

BE A MAN OF INTEGRITY

Introduction

Everyone in our office knew this girl was different. She had something I didn't have. I didn't know what it was, but I wanted it. My friends didn't have it. In fact, compared to this girl, they and I became ugly in my sight. This girl's daily life convicted me. Yes, something was wrong—not with her, but with me and my friends.

I had made little pins, earrings, and paperweights with flowers drilled into them; so I brought some to the office to sell.

"Look, Lillian," I approached her, "you don't really have to buy any of my things. But it would help if you would head the list on this sheet of paper, indicating that you were ordering something."

For a moment, Lillian said nothing. Then she replied, "I couldn't do that if I didn't buy, Muriel. But I'll tell you what, Give me that paper, and I'll put my name down for a paperweight."

Afterward I thought about it. I couldn't understand it. Lillian couldn't afford to buy a paperweight. She was saving her money to go back to Bible College. Why would she sacrifice like this just to avoid a minor deception?

One day when Lillian was late getting back from lunch, I punched her time card for her. When I told her of the favor I had done, I expected gratitude; but instead she was dismayed. "I appreciate your concern, Muriel," she said, "but please don't ever do that again!"

Though she didn't explain, I realized that again it was a matter of dishonesty, and she couldn't be a part of it. These incidents and others showed me the difference between Lillian and me. (*POWER*, 4/18/93, p.7)

The thing that made Lillian different, the thing that enabled her fellow workers to see Christ in her, was her integrity. Our next topical study from the Book of Proverbs focuses our attention on the subject of integrity. As a Christian, you and I are called to be a man or woman of integrity.

I. Be a Man of Integrity, because It is of Great Value

(Prov. 28:21; Prov. 20:6; Prov. 28:6; Prov. 22:1; Prov. 13:15; Prov. 20:7)

INTEGRITY IS OF GREAT VALUE BECAUSE IT IS A RELATIVELY RARE COMMODITY.

It is not good to show favoritism, yet a man will do so for only a piece of bread.
(Prov. 28:21)

“It is not good to show favoritism,” because by so doing you are not treating people fairly. Note what the prophet Micah says about the LORD’s demand that we practice justice: *“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does Jehovah require of you? [He requires that you] act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with your God”* (Mic. 6:8.) Furthermore, *“it is not good to show favoritism,* because by so doing you are not imitating God who Himself is no respecter of persons: *“Jehovah your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes”* (Deut. 10:17.)

Nevertheless, as the latter half of the proverb testifies, you all too frequently find men showing partiality, forsaking integrity in their dealings with their fellow men—even for so small a gain as *“a piece of bread.”* Integrity is a valuable commodity because it is so rare.

Most men will proclaim their loyalty, but who can find a faithful man? (Prov. 20:6)

Most men will identify themselves as men of integrity, someone on whom you can depend. But, as the latter half of the proverb indicates, despite what men may say about themselves, it is extremely difficult to actually find a faithful man—a man of integrity: a man who keeps his word, fulfills his commitments, and consistently identifies himself with the truth. By way of example: One day a Christian man sought to purchase a weekend edition of the newspaper from a street vendor in Philadelphia. When he discovered that he did not have the necessary change, he told the vendor that he would be back in a little while to make his purchase. When he returned some time later with the change needed to buy the paper, the vendor exclaimed, “You really did come back!” That vendor had come to discover that few people keep their word.

INTEGRITY IS OF GREATER VALUE THAN MATERIAL PROSPERITY.

The poor man who walks in his integrity is better than the man who is crooked in his ways, even though he is rich. (Prov. 28:6)

The contrast is between a *“poor man”* who values his integrity and lives by it, and *“a crooked man”* who has sacrificed his integrity in order to attain wealth.

The Word of God emphasizes the value of integrity by declaring that it is better to maintain your integrity, even if it means living in abject poverty (the Hebrew word, from the root עָנָו, translated “poor” has the connotation of great poverty, or impoverishment.) On this subject note the testimony of a man who witnessed life in poverty-stricken Poland:

When asked, “What is the biggest lesson you learned over there?” he replied, “That it’s possible to endure poverty with great dignity.” He explained that the homes he visited were humble, but clean. The people he met had little—except values. (*POWER*, 4/10/94, p.8.)

It is possible to maintain your dignity if you maintain your integrity; but it is not possible to maintain your dignity if you sacrifice your integrity.

Note: Proverbs 28:6b literally speaks of a man who is “*perverse in two ways*”—i.e.; he lacks moral wholeness, his ethics are not affecting every dimension of his life, his life has become sinfully compartmentalized; he has a morally split personality. Consider the testimony of a Christian businessman:

I had fallen prey to the heresy of accepting the Bible as authoritative in matters of faith, but generally irrelevant in the workaday world. ...for 25 years I managed to compartmentalize my faith to such an extent that I virtually shut God and His Word out of my work arena. ...In the world of commerce and economics, ...I functioned as if Jesus’ standards were impractical. I actually believed they could disrupt the economic system that had developed over the past two and a half centuries. I didn’t realize then that the system *will* eventually collapse without the ‘salt’ and ‘light’ of Christ’s followers. ...The pursuit of wealth has been elevated almost to the point of being a tenet of faith. When amassing wealth is life’s ultimate goal, it is not surprising that businessmen—even Christians—can overlook the clear teachings of Jesus. (*POWER*, 9/25/88, pp.2-ff.)

