

## Pricing Policy: Fairness and Consistency



In biblical times, merchants used scales in the marketplace to conduct their business. Since there was no common currency, they would weigh out the silver and gold to determine what had been paid, and in some cases weigh out what had been purchased. On one side of the scale they would place the standard measurement weights, and on the other side they would place the silver or gold being used for payment or the product being purchased if sold by weight.

Apparently, it was a common business practice for merchants to have multiple sets of weights. One set would be the true weights, another would be heavier, and yet another would be lighter. The heavier weights were used to make the customer weigh out more silver or gold, to pay more for the same product. The lighter weights were used to weigh out less product, to give the customer less for the same price.

Savvy customers carried their own sets of weights. They had their own set of true weights to keep the merchants honest. Some had heavier and lighter sets as well in order to pay less or get more than other “less sophisticated” customers and/or cheat the “less savvy” merchants.

Now we might say that this manipulation of the weights was just business as usual, that it was merely negotiation, the normal give and take of the marketplace where knowledge, power and leverage determines the winners and losers – a sort of buyer beware and survival of the fittest mentality. We might say that these practices are value neutral, neither ethical nor unethical.

We might say these things, but that is not what God says. We are going to study 10 verses that deal specifically with this common business practice, 10 verses in a business context. In fact, this instruction regarding pricing is God’s most direct, most repeated, most emphatic teaching on business practices in the entire Bible!

### Proverbs 1:1-7

1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

2 To know wisdom and instruction,  
To discern the sayings of understanding,

3 To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and

Proverbs is a book of “wisdom literature.” It is not a book of doctrine, prophecy or history. It is a collection of wise sayings from the heart of God that give insight into the nature of man, into the character of God, and into the sharp contrast between worldviews (God’s wisdom versus man’s foolishness) and the consequences of embracing each. It is an extremely practical book that gives us timeless principles so that we can order our daily lives in accordance with God’s perfect design. It is packed full of business principles, and this is where we will begin this series.

*Leader: Read Proverbs 1:1-7 and have the group say aloud and mark each phrase beginning with “to ... .”*

equity;

4 To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion,

5 A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,

6 To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles.

7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

#### Proverbs 16:11

11 A just balance and scales belong to the Lord; All the weights of the bag are His concern.

#### Proverbs 20:10

10 Differing weights and differing measures, Both of them are abominable to the Lord.

What are the purposes of the book of Proverbs according to this passage?"

Let's discover what Proverbs teaches about pricing.

#### OBSERVE/DISCUSS

*Leader: Read Proverbs 16:11 and ask the group to say aloud and mark **just**.*

This Hebrew word translated **just** was a legal term meaning a correct legal decision, simple justice, the right thing to do in a given set of circumstances.

What is God's interest in this marketplace practice of weighing out money and product?

The Living Bible renders this verse: *The Lord demands fairness in every business deal. He established this principle.*

Paraphrase translations such as The Living Bible do not translate the original language word for word or even thought for thought, but rather they express the translator's interpretation in modern terms. Thus, paraphrase translations are not the best choice for study, but they can be helpful in much the same way commentaries are helpful to complement your individual inductive study. In this case, I believe the translators captured the heart of the principle.

Now, fairness is a broad term and means different things to different people in different circumstances. Let's discover how God defines fairness in business deals.

*Leader: Read aloud the next three proverbs (20:10, 20:23, 11:1) and say aloud and mark **differing, false, abominable** and **abomination**.*

The Hebrew word translated **false** is an antonym of **just**. It means the intentional misleading of someone through distorting or withholding the truth, which God says is deceit and fraud.

**Proverbs 20:23**

23 Differing weights are an abomination to the Lord, And a false scale is not good.

**Proverbs 11:1**

1 A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, But a just weight is His delight.

If “differing weights” and a “false balance” are an abomination to the Lord, how does the Lord define a “fair” business deal according to these verses?

Since we no longer use scales, balances and weights in our business transactions, what is our modern day equivalent of weights, measures and scales?

What is the equivalent of differing weights and measures?

What is the equivalent of a false scale or balance?

Compare and contrast, in business terms and examples, *equal weights* and a *just scale* with *differing weights* and a *false scale* in this chart.

