

# *Make Yourself an Honest Man*

VICTOR L. BROWN

Good morning, brothers and sisters. I am grateful to have this opportunity of being with you this morning. Many times when I am introduced, the first question asked after the introduction is “What ward are you bishop of?” The other day at breakfast, I sat next to a local government official. He leaned over to me and said, “Who’s the new Presiding Bishop of the Church?” So I have several influences keeping me humble.

I am grateful for the lovely music these wonderful young women have presented this morning, for their soloist and their director, and particularly to be on the same program where these Indian leaders were introduced. It’s wonderful to be with you this morning.

I’d like to visit with you this morning as a bishop. I am a bishop, even though I don’t have a ward to preside over. I would commend to you your branch presidents, who have the responsibilities of a bishop. As a bishop, I would like to talk this morning about some rather intimate matters, some matters that are of great import to you and to me and to everyone, and I pray that the lord will bless me that what I might say will have lodging in your hearts and have meaning to you. I pray that my remarks may be such that you will understand your relationship with your Heavenly Father perhaps a little bit more.

In speaking of relationships with our Heavenly Father, I would like to tell you of an experience my brother had. He was a judge presiding over the family court. He was sitting on a child custody case, a nine-year-old girl whose father was suing for her custody. She had been reared by her aunt. She was frightened of her father. No one on either side of the family wanted her to go with her father. After hearing the arguments of the attorneys on both sides, Judge Brown invited this little nine-year-old Negro girl into his private chambers. He wanted to get acquainted with her without the influence of the courtroom. He said to her, “Whom do you love more than anyone else in the world?” She did not respond. He said, “Do you love your grandmother more than anyone else in the world?”

She said, “No.”

“Your grandfather?”

“No.”

“Your auntie?”

“No.”

“Whom do you love more than anyone else in the world?” She said, “I love Lord Jesus

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more than anyone else in the world. Would you mind if I spoke to Lord Jesus?"

He said, "Why, certainly not, you go right ahead."

She pushed her chair back from his desk, knelt down, and said, "Lord Jesus, would you please bless Mr. Judge Brown so he'll know what's best for me."

A relationship with our Heavenly Father, the faith of a child.

Now, as a bishop, I would like to talk for a few moments about some of the problems we are faced with in this life. One of the serious problems today is the philosophy that as long as a certain activity or standard is practiced by many, it's acceptable. Today we see evidence all about us of men and women who have lost their integrity. We see it on the national scene; we also see it on the local scene.

Not long ago an employee of one of our cities was discharged. He was discharged because of improper conduct on the job. Some might call it dishonest conduct, although I don't think he was accused of stealing. He stole time. Regardless of the reason, he was discharged. And then he was reinstated because what he had done was such a common practice they would have had to fire most of the employees in the department. It was acceptable. By the fall of one of our great leaders, and I considered him a great leader, we have seen what has happened on the national scene as a result of doing things that are acceptable. One problem that concerns me as much as any other is the apparent self-righteous attitude displayed by many as these problems have become known. I would like to quote a scripture that can give us some balance in our attitude as we see others in difficulty. In Luke we read:

*Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee and the other a publican.*

*The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men*

*are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*

*I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

*And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*

*I tell you [and this is the Lord speaking], this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. [Luke 18:10-14]*

I would hope as we view the tragedies that are occurring we would remember which of these two we would like to be. May I suggest that we paraphrase the words of a song? Remember the words, "let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." May I suggest that for *peace* we substitute the word *integrity*.

### **The First Step to True Greatness**

What is integrity? In a general conference of the Church in 1938, Elder Albert E. Bowen, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, said this:

*It has been said that on that day when someone at some inconvenience to himself determined to keep a promise which he was not compelled to keep, civilization was born. The statement, of course, is intended to make clear that the relationships inherent in civilization could not exist, nor civilization endure, if people as a general rule did not keep their promises. Certainly the business world would collapse at once if this practice fell into decay. Almost all the vast and complicated intricacies of trade and exchange are carried on on the basis of promises. [Conference Reports, October 1938]*

