

THE INTEGRITY OF SOME PEOPLE, AS WELL AS STATE OFFICIALS, FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Through this study we will present the scriptural image of some examples of honest people, either in their personal lives or in relation to their peers, the church of their time, as well as state officials, in difficult political situations, personalities who have remained for posterity as models of integrity in their service in the state apparatus where for a period of time they worked. These examples taken for analysis were Deacon Stephen, Joseph, Nehemiah and Job, who did not compromise in any way, remaining models of life and ministry.

Keywords: *integrity, character, society, life, ministry, Biblical perspective*

Through this study we will present the scriptural image of some examples of honest people, either in their personal lives or in relation to their peers, the church of their time, as well as state officials, in difficult political situations, personalities who have remained for posterity as models of integrity in their service in the state apparatus where for a period of time they worked. Integrity, contrary to what we generally understand, is based on a belief, on a principle to which man binds himself with all his might. The Holy Apostle Paul wrote to the Jews: “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.”¹ We thus observe that the Holy Scripture follows this process of education, of growth, because it wants to form victorious people, strong people, honest people, and all those who will reach heaven will be victorious, because

¹ Hebrews 13:7.

they will receive a laurel wreath, and this can only be received by the winners, the victors. Just as on Earth the victors are sung their national anthem, for those who will be victorious and reach Heaven, will be sung the song of the victors, and one of the qualities necessary for the victors is integrity. Cennino Cennini, in his famous treatise on painting, taught his disciples in the arts that if they wanted to become masters, they must first learn from their masters, so they must learn their art from them and then make copies after them, so that they can discover themselves and become masters. This aspect is especially presented by St. Apostle Paul in order to learn from the masters of faith presented in the Holy Scripture, in order to discover ourselves and follow the example of faith and integrity of others. That said, integrity can be learned by example. Apostle Paul advises to look at leaders, to study them, and to follow their example. Another great man of Scripture, Deacon Stephen, a man who was like a meteorite, appeared for a very short time, appearing in a situation of conflict with his opponents, with the Jews, who had no argument against him. (Acts 6: 8-10) Deacon Stephen won the battle of ideas, and his opponents won the battle of stones. Each of the two sides was strong where they could. In primitive politics it was considered that whoever stood in your way should be suppressed. Stephen was strong in the ideas presented, winning the battle of speech, while the others were strong in stones and won the battle of stones, but in his speech, Deacon Stephen says some very simple things: "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt; but God was with him, And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house."²

The apostle Paul writes that God was with him and saved him from all his troubles and gave him grace and wisdom ... then he was appointed ruler over Egypt and over all his house. Such a thing is hard to accept, a slave who arrived in Egypt in chains, to become the country's prime minister in a few years. Such a thing was not easy to meet and accept, and the Egyptians were a fairly balanced and very conservative people, with a categorical attitude of rejecting foreign influences, and precisely this fact by which the Egyptians admit that they have no other better man, more capable, who could get them out of the terrible famine that was to come, or who could handle the crisis better than Joseph. Joseph had an essential

² Acts 7:9-10.

quality, that of trusting in God completely, but God was the One who intervened, who gave him the wisdom to speak before Pharaoh.

Deacon Stephen says that the patriarchs, and speaks not in general terms, like the sons of Jacob, but in the most appropriate and respectful term, namely the patriarchs, the basic people of the people of Israel, who laid the foundation of the Jewish nation, these patriarchs envied Joseph. Why did they envy him for he was their brother? Due to the fact that Joseph had a special integrity, when they spoke, as boys talk about girls, when they talked about gossip, when they made various bad plans, Joseph was always ready to tell them that certain things are not compatible with them, because they are the sons of Jacob, they are not Canaanites, but they represent God, not being heathen, with the conviction that God will one day give them that land as well. Joseph was always ready to come up with something else, something positive, something to bring honor, and it was this fact that bothered his brothers. They, considering that he was not even the eldest of them and having all sorts of strange dreams, came to envy him precisely for this integrity of his, which was annoying to them.

Integrity means fidelity to certain principles. Joseph knew the Ten Commandments from his father and from his grandfather. His great-grandfather, Abraham, commanded his house: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."³

Joseph, Abraham's great-grandson, considered that he could not compromise those principles, because they represented them, they distinguished between their tribe and the rest of the Canaanites, because God had made a covenant with them promising them that land. Integrity means to remain steadfast, to remain faithful, to fully represent the rules, principles, and covenant made, either with someone (husband, wife, boss, institution, etc.), or with God. This kind of man was Joseph, and for his integrity he came to be envied and sold as a slave. Living in a relative world, where any evil is possible, especially since the Devil was also thrown onto Earth, being overwhelmed with great anger, because he knows that he has little time to activate. Joseph arrives as a slave in Egypt, but in a short period he is noticed (diligent, correct, intelligent) and then promoted, having responsibilities over others, until he becomes

