

## **Integrity – an Influential Characteristic of the Christian Life – Madut Tong Ngor**

Integrity is one vital virtue that every Christian believer must highly prize and embrace throughout their daily lives. It brings a soundness of character with adherence to good moral principles, for instance, uprightness and honesty.

Remember though, to walk in integrity is to reveal a habitual manner of life. Living in Christian integrity is a 100% lifestyle, not just something done from time to time. One dictionary defines integrity as “firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values, an unimpaired condition, the quality or state of being complete or undivided.”<sup>1</sup> This implies that integrity involves incorruptibility, soundness, wholeness and completeness, all values that a Christian treasures. She cannot them earn by her own effort alone, but he can through the grace of God in his life. Christian integrity, once begun at conversion, develops throughout a Christian’s lifetime. It carries a responsibility with it. Every Christian believer should always live honestly before God and before all other people.

The Old Testament uses Hebrew word *tam* for integrity, to refer to the “wholeness or completeness” of human character or behaviour.<sup>2</sup> But the New Testament uses the Greek word *politeuomai* which originally means to live as the citizen of a city state.<sup>3</sup> This is a reminder that every citizen has both privileges and responsibilities in his country. Furthermore, the ultimate citizenship of every Christian believer is in heaven, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ”, Philippians 3:20. This gives us greater privilege and higher responsibilities. In fact Christians are citizens of the two kingdoms, the temporal and the eternal. Sudanese Christians are citizens of Sudan *and* of heaven! This condition requires us to faithfully and honestly carry out our responsibilities and thus enjoy our privileges.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.websters-online-dictionary.org](http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org)

<sup>2</sup> W.E. Vine Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament words (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson) 1996, page 47.

<sup>3</sup> W.E. Vine Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament words (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson) 1996, page 103.

Vine uses the beautiful phrase for integrity: “conduct characteristic of heavenly citizenship”.

The argument in this paper will be that Christians who confess their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, God's revelation and the work of the Holy Spirit, must demonstrate what they believe in their daily lives. They must show the world genuine Christian life characterised by integrity. The impact of this virtue called integrity should be visible, first in our relationships, second in our marriages, thirdly in our jobs.

### **The impact Integrity has on our Relationships**

Integrity is one of the most important and often cited virtues which should influence our characters as believers, producing fruit in daily life worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Integrity implies the wholeness of character and life, because a person of integrity maintains a good relationship within himself. This influences positively the way he acts morally. She will be Christianly different from those around her.

The apostle Paul urges the Philippian church to conduct a life of integrity:

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have", Philippians 1:27–30.

Children of God must live according to the principles of their Father God in heaven, and not according to their own personal desires. Integrity is one of the virtues that our Heavenly Father wants us to embrace and reveal in our daily lives for His glory. Integrity implies sincerity of heart and motive, singleness of purpose, genuineness, truthfulness, and uprightness.

David understood the importance of walking in God's ways and determines: "I will be careful to lead a blameless life – when will you come to me? I will walk in my house with a blameless heart", Psalm 101:2.

In biblical thought moral character is not judged by absolutes or ideals as it is in Greek philosophy. Moral character is judged by relationship to God. God sets the standard by which every man and woman is judged. The only person who is perfect is the one whom God judges as perfect. Integrity thus marks the person who walks with single hearted devotion to God and who walks in honourable behaviour towards all people.

For example the word of God says: "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink", Proverbs 25:21. Is this how we live as Christians in Sudan today? Both our Lord Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul reiterate the same comprehensive value, Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:20. Yet many who claim to be Christians pass by every day those they consider to be their enemies *without even giving daily greeting which characterises Sudanese culture*. Is that honestly loving our enemies? We need to walk in daily Christian integrity with honest and sincere hearts. This does not mean we will be without problems and conflicts. But our Father in heaven will give us ways to overcome whatever we face if we are submissive to His will and His desire. He will use this to heal our relationships. The word of God says "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." 1Corinthians 10:13.

The assertions of integrity and innocence do not indicate a spirit of self righteousness or smug self-satisfaction as this Pharisee thought: "The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'" Luke 18:11-12. Rather, the great religious people who professed integrity, people like David, Job, the Psalmist, and Paul, are those most keenly aware of personal sin.

