



Integrity and Character

We live in a time where dishonesty and a lack of integrity are on the rise. I have seen this very prevalent not just in Uganda which would be considered a third world but also in the United States which is 1st World. Simply put, this is a problem across all cultures and borders. The level of dishonesty even in the church is beyond articulation. It is mind-boggling and shaming. Most of the sufferings, lack, and heartaches we go through are self-afflicted. Dishonesty has closed many doors for many people.

Proverbs 20:7 *The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.*

What is integrity? Integrity means honesty, honor, purity, rectitude, virtue, and adherence to moral and ethical principles. This word integrity comes from the word “integer” which means whole, complete, and entire.

Integrity is the uprightness of character, trustworthy action, and responsible commitment. It is a standard of incorruptibility, a refusal to be false to a trust, responsibility, or pledge.

It is disciplined, focused, and established behavior.

Integrity predetermines its actions or what I will do before temptation. It makes decisions ahead of any temptation. It has moral absolutes set in place and established.

To the degree we trust and depend on the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will manifest integrity in our lives. We can't do this through willpower. We need to depend on the Lord Jesus.

We must learn to be honest. If we do not, we are missing out on God's will for our lives.

- A. Proverbs 11:3 The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.

- a) Sometimes we do not have to have a word from the Lord, so to speak, but we can be led by integrity. Integrity guides us. God is a God of Integrity, and so is His Word.
 - b) If we leave integrity, we have left guidance.
 - c) As we study God's Word we will grow in integrity and character and in the long run, that integrity and character will guide us.
- B. Proverbs 19:1 Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.
- a) Doing things with integrity, supersedes wealth, riches, and honor that this world could offer.
- C. Proverbs 20:7 The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.
- a) Walking in integrity is profitable not only to us but also to those who are surrounded and associated with us. Our children can and will reap blessings from our integrity and uprightness. On the other side, the opposite is true as well. Those who walk in dishonesty and a lack of character not only affect their lives but the lives of their children and those associated with them.
- D. Psalm 26:1 A Psalm of David. Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide.
- a) Notice that there is a relationship between integrity and trust.
 - b) Those who walk in integrity do so because they are trusting the Lord. A dishonest person is not trusting the Lord or else he would not be dishonest.
- E. Proverbs 28:8 He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.
- a) If people only knew this, they would act differently. What's the point of destroying other people's lives through thievery and ill accumulated wealth just for it to end up in the hands of another? If we knew that all the dishonesty will

end up in the hands of another, we would think twice before committing to such behavior. This could change or affect our actions. This shows the silliness of this dishonesty. It doesn't pay off, and it's not true increase. Sin is emotional. It's not smart.

- b) "Usury" refers to Interest on debt (Strong's Concordance). It was prohibited to the Children of Israel to charge interest on money lent to each other. Doing so was wrong and was an unjust accumulation (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36-37; Deuteronomy 23:19-20). This is not to say that earning interest is ungodly, but I do believe there is some ungodly interest that is gained through overcharging and taking advantage of others.
 - c) There are two types of gains: Just gain and Unjust gain. So then if these two types of gains, then it's clear that the end doesn't justify the means.
 - d) He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse. Proverbs 28:27
- F. Proverbs 28:20 A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.
- a) The Hebrew word for 'faithful' here means firmness and moral fidelity. So, one who is a faithful man is one who is firm in their moral convictions. They don't compromise. They are secure. They cannot be bought, and they will not cut corners. Therefore, they will be blessed.
 - b) Making haste to be rich is referring to compromising moral convictions and godly values for riches and wealth. Such a person is not firm enough.
 - c) Another way we can look at this verse is in context with the previous verse.
 - i) So faithful would mean trustworthy, diligent, hardworking, committed, and persistent person.
 - ii) This kind of person will be increased in blessings. Everyone wants to bless or be around such a man. Hard work pays.
 - d) "Making haste to become rich" would be a reference to get-rich-quick schemes.

