

Why This One Trait Is Crucial for Any Man or Woman of God

It is impossible to define “integrity” adequately with one word. But you know it when you see it. There was a time in ancient church history when confessing Jesus as Lord sent a signal to the authorities that made you a marked man or woman. Saying “Jesus is Lord” was taken as an insult to Caesar, and those who confessed Jesus as Lord were liable to a martyr’s death. Integrity is revealed by what you will give your whole life for. Lack of integrity is exposed by caving into the fear of man, rather living for an audience of one.

I preached my first sermon at the Calvary Church of the Nazarene in Nashville, Tennessee, on Dec. 2, 1954. It was on the faithfulness of God, my text being Lamentations 3:23b (KJV): “Great is thy faithfulness.” In the sermon, I quoted Proverbs 20:6 (NKJV): “Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?”

Every person I have known that I began to admire a little bit too much sooner or later disappointed me. This is not their fault. It is mine. One should know not to admire anyone too much. The best of men are men at best. I hate to think it, but I am sure there is someone out there who has been hurt by me.

God is faithful because He is a God of integrity. In Him there is no guile, no guilt, no shame, no injustice. He cannot lie; He keeps His word (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2). Likewise Jesus, the Son of God, mirrors His Father’s integrity and faithfulness. This is why Paul could say, “I live by the faith [or faithfulness] of the Son of God” (Gal. 2:20b, KJV). God keeps His word; He will never let you down.

That said, if you and I are to maintain integrity, it means we must reflect the character of God—namely, trustworthiness,

honesty, graciousness and faithfulness.

Without Fault

In 1948, before he became very famous, Billy Graham and three friends—Cliff Barrows (1923-2016), George Beverly Shea (1909-2013) and Grady Wilson (1919-1987)—felt the need to make a covenant with each other. They were aware of so many people in the ministry who went off the rails in various ways. They had the perspicacity to see that this could happen to them. In a hotel room in Modesto, California, they covenanted together to maintain certain principles. They called it the Modesto Manifesto. These principles came under four areas:

Money: The four men were aware that some evangelists emphasized money a great deal and took love offerings. They vowed never to emphasize money. They would also let someone else handle the money. Local campaign committees would oversee the offerings and the distribution of funds. They also agreed to live on a certain salary, no matter how much the offerings increased.

Sexual purity: A number of religious leaders, especially those who traveled, were falling into sexual sin. The men agreed to pray continually to God that they would be kept from this. They set up some rules. They would never allow themselves to be alone with a woman—whether at meals, counseling sessions or traveling.

Criticism: Some evangelists openly criticized local pastors from pulpits. The men vowed not to do this, nor would they criticize those who criticized them.

Exaggeration: The phrase “evangelistically speaking” has been coined to label exaggerated figures of the number of people attending meetings or the number of people who came forward to confess Christ publicly. The men vowed to be honest in this matter. If numbers were mentioned, they came from information from the local police, fire departments or arena managers.

Best of all, these men kept their vows! Did it pay? Oh yes. I doubt that any public figure has been scrutinized like Billy Graham or members of his team. The world tried to get something on them but never did. Graham and the other men kept their covenant with each other. There is no doubt in my mind that God honored Billy Graham, part of the reason being these principles laid down in what Barrows called the “Modesto Manifesto” years later.

I believe people with a big hole in their integrity will be found out, whether in this life or at the judgment seat of Christ (Num. 32:23). Proverbs 10:9 (NIV) says, “Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out.” You don’t need to read far into Proverbs until you see the connection between the fear of the Lord and wisdom, integrity and sexual purity.

Without a Price

Can you be bought off? There are stories of spies, whether with the KGB, the CIA or MI6, who have crossed over to work for the enemy they started out to be against. Why? They had a price. They could be bribed. It has happened with corrupt judges, politicians and government employees. It has happened with men and women who went to Hollywood—each aspiring to become a star—who succumbed for a price. I’m afraid that there are those in the ministry who traded their convictions for the invitation that promised a high honorarium.

The Syrian commander, Naaman, came to Israel to be healed of leprosy by Elisha. Assuming he would need a lot of money, the wealthy general brought silver and gold and other commodities that would be worth millions today. He was not prepared for the kind of person who would be healing him.