3 Genesis 18:19.

responsible over the whole house of Potiphar, reaching from the position of slave to one to give orders, but here in Potiphar's house he has another trap, being probably a handsome, intelligent young man, the wife of his master Potiphar fell in love with him. It is quite rare for a man to resist a woman's temptations. It happens that a woman resists a man's temptations and says: no, but for a man to resist a woman's temptations is something much rarer. Joseph is the man who says no, and says so categorically and motivates his answer: "And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what *is* with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; *There is* none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou *art* his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, *or to be with her.*"⁴

How could I do such great harm? Maybe he was told: where is your God? You see here you are a slave, without a father, without a mother, without any of your kin, you are among strangers, you have to settle here, because that is life. Regardless of the consequences, Joseph acknowledges that God has been with Him, and he wants to remain faithful to God, wholeheartedly. The divine command told him not to commit such a sin, and he was willing to bear any consequences other than to break the divine command. Thus, after Joseph became a slave in Egypt, he ended up in prison there. Although some might say that the attitude of always remaining upright only brings harm and inconvenience. With all the unpleasant consequences that come upon him, the honest man eventually comes out well and ends up on top. Joseph was on top among his brethren, he was on top among his fellow slaves in the house of Potiphar the Egyptian, he was on top among his fellow prisoners in the Egyptian prison. Even if he was uncomfortable, it was still preferable, because his integrity was appreciated even by the Egyptians. Even nowadays in today's society for example if you make an offer to an employer, introducing him to two great people who can do great things, but with the stipulation that one takes absolutely nothing of what is not his, not even one needle, while the other never goes home

4 Genesis 39:7-10.

without pinching something. Which of them will be preferred by the employer? Certainly the preferred one will be the honest, the correct one, which you know about and you are convinced that it will not harm you in any way. Joseph is such a man, upright, honest. Integrity is not earned as honor is, but is preserved and once lost it can never be raised to the same level it was. For this reason, Joseph prefers to become a slave, he prefers to be imprisoned, but to keep this valuable asset, his integrity. After Joseph went through two very hard experiences, through the experience of slavery and imprisonment, keeping his integrity, following this two experiences came his reward. When the integrity of Joseph was verified, being passed through the fire of trials, thus becoming even more obvious, just then came his ascension. Scripture says that they shaved Joseph, washed him, clothed him, prepared him, and so they brought him before Pharaoh, after which they appointed him prime minister, and in the end they married him to an Egyptian girl from high society, becoming so changed that for his brothers, he was truly unrecognizable. The podium of integrity is the one that raises you up, that really lifts you up. Even in today's world when some say that it is difficult to find an honest, moral, fair man, there are still people who have these qualities, being defined by integrity in all aspects of their activity. The divine invitation for people who believe in His existence is to look to our forerunners. Joseph is a model of morality in a corrupt world, a model that transmits the idea of maintaining integrity, being a pearl of great value, because, as it came for Joseph, will come the day of reward for those who keep their honor, fairness and integrity.

In other times, Governor Nehemiah was able to prove his integrity and loyalty. Emperor Ahasuerus was the son of Xerxes, who died in a conspiracy, being poisoned by what is known to this day, and his son, who knew that his father, the great Persian emperor Xerxes, had died of poisoning was very attentive to this aspect. From this perspective, the man who had the rank of cupbearer was the most important and for a long time his cupbearer was a Jew, respectively Nehemiah. Why? The emperor trusted him. Nehemiah could not be bought, which earned him the king's trust. For years he served in this capacity, enjoying the trust of the king, but one day this cupbearer stood sad before the king, as if pressed by a great inner problem. At first sight, the emperor was also interested in his condition, because he knew that he was not ill. The cupbearer could

be pressured by certain people or certain circles of influence to make an attempt at the emperor's life, to poison him. The cupbearer Nehemiah, at the request of the king, says that in fact his state of sadness is not due to anything related to his physical health, but was due to another cause, namely one of a spiritual nature, a cause concerning his people and the state of Jerusalem. Thus finding out the true state of affairs, the king will give Nehemiah permission to go home to his country, accompanied by an army corps, with delegations for everything he needed to accomplish his mission. An honest man is trusted, he has a say, and when he gets into a difficult situation he finds help. The lesson of integrity is far more valuable and far more important than the lesson of doing so and so. He arrives in Jerusalem and gets to work, things go well, until the neighbors appear who try to slow him, to stop him and threaten him with all kinds of complaints, if he doesn't get along with them. They were kind of right, because neighbors can make someone's life bitter. Nehemiah knew that those agreements meant compromises, so he gave up the compromise from the start. Nehemiah will write that his neighbors called him to a deal six times, and each time Nehemiah gave them the same answer: "And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"⁵

Within 52 days, Nehemiah completed the fortification of the walls of Jerusalem, a worthy deed. Just like then, the society of our world today needs such people, honest people, who do not compromise under any circumstances. That is why the Apostle Paul said: Look at your forefathers and follow their example.

