

Becoming a Man or Woman of Integrity

Integrity—“the quality of always behaving honestly and according to moral principles”.¹

Living our lives showing *Christian* integrity means we will try our very best, all of the time, whatever we are doing, to live by the highest principles of good Christian behaviour.

One of Jesus' closest disciples wrote urging everyone who wanted to follow Christ not only to live, but to live well:

- “Whoever claims to live in him (Jesus Christ) must walk as Jesus did”,
1 John 2:6.

We can never *earn* our salvation by doing ‘so many’ good things. Salvation doesn’t work like that! Salvation is God’s gift for all who trust themselves to Jesus, the Saviour from all sin. Yet we should always be giving *evidence* that we are being saved. That evidence is simply living life the Christian way.

In the garden by my home in Khartoum North I used to enjoy growing a small amount of fruit. I planted melon seeds which grew into vines and produced sweet melons. I planted banana suckers which, after a while, produced the hanging clusters of tasty yellow fruit. I planted lime trees and drank many a glass of juice rich in vitamin C from their green, round or oval fruits.

It may seem an obvious thing to say, but the melons only grew on the melon vines, the bananas only grew on the banana stalks, and the limes did not grow anywhere else but on the lime trees. God planned this right back at the beginning of everything: “The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed *according to their kinds* and trees bearing fruit with seed in it *according to their kinds*. And God saw that it was good”, Genesis 1:12, (my italics).

¹ MacMillan School Dictionary, (Oxford: Macmillan) 2004.

A Christian life should witness positively for Jesus Christ, without needing any words to be spoken. Christian integrity means we will be honest in our lifestyles. Our habits, our attitudes, our values and our standards will all recommend Christianity to those who live around us. They will notice the difference. When they like what they see and hear, we have introduced Jesus Christ to them by “walking as Jesus walked”.

When friends such as our neighbours, work colleagues or travelling companions, ask us “what makes you so different?”, we will be able to personally introduce them to our living Lord Jesus. God sees this as “good” too—God wants it! This is evangelism as He always intended it to be: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect”, 1 Peter 3:15.

Children often look like, and sound like, their parents. While staying in one Khartoum home, I remember noticing the young son of a pastor at a desk, typing on to a computer. He was sitting in exactly the same position as I had seen his father sit earlier. When the mother called out “Rani, it is time for you to go to bed”, the boy spoke the words—and used the same tone of voice—I had heard his father use many times: “Just a moment, my darling, I’ll come as soon as I’ve finished this”!

As Christians we are children of our Father God. Can people around us see God-like quality in our lives?

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him”, 1 John 3:1.

We should live in the day to day world remembering that we represent our Father who is in heaven. People will notice the godly characteristics which are in our behaviour, even if we are not

aware of it. Jesus told his disciples: “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”, Matthew 5:16.

Integrity means wholeness. Something that is whole has everything necessary to be complete. A healthy person is a whole person. A healthy Christian is a Christian who lives with integrity throughout his or her life. People who say they are Christians but who do not show they are Christians are sick Christians, if indeed they are real Christians at all.

For a moment think back to the fruit in my garden. Pretend my banana tree was able to speak. And imagine it kept on saying to me, “I’m a banana tree”, “I’m a banana tree”, “hey—I’m a banana tree”! I could hear the voice from the tree speaking, but when I looked for the banana fruits, to take some and to eat, there was nothing there. How would I feel?

I would probably think—and maybe even talk back to my banana tree (when no-one was looking, of course!)—and say: “Here, listen to me you tree: stop your talking, and start your fruiting! The best way for me to know you are a good banana tree is for you to produce lots of green and yellow, crescent-shaped fruit for me to enjoy. Don’t say another word. Show me what you are”.

As a Christian, what I believe is shown by how I behave!

In the following four examples we will discover several practical situations where we face choices as Christians. We can live like most other people do around us, or, we can choose the pathway of Christian integrity. Our decision may make our lives more difficult. It may even result in us having to pay a high price for living the Christian way. But it will be the right thing to do. We will have kept the integrity of our Christian witness.

For every example read the Bible passage carefully. The Bible is God's word to us. He wants us to be able to "walk as Jesus walked". Our Lord Jesus paid a high price for us. We are his—we are not our own.

Let's pray this prayer as we continue our study:

Father God, may we learn what is the right way to live

and may we live that way, always.

Thank you for your promise to help us. (Philippians 4:13).

We are in this together!

May our light shine in the darkness,

in Jesus' name, Amen.

Example one the Lord Jesus. Read Matthew 22:15-22.

People who were against Him, and who were trying to make a fool of Him, never-the-less recognised in Jesus: "a man of integrity", a man who was true to His teachings, verse 16.

Jesus was being asked by these Pharisees to start rebellion against paying Roman taxes, or to risk losing His personal popularity with the crowds as a teacher. What should He do?

The four things said about Him by the Jewish leaders, in verse 16, give us an idea of what helped Jesus make His decision:

1. **"You are a man of integrity"**. An honest, moral and upright man. An older Bible translation says, "Thou art true". Jesus was true to the truth He was, John 14:6, and to the truth He believed. He lived truth. Always.
2. **"You teach the way of God"**. Jesus knew that God's truth does not change with changing circumstances. He would speak the truth and live by the truth, whether it seemed to His advantage or not.