A man by the name of Simmons said this of integrity: "Integrity is the first step to true greatness. Men love to praise but are slow to practice it. To maintain it in high places costs

self-denial. In all places it is liable to opposition. But its end is glorious, and the universe will yet do it homage." And Emerson: "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself and you shall have the suffrage of the world." And Carlyle: "Make yourself an honest man, and then you may be sure there is one less rascal in the world." (Someone has said that those who go to institutions of higher learning just to gain intellectual knowledge and forget their morality become the rascals of the world.) George Eliot: "There is only one failure in life possible, and that is not to be true to the best one knows." And again, Carlyle: "The courage we desire and prize is not the courage to die decently but to live manfully." And finally Shakespeare:

*The purest treasure mortal times afford  
Is spotless reputation; that away,  
Men are but gilded loam or painted clay. . . .  
Mine honour is my life; both grow in one;  
Take honour from me, and my life is done.*  
[Richard II, I.i.177-83]

And then, what does the Lord say in the scriptures? "Wo unto the liar, for he shall be thrust down to hell" (2 Nephi 9:34). "He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house. He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight" (Psalms 101:7). "Lying lips are abomination unto the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight" (Proverbs 12:22).

### Examples of Integrity

May we look at some examples of integrity, examples that would teach us what it really means. There are so many examples of integrity. I believe there are more examples of integrity than there are of the lack of integrity. But I believe also, my brothers and sisters, that we individually must determine our state of integrity, if there is such a thing, and I think there is only integrity or lack of it. The greatest

of all the examples of integrity was given to us by Jesus Christ himself. We read in Matthew:

*Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;*

*And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*

*Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

*Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him. [Matthew 4:8-11]*

Perhaps one of the next most inspiring displays of integrity is found in the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith. You remember in studying the life of the Prophet that he was stripped of his clothing and tarred and feathered, and it took all night to take the tar off of his tender flesh. And then he said, as he recorded very simply in his history, "This being the Sabbath morning, . . . I preached to the congregation as usual, and in the afternoon of the same day baptized three individuals" (*History of the Church*, 1:264).

Again he showed tremendous integrity when he was in jail. After listening, to obscene jests, oaths, blasphemies, and filthy language from the guards, he suddenly arose to his feet and spoke in a voice of thunder the following: "Silence, ye fiends of the infernal pit! In the name of Jesus Christ I rebuke you and command you to be still. I will not live another minute and hear such language" (Leon R. Hartshorn, comp., *Classic Stories from the Lives of Our Prophets*, p. 29).

And that great ancient prophet Job:

*All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils;*

*My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit.*

*God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me.*

*My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.* [Job 27:3-6]

Then there is the example of two young men not too many years ago—before you were born, maybe even a little before I was born—but not too many years ago. Two young Mexicans down in Mexico gave their lives rather than deny the faith. Many of you have perhaps seen the film produced here on campus, *And Should We Die*. Let me just read a couple of passages from that film:

*The two young Mexicans talk together about what they will do if they really are to be killed for their religion.*

*Elder Monterrey says, “I have a good wife and children. I would love to see them grow tall, but the Lord has given me a testimony, and to deny it would be worse than death.”*

*His companion speaks of how much joy he has found since joining the Church. He says he does not want to die, but he could never deny the faith that had brought him so much happiness. They pray for strength and ask the Lord to bless their families, ending with “Thy will be done.”*

*The two young men are marched out into a field by Pancho’s men with guns, followed by a number of women and a few men and children. Monterrey’s wife falls on her knees beside the leader and begs for her husband’s life. He tells her, “I have offered them life. It is their decision.” He then gives them one last opportunity to give up their religion.*

*Elder Monterrey answers, “We cannot deny Jesus Christ nor the testimony we have of the truth.”*

*They are then asked if they have a last request. Elder Monterrey says, “Yes. We would like to pray.”*

*The leader says, “Well, pray and get it over with.”*

*The elder says, “Our Father in heaven, we approach thee in the final moments of our lives. Bless us with strength, and forgive these men who are about to take our lives. Bless our families with*

*health and strength that they may live good lives.” His mother and wife stand together, watching, as the guns are fired and the two men drop dead.*

These men exemplified honesty, integrity of the soul, integrity of the heart, integrity of the intellect.