A good reputation is to be chosen rather than riches, and to be affectionately desired rather than silver and gold. (Prov. 22:1)

Which would you choose: a million dollars, or the respect and favor of your neighbors?

How do you establish a good name and loving favor? Consider Proverbs 3:3-4,

Do not let kindness and integrity forsake you, tie them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart; ⁴then you will find favor and a good reputation in the sight of God and man. (Prov. 3:3-4)

A good reputation wins favor, but the way of the transgressor is hard. (Prov. 13:15)

The Hebrew word שָׂכַל, often translated “understanding,” also has the meaning “regard,” or “estimation.” Here it seems to have the sense of “to be held in high regard,” “to be given a good estimation;” i.e., “to have a good reputation.”

The teaching of Proverbs 13:15 seems to be that a man's good reputation will serve as a key that opens doors of opportunity and grants him a warm welcome: it gains him favor.

Conversely, a man's bad reputation will go before him, closing doors in distrust and contempt. Consider the testimony of an auto mechanic when asked how his shop handled customers who wrote bad checks. His reply, "A customer may write one bad check, but he won't write two." (Because that particular customer proved to be unreliable, the auto repair shop would not honor another check written by him.)

INTEGRITY IS OF GREAT VALUE BECAUSE IT PRODUCES A FAR-REACHING BLESSING.

A righteous man walks in his integrity—blessed are his children who follow him. (Prov. 20:7)

A righteous man, having been a model of integrity before his children, now leaves a legacy of integrity to them. Such sons and daughters are blessed to have such a father, and they will personally experience God's blessing, **if they follow** their father's example of integrity. Take note of Job's testimony concerning how much he valued his integrity: *"until I die, I will not renounce my integrity. I firmly hold on to my righteousness and will not let it go; my conscience will not reproach me so long as I live"* (Job 27:5b-6.)

Together with Job, let us value our integrity, not only for our own sake, but also for the sake of our children, and above all, for the sake of the LORD our God. Note Romans 2:23b-24a and the effect lack of integrity can have on our Christian witness: *"do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴As it is written, "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."* The Apostle Paul is speaking here of the consequence that resulted from the Jews failing to adhere to the LORD's moral standard in their dealings with one another and with the Gentiles.

Be a man of integrity, because it is of great value. May the words of the Psalmist serve as our prayer: *"as for me, you uphold me in my integrity"* (Psl. 41:12a.)

II. Be a Man of Integrity, in Every Part of Your Life (Prov. 11:13; Prov. 22:28; Prov. 20:10; Prov. 25:13; Prov. 25:26; Prov. 29:18)

BE A MAN OF INTEGRITY IN YOUR SPEECH.

He who goes around as a gossip reveals secrets, but he who has a faithful spirit keeps a matter confidential. (Prov. 11:13)

Be a man of integrity by maintaining a confidence; ...by being loyal to your friend or brother or neighbor by keeping confidential what he has confided to you; ...by

resisting the temptation to yield to the lust to spread gossip (to tell what is new, or what is exciting or sensational, or what is scandalous, at the expense of your neighbor.) May the prayer of the Psalmist also be our prayer: *“Set a guard over my mouth, O Jehovah; keep watch over the door of my lips”* (Psl. 141:3.)

Note also Proverbs 28:23; *“He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who flatters him with his tongue.”* Be a man of integrity by speaking the truth in love when necessary, rather than speaking insincere words of flattery. Bear in mind the teaching of Proverbs 27:6, *“The wounds inflicted by a friend are given in faithfulness, but the kisses of an enemy are profuse.”*

We may also take note of Psalm 15:1,4b, *“Jehovah, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? ... ⁴he who keeps his oath even when it hurts.”* A man of integrity is one who is true to his word and his commitments even when it is personally costly to himself. Be a man of integrity by being faithful to fulfill your promises and by being true to your vows and commitments.

BE A MAN OF INTEGRITY IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR NEIGHBOR.

Do not move the ancient boundary stone erected by your forefathers. (Prov. 22:28)

The moving of the landmark (moving it to a more personally advantageous position) was designed to increase one’s own land at the expense of one’s neighbor.