David admits sin that he committed with Bathsheba: "Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord". Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.'" 2 Samuel 12:13. This suggests that the whole drama of redemption makes it

possible for the sinner to walk uprightly before God.<sup>4</sup> Our sin is no excuse for a lack of integrity.

The awareness of our personal weaknesses compels us to give time to those friends whose ideas oppose our own and cause relationship breakdown. We try to understand each other's point of view. When we give ourselves opportunity and start listening to each other carefully – not so as to defend ourselves but to clarify their point of view – we will discover that we had a different concept of what we were disagreeing over. Integrity in personal contact paves the way for reconciliation. It helps us restore our relationships with other people. “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over”. Matthew 18:15. An honest Christian knows that he is a keeper of his brother (and therefore our brothers and sisters are keepers of us!). Paul tells us that we need each other in every overwhelming circumstance or situation, Galatians 6:1-3.

Integrity is a value demanded from every believer in their daily lives because it grows from the penitent heart, Luke 3:8-14.

- Integrity leads to purity of heart, Matthew 5:8.
- Integrity develops singleness of eye, Matthew 6:22; Luke 11:34-36.
- Integrity strengthens purity of motive, Matthew 6:1-6; Matthew 6:16-18.

Moreover, there are numerous injunctions to truthfulness, sincerity, and genuineness as being fundamental to Christian character and conduct. Integrity is an indispensable ingredient in Christian teaching: “In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech”, Titus 2:7.

We should know also that it is not enough to live only by an integrity which is most comfortable to us personally. We have to stretch our horizons, to strive to become whole and complete yet living with the pluralistic backgrounds of every tribe, clan, kin and kith of Sudan. Integrity may be very uncomfortable and demanding, but it is still necessary!

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<sup>4</sup> See also 2 Samuel 24:17; Job 13:26; Job 14:16-17; Psalm 51:5; Psalm 69:5; I Corinthians 15:9; I Timothy 1:15.

Jesus Christ put down the basis for the kind of life we should live. "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." John 13:34. Jesus loved His disciples and us to the extent of submitting willingly to unjust execution. We have to love one another in the same sacrificial way. Jesus' new law is just waiting for Christians like us to live by in this third millennia era. Christian integrity shows visible love.

### **The impact Integrity has in our Marriages**

Although the founder of marriage is God Himself, many misunderstand marriage to be merely a product of the cultures and traditions of nations. God the creator established marriage. The Bible says that God created every living thing male and female. Every creature had its own partner, "but for Adam no suitable helper was found". "Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man". Adam then sang his first wonderful song, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', because she was taken out of man". "For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother, and be united to his wife; and they will become one flesh."<sup>5</sup> God completed the first man with a wife; someone who was a real part of himself and whom the man would care for just as he would care for his own body, soul and spirit.

Here in Sudan we greatly need fidelity and integrity in family, marriage, and sexual behaviour. Monogamy is the God-ordained way of preserving humanity, and integrity should be the main characteristic of family relationships. Monogamy needs practice, but many African churchgoers live a long way off this habit. Perhaps they don't understand? They sometimes take monogamy to be western practice and far different from African culture. They choose to ignore the fact that it is the ordained practice blessed by God. Polygamy, according to my understanding, is a product of human rebellion against God. It is a result of the fall from Paradise.

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<sup>5</sup> Selections from Genesis 2:20-24.

Dishonesty in marriage is very destructive. I will give just one example, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (A.I.D.S.), which has infected people according to media headlines even in our beloved country these past several years. The government of Sudan announced that around ten thousand Sudanese are HIV/AIDS positive. The number may be higher and is certainly rising. This aggressive pandemic reaps souls every year. People die from A.I.D.S. Although this disease is transmittable through sexual intercourse it can also be transmitted through several other means. It is important for Sudanese to cling to the practice of God's law: one wife for one man, one husband for one woman. Let Christians not compromise this wonderful pure and protecting law which emphasises human dignity. Let us reject the demeaning polygamy and profligacy of others around us. Let us live in integrity at home with our families.

Every Christian person must cleave to their one spouse with love, submission, and service to each other, for the glory of our God, Ephesians 5:22 – 33.

### **The impact Integrity has in our Ministry**

The church is the institution that God founded through the great redemptive work of His son Jesus Christ. The church is to bear witness to His person and work in the world.

