

INTEGRITY

WHATEVER the achievements of any man – in scholarship, position or material wealth- he can never command the respect of decent people in society if he has no integrity. According to the Scriptures, integrity is a safe guide to those who have it. A man of integrity is a man of noble character and of an excellent spirit.

The word *integrity* is defined as meaning uprightness of character – that is, the state of being honest, just, honourable and sincere. Figuratively, it is the controlled realisation of all the component aspects of one's personality.

From the definition given, we can at once understand that it is lack of Integrity that makes men and women commit acts of immorality, dishonesty and such like even though they know that it is evil to do them.

Practical Example

Esau, one of the twin sons of Isaac, is a practical example of a man who has no integrity. He gave himself to carnal things, and for a mess of pottage when he suffered from hunger he sold his birthright to Jacob, his younger brother! (Genesis 25: 29-34) If he were a godly man who had integrity, he would rather have preferred to die of hunger than, for a single meal, to part with his birthright.

Christians are warned against the ungodly conduct of Esau. In his epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul stated: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God...lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance though he sought it carefully with tears." – Hebrews 12: 14-17.

Today, there are people who behave like Esau. Because they lack integrity they often conduct themselves improperly at social gatherings or on other occasions whenever meals or drinks are served. They look at the dishes or bottles of beer with greedy eyes" and as soon as the table is declared open they eat and drink without any sense of moderation or dignity, and manifest all the traits of a glutton.

But people who have respect for themselves always like to maintain their integrity. They are temperate in all things: in speech they are moderate and in behaviour they show self-control. For all these they are held in high esteem. It is clearly shown in the Scriptures that temperance or moderation is a Christian virtue. St. Paul stated that the fruit of the Spirit is temperance

(Galatians 5: 22, 23); and he admonished: "Let your moderation be known unto all men". – Philippians 4: 5.

In a certain town in one of the African States, there was a man who for lack of integrity was made an object of ridicule. He was depraved in character – he sexed lawlessly with young and even old women and seduced ungodly married women from their husbands. He was often penalised and made to pay damages because of his evil deeds. In the long run he died young. However, there was an aspect of his life which needs be pointed out to teach others some lesson. When it became known that the man had no integrity being an immoral character he was always suspected of sinister motives or indecorous manners whenever he was found talking to any woman even if his intentions were good. This man, until his death, was never a happy soul.

"Useless Bosses"

Integrity is a very good thing, and every Christian is required to be honest and upright in the service of God. King David, in his song, prayed to God: "O keep my soul, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust in Thee. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on Thee." (Psalm 25: 20, 21) There was need for him to pray for integrity because he knew what he suffered for seducing his neighbour's wife. (2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12).

There are some people who are highly placed in this world but because they have no integrity they are not given their due respect. An executive officer who is often found flirting with his female secretary or typist or known to be making immoral advances to loose women is selling away his honour. Responsible, decent women who work with executive or senior officers of such a character see them as "useless bosses". This same opinion was expressed by a lady secretary as published in the *SPEAR* magazine issue of April, 1969. About "making love in the office", she said: "This is very true. A few girls who are not efficient in their work try to appease their bosses by offering their bodies so that they can still be kept in the office. And once these useless bosses get enjoyment and satisfaction there will be no complaint."

There are complaints that certain heads of departments are fond of demanding bribes or "tips" from the workers under them. By their indulgence in bribery such high officers are not only committing sin but are also making themselves very mean.

The Psalmist said in his prayer: "Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide...Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men. In whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes. But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity, redeem me, and be merciful unto me." – Psalm 26: 1,9-11.

Uprightness

Despite the shortcomings of David for which he fully repented, God was pleased with him because of the integrity of his heart. To Solomon, the son of David, God said: "And if thou wilt work before me, as David thy father walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep my statutes and my judgments, then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, there shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel." – 1 Kings 9: 4, 5.

Job was also a man of integrity. Although the devil subjected him to severe temptations he did not deny God neither did he turn away from righteousness; rather "still he holdeth fast his integrity". (Job 2: 3) When his faithless wife became despondent because of the severity of the test, she said to her husband: "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die." But Job's answer reflected faith, manliness and real integrity. He told her bluntly: "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lipss." – Job 2: 9, 10.

What is more, Job himself declared: "All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils; my lips shalt not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. Till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go." – Job. 27: 3-6.

Is it not true that certain so-called Christians become lukewarm in their religious devotions when they fall into temptations of the devil? Do some not resort to idolatry when they or their children are sick? And when for some time they get no employment, do they not consult oracle men or occultists contrary to God's laws? (Deuteronomy 18. 10-12, Isaiah. 8:19).

A certain man, because his beautiful wife died, said that there was no God. It was his opinion that God ought not to have allowed his wife to die if He existed. His temptation was not in any way comparable to that of Job but since he had no faith or integrity he fell fiat. Whereas in the case of Job, his faith, integrity and patience brought him abundance of reward. "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (Job. 42: 12-17) And St. James wrote: Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." – James. 5: 10. 11.

We as Christians should always maintain our integrity by doing things in the fear of God and with faith. We must not allow the devil through ungodly friends or relatives to turn us from the path of rectitude or the faith of Christ. Said God through Solomon: "My son, if sinners, entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause. Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole as those that go down into the pit. We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil. Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse. My son walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path. For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood." – Proverbs. 1: 10-16.

No one can lead a true Christian life without integrity. The Bible says: "The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressor shall destroy them," (Proverbs 11: 3) Again it is written: "The just man walketh in his integrity; his children are blessed after him" – Proverbs 20:7.

A woman of integrity will never because of the love of carnal things like money, gold, silver, clothes, cars, ultra- modern flats and so on, run away from her husband to "marry" another man. It is a foolish and ungodly woman that does so, and God will certainly punish her except she repents enough. What is important in a woman is not wealth, worldly fashion, beauty or her education but the fear of God and integrity which must be reflected in good manners. King Solomon stated: "A gracious woman retaineth honour..." (Proverbs 11; 16) And he further said: "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband; but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones." – Proverbs 12: 4.

Clean Hands

A man or woman who is poor but has integrity is better than a rich man or woman who is of a shady or dubious character. A man may ride in cars or live in a beautiful house and yet will not inspire respect if he has no integrity. Said King Solomon: "Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich." – Proverbs 28:6."

To have clean hands and keep a clear conscience is very good indeed. It inspires self-confidence. If you have no guilty conscience, you sleep well and good in the night and will not be haunted by the fear of law officers. Whenever you come across a policeman you will have no cause to fidget or quail in heart. Yes, the Bible says: "He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known." – Proverbs 10: 9.

Some highly placed persons are sometime asked to relinquish their offices because of what is often termed an abuse of trust. They usually start well, but later succumb to evil influences owing to their lust for filthy lucre which makes them throw their integrity to the wind, and end up in disgrace. It was Solomon who said: "Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off an evil odour; so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honour." – Ecclesiastes 10: 1. *Revised Standard Version.*

In order that we may be saved, we are required to live up to expectation in the Lord. Anyone who calls himself a Christian but goes about stealing, taking bribes, telling lies, committing fornication or perpetrating any other form of wicked act, is deceiving himself; he will be justly punished and cannot obtain God's salvation. – Proverbs 11:19,21; 2 Corinthians 5: 10; Revelation 21: 8.

As regards the qualities of those who deserve to remain in God's Organisation to enjoy His goodness, the Psalmist stated: "LORD, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury. nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved." – Psalm 15: 1-5.

And what is more, St. Paul said: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." – Philippians 4: 8, 9.

Yes, "The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them." – Proverbs 11: 3.