

## Do You Think This is an Odd Pair?

Quick! Fill in the blank...

The rich and \_\_\_\_\_.

You might have thought of a synonym like wealth: *The rich and wealthy*. You might have thought of something that compares with, or goes along with rich, like power: *The rich and powerful*. Or, you might have considered a contrasting idea, like poor: *The rich and poor*.

My simple point is that there are *familiar* ways that things are paired together. With that thought in mind, take a look at this proverb:

**Better is a poor man who walks in integrity  
Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool.** —Proverbs 19:1

What did you expect to be paired with ‘poor man’?

It might not be obvious at first, but the ‘poor man’ is compared to ‘the fool,’ i.e. ‘the foolish man.’ The poor man’s way of life is described by the phrase, ‘*who walks in integrity*.’ The fool’s way is described by the phrase, ‘*who is perverse in speech*.’ Now that we have the parts matched up, how do we make sense of this saying?

The word ‘poor’ in this proverb is comes from one of eleven Hebrew words to describe the poor. It is used almost exclusively by Solomon and indicates *destitution*. How does it strike your mind that a *destitute* person would walk in integrity? In many ways *poverty* and *integrity* are odd partners. A man who is *destitute* lacks the basic needs of life. He probably does not have a place to live (homeless). He has nothing that resembles a *wardrobe*, but only the clothing on his back. He does not have enough food. It is an understatement to say that he is in need.

Now, imagine a *destitute* man with integrity. That means that even though he has virtually

nothing, he is a man of good character. He is an honest man, reliable and fair in his dealings with others. He is morally good. Judging him by his worldly possessions, he is empty, worthless; yet judging him by his character, he is complete.

Compared to the poor man of integrity is the *fool who is perverse in speech*. Used primarily in the Book of Proverbs the Hebrew word for *perverse* means to *twist* or *make crooked*. It is used to describe sin. So, perverse speech suggests the sin of *deception*.

Perverse speech describes the way of *the fool*. It is curious that this Hebrew term for fool literally means *to be fat*. It has a positive sense of *strength*, though it is usually used in a negative sense of *heaviness* and *inactivity*, therefore, *stupidity* and *foolishness*. However, the idea of *strength* appears to fit this verse when compared to a parallel proverb (Proverbs 28:6).

**Better is the poor who walks in his integrity  
Than he who is crooked though he be rich.**

In both proverbs crookedness or perversity of speech might even be the means by which the individual became strong/rich.

The lesson is simple, but so difficult for people to embrace:

We would all agree that it is better to be *strong/rich* than to be *destitute*. However, if strength and riches are accompanied by sin, they are of no real value. **The man of integrity is better off even if he is destitute of the world’s goods.**

So, “*Do I have to give up my possessions to be a man or woman of integrity?*” Wrong question!

Rather, we should ask ourselves: “*Am I a man/woman of integrity?*”

**Do you value integrity???**