



INTEGRITY OF MINISTRY

Recently, as I was driving to work one morning, I was listening to a commentary by someone who made a statement that a recent survey was given to “church goers” asking them to give, in their opinion, what is the most vital aspect that they are looking for in a pastor or ministry leader. As the commentator was making this statement, what immediately came to my mind was the character trait of “integrity.” As the commentator was giving all the possible answers that may have been given, sure enough, the number one aspect in a pastor or ministry leader that people are looking for is - “integrity.” Unfortunately, this many times, is also the answer that many people give as to which character aspect they see lacking in many of their church leaders - the lack of integrity.

When you think about it, this is a very sad commentary on the state of the Body of Christ these days. It is one thing to talk about government leaders, business leaders, athletes and the like having a lack of integrity. That is something that is unfortunately - nothing new. However, when it comes to the Body of Christ stating that the most disappointing thing that they experience is the lack of integrity within church leadership - that is startling and for lack of a better term - pretty bad.

As we go forward in our discussion, it is of most importance to have a starting point when we speak about the character trait of “integrity.” The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the term “integrity” as follows: The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness; the quality of being honest and fair; the state of being complete or whole; total honesty and sincerity; a firm adherence to a code of moral or artistic values: incorruptibility; an unimpaired condition: soundness; the quality or state of being complete, whole or undivided: completeness.

Of course the perfect role model for the character trait of “integrity” is Jesus, Himself. He personified this to all the people He came in contact with. The people saw this within Jesus. Integrity is what made Him different than the other religious leaders of the day. The people understood that the Roman government could not be trusted. However, the sad part was that their spiritual leaders, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes could not be trusted, as well. In Jesus, the people saw that He spoke with “authority.” This did not just mean that He knew the scriptures and could unfold them to His listeners, but rather the “authority” came because He was living it out.. They saw the words He was saying to them being put into action by and through His lifestyle. What He was telling them concerning being a child of God, He was actually living it out and doing it.

If we look at our definition of integrity above, let’s see if Jesus fulfilled our definition: Was Jesus honest and did He have strong moral principles - **YES**; Did Jesus walk in moral uprightness - **YES**; Was Jesus honest and fair - **YES**; Was Jesus honest and sincere - **YES**; Did Jesus hold to a firm adherence to a code of moral or artistic values and was He not open to being corrupted - **YES**; Was Jesus sound and complete as far as doing, living and being all that He said He is - **YES**.

I am not going to ask anyone to ask these questions concerning our pastors and leaders - that would be a little unfair. However, I think you get my point. We as leaders within the Body of Christ have been entrusted to be the “under shepherds” to the Body of Christ. It is imperative that we bring ourselves in line with the character of our Good Shepherd, Jesus.

Most of the time when we hear messages concerning “integrity” it is associated with being true to our word - doing what we say we will do. This is very true. We all know the scripture in James 5:12 - *“But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and [your] nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.”* We also know the scripture spoken by Jesus in Matthew 5:12 - *“But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”* These are very clear in and of themselves and I do not believe we need to go into these at this time.

Fortunately, we do hear these scriptures preached to us many times from the pulpit. The unfortunate thing is that those that are teaching us these scriptures many times, unwittingly and/ or unknowingly, are the very ones that lack in this area. It becomes a “do as I say but not as I do” message because we see the leadership not keeping their word. They become as lawyers who use “slippery language” that definitely seems as though they are saying one thing but then come back and tell us that that is not “really” what they said. Unfortunately, we do not walk around with recorders in our pockets that record our conversations. However, it is recorded in heaven. (Matthew 12:36, 37 - *“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”*) Hmmm...

However, the above is not really what I would like to key in on during this discussion of “integrity.” What I would like to discuss is in the area of “integrity of ministry.” In referring to our definition of the term “integrity” part of that definition is to “have strong moral principles and moral uprightness.” As Christians, and as the Body of Christ, we have a clear distinct code of moral principles and values that lead us to a life of moral uprightness or we can say in “Christianese” terms - righteousness. This is not just for us as individuals but it also is for every ministry, church, assembly or organization that calls themselves Christians and whose purpose is to serve the King and be a place where Yahweh, God can place His name upon.

Over the years we have seen the “integrity of ministry” within the Body of Christ deteriorate in so much that we have not been that “light that shineth on a hill” but rather the Body of Christ’s reputation has become just “like any other organization.” Sin has become rampant within leadership. Adultery, fornication, embezzlement, thievery, pornography and defilement has permeated the Body of Christ and its leadership. The “bar” or standard of moral character (and even, God forbid I mention the term “holiness” without being termed a self-righteous, “religious,” pharisaical hypocrite) has been watered down. The inordinate “grace message,” the forgiveness message, the inclusive love message has infiltrated the Body of Christ.