One of the great leaders of our nation, Abraham Lincoln, left us something. He left us the example of integrity in his public office, integrity in the home, integrity in the individual heart. Summing up his accomplishments—the preservation of the nation, freeing the slaves, his kindness and mercy to the unfortunate, his compassion for his soldiers, his statesmanship at the head of the government—all will be seen as but products of his two outstanding characteristics: spirituality and uncompromising honesty.

Last Friday night, here on campus, I sat across the table from an eminently successful businessman and had a most interesting conversation with him. He comes from Southern California. He has achieved great success in his business. He said to me, “When I have young men come to work for me who appear to have the potential to become somebody in my business, I tell them there are four things that they must accept and do, and the first of these is honesty.” He gave me the others. I shan’t give them to you. I am not sure that the other three are necessary. They certainly are not necessary if the first one is forgotten.

*Einstein once advised young people: “Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value.” A man of value hopes to win success by it, but is not crucially dependent upon success; a man of mere success is always haunted by the fear of losing success, whereupon he loses all. No human being can live comfortably with himself upon such precarious terms. [Quotation from Sydney J. Harris]*

A few weeks ago, Sister Belle Spafford, who is the president of the Relief Society of the Church, was attending a women's convention in New York City. She was on a panel representing approximately twenty million women in the world. She was invited to participate as a voter on an issue. A proposal was made that did not conform to her teachings as a member of the Church. It had nothing to do with morality as such—that is, the type of morality we normally think of—but it was contrary to her beliefs. She was the only one who voted negatively in that great convention. Integrity! And now the leaders of that conference are reconsidering their position. All of the other women voted positively. You see what courage it takes to be a woman of integrity?

I was in the East a few weeks ago, and I visited with a businessman, a member of the Church, one of the most inspiring businessmen I have ever met. He told me of an experience he had had some time ago. He was the chief executive officer of a billion-dollar-a-year business. The company manufactured products of various qualities. The first-quality product was in the manufacturer's name; the second-quality product was in the name of the customer. One of their customers, who did sixty million dollars' worth of business a year, came to him a while ago and said, "I want a letter from you telling me that the second-grade product is just as good as the first-grade product."

He replied, "But it isn't as good."

The customer said, "But it has the same ingredients."

"The ingredients aren't in the same quantity. It is not as good."

"I want that letter or you'll lose my business." A sixty-million-dollar account. And this wonderful man said, "If that is what I have to do to keep your business, I don't want it."

Integrity! It exists in the world, my brothers and sisters, but it exists in the hearts and the souls and the minds and the intellects of

individuals. It doesn't exist just in masses of individuals.

I had the experience one day of coming back to Salt Lake City on an airplane after a conference. A young man whom I had never seen sat in the seat in front of me. He recognized me, I suppose, from some of the pictures he had seen. He spoke to me and told me he was returning to his home in Detroit. He had graduated from Brigham Young University and had gone on to another school to get his MBA. He was a junior employee in the department in which he was employed at the Ford Motor Company. He had been chosen by his department head to represent the company at a very important meeting on the west coast. There were many men his senior in the department; they were furious that a junior man would be invited to go to such an important convention. It was a real plum professionally. The department head told one of them why he had chosen this young man. He said, "I know he will not embarrass the company. He won't go out and get drunk. He'll go out and take care of himself and represent us properly. That's why I chose him." You see, integrity can mean many things in the way of success in our lives.

Now I'd like to share with you a lesson that a young man has taught. This, to me, is one of the most touching lessons of integrity I have ever read. This is the true story of Elam Hill, director of physical education at Sequoia Junior High:

*Today I saw truth. For a moment I lived and breathed in the great presence of truth and felt its sweetness plunge deep into my soul. I am a coach in a junior high school. I work with five hundred boys each day. This has been my occupation for over twenty years. I enjoy it. Traditionally, I am supposed to be rugged, tough, crusty—yes, even a little severe at times. And yet underneath this exterior, feeling and understanding must exist if the job is to be done.*

Today was test day in climbing the rope. We climb from a standing start to a point fifteen feet high. One of my tasks these past few weeks has been to train and teach the boys to negotiate this distance in as few seconds as possible. The school record for the event is 2.1 seconds. It has stood for three years. Today this record was broken. But this is not my story. How this record was broken is the important thing here, as it is so often in many an endeavor in life.

