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THE DESTRUCTIVE COST OF DECEPTION

By Rick Boxx

When I began my banking career, among my responsibilities was the investigation of bank frauds. One of the fraud cases I worked on concerned a bank president who apparently had determined his salary and benefits, although very sizable, were not enough.

To “correct” this problem, this top banking executive began producing false travel expense reports, claiming that he was driving to corporate headquarters, four hours each way, multiple times a month. As his spending habits continued to grow, so did the scope of his deception. His insatiable desire for more caused him to become more aggressive with his falsified travel claims.

As is so often the case, however, the executive’s fraudulent activities could not be concealed forever. A bank teller uncovered the fraud and reported the bank president’s actions. He was arrested, tried in a court of law, convicted of fraud, and sent to prison.

Sadly, fraudulent practices are common in our times, perhaps even rampant. Whether it is the financial industry, manufacturing, retailing or any other field of endeavor, there are those who are not satisfied with what they have. People once highly regarded and held positions of authority have seen their lives destroyed, driven by greed, pride, envy, jealousy, and other motivations the Bible defines as “sin.”

We can learn much from the Scriptures about such practices, warnings of the severe consequences that can result – not only for the individuals committing dishonest acts, but also to their families and many who trusted and relied upon them. Here are some examples:

Destructive power of insatiable greed. When desire is not controlled, the answer to the question, “How much is enough?” is always, “Just a little bit more.” *“Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man”* (Proverbs 27:20). *“A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live”* (Proverbs 15:27).

Temporary rewards with permanent consequences. Fraud always focuses on short-term objectives, ignoring the long-term ruin such dishonesty can cause – to one’s job, a career, a reputation, a life. *“Dishonest money dwindles away, but whoever gathers money little by little makes it grow”* (Proverbs 13:11). *“Ill-gotten treasure is of no value, but righteousness delivers from death”* (Proverbs 10:2).

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Wisdom of choosing contentment over the lust for more. Determining to be satisfied with whatever we have and resolving to advance one's career with integrity and high ethical standards, can prevent unimaginable pain and suffering. *"Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown You and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God"* (Proverbs 30:8-9).

Can you even conceive of what it must have been like for that bank president, caught up in a web of lies and deception, knowing that at any moment his acts of fraud could be exposed and his life and everything around him could be destroyed? Learning to discipline ourselves to live within our financial means is more profitable than dishonesty, with all its potential penalties.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think it is so appealing to some people to commit acts of fraud, whether making false expense claims, embezzling, or stealing?
2. Even being aware of severe consequences, these individuals still move forward with their deceptive schemes. Why is it those possible penalties – even being sentenced to prison – do not serve as sufficient for deterring their dishonesty?
3. What steps can a person take to avoid the temptations of taking ethical or moral shortcuts, all in the pursuit of greedy and selfish desires?
4. How can one's faith in God and understanding of principles from the Bible serve as safeguards against falling into such temptations?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
Proverbs 10:9, 11:3, 13:6, 15:16, 17:23, 20:17; Matthew 6:13; 1 Corinthians 10:12-13

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