

The Ten Commandments include the following admonition: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Exodus 20:16).



We Believe in Being Honest

“If we would have the companionship of the Master and the Spirit of the Holy Ghost, we must be honest with ourselves, honest with God, and with our fellowmen.”

From the Life of Howard W. Hunter

While waiting to take a tour of Hearst Castle in California, President and Sister Hunter and another couple drove to a small store. As they were looking around the store, “Elder Hunter went to the counter, counted out some licorice, [and] paid the clerk 10 pennies.” The two couples then returned to the car and began driving back to the castle for the tour. On the way, “Elder Hunter passed the licorice around once, and then again, and then suddenly it was apparent to him that he must have miscounted, for we ended up with 11 pieces instead of the 10 he had paid for.

“He could have easily overlooked the error. After all, it was just a penny, and we were in a bit of a hurry now to make the tour. Who would know the difference or care? But he didn’t even think twice about it. He wheeled the car around and headed back up the road to the store. . . . He explained the problem to a different attendant, apologized for the error, and paid the extra penny to the surprised clerk.”¹

For Howard W. Hunter, it was important to be honest in small matters as well as large ones.

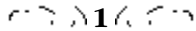
He taught his sons about integrity by his example. “What I know about honesty and integrity has come in large measure by what people have told me about my father,” Richard Hunter said. One time Richard went with his father to a business meeting where a complex project was being discussed. While outside for a break, Richard and one of the men were talking about the meeting. Richard said there would probably be a long wait to begin the project

because it would require an immense amount of legal paperwork. The man corrected Richard, telling him the project could proceed before the paperwork was finalized because the people knew that Howard W. Hunter would do whatever he said he would do.²

In 1962, President Hunter addressed the youth of the Church and expressed his conviction about the importance of being honest:

“A happy life will come to each of us if we will but be honest—honest with our fathers and mothers, whether it pertains to our dating, our school work, the kids we run with, or attendance at church; honest with our bishops—taking their advice, telling them the truth about ourselves, paying our honest tithing, living a clean, pure life; honest with our schools—never cheating in any part of our activities, whether in class or on the campus; honest in paying our way, whether into games or movies, or in carrying our part of the responsibilities at a party; honest with our boyfriends and girlfriends—never taking advantage of them, never deceiving them, never leading them into temptation; honest with the Lord himself.”³

Teachings of Howard W. Hunter



The Lord admonishes us to be honest.

Scripture is replete with admonitions to be honest, and commandments are myriad to the effect that we should be honest. We think of them in bold type: THOU SHALT NOT—thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt not covet [see Exodus 20:15–17]. . . .

Some of the more common examples of dishonesty are these:

1. *Stealing*. I seldom read a newspaper without finding a number of reports of burglary, robbery, purse-snatching, shoplifting, car theft, and a thousand other things. Even in our chapels there are reports of petty theft.

2. *Cheating*. Newspapers carry similar accounts of fraudulent transactions in security dealings, in business transactions, cheating in investments, and other things that are called to public attention.

There are some who would cheat their way through school and some who would cheat in examinations.

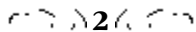
3. *Violations of Word of Wisdom standards.* These are Church standards. They are not violations of the standards of the world. But you have been given the word of the Lord on this subject.

4. *Violation of traffic ordinances.* One cannot be basically honest and violate laws formulated by society and government for the welfare of other persons.⁴

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” [Exodus 20:16]. Primarily this commandment has reference to false testimony in judicial proceedings, but it is extended to cover all statements which are false in fact. Any untruth which tends to injure another in his goods, person, or character is against the spirit and letter of this law. Suppression of the truth which results in the same injury is also a violation of this commandment.

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” [Exodus 20:17]. To covet means to desire, to long for, to crave that which belongs to another person. The desire to acquire good things is not a violation, but the desire to take them away from another unlawfully is a wrong. In this respect it is well for us to understand that good or evil commences not when the act occurs, but when one sets his heart upon a thing.⁵

The Lord hates a proud look, a lying tongue, a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, [and] he that soweth discord [see Proverbs 6:16–19]. As Latter-day Saints, can we afford to do anything the Lord hates? How often has he spoken against dishonesty!⁶



We cultivate honesty in the little, ordinary things of life.