	<i>Equal weights Just scale</i>	<i>Differing weights False scale</i>
<i>Pricing schedule</i>		
<i>Terms and Conditions</i>		
<i>Discount policy: sales, promotions, size of order, time of year</i>		
<i>Negotiable prices</i>		
<i>Products and services</i>		
<i>Other</i>		

Summarize in one or two sentences this biblically-based business principle of “Equal Weights and Measures” (EW&M)

How does the Lord feel about the merchant who uses “differing weights” for different people? How does He feel about the business practices and examples that we listed in that column?

This word translated **abomination** means an abhorrence, disgust, something repulsive. There is no stronger word in the Bible to describe God’s displeasure. If the praises and the prayers of the saints are a sweet aroma to the Lord, abominable practices are a stench! **Abomination, abominations** and **abominable** are used 119 times, mostly in the Old Testament. Let’s survey and categorize the behaviors that are **abominable** to the Lord.

*Leader: Move around the table and ask each member to read one of these verses from their Bible and then identify and write down the abominable behavior.*

- Jeremiah 44:1-6
- Deuteronomy 7:25-26
- Deuteronomy 13:12-14
- Deuteronomy 17:1-4
- Deuteronomy 18:9-14

- Isaiah 1:11-17

What is the “theme” of these behaviors that are **abominable** to the Lord?

Does it surprise you that the Lord considers “differing weights and measures” as abhorrent as idol worship?

Let’s continue our survey.

- Leviticus 18:1-30

Does it surprise you that the Lord considers “differing weights and measures” as abhorrent as sexual immorality?

- Deuteronomy 22:5
- Proverbs 24:9
- Proverbs 26:20-26
- Proverbs 28:9
- Proverbs 12:22
- Proverbs 16:5
- Proverbs 6:16-19

- Proverbs 16:12
- Proverbs 17:15
- Ezekiel 16:49-50
- Ezekiel 18:5-13

What is the “theme” of these behaviors that are **abominable** to the Lord?

Does it surprise you that the Lord considers “differing weights and measures” as abhorrent as stealing and murder?

Does it surprise you that the Lord considers lying, scoffing, gossiping, pride, not caring about the poor and needy, and charging too much interest as **abhorrent** as idol worship, witchcraft, sexual immorality, stealing and murder?

Is this matter of pricing and making fair, honest and consistent business deals important to God? Shouldn't it be important to us?

In contrast to how the Lord feels about these abominable business practices, how does He regard fair and honest business dealings (refer back to Proverbs 16:11 and 11:1)

### **OBSERVE/DISCUSS**

Next, let us look at several passages where the Lord applies this principle of “equal weights and measures” to His people.

**Deuteronomy 25:13-16**

13 "You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a large and a small.

14 "You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small.

15 "You shall have a full and just weight; you shall have a full and just measure, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

16 "For everyone who does these things, everyone who acts unjustly is an abomination to the Lord your God.

**Leviticus 19:33-37**

33 'When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong.

34 'The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.35 'You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity.

36 'You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt.

37 'You shall thus observe all My

*Leader: Explain the context and then read Deuteronomy 25:13-16 and say aloud and mark **just** as you have been doing.*

**CONTEXT**

The theme of Deuteronomy is practical instruction to God's people regarding how to live out the 10 commandments, how to live in the land that God had promised them.

It is an exhortation to the old covenant saints and to us to listen to God's Word to do, to live, to possess all that God has for us while on this earth.

What is God's instruction to His people in this passage and why?

*Leader: Explain the context and then read Leviticus 19:33-37 and have the group say aloud and mark **just** as they did in the previous section.*

**CONTEXT**

The theme of the book of Leviticus is sanctification, the setting apart of God's people from the world. It changes direction in chapter 18 from instruction on how to worship the Lord by following the ceremonial law to instruction on how to worship the Lord by following His moral law.

We understand from the New Testament that we are no longer subject to the ceremonial law, but the Lord's moral law is taught consistently throughout both the old and the new testament.

statutes, and all My ordinances, and do them: I am the Lord.' "

### Amos 8:1-7

1 Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, [there was] a basket of summer fruit.