Twenty or Thirty years ago, when we heard of a Pastor or leader running away with the church secretary or stealing from the church funds it was scandalous to us. Nowadays, it is, “Oh well. God loves us all no matter what we do - runaway with someone else’s spouse; steal money from the church; Oh well God’s grace and love has covered that. Just get over it. They *said* they were sorry and that they repented. Let’s put them right back into ministry - and not just ministry - but restore them to leadership positions. Next.” The question that should be asked is, “Did the individual truly repent or were they just merely remorseful for their actions?” (The reader is encouraged to read the essay “True Repentance or Mere Remorse” found at <http://www.simplysimpleworship.com/True%20Repentance%20or%20Mere%20Remorse.pdf>)

Please, do not think that I am trying to be too harsh or “religious.” I am not advocating “shooting the wounded.” I fully believe in the Love, Grace and Mercy of God. I do believe in restoration to the Body of Christ and even to ministry position. However, I also believe in the total healing and restoration of the individuals first and foremost. The individual, as well as the Body that was affected, needs to be healed. The thinking of “well we are different and we can show the world that we are different by putting our fallen leaders ‘right back in the saddle’ and get back to what God had in mind for them” is faulty and dangerous. This is much, much different than falling off a bicycle and “getting right back on.”

Erroneously, to justify our methods of quick restoration, we use the example of the Apostle Paul. After all, he was a murderer of innocent Christians, yet God forgave him and used him mightily. This is very true. However, Paul was not yet saved when he went on his murderous spree. His spirit was not yet born again. It was only when he had his “road to Damascus experience” and he accepted Jesus as his Lord that his life was able to change and become what God had destined for him. We also tend to forget that the time period between Paul’s conversion and his actual start in ministry was somewhere between 8-13 years. It wasn’t just an overnight “healing and restoration and then into full time ministry.” It was a complete overhaul of Paul’s thinking, thought processes and spiritual growth.

We also erroneously use King David as an example of healing and restoration. After all, David committed adultery and conspired to commit murder, yet God used him in a mighty way. Yes, David had a heart that loved God. Yes, the plans for the Temple were given to him. However, we tend to forget that #1, the Holy Spirit was never within David. He did not have a born again spirit. The Holy Spirit was “upon” him and God chose to use him as such. After his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah, David was never the same. Yes, he did “own up to his sin.” However, it affected the rest of his life. He lost a son right after birth. His family was totally dysfunctional. He had more than one wife and had many concubines. His son Absalom rebelled against him. He ultimately lost Absalom. He suffered with deep depression. The people, although they loved him, ended up being disappointed with him towards the end of his life. Even though he was given the plans for the Temple, he was defiled by the blood that he had shed throughout his life so that he was prohibited from building the Temple. Yes, God worked through David and he was a mighty man of God. However, we can surely see that his beginning was much better than his end was once he yielded to temptation, sin and the covering up of that sin. It ended up controlling and affecting his life.

On the other hand, a good example of integrity in life and ministry is Joseph. We know his story. We know what he endured through the hardships of sibling rivalry. We know what he endured while in prison. We know that he endured and overcame the ultimate test of sexual seduction by his master’s wife. He was a man of integrity, not just to his own values and morals but to those he was entrusted to serve. God honored his integrity of serving (ministry) by having his body brought out of Egypt (symbolic of being brought out of slavery to sin) with the children of Israel at the time of the Exodus.

James 3:1 explicitly speaks to anyone who is aspiring to be in leadership position within the Body of Christ. It states “Let not many of you become teachers.” This is referring to the “pastor/teacher” role as found in Ephesians 4:11. James gives a stern warning to those who would become teachers/ pastors or leaders in the Body of Christ. This responsibility is given by God and He takes it very seriously. James states that there is a “stricter” or greater judgment that teachers and leaders receive if they lead people astray or cause them to stumble by either the words they speak or by their actions and lifestyle. James goes on to say in the scriptures that follow (James 3:11) that a teacher/leader/pastor should be a pure fountain that gives forth clean, fresh, sweet water.

Jesus also gives a stern warning concerning the responsibility and accountability required of being a leader. Luke 4:48 - *“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”* And again in Matthew 18:6 - *“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and [that] he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”* Wow!! I guess Jesus didn’t get the memo or listen to last week’s CD of the message on forgiveness, grace and mercy. (Hopefully, you understand I made that last statement with a bit of sarcasm in it.)

As leaders we must understand the concept that “integrity breeds trust.” When people tell us that they see a lack of integrity within an individual who is in leadership, they are also telling us that they therefore have a lack of trust in that leader. If you cannot trust the leader, how can you truly commit yourself fully to that leader’s ministry? If there is a crack in the foundation (caused by a lack of integrity within leadership) the building will ultimately fall. In the construction industry they use terms such as “structural integrity” or “the building is sound” when describing the strength of a building to endure harsh weather or other situations. It is the same with the Body of Christ. How can the ministry stand the difficulties of persecution, temptation and the onslaughts of the enemy if the foundation of leadership is not “sound” and its “integrity” is faulty?

