

The Upright of Heart as a Metaphor for Integrity

Psalm 11.2 says that the wicked seek to destroy those who are “upright in heart” (לְיֹשְׁרֵי-לֵב). The LXX renders the Hebrew phrase as: τοὺς εὐθείς τῆ καρδίᾳ (“the straight ones [=upright] of heart”). The Aramaic Targum renders the phrase in its oft-expanded way: תְּקִינֵי לְתַרְיֻצֵי לִבָּא (“the firm stability of the upright ones in heart”). Why is this language used to speak about integrity? Why does this describe the godly?

I want to offer a few observations about this phrase.

1. This phrase refers to the godly person being one who is unbending and standing straight up for the Lord and for His Word.

The Hebrew root for “upright” (יָשַׁר) speaks of that which is straight and right. So then, the person who is upright in heart is one who is straight in his life, straight in his course, unbending in his convictions, unswerving in his conduct. Joshua was told not to turn away from the Law of God either to the right or the left (Josh 1.7; cf. Deut 5.32; 2 Kings 22.2). So then, this upright person is one who has a straight-course set before him on walking with God and not veering off the path of godliness.

2. This phrase includes the reality that one’s pattern of life is upright, straight, and consistently Godly.

Because the language speaks of one who is “upright” and unbending, unswerving, unalterable, it thus shows that this is more than a one-time act or decision. To be upright means that the length of one’s life is upright. It’s longer than a decision. It’s more durative than a choice. It consists of a pattern of life that is in perfect harmony with the standard of God’s holiness and righteousness. The Bible says in 2 Kings 22.2 in describing King Josiah of Judah, he did right (דָּיָרָה) in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of his father David nor did he turn aside to the right or the left. This then speaks of the way Josiah lived, walked, conducted himself. In a word, he lived a godly life. That is contained in the idea of being “upright.”

3. This phrase forces the meaning of uprightness as beginning in the heart rather than focusing on mere externals.

Significantly, the entire phrase “upright of heart” (לְיֹשְׁרֵי-לֵב; Ps 11.2) shows that it is not mere externals or outward conduct alone that is most significant. The uprightness is sourced in the heart. It resides out of the heart. The uprightness of conduct is a result of being upright in one’s heart. One’s moral uprightness without internal uprightness is moralism and despicable in God’s eyes. God tests the “heart” (Ps 11.4-5).

This phrase occurs in the Psalms and those who are “upright in heart” are saved by God who is their shield (Ps 7.10). God continues His covenant-keeping lovingkindness and righteousness to the upright in heart (Ps 36.10). The upright in heart will glory in God because they rejoice in God and take refuge in God (Ps 64.10). The upright in

heart follow God's righteous judgment (Ps 94.15). And the upright in heart are called to rejoice in the Lord and shout for joy (Ps 32.11; 97:11).