2 And He said, "What do you see, Amos?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." Then the Lord said to me, "The end has come for My people Israel. I will spare them no longer.

3 "The songs of the palace will turn to wailing in that day," declares the Lord God. "Many [will be] the corpses; in every place they will cast them forth in silence." 4 Hear this, you who trample the needy, to do away with the humble of the land,

5 saying, "When will the new moon be over, So that we may sell grain, And the sabbath, that we may open the wheat [market], To make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger, And to cheat with dishonest scales,

6 So as to buy the helpless for money And the needy for a pair of sandals, And [that] we may sell the refuse of the wheat? "

7 The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob, "Indeed, I will never forget any of their deeds

What is the Lord's instruction regarding doing business with these non-Hebrew people living among them?

Why do you think the Lord gave this instruction?

### OBSERVE/DISCUSS

The final four passages on this subject in the Old Testament are in the books of the prophets.

*Leader: explain the context, read Amos 8:1-7, and have the group say aloud and mark **cheat with dishonest scales**.*

#### CONTEXT

Amos was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel with a message warning them of the coming judgment of their idolatry and wickedness. He uses the word picture of a "basket of fruit" to indicate that the nation is ripe for ruin.

Who does the Lord address beginning in verse 4 and how does He define their "trampling of the needy?"

What business practices are described here? How does the Lord regard them?



**Hosea 12:6-8**

6 Therefore, return to your God,  
Observe kindness and justice, And  
wait for your God continually.  
7 A merchant, in whose hands are  
false balances, he loves to oppress.  
8 And Ephraim said, "Surely I have  
become rich, I have found wealth for  
myself; In all my labors they will find  
in me No iniquity, which [would be]  
sin."

**Micah 6:8-13**

8 He has told you, O man, what is  
good; And what does the Lord require  
of you But to do justice, to love  
kindness, And to walk humbly with  
your God?  
9 The voice of the Lord will call to the  
city-- And it is sound wisdom to fear  
Thy name: "Hear, O tribe. Who has  
appointed its time?  
10 "Is there yet a man in the wicked  
house, [Along with] treasures of  
wickedness, And a short measure  
[that is] cursed?  
11 "Can I justify wicked scales And a  
bag of deceptive weights?  
12 "For the rich men of [the] city are  
full of violence, Her residents speak  
lies, And their tongue is deceitful in

*Leader: Explain the context and read Hosea 12:6-8.*

**CONTEXT**

Hosea followed Amos with a message of love and hope to the northern kingdom (Israel) before, during and after God's judgment and the Assyrian captivity. In chapter 12, the Lord is pointing out the wickedness of the people, making one final appeal for repentance.

God is pleading with His people to return to Him. What is their response in this passage?

Note how they rationalize this. Does this sound familiar?

*Leader: explain the context, read Micah 6:8-15, and have the group say aloud and mark **wicked** and **deceptive**.*

**CONTEXT**

Micah was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah during the time the northern kingdom was judged by the Lord (they did not heed Amos' warning) using the Assyrians to conquer and punish the people. Micah is warning Judah that God's judgment will come upon them next if they do not repent as a nation.

In this chapter Micah points out that the nation's sins of ingratitude to God, religious pretense, idolatry and dishonesty (sound familiar?) will lead to certain punishment.

Our passage begins with the Lord's answer to the question of how a man should approach God in the midst of such sin.

their mouth.

13 "So also I will make [you] sick, striking you down, Desolating [you] because of your sins.

14 "You will eat, but you will not be satisfied, And your vileness will be in your midst. You will [try to] remove [for safekeeping], But you will not preserve [anything], And what you do preserve I will give to the sword. 15 "You will sow but you will not reap. You will tread the olive but will not anoint yourself with oil; And the grapes, but you will not drink wine.

#### Ezekiel 45:9-14

9 'Thus says the Lord God, "Enough, you princes of Israel; put away violence and destruction, and practice justice and righteousness. Stop your expropriations from My people," declares the Lord God.

10 "You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath.

11 "The ephah and the bath shall be the same quantity, so that the bath may contain a tenth of a homer, and the ephah a tenth of a homer; their standard shall be according to the homer.

12 "And the shekel shall be twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, twenty-five

What is the Lord's answer to the question?