Another example of integrity is presented in the Holy Scripture, namely Job, who was written about at the time: "There was a man in the land of Uz; his name was Job; and this man was upright, and righteous, and fearful of God, and turned aside from evil." And the Lord said unto Satan: "Have you seen my servant Job, that there is none like him on Earth, a perfect and upright man, one that fears God, and does no evil?"⁶ This statement about integrity also appears in the statement of his wife, who said to him: "Are you still strong in your integrity? Curse God and die!"⁷

5 Nehemiah 6:3.

6 *Biblia*, new literal translation, Gute Botschaft Verlag (GBV), Job 1:2.8.

7 *Biblia*, new literal translation, Gute Botschaft Verlag (GBV), Job 2:3.

The idea of integrity appears in the texts of the Holy Scripture, and Job has the courage to stand and judge himself for his situation. He even makes a process of conscience and tries to find any guilt, but he does not find it, only his friends try to make him accept that something was wrong in his life, that otherwise so much misfortune would not have come upon him. It is extraordinary to have the courage to call God to judgment with yourself and to uphold your innocence and justice, which Job will do. Thus, for Job, we can define integrity as a constant, determined, bold attitude, in any situation, either of well-being or of trouble, always remaining constant in such an attitude, without changing his attitude. It is very rare to find people who do not change. In this respect, Job is unique, remaining constant in his integrity, and God the Creator takes Job and sets him as an example of integrity to the whole Universe. In general, people are not very interested, beyond their honor, in the honor of God, a fact that interests Job, thus being the man through whom God triumphed in His conflict with the Devil.

In order to have such an integrity, a pure heart is needed. Just as the heart is the very important organ for our physical health, so it is in the spiritual realm. If a man's heart is pure, sincere, honest, he can go on, looking anyone in the eye, and Job said that he does not feel rebuked in his conscience for any of the days of his life. Integrity is a personal good, received from God by birth and which must be kept very carefully, because this good is unique. The correctness of an administrator is easily lost when he is caught touching what is not his. The word of a man, which says, "on my word," or "so it is," and if afterwards it is proved that what was said in earnest was not so, the man loses his word, and will never have it again, and people will lose confidence in him. Thus integrity is a quality that is lost very quickly and for which, in order to be preserved, it must be fought very seriously in order to be preserved. There are certain things in life that have only one chance, which if won brings victory. A lost integrity will never be able to reach the level previously held. In the history presented in the Holy Scripture, there are many people with extraordinary experiences, but who in turn have had different falls, but about Job God speaks clearly and openly about his integrity, which does not change in character, integrity, in spite of all the calamities that befell him. Job demonstrates that love for a person is the highest and deepest thing, love that must not be motivated by external elements, but by the quality of the person himself. Job loved

God, not because he had a great fortune, not because he had a beautiful and fulfilled family, but because he loved Him from the bottom of his soul, and all of Job's experience proves that God deserves to be loved in any circumstance. Job's integrity further highlights the depth of his love, that of loving without interest. The secret of Job's integrity can be found in his statement, "I have gathered the words of His mouth more than the thoughts of my heart"⁸, thus putting to the forefront of life, obedience to the words of the Creator God, fulfilling a series of altruistic deeds for his fellow men (Job 29:15-17 & ch. 31). Job makes a sacrifice for the possible mistakes of his children, with the conviction that every human being needs to have a covering sacrifice in blood.

Today's society, the desire for quick profit, the resolution of critical situations, the desire to get or keep a job or for who knows what interest, determine some people to resort to lying, compromise, blackmail, theft, adultery, so that in such situations the integrity loses its value.

Even if in certain situations the integrity is no longer appreciated by people, but it is worth noting that the Most High, the Creator, appreciates it. Just as God saw Job, so he sees each of us as human beings. In any administration or field of life, integrity brings and must bring success. Only with such people will human society⁹ itself be able to move forward and prosper.

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⁸ Job 23:12.

⁹ Himcinschi, Mihai, „Building a Nation: The Mission of the Church in Contemporary Society”, in vol. *Mission in Central and Eastern Europe. Realities, Perspectives, Trends*, Edition Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Volume 34, Edited by Corneliu Constantineanu, Marcel V. Măcelaru, Anne-Marie Kool and Mihai Himcinschi, Oxford, 2016, pp. 668-675.