

# The Integrity of the Upright

## *Proverbs 11:3*

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*“The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.” - Proverbs 11:3.*

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The verse here is divided in to two sections, each addressing a different “kind” of individual. The first uses the Hebrew word “tummâ” (toom maw) which is a relatively uncommon word in the OT, being used but 5 times. It carries the idea of purity, innocence, respectability and the like. It is what is known as a “construct” form of the noun. The idea is that the form given of the noun is tied in a definite way to the verb that follows (shall guide). There is, in this statement, a definite and sure relationship between the “integrity” of the one in view and guidance that this “integrity” yields or provides to him/her. There is also the implication here that (or shall) guide them as they walk through life and face life’s issues and trials.

I think that we all have at least a bit of a grasp on the idea of integrity and the way that this character trait has the profound effect on a person. For many, this concept of human integrity and the effect that it can have (and hopefully DOES have) on our behavior is fairly common. It is commonly thought of as a positive and valuable quality, to be seem with esteem and developed with some real zeal. The word is one rarely used in the Hebrew OT. “Toom-maw” being used only 5 time in the OT. It could be rendered as purity or innocence and so, in the context of one’s character carries the idea of innocence or respectability, speaking of a spotless character.

Solomon, in this particular place, has this spotlessness in character in his view in this first part of our verse. He does not seem to be speaking of the idea of innocence so much as the idea of that moral capacity which has led to the innocence in the first place! As we have seen as we have considered other, nearby passages, King Solomon has been making clear a contrast in life and conduct in matters of work, diligence, ambition, speech, truth, stability, honesty, integrity, fidelity, guidance, graciousness, kindness, and so on that he began back at the beginning of chapter 10 and will continue through to the end of chapter 11.

Many commentators to note (here and many other places in Proverbs) that what Solomon describes in terms like he uses here speak in numerous fashions of the path of righteousness and, Solomon being a Prophet of God, is ultimately descriptive and prophetic of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the perfectly Righteous One (John 14:6). Here and in other places in the Book, we can clearly see that all other ways lead to destruction (cp. Matt. 7:13–14; Acts 4:12).

Taking the verse as a whole, it contrasts two lifestyles, affirming the value of integrity. The upright live with integrity—blamelessness—and that integrity

leads them in success and happiness. Those who use treachery will be destroyed by it. That is actually the essential point of the second phase of the verse.

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<sup>3</sup> *The integrity of the upright will guide them,  
But the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them.*

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Whereas on the one hand, in the lives of those who have (and live) upright lives, founded on integrity and demonstrating that upright character and in the various matters and affairs of their lives Solomon tells that that this quality acts as a guide, with the implication that this “guide” isn’t just one acting in a few matters, but, rather as a general guide in all of life. “Guide” is a somewhat more common word in the OT (tanhē) being used 39 time in the OT as a whole. It is used of both physical guidance as in the idea of giving directions from one place to another. It is also used to speak, as it is here, in the act of advice or mental/emotional guidance in the matters and affairs that face us as we walk through our lives.

The point Solomon is seeking to put forth here is that the very basic moral quality of Integrity is fundamental to many things in life. As such stands to “guide” one is virtually every area in which the need to make decisions and take direction.

In contrast, he speaks of the matter of “perversity” as that which has a corresponding negative effect. Note first that this second phrase begins with the contrasting conjunction “but” used to set the two halves of the idea, one against the other. “Perversity” only occurs twice in the OT and refers to misrepresenting or presenting info or ideas that can lead to ruin. It is not merely that which is morally wrong (as we think of it in our time) but rather it is some form of thinking or pursuit that leads to crookedness. The implication is that this “guidance” is, at least to some degree, done with the knowledge or purpose of the end effect. There are many “ways” in our pursuit of the various paths of life that can end in a crooked way. But, what Solomon has in mind for us seems surely to be the taking of a route that is knowingly perverse.

That being said, it is easily understood how Solomon can tell us that this “end path” is one of destruction.

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This second part of the verse also adds to the idea that this “perversity” is a knowing one, seeing as Solomon speaks of the one who takes such a path as “the unfaithful”. This word is, of itself, interesting. In this context, it speaks of the fact, that those who deal perversely, will see those choices and purposes result in their destruction, a totally unexpected and unprofitable end result. “Unfaithful, in fact, really speaks of those who deal treacherously or perversely. “To destroy” here speaks of an utterly useless and destructive finish.

The point here is to uphold the quality of integrity and that which ought to be pursued and taken as character quality to be embraced. Opposed and clearly

held as virtually the opposite of this is the matter of perversity as pursued by the unfaithful ones. The end results held as goals to be desired and pursued are good and solid, profitable guidance in whatever situation one has in mind. That, contrasted with the destruction or utter failure in success and wisdom that comes when one chooses those paths that misrepresent and mislead.

To rethink our interpretation - Integrity is whole-heartedness. Uprightness is straightforwardness. Given these two, and the pathway of safety will surely be kept. Whereas “the faithless,” who conceal malicious thoughts and plans, will try crooked ways, leading sooner or later to destruction. Perfect honesty in dealing with our neighbor is here contrasted with subtle, underhand, false dealings, and commended as “the good and the right way.”

As is consistently the case in Biblical matters, there are some illustrations that serve to clarify and help with the application of these ideas:

- Ahitophel and Joab were both of them men who took crafty and treacherous measures to compass their ends.
  - The first, disloyal to his king, sought to betray him into the hands of his wicked son, and brought shame and ruin on his own hoar head.
  - The other, jealous of a rival, assassinated him under cover of friendship, and in the end, himself sued in vain for mercy at the horns of the altar.
- Whereas Joseph and Daniel, by their guileless loyalty and simple integrity of purpose, were enabled to steer their course safely through the intrigues of foreign courts, winning esteem and confidence and prosperity in the long run.

To think by way of application - It surely has proved itself true in my dealings with others in this fashion... Let me aim at simplicity of purpose, honesty, and candor. Like Nathanael, a Christian should be without guile. He should put on “*the breastplate of righteousness.*”

The way of the world is tortuous; its wisdom is that of the serpent. Its words are “softer than butter,” while war is in its heart. It dissembles, to conceal wrath, till the opportunity for revenge is come. It smites unawares, perhaps after a friendly kiss. But can such perfidy be pleasing to Him who is “*the Truth*”? And is it not certain to provoke requitals, and to lead to misery, if not ruin? Be it my purpose and habit to deal openly with an enemy, if such I have. Let me tell him to his face his fault, and if he will not hear me, let me tell it to the Church, or at least to some spiritual overseer, who may act as a go-between. If this fail, the fault will not be mine. And so, in all matters of business and in the social relations of life—

*Oh for a single eye to see my duty, and for a heart “without folds,”  
to aim at nothing else, that I may go straight forward, and avoid  
the pitfalls of the enemy!*

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