Then the Lord contrasts what He is yearning to see among His people with what He does see. What does the Lord see instead of justice, kindness and humility?

How does He describe what the rich business men in the city are doing?

What does the Lord promise to do to them?

*Leader: explain the context, read Ezekiel 45:9-14, and have the group say aloud and mark **just**.*

#### CONTEXT

Judah did not heed the warning of Micah and was eventually judged by God for their sin and put into captivity in Babylon. Ezekiel was a prophet during this time and he prophesied the rebuilt temple and the return of justice to the people, pointing also to the Messiah's return (second coming) to rule and reign on the earth.

This passage deals with civil authority. The Hebrew word translated here "expropriations" means stealing by transferring ownership of others' possessions to oneself – like the keeping of collateral in an improper, unfair business deal. A legal transfer in an unethical business deal is still stealing in God's eyes.

shekels, [and] fifteen shekels shall be your maneh.

13 "This is the offering that you shall offer: a sixth of an ephah from a homer of wheat; a sixth of an ephah from a homer of barley;

14 and the prescribed portion of oil ([namely,] the bath of oil), a tenth of a bath from [each] or ([which is] ten baths [or] a homer, for ten baths are a homer);

What were the princes – those in civil authority – doing to the people, and how were they doing it?

In contrast, how does God define justice and righteousness?

*Leader: direct the group to the summary chart at the end of the study, discuss, and summarize the Old Testament teaching on equal weights and measures.*

Lest anyone think this is an old covenant teaching not applicable to us today, let us look at some new testament passages that are relevant to our study.

*Leader: Explain the context and ask the group to read aloud from their Bibles the following passages, noting what Jesus did and why.*

#### CONTEXT

The priests had a real racket going in the temple. The law required the people to bring prescribed offerings to the temple on prescribed days. They forced the common people to purchase their animal sacrifices from only the "approved" vendors operating in the temple area by always finding an unacceptable blemish on animals brought in from the outside. In addition, they required that all transactions be conducted with the temple currency, thus the moneychangers were able to rip the people off with unfair exchange rates, no doubt taking advantage particularly of the Jews coming to Jerusalem from other lands.

- John 2:13-16
- Matthew 21:12-13

- Mark 11:15-17
- Luke 19:45-46

What did Jesus think of this “profiteering” (refer back to our last study on price setting) and these “unequal weights and measures” in the temple marketplace?

What does He think of your “weights and measures,” of your “scales and balances?”

Up to this point, we have focused exclusively on the principle of equal weights and measures from the perspective of the seller. **But what about the buyer, what about the buyer who demands unequal weights and measures for their benefit?** There is an interesting verse in Proverbs that sheds some light on this question.

*Leader: Read Proverbs 20:14.*

What do you think the buyer is boasting about?

Is there a difference in God’s eyes between bargain hunting and deception?

How does this relate to the principle of equal weights and measures in the marketplace? Do you think the Lord approves of this approach to buying? Why or why not?

**Proverbs 20:14**

14 “Bad, bad,” says the buyer;  
But when he goes his way then he  
boasts.

## BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES DISCOVERED

- **The Lord demands fairness in every business deal. He established this principle.**
  - **Fairness** is always using **equal weights and measures** (honest, objective and fully disclosed pricing), and **true scales and balances** (consistent application of the pricing schedule) to determine what customers pay and what they receive.
  - **Unfairness** is using **unequal weights and measures**, and **false scales and balances**, to deceptively cause some customers to pay more for the same product/service, other customers to receive less for the same price.
- **Doing business fairly delights the Lord, but unfair business practices are an abomination to the Lord.**
  - Unequal weights and measures, false scales and balances, are **sinful** business practices and particularly **offensive to the Lord** because they hurt the poor, weak, honest and most trusting people the hardest.
  - The Lord considers these unfair business practices as abominable as worshipping false gods, sexual immorality, stealing, and even murder.
  - The Lord wants His people to be set-apart, holy, in business.
- **The Lord judges these unfair business practices.**
  - He judges individuals (they will never be satisfied with what they have gained, they will lose it all, the Lord will oppress them, the Lord must judge sin.)
  - He judges nations (pervasive corrupt business practices are indicative of a nation that has turned away from the Lord and always go hand in hand with the other abominations that the Lord must judge.)