3. **“You aren’t swayed by men”**. The right thing to do—or to say—does not change if you are dealing with a family member, or someone from your own tribe, or an important and influential official. What is right *is* right, whoever is asking the question!
 4. **“You pay no attention to who they are”**. These verses, with Mark 12:13-17, seem to say of Jesus: “You are not swayed by men, but only by God”. “You do not say what people want You to say. You keep to God’s right way. You are 100% honest and 0% hypocritical”.
- What do people say about you?
 - What does God *know* about you?
 - Are you “walking as Jesus walked” in all that you do?

If we want to keep a good Christian witness, then in every situation we face, we must say and do only what our Lord Jesus would do if He were standing in our place.

Example two Titus, a pastor at Crete. Read Titus 2:6-8.

The life of every pastor or group leader is to be an example, a pattern, a visual aid to all the members of his or her group. Any leader should be able to say: “If you want to live as a Christian should, then live like me”.

1. Paul did this himself, 1 Corinthians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 11:1, Philippians 3:17, 2 Thessalonians 3:7,9. Human beings like to copy one another. Paul was careful to be a good model for others to follow.
2. He encouraged Timothy to live as a pattern for others too, 1 Timothy 4:12, “...set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity”.

In the passage above Titus is encouraged to teach young men to be masters of themselves. They should not be out of their own control, but be under Holy Spirit inspired self-control, verse 6. The Holy Spirit helps us to *apply* the Bible in practical ways to our daily lives, (e.g. Colossians 3:1-17).

Personal example joined with sound teaching, verse 7, will be a potent weapon in helping Titus become a good minister. “Integrity” translates here the Greek *aphthoria* which literally means “uncorruptness”. As one rotten fruit badly affects the whole basket full of fruit, so—in a positive way—a healthy messenger giving a healthy message leads to a healthy congregation.

As we visibly show our faith is genuine (not just talked, but walked), we are seen to be different from the false teachers mentioned in Titus 1:11. Paul strongly criticises them. The first part of Titus 1:16 is the opposite of integrity: “They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him”.

Integrity helps our witness for Jesus. Your opponents can say nothing bad about you *that is true* when you live an upright life, Titus 2:8.

- If people were to judge the Lord Jesus by what they see in your life now, what would they think about Him?

Example *three King David.* Read 1 Chronicles 29:1-20.

For us the key is verse 17. David has led his people in giving money and skills towards building the temple. In his prayer to God David says: “I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent”.

Because he was king David had

1. the power to command his people to give their taxes for this project.
2. Instead he encouraged them by his own example. His people copied his good pattern.

Compare verses 2, 3, 6, 9, 14. Integrity inspires others.

- Do you always walk as Jesus walked in the way you handle your money?

- Can others copy your good example?

When King Solomon finished building the temple using these resources, God promised him something. It was a conditional promise: "If you will, then I will".

"If you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever ...", 1 Kings 9:4-5.

The following verses warn of disastrous consequences being sent from God, if the king or his sons "turn away from" Him, 1 Kings 9:6-9.

Note: The opposite of integrity is being "away from God".

- What does God see in your heart and life?

Example four Hananiah. Read Nehemiah 7:1-3.

Hananiah means "Yahweh has been gracious". Integrity is a gracious work of God in our lives.

We can pray for our own integrity as well as practise it.

Because Hananiah could be seen to trust God in an exceptional way, he was given a trustworthy position by Nehemiah, verse 2. Being a man of Integrity earned him his job.

Honouring God was more important to this soldier than anything else. Threats were being made against God's work, Nehemiah 4:11-12; 4:16-23; 6:10; 6:17-19. The successful rebuilding of Jerusalem depended on his wisdom, his courage and his integrity. Hananiah could be relied upon by everyone.

- Can God rely on you to do his work, and do it well?

- Are you the type of person God wants to choose to help in His work?

I speak only a very little Arabic.

When I lived in Khartoum, Sudan, I often heard people during conversations use the word: “tamaam”.

They were saying, “That’s OK”, “everything is right”, “good”.

The Hebrew Bible’s word for “integrity” is “tamam”.

It is also translated “sound, complete, and finished”.

It seems that when God finds a Christian who is learning to live in Christian integrity all of the time, God says, “tamaam”.

Let’s pray that you and I will always be among them!

Discussion guide

Using this chapter and Scriptures quoted:

1. Why is it important that other people can see your good deeds and not just hear you talk about them? Matthew 5:16.
2. Share some of the worst examples you have seen when Christians have not lived up to the name “Christian”. What has been the result on other people?
3. “What I believe is shown by how I behave”.
True or false? Why?
Luke 6:43-49.
4. Give some examples of where you have been tempted to be “swayed by men”, Mark 12:14.
What has stopped you changing what you say or do?
5. Compare Titus 1:11 “They claim to know God *but by their actions they deny him*”, with Titus 2:8 “and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed *because they have nothing bad to say about you*”.

Explain how you can live as the Christian you should be.

Give practical examples of what to do and what to avoid.

6. What do you learn about the value of integrity from 1 Chronicles 29?

7. Where does Christian integrity come from?

After your own thoughts, consider Romans 8:1-17; Galatians 5:16-25; Colossians 3:1-17.