For three years Bobby Palacio, a fourteen-and-a-half-year-old ninth-grade Mexican boy, has trained and pointed and, I suspect, dreamed of breaking this record. It had been his consuming passion. It seemed his whole life depended upon owning this record. In his first of three attempts, Bobby climbed the rope in 2.1 seconds, tying the record. On the second try, the watch stopped at 2.0 seconds flat, a record. But as he descended the rope and the entire class gathered around to check the watch I knew I must ask Bobby a question. There was a slight doubt in my mind whether or not the board at the fifteen-foot height had been touched. If he missed, it was so very, very close, not more than a fraction of an inch, and only Bobby knew the answer.

As he walked toward me, expressionless, I said, "Bobby, did you touch?" If he had said yes, the record he had dreamed of since he was a skinny seventh grader and had worked for almost daily would be his, and he knew I would trust his word. With the class already cheering him for his performance, the slim, brown skinned boy shook his head negatively. And in this simple gesture, I witnessed a moment of greatness.

Coaches do not cry. Only babies cry, they say. But as I reached out to pat this boy on the shoulder, there was a small drop of water in each eye. And it was with effort through a tight throat that I told the class: "This boy has not set a record in the rope climb. No, he has set a much finer record for you and everyone to strive for. He has told the simple truth." I turned to Bobby and said, "Bobby, I'm proud of you. You have just set a record many athletes never attain. Now, on your last try, I want

you to jump a few inches higher on the takeoff. You're going to break the record."

After the other boys had finished their next turns and Bobby came up to the rope for his try, a strange stillness came over the gymnasium. Fifty boys and one coach were breathlessly set to help boost Bobby Palacio to a new record. He climbed the rope in 1.9 seconds—a school record, a city record, and perhaps close to a national record for a junior high school boy.

When the bell rang and I walked away, now misty-eyed, from this group of boys, I was thinking, "Bobby, little brown skin with your clear, bright, dark eyes and your straight, trim, lithe body—Bobby, at fourteen you are a better man than I. Thank you for climbing so very, very high today." [Quoted from the *California Teacher's Journal*]

Integrity, honesty, living as the Lord would have us live—these are the important things. I suggest, my brethren and sisters, that we students and faculty on this campus relate what I have said this morning to ourselves. There is a code of honor on this campus; and when I think that there might be some who come to this campus knowing that code of honor with no intention of keeping it, I have a hard time believing it. This student body should be above reproach in every way. And I would hope, my brethren and sisters, that of all the principles of the gospel that you study you will take to heart the lesson of morality. When I speak of morality, I speak of virtue. I speak of keeping ourselves clean and pure from the things of the world and not following the world, in its acceptance of immorality, sexual relations out of wedlock, adultery, fornication, homosexuality. Even though the world is accepting these things, the Lord has never modified to the least degree the commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery." This is one of the teachings that are vital in your life and my life: to keep ourselves from these evils, to maintain our morality and integrity.

The Lord recognizes that we are human beings, and sometimes we make mistakes. But he has given us a way whereby we can regain his good grace, and that is the law of repentance and forgiveness. If we truly repent, if we will go to our branch presidents and discuss our problems freely and honestly, we can gain forgiveness from our Heavenly Father if we follow the full steps as directed by our branch presidents. But if we avoid that, the Lord has cautioned us he will not always strive with the souls of men.

I pray, my brethren and sisters, that each one of us will analyze our own intimate lives,

that we will determine to be men and women of integrity, that we will be so much so that we will enjoy living with ourselves. I bear witness that God lives, that Jesus Christ is our elder brother, and that it is in his way, and only his way, that we will find eternal life and the joy and happiness that come from righteous living. I bear this witness to you and leave my blessing with you that through loving the Lord enough to keep his commandments you may find the peace that surpasseth all understanding. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.