If we are sensitive to our relationship to the Savior, we must be honest in little things as well as the big.⁷

As we strive for achievement and success, so much of our time is consumed in thought and study of the complex that we seldom take time for the simple—the simple things, the little things that are in reality the basis upon which we build and without which a strong foundation cannot exist. A structure may tower to the sky, and we may look at it with awe because of its stature and great height; yet it cannot stand unless its foundation is anchored in rock or in steel and concrete.

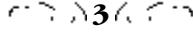
Character must have such a foundation. I draw your attention to the principle of honesty. Why is it so many believe in the high and lofty principles of honesty, yet so few are willing to be strictly honest?

[Many] years ago there were posters in the foyers and entries of our chapels that were entitled “Be Honest with Yourself.” Most of them pertained to the little, ordinary things of life. This is where the principle of honesty is cultivated.

There are some who will admit it is morally wrong to be dishonest in big things yet believe it is excusable if those things are of lesser importance. . . .

I recall a young man who was in our stake when I served as a stake president. He traveled around with a crowd that thought it was smart to do things that were not right. On a few occasions he was caught in some minor violations. One day I got a call from the police station and was told he was being held because of a traffic violation. He had been caught speeding, as he had on a few other occasions prior to this time. Knowing the things he was doing might prevent him from going on a mission, he straightened up, and when he was 19 years of age, he received his call.

I shall never forget the talk we had when he returned. He told me that while he was in the mission field he had often thought of the trouble he had caused by the mistaken belief that the violation of little things was not important. But a great change had come into his life. He had come to the realization that there is no happiness or pleasure in violation of the law, whether it be God’s law or the laws that society imposes upon us.⁸



**We can serve God by being honest and fair
in our personal and business dealings.**

Religion can be part of our daily work, our business, our buying and selling, building, transportation, manufacturing, our trade or profession, or of anything we do. We can serve God by honesty and fair dealing in our business transactions in the same way we do in Sunday worship. The true principles of Christianity cannot be separate and apart from business and our everyday affairs.⁹

If religion means anything to us, it should be something that motivates our lives. I don't believe religion can be relegated to a minister's sermon for an hour on Sunday and mean anything in our lives. If it doesn't enter into our individual life—our family life—our business life—and everything that we do, then religion means little to us and it becomes merely an idol to be set in a high place and worshipped only occasionally.¹⁰

What a great change would come over the world if we could all rely upon others as far as honesty is concerned. Men would have perfect confidence in each other in personal and business dealings. There would not be . . . distrust between labor and management. There would be integrity in public office and in government affairs, and nations would exist in peace rather than the turmoil we presently know in the world. . . .

In business dealings there are some who will take a dishonest advantage if it is placed before them. They rationalize and justify their position by saying that in business one is expected to take every offered advantage. Such transactions can amount to large sums of money, but in principle are no different than the failure to return a penny that has been overpaid by the cashier to one who notices the error. It is a form of cheating.¹¹

May I suggest a definition of "honorable employment." Honorable employment is honest employment. Fair value is given and there is no defrauding, cheating, or deceit. Its product or service is of high quality, and the employer, customer, client, or patient receives more than he or she expected. Honorable employment is moral. It involves nothing that would undermine public good



Job declared, “I will not remove mine integrity from me” (Job 27:5).

or morality. For example, it does not involve traffic in liquor, illicit narcotics, or gambling. Honorable employment is useful. It provides goods or services which make the world a better place in which to live.¹²

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**Integrity protects us from evil, helps us be
successful, and will save our souls.**

The temptations of evil surround us on every side. Without the protection of integrity, we are at the mercy of all kinds of sin and wrongdoings.

Job had no difficulty with these problems. He was protected by his own integrity. This is how he felt:

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

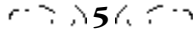
“My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit. . . .

“My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live” (Job 27:3–4, 6).

How inspiring. Because of his strength, he had no concerns for the trivial temptations before which most people fall. Job had built into his own life a strength and satisfaction that Satan himself could not crash. It is also interesting to see how God was delighted with him: “There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil[,] and still he holdeth fast his integrity” (Job 2:3).

This great quality of integrity is fully available to us. If effectively used, it will solve all of our problems in government, religion, industry, and our individual lives. It would wipe out the awful scourge of crime, divorce, poverty, and misery. It would make us successful here and save our souls hereafter.

