exceptional business integrity, contributing to the church's growth as people encountered believers whose word and measurements could be trusted absolutely.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What modern business practices might constitute "divers weights and measures"—using different standards to exploit others?
2. Why does God place commercial dishonesty in the same category of "abomination" as sexual immorality and idolatry?
3. How can Christians maintain absolute integrity in business environments where deceptive practices are normalized or even rewarded?
4. In what ways might we unknowingly use "different measures" in our personal relationships—holding others to stricter standards than we apply to ourselves?
5. How does the marketplace serve as a testing ground for genuine faith, revealing whether our Christianity extends beyond private devotion to public ethics?

Interlinear Text

זָבָן זָבָן	זָבָן זָבָן	וְזָבָן זָבָן	וְזָבָן זָבָן
Divers weights	Divers weights	and divers measures	and divers measures
H68	H68	H374	H374
תּוֹשֵׁבַת	לֹא הֵן הִיא	גַּם	שְׁנֵיהֶם:
abomination	to the LORD	of them are alike	both
H8441	H3068	H1571	H8147

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 20:23 (References Lord): Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance is not good.

Proverbs 11:1 (References Lord): A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.