## BUSINESS APPLICATION

1. Does your business operate with "equal weights and measures?" Ask yourself the following questions:
  - a. If all my customers knew what and how I priced and charged each one of them, would I still price this way?
  - b. If a customer asks me, after a price has been determined, if this is my best price, what do I say? Is my answer the truth or a lie?
  - c. Do I reward customers who demand discounts and special treatment and let the "nice" or "naive" customers pay more and/or get less?
  - d. When I charge a customer a different price than others, can I explain that difference rationally and unabashedly to the customer who paid more or received less? Do I apply these different prices consistently so that everyone meeting the criteria receives the same price?
2. Based on what we have learned in this study, how you answered the questions, and that still small voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart, are your pricing practices a delight or an abomination to the Lord?

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## Addendum

### Principle

The Lord demands fairness in every business deal. This is His design for business.

### Differing Weights

Do not cheat or take advantage of any of your customers – especially the poor, the powerless, the naïve and the outsider – by charging them more or giving them less through deception and manipulation.

### Just scale/balance

Treat all customers with the same objective and consistent standards.

### Discounting Policy

All customers meeting the same objective criteria are entitled to the same price.

#### Criteria:

- Nature of customer relationship – tenure, \$ spent
- Ability to pay
- Geographic region (if travel required)
- Volume of business
- Terms and conditions
- Means of placing order (internet vs phone)
- Promotions
- Professional courtesy

### Exceptions

Principles: (1) not for personal gain; (2) lean towards grace and mercy

Luke 6:20-31	"golden rule", open-hearted, open-handed, generous
Philippians 2:1-7	WWJD, servant hood, look out for other person's interests
James 2:13	Mercy triumphs over judgment
Colossians 3:22-4:1	Do work as unto the Lord, if not boss, boss takes responsibility
Eph 5:1-4	Appearances matter
James 4:17	Sins of omission, personal convictions
Proverbs 16:2	What is the motive of your heart?

## Summary of Old Testament Teaching on Equal Weights and Measures

Book	Context	Business Instruction
Proverbs	Wisdom literature, God's design for living, general principles for life.	The Lord is concerned about fairness in the marketplace, especially for the innocent. Unequal weights and measures (unfair, deceptive or manipulative pricing policy) is an ABOMINATION to God, while pricing fairly and honestly is His DELIGHT.
Deuteronomy	Instruction to nation of Israel how they were to live out the 10 commandments in the land God had promised to give them, how to possess all that God had planned for them.	The Lord includes business in His instruction to the people. He warns that if they engage in unfair, false pricing schemes that they will not be allowed to stay in the land because this behavior is an ABOMINATION to Him.
Leviticus	The theme is sanctification, how to live and worship the Lord by following His Word.	The Lord instructs the people that how they conduct business, specifically how they price and measure and deal with non-Jews, is a moral issue. God's set-apart people should also do business in a set-apart manner.
Amos	Prophet to northern kingdom during their prosperity. Warns people of coming judgment for their idolatry and wickedness.	The Lord considers dishonest business wicked and a form of idolatry. The Lord is going to judge them for eagerly cheating the poor and humble in business with dishonest scales and unequal measures.
Hosea	Followed Amos with a message of love and hope to the northern kingdom before during and after the judgment that Amos prophesied via the Assyrian captivity.	The Lord calls Ephraim (synonymous with Israel) to return to God and observe kindness and justice, but instead their merchants oppress and cheat the people in the marketplace with false balances. And when confronted, they rationalize that the ends justify the means.
Micah	Prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah during the northern kingdom's judgment. Warned that they will be judged also if they do not repent.	The Lord contrasts what He is yearning to see with what He does see – using their business practices to illustrate their injustice, violence and pride. The Lord cannot condone their wicked scales and deceptive weights, and not only will the nation be judged, but the individuals will suffer terrible consequences
Ezekiel	Judah did not heed Micah's warnings. Prophet to the southern kingdom during their judgment and the Babylonian captivity.	When Israel is restored (after Christ's return), civil authorities will no longer cheat and steal from the people with unjust balances and measures as they collected taxes.