Sometimes, we see in the Body of Christ, where leadership “glosses over” its imperfections and tries to put itself out there on display as being pure, holy and righteous. It reminds me of the background of the word “sincere.” The word “sincere” is an interesting word. It comes from the Roman or Latin word “sincerus.” It means to be pure and clean. However, its usage goes beyond its mere definition.

In the Roman world back in the times of the Bible, obviously, the pottery business was a good business to be in. Pottery would be formed, and then placed into an oven to cure. The well-respected potter would inspect his pottery after firing, and if any cracks were found, the vessel would be discarded and he would start over. Naturally, this would increase the overall price and value of fine pottery.

However, less reputable potters would take a blemished or cracked vessel and rub wax into the crack, perhaps melting it somewhat so that it would conform to and into the crack. After the wax hardened, they would then paint over the imperfection and sell it as if it were perfect and pure. Because of this practice the honorable pottery makers would hang a sign over the entrance to their stores: “sincerus,” meaning this store has pottery “without wax.” What do you think the dishonorable potters did? They hung a sign out as well stating that their pottery was “without wax.” Knowing this, a smart shopper, prior to making a purchase would take the piece of pottery out in to the sun for a while. If there was any wax it would begin to melt and they would know it was an inferior piece of pottery. In other words the pottery “wouldn’t hold water.” There were hidden cracks.

Ministry and its leadership must be – “without wax.” We must be thought of as “sincere” and be sound, complete and have integrity of ministry. We must stop trying to hide the “cracks” that are in our leaders. Hey, the truth is that we all have “cracks.” We just need to be honest and real – foremost with God because He knows them already and then with the Body of Christ whom we are called to serve. The fact of the matter is that some that are in leadership really do not trust the Body of Christ to do the right thing. What a predicament we end up having - no one trusts each other.

We need to be honest and make sure our motives are correct. We need to make sure that we do not have any “hidden agendas” or “cracks” of self-exaltation or pride that we are trying to hide and gloss over with “wax and a fresh coat of paint.” If this is the case, then watch out. As soon as it starts getting hot and the “Son” gets to shining on you through the Word of God and the fire of the Holy Spirit comes, the “wax” will melt and the painted façade will fall away and the cracks will ultimately be exposed for all to see. The scriptures tell that everything that is hidden will one day be exposed. (1Corinthians 4:5)

As we conclude our discussion, I would like to mention that I am not making a sweeping indictment of all leaders within the Body of Christ. I do believe that the majority are sincere and walk in “integrity of ministry.” Unfortunately, the Body of Christ is beginning to see the balance shifting in the wrong direction. Hey, the bottom line is that no one within the Body of Christ, whether in leadership or anyone who calls themselves a Christian is exempt from walking a life of integrity.

Anyone who is in leadership within the Body of Christ should not and must not compromise their integrity either within their own lives or in the ministry they are entrusted to oversee. According to Patrick Lencioni’s Five Dysfunctions of a Team, *“trust is the very foundation upon which teams and organizations thrive. If we lose that trust, then our ability to make an impact in the lives of others draws up default. Integrity is a deal-breaker: the lack of integrity will be a sure-fire way to create distrust, animosity and apathy. **Without trust, a leader has no authority to influence.**”*

Integrity of ministry creates “spiritual authority.” “Spiritual authority” leads to being trusted by others. To thrive as an effective pastor or leader within the Body of Christ, integrity is something that we cannot afford to abandon, cheapen or lose. In order for the Body of Christ to flourish in these end times it must be different, not just in word, but in actions and within our lifestyle. It is no longer acceptable to “do as I say but not as I do.” The foundation must be “structurally sound” and be built with one of the key ingredients known as “integrity.”

Below are some quotes concerning integrity:

*“We must be the same person in private and in public. Only the Christian worldview gives us the basis for this kind of integrity.” ~ **Chuck Colson***

*“Integrity is keeping a commitment even after circumstances have changed.” ~ **David Jeremiah***

*“According to Scripture, virtually everything that truly qualifies a person for leadership is directly related to character. It’s not about style, status, personal charisma, clout, or worldly measurements of success. Integrity is the main issue that makes the difference between a good leader and a bad one.” ~ **John MacArthur***

*“Few things are more infectious than a godly lifestyle. The people you rub shoulders with everyday need that kind of challenge. Not prudish. Not preachy. Just honest to goodness, bone deep, non-hypocritical integrity.” ~ **Chuck Swindoll***

*“Integrity is built by defeating the temptation to be dishonest” ~ **Rick Warren***