The church is:

“an outpost of the kingdom of God, placed in a particular spot in the world to bear witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. A church is a mission living by the foolishness of God in a world that sometimes hates it, sometimes is indifferent, and sometimes seeks to take it captive. Any church that does not recognise the basic purpose for its existence is in jeopardy of its life”.<sup>6</sup>

The difficulty that the Sudanese church is facing is that it does not recognise that it is in a missionary situation. It has been taken captive by the world. It has to free itself from this captivity and to re-establish itself as an outpost of the kingdom of God as it comes to

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<sup>6</sup> Walker L Knight Struggle for Integrity ( Waco, Texas: Word Books) 1969, p.45.

recognise that it must indeed exist within missionary situation. Christians are to be attractively different from those around us.

Integrity demands that the church stay and minister in the whole country of Sudan, and that it become in reality what it purports to be, a fellowship of reconciled and reconciling people. There is a great need for a missionary faithfulness among our Christians if we want to influence our nation in every aspect of life. The majority of Sudanese church leaders always speak of mission and missionary in relation to western missionaries, those who established the first churches in Sudan which gradually transformed into Sudanese indigenous churches. I do not deny that there are mission-minded groups in this country, but I believe that the majority of Christians are not aware of their own purpose for existence! Churches just cling to their established congregations. When sometimes they open prayer centres, the new members are not new believers but simply relocating members of the mother church.

The church of Christ should not be indifferent to the existing problems of its own communities. But it must stand steadfastly Christian to confront those problems in the light of God's living truth. This is the hope for setting the nation free from the bondages of this world. Knight correctly asserts that,

“It is naïve to assume you can go anywhere and put your head in the sand and escape the problem. The problem is here, and where the world is at its worst the church of Jesus Christ ought to be at its best. You cannot lose your integrity and become one with your culture, but you must live above your culture, you must stand over and against it, saying that God stands here and as long as we bear the mark of Christ we must stand with Him, even when it means standing against our culture. God reminds us that the people who refuse to do this, who let the distinction be erased between their Christianity and the world, lose their integrity and do in fact decay”.<sup>7</sup>

The church should not overlook their community problems or hide her head in the sand in an attempt to escape responsibility for them. It should address, confront and reveal falsehood to

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<sup>7</sup> Walker L. Knight Struggle for Integrity ( Waco, Texas: Word Books) 1969, p.75.

the community. It can only do this from a lifestyle of integrity. Jesus said the church is the light of the world, and the light cannot be hidden. Nor should the church hide! The church must be very clear to the world. The Bible says, "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds, and praise your Father in heaven". Matthew 5:14-16. We must do good Christian works where they can be seen and felt positively by the non-Christian community around us.

The ultimate goal of the church is to penetrate the darkness of this world with its glorious light so that Jesus' light can transform the face of the earth for the glory of our Heavenly Father. But how can that happen? Through Christian integrity. We need to demonstrate a lifestyle worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our habits, our attitudes and our standard values matter to the unbelieving world around us. The most frequent and embarrassing thing that keeps non-believers away from Christ is our unchristian, hypocritical, double-standard, attitudes. An example is when we fail to keep our promises. We do not do what we said we would do. This is a lack of faithfulness. It may even be dishonesty. These detestable habits should not be the way that children of Heavenly Father behave. On the contrary we should "let (our) light shine before men" for the glory of our "Father in heaven". If we do not shine brightly, what are people around us going to think about our God? Actions are more eloquent than mere words.

The mission of the church of Christ is to reconcile men to God. Those men will also do the work of reconciliation among themselves and extend that glorious message to the all people of their communities. I hope that God will hasten the day when our Sudanese church devises strategies of encouragement and support for churches in the whole country to rise and minister with *integrity in the field of mission through every member in their everyday life.*

I hope the Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes to see what our Lord Jesus Christ has seen, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field", Matthew 9:37-38. It is essential for the church to

practise what it teaches, that Christ has died for *all* people. The honest projection of that message demands that the church should minister to *all* segments of the population.