First, Elisha did not even come out to meet Naaman. That was a humbling moment for the Syrian general. Generals are used to everybody bowing and scraping before them. Second, he was told

by Naaman's servant to dip himself in the Jordan River seven times. That was even more humbling. But he finally yielded, did what he was told to do and was miraculously healed (2 Kings 5:14). After that, he meets Elisha for the first time.

Naaman is overwhelmed with the miracle and wants to show his appreciation and gratitude to the prophet Elisha. Elisha almost certainly lived on the offerings of people. But when a wealthy Syrian shows up, Elisha won't take any money at all (2 Kings 5:16). Elisha wanted to teach Naaman a lesson—that the God of Israel is different from the gods of Syria. Naaman was given a glimpse of sheer grace. The glory of God meant more to Elisha than anything else.

However, Elisha's servant Gehazi was of a different ilk. As we will see again and further below, he chased Naaman's caravan before he got too far and lied to Naaman, saying Elisha had changed his mind and would take a gift after all. "Of course," said Naaman. But Gehazi should have known better. Elisha perceived Gehazi's wicked deed by the Spirit, and the result was that Gehazi was struck with leprosy for the rest of his life—and also lost his job.

But there is an aspect of the story that moves me more deeply; Elisha does not command Gehazi to go and tell Naaman the truth. This would seem to be a natural thing for Elisha to do—to make sure Naaman did not believe Elisha put Gehazi up to what he did. But Elisha did nothing. He did not even bother to protect his own reputation with Naaman; he let him think whatever he willed.

This to me is amazing. Elisha knew God knew the truth. Even though Elisha wanted to teach Naaman a lesson—namely, to let Naaman see what the God of Israel is like—Elisha still did not try to clear his name before Naaman.

All Elisha did was for an audience of one. That is what mattered to Elisha—that God Himself knew. Elisha wanted the

praise that comes from God only (John 5:44).

It hurts a lot when people believe things about you that are not true—especially if those who love, support and admire you are told lies. The temptation can be heavy to say something! Tell the world the truth! But to do that would be forfeiting the praise God would have given, not to mention risk losing the anointing. It's not worth it to try to clear your name! That is why I admire Elisha so much.

Without Arguing

Sometimes God asks us to believe and do things that make no sense at the time. God “tested” Abraham and said to him, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you” (Gen. 22:2).

This is arguably the strangest, most apparently unfair and senseless request of God to be found in the entire Bible. Abraham believed the Lord when He promised Isaac to him and Sarah in their old age (Rom. 4:19-21). God made it clear to Abraham that Isaac, not Ishmael, was to be the promised child (Gen. 17:18-21). So why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac? It made no sense at all. Here is what is even more extraordinary: Abraham obeyed! He followed through. He knew two things full well: God gave him Isaac, and Isaac was the only link to the fulfillment of the promise that his seed would be as the sand of the sea and the stars of heaven.

Did Abraham complain? Did he say, “Why, Lord?” One would sympathize had Abraham done so. But in his own mind, Abraham reckoned that God would raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19). That is how much he believed God's word! His own reasoning was, simply, that he must sacrifice Isaac and then wait for God to raise him from the dead.

But God had another idea. The moment Abraham was about to come down with the sword and slay his beloved Isaac, God stopped

him (Gen. 22:12). It was Abraham's finest hour. He not only showed complete loyalty to God but was rewarded with God swearing an oath to him (Gen. 22:16; Heb. 6:17).

Abraham should be your role model—and mine. This means believing God's Word even when it makes no sense at the time.

Here's the thing: God always honored the person who held to Scripture. "You have so exalted your solemn decree that it surpasses fame" (Ps. 138:2b). King Saul became "yesterday's man" because the Scripture that stated only the person called of God should offer the burnt offering made no sense to him.

You and I face the same thing. There are passages in the Bible—Old and New Testament—that don't make sense to us. It will be to our folly if we dismiss these merely because they don't make sense to us—as if our opinion is valid and lets us off the hook because we deem ourselves capable of judging God's Word. Never forget that the Bible is God's integrity put on the line. He knows what He has written. He has not forgotten what He has written. His Word is a test whether we will believe His Word or dismiss it because it does not make sense to us.

As Paul put it, "Who are you, a human being, to talk back to God?" (Rom. 9:20a). Who do we think we are, that we can judge God Almighty?

The Bible is God's integrity put on the line. God magnifies His Word above all His name (Ps. 138:2b). I can think of nothing more wonderful than this: The God of the Bible is a God of pure integrity. The same can be said about His Son.

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