Note the emphasis on *“the ancient boundary stone [set up by] your forefathers.”* Here is a long standing tradition of trust and a well-established standard between neighbors that allows them to live with one another in peace and goodwill and mutual respect for one another. But now, motivated by greed or self-interest, and operating in an unscrupulous manner, that long standing trust and respect is broken. Be a man of integrity by refraining from deceitful and unscrupulous practices designed to take advantage of your neighbor for your own personal betterment at his expense. Let us take careful note of the warning attached to Proverbs 23:10-11, *“Do not move the ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, ¹¹because their Redeemer is strong and he will defend their case against you.”*

BE A MAN OF INTEGRITY IN THE WORKPLACE.

Differing weights and differing measures—both of them are detestable to Jehovah. (Prov. 20:10)

This proverb is referring to the practice of having on hand two diverse sets of weights and measurements: the businessman would employ the heavier set when he was buying, so as to gain a greater quantity of the item he was purchasing, and the lighter set when he was selling, so as to sell a smaller portion at a high price. By way of illustration: A Norman Rockwell painting shows a lady at the butcher shop: with her finger she is seeking to hold up the scale so as to have the butcher put on more meat, while the butcher has his finger on the scale, pressing it down.

Unscrupulous, dishonest business practices are identified as being detestable in the sight of the LORD, the One who is holy and who demands holiness of us in every dimension of our lives: *“just as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶because it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy’”* (1 Pet. 1:15-16.) Be a man of integrity, by doing your best to be honorable and fair in all your business dealings. May we take to heart the admonition of the apostle James:

Behold! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ⁵You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. (Jam. 5:4-5)

Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a trustworthy messenger to those who send him, for he refreshes the spirit of his masters. (Prov. 25:13)

The coolness of snow in time of harvest is a very much-appreciated relief, a source of refreshment. Likewise, when you send someone out to do a job, and you know that you can depend on him to get the job done and done right, he is a very much-appreciated source of refreshment and satisfaction. Be a man of integrity, by doing your best to show yourself to be a reliable and efficient employee. Note the admonition the Apostle Paul makes to servants (employees) and masters (employers):

Servants, obey your [earthly] masters in all things, not [merely] for the sake of appearance as those who seek to please men, but with a sincere heart, fearing the LORD. ²³Whatever you do, work with all your heart, as doing it for the LORD and not for men; ²⁴knowing that from the LORD you will receive the compensation that is the inheritance. You are serving Christ the Master. (Col. 3:22-24)

BE A MAN OF INTEGRITY EVEN WHEN IT IS HARD.

Like a muddied spring or a polluted well, so is a righteous man who yields to the wicked. (Prov. 25:26)

Especially in an arid land, to come across “*a muddied spring*” (i.e.; one that had been trampled by a herd of cattle and left foul and unusable) or to discover “*a polluted well*” was more than a great disappointment, it could be a tragedy.

Such a situation is used to illustrate the affects and consequences of a righteous man yielding his integrity before the wicked. Being either intimidated by their threats or seduced by their winsomeness and their favors, a good man sacrifices his integrity before the wicked. The consequence is one of great disappointment and maybe even tragedy: an evil act is abetted, instead of challenged; a role model is tarnished, if not demolished.

Be a man of integrity by faithfully withstanding both the threats and the seductions to allow wrongdoing to pass by your way unchallenged. Let us bear in mind the truth of 2 Timothy 1:7 and by the grace of God live accordingly: “*God did not give us a spirit of fearfulness; but the Spirit of power and love and discipline.*”

BE A MAN OF INTEGRITY EVEN WHEN YOU MUST STAND ALONE.

Where there is no vision, the people throw off restraint; but he who keeps the law, blessed is he. (Prov. 29:18)

Proverbs 29:18a is informing us that it is a moral vision—the determination to bequest unto the next generation a society characterized by freedom, a society conducive to their spiritual and material well-being, a society conducive to the spread of the gospel and the peace of the church—that enables a people to live within the bounds of the law and to practice the sacrificial life of self-discipline. But when that moral vision is gone, the people cast off restraint. When they lose sight of building for tomorrow, they start living for today; living for the present, living for themselves. Self-discipline gives way to hedonism and lawlessness; self-sacrifice gives way to self-indulgence.

Proverbs 29:18b is describing an individual man who continues to maintain his integrity when all those around him have lost their moral vision—the blessing of God is pronounced upon that man. Be a man of integrity even when all around you have cast off their moral restraints and have lost their moral vision.

By the grace of Christ our Savior, may we be men and women of integrity in every part of our life, and under every circumstance.

Conclusion

The young woman, Lillian, stood out in contrast to all those around her. In the words of her co-worker,

Everyone in our office knew this girl was different. She had something I didn't have. I didn't know what it was, but I wanted it. My friends didn't have it. In fact, compared to this girl, they and I became ugly in my sight. This girl's daily life convicted me. Yes, something was wrong—not with her, but with me and my friends.

The thing that made Lillian strikingly different was her Christ-like integrity. It was Christ dwelling in her and radiating from her His grace and truth.

By the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ may we be like Lillian, may we be men and women of integrity—for Jesus' sake.