Successful church leadership should be based on the principle Jesus Christ calls a new commandment that He gave to His followers "...love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another", John13:34. Although this principle is not totally new, Jesus Christ added a new dimension to it. The commandment is new because of Jesus' profoundly new example of how to reach out to one another. As Jesus loved and served us, so we must love and serve other people. There are useful daily rules to be learnt from this commandment:

- **Leaders have to give their best in the worst of times.** When crises become too deep church attendance should help a Christian live at his or her best. Sadly it all too often tends to make little difference in terms of his ethical views and behaviour. Paul calls this the perilous times: "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days", 2 Timothy 3:1. Crisis situations demand us to demonstrate integrity of life. To do this we need the help of friends, brothers and sisters to keep us on the track because we are all keepers of one another. Are we ready to be accountable to each other? This is the only assured way to keep us on the track of total honesty.
- **Leaders should look up to those under them.** It is common for leaders to look down on those under them, on the pretext that they are superiors over them. But the wisdom of God asks us to esteem others more than ourselves. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others", Philippians 2:3-4. It is important to give to those under you enough room so they can grow into giants!
- **Leaders should stand up for their convictions.** This does not imply insubordination, hostility, or rebellion, but it means esteeming others while holding strong Christian beliefs and gospel convictions. We should stand up for what we believe. At the same time we should humbly give ground if we are wrong. This kneeling for forgiveness is often the high peak of an honest heart.

- **Leaders should love integrity.** Let us be men and women of integrity to reverse the terrible trends to dishonesty and deception which currently exist in our communities.

As discerning Christians watch out for the sort of people who want to be church leaders by any means and therefore lack integrity. A team of psychologists from the University of California discovered some characteristics of these people:

- They are aggressive against people who do not agree with them, or who do not do as they want them to.
- They are apprehensive that others are scheming against them, or their work.
- They accept the fatalistic concept that most of their workers are not to be trusted; and they are intolerant of other leaders.
- They are inflexible. They do not like change from the course they have set.
- They are prejudiced against certain social groups, companies, religions, or even nations.
- They demand rather than earn submission. Those who submit blindly to them follow forceful leaders of whom they are afraid. They do not lead as gentle shepherds.<sup>8</sup>

Although this study was done in the United States of America, the same characteristics are found even here in Sudan. I am not pointing at certain leaders, but we all have to take heed lest we fall into one or more of these categories. Such conduct is disgraceful behaviour before our Heavenly Father. It disappoints Him deeply.

We have a daily choice to make. We have to decide to conduct a life of integrity if we want to please, honour, and exalt Jesus' name in our lives and ministry. As the prophet Micah puts it "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God", Micah 6:8.

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<sup>8</sup> Ted W. Engstrom and Robert C. Larson Integrity (Waco, Texas: Word Books) 1987.

## Conclusion

Integrity is the habit of doing what one promises to do. It is the attitude of heart which shows *who* we actually are, the children of God per se, or it shows we are not. Integrity should influence all aspects of our daily lives, our personal relationships, our family and marriage relationships, and our ministry. If our Christian integrity misses any part of our human life, then it is not yet what our Lord Jesus wants from us. We may have started out right, but there is currently much room for improvement.<sup>9</sup>

## Discussion guide

*Using this chapter and the Scriptures quoted:*

1. List some of the worst things that you think show a lack of integrity in some Christian living.
2. What affect does such poor Christian living have on our general Christian witness?
3. Since we are “children of God”, what characteristics of our Heavenly Father should we show to people around us? Share as many as you can.
4. How can we honestly “love our enemies” amongst whom we live and work everyday?  
(Take “enemies” to mean people of other tribal or faith background).  
Consider talking with them and practical ways to serve and build bridges to them,  
Proverbs 25:21, Matthew 5:44.
5. How is Christian integrity *to be expressed (practically lived out)* in marriage and family life?  
Consider relationships between husband and wife, parents and young children,  
older children and parents, adult children and parents, care for the elderly,  
single unmarried people, etc.  
Be as practical as you can in your answer.
6. Since a local church is placed where it is to be a witness to those around, describe how you feel Christians should become involved in their wider community.  
Explain how being “salt and light” influences your answer, Matthew 5:13-16.
7. List the blessings and the challenges for a Christian leader living in absolute integrity.  
Prayerfully consider what percentage of your own life is touched by Christian integrity.

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<sup>9</sup> Recommended further reading:

John Stott [Evangelical Truth: A personal plea for unity](#) (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press) 1999.