

Proverbs 11:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.

Analysis

This proverb contrasts the guiding power of integrity with the destructive force of perverseness. "The integrity of the upright shall guide them" employs tummah (תִּמְהָ, integrity, completeness, innocence) and yashar (יָשָׁר, upright, straight). Integrity serves as an internal compass—tancheh (תַּנְחֶה, shall guide) indicates leading, conducting, directing. Those who walk in wholehearted honesty find their very character provides moral direction.

"But the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them" presents the alternative. Selef (סֵלֶף, perverseness, crookedness) characterizes bogedim (בִּגְדִים, traitors, treacherous ones, those who deal falsely). Their own crookedness yeshoddem (יִשְׁדְּם, shall destroy them)—the verb emphasizes violent destruction. The wicked aren't destroyed by external enemies but by their own corrupt character.

The principle is self-fulfilling prophecy: virtue leads to life, vice to death. Integrity creates trust, opens opportunities, and aligns with reality. Perverseness breeds suspicion, closes doors, and conflicts with God's moral order. Psalm 25:21 prays, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me." Conversely, Proverbs 11:5-6 warns that wickedness overthrows the wicked. Paul teaches that sin pays wages—death (Romans 6:23). Only Christ's imputed righteousness and transforming grace establish true integrity that guides to eternal life.

Historical Context

Ancient business depended on personal reputation and integrity. Without modern legal systems or credit reporting, merchants relied on character assessments. Integrity meant deals could be trusted; perverseness meant isolation from commerce. The "treacherous" (bogedim) were covenant-breakers who violated agreements, bringing ruin upon themselves through lost partnerships and exclusion from trustworthy networks. Israel's covenant with God made corporate and personal integrity essential for national flourishing.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. In what areas of life might you be tempted to compromise integrity for short-term gain?
2. How have you experienced integrity guiding you toward good outcomes, or perverseness leading to destructive consequences?
3. What does it mean to have Christ's perfect integrity imputed to you, and how should this transform your pursuit of uprightness?

Interlinear Text

תִּמְתָּ	יִשְׁרֵי	תִּנְיֶה	וְלֵךְ	בְּגֵדֵי
The integrity	of the upright	shall guide	them but the perverseness	of transgressors
H8538	H3477	H5148	H5558	H898
וְשָׂדֵם:				
shall destroy				
H7703				

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 13:6 (Parallel theme): Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.

Proverbs 28:18 (Parallel theme): Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once.

Psalms 26:1 (Parallel theme): Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide.

Psalms 25:21 (Parallel theme): Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee.

Proverbs 19:3 (Parallel theme): The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.

Proverbs 11:5 (Parallel theme): The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.

Ecclesiastes 7:17 (Parallel theme): Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?

John 7:17 (Parallel theme): If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.