One of the greatest accomplishments of our lives is to promote an honest, earnest integrity within ourselves. This means that we become spiritually sound, intellectually sincere, morally honest, and always personally responsible to God. Integrity is that golden key which will unlock the door to almost any success.¹³



**True joy results from being honest with
ourselves, with others, and with God.**

We often speak of that scriptural reference, “Men are, that they might have joy” [2 Nephi 2:25]. There is a joy that comes to one from being honest. Let me tell you how. By this means you can have the companionship of the Master and you can have the Spirit of the Holy Ghost. Violations of the code of honesty will deprive you of these two great blessings. Could you believe that one who would lie or cheat . . . could have the companionship of the Master or have the Spirit of the Holy Ghost?

. . . We should always remember that we are never alone. There is no act that is not observed; there is no word spoken that is not heard; there is no thought conceived in the mind of man that is not known to God. There is no darkness that can conceal the things we do. We must think before we act.

Do you think you can be alone when you commit a dishonest act? Do you think you can be unobserved when you cheat in an examination, even though you are the only person in the room? We must

be honest with ourselves. If we would have the companionship of the Master and the Spirit of the Holy Ghost, we must be honest with ourselves, honest with God, and with our fellowmen. This results in true joy.¹⁴

The Lord knows our innermost thoughts [see D&C 6:16]. He knows each deed we do. We will meet him someday, and we will look him in the face. Will we be proud of our life's record?

We make that record every day. Each act, each thought is a part of it. Will we be proud of it? We will if we have done our best—if we have been honest with ourselves, with our loved ones, with our friends, with all mankind. . . .

Blessed are they who are honest. . . .

Blessed are they who are obedient to the Lord.

They are they who are free—who are happy—who can walk with their heads high. They have their self-respect. They have the respect of those who know them best.

And above all, they have the respect and blessing of our Father in Heaven. Jesus invites us to follow him. His paths are straight and clean and upright and honest. Let us follow him into the abundant life of happiness. It is the only way.¹⁵

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Questions

- Review the examples of dishonesty that President Hunter identifies in section 1. What are some consequences of those dishonest practices? What can those consequences teach us about why the Lord places so much emphasis on being honest?
- Ponder President Hunter's teachings about being honest in little things and being honest with ourselves (see section 2). Why do we need to be honest in "little things"? What does it mean to be honest with ourselves? How can we overcome temptations to excuse even seemingly small acts of dishonesty?
- President Hunter emphasizes the need to make religion part of everything we do in our daily lives (see section 3). How can we

better live the teachings in this section? How can we effectively teach honesty in our homes?

- In section 4, President Hunter mentions several blessings that come from living with integrity. How does a person develop integrity? How have you been blessed when you have lived true to the Lord's standards?
- How does being honest bring us joy? (See section 5.) Why is being honest necessary for us to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost? How does being honest make us free?

Related Scriptures

Job 27:5; 31:5–6; Psalm 15; Proverbs 20:7; Alma 53:20–21; D&C 10:25–28; 42:20–21, 27; 51:9; 124:15; 136:20, 25–26; Articles of Faith 1:13

Study Help

As you read, “underline and mark words or phrases so that you distinguish between ideas in a single [passage]. . . . In the margins write scripture references that clarify the passages you are studying” (*Preach My Gospel* [2004], 23).

Notes

1. Doug Brinley, “President Hunter Taught Value of a Penny’s Worth of Integrity,” *Church News*, Dec. 3, 1994, 11; see also “Loved by All Who Knew Him: Stories from Members,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1995, 19–20.
2. See Don L. Searle, “President Howard W. Hunter, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1986, 24.
3. “We Believe in Being Honest” (transcription of an address given in the Youth Fireside Series, Apr. 10, 1962), 8–9, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; punctuation adapted.
4. “Basic Concepts of Honesty,” *New Era*, Feb. 1978, 4–5.
5. In Conference Report, Apr. 1965, 57–58; see also “And God Spake All These Words,” *Improvement Era*, June 1965, 511–12.
6. “We Believe in Being Honest,” 8.
7. “Basic Concepts of Honesty,” 5.
8. “Basic Concepts of Honesty,” 4–5.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1961, 108.
10. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (1997), 261–62.
11. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 90–91.
12. “Prepare for Honorable Employment,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1975, 122–23.
13. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 92.
14. “Basic Concepts of Honesty,” 5.
15. *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, 88.