- i) Taking advantage of others is also part of making haste to get rich. We should avoid such. For us to take this kind of route means we have to compromise what is right (moral convictions)
 - e) We should endeavor and seek to be faithful because it pays off big-league.
- G. Proverbs 28:22 He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him.
 - a) Hastening to be rich is equivalent to having an evil eye. You may be thinking, "What's wrong with hastening to be rich? Doesn't everyone want to be rich at least quickly?"
 - i) The problem with hastening to be rich is one will have to compromise, steal, cheat, or cut corners to get rich.
 - b) We are not to take advantage of others to get ahead. Many people kick down doors to get ahead. They step on others and sometimes crush them just to advance themselves.
 - c) Prov 15:27 He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live.
 - i) Proverbs 22:16 He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want. 22 Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate:
 - ii) Proverbs 11:1 A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.
 - iii) Prov 23:1-7 When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: 2 And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. 3 Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat. 4 Labor not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. 5 Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven. 6 Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats: 7 For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.

- iv) Proverbs 15:16 Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith. This verse is saying that there is also much without the fear of the Lord, and small treasure without trouble.
 - v) Proverbs 16:8 Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right.
 - d) It's impossible to get rich quickly without compromise. People always compromise so they can increase quickly. This is not God's way of doing things. Such a kind is not blessed.
- H. Proverbs 28:24 Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer.
- a) Some folks believe it's okay to cheat and take advantage of their parents. Whether or not they are old, it is wrong. It's a sin.
 - i) **Robbing is a sin regardless of who you steal from. Whether from parents, siblings, or friends, it is wrong.** This person may think it's a light transgression, but it's not. This verse compares him to a destroyer. For example, the Pharisees and scribes asked people to take what was supposed to be given in support of their parents and give it to God, and they were free from honoring their parents. This was wrong

First things first—You must be born again

People need to be born again to fully walk in integrity and become men and women of character. I hear the screaming from non-believers. Well, that's right I said it. Not only that but also renew their minds through God's Word (Romans 12:1-2).

I know a friend who was trying to teach his employees honesty. I'm not discouraging this, but I truly believe the best approach to teach people integrity, character, and honesty, first is to have people born again and transformed from the inside out first otherwise this is behavior modification that is rooted in self-effort. Behavior modification is not a solution to fixing any issue and is just a temporary fix. It will not endure the test of time. I believe to achieve the best results of integrity, character, and honesty, people must be born again.

Am I saying everyone needs to be born again? Yes, I am. You can find some who are people of integrity more than believers, but that doesn't make them born again, nor does it mean that their integrity is sincere.

Most people are men and women of integrity only if someone is watching. Should they perceive that no one is watching, they will indulge the flesh in a heartbeat. Others do the right thing because of some fear attached to doing the opposite, but should that fear be removed, you will then see their true colors.

Only a relationship with Jesus can set a person free to walk in integrity whether they are being watched or not.

Better is little

Prov 15:16 Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith.

This verse is saying that there is also much without the fear of the Lord, and small treasure without trouble.

Proverbs 16:8 "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right."

I have a guy who was once a friend who lost tremendously enormous opportunities because of a lack of truthfulness. He had a doctor who came to Uganda for vacation, and he was given a job to drive him around for two weeks. The first day went well, and the doctor loved and believed in this young man. The next day the doctor called him to go pick him up at the hotel and he drove him for the whole day. At the end of the day, the doctor was getting ready to pay him and asked him how much he owed him. This driver overcharged the doctor, but the doctor was smart enough to know that the driver was taking advantage of him by jerking up the price. The driver was not honest in his charges, and he knew it. Things got ugly. The doctor was angry that he almost went into a fistfight with the driver had it not been for his wife to calm him down. He paid the overcharged price to the driver and then **fired him immediately.** He told him he was never to see him again, nor should he attempt to come back to his hotel.

- a) This driver lost more money by far in the long run. He only worked for two days rather than two weeks. The profit he would have made through honesty would have outweighed the temporary gain of dishonesty.
- b) Many people would go home mad at God for what has happened, yet they are the very ones who shut this door to themselves because of a lack of dishonesty.

- c) God had nothing to do with this firing, the driver did. God opened a door for him and the driver through his lack of integrity slammed it shut to his own face.
- d) We do not gain a thing by being dishonest. We may look like we have, but the truth is we have lost more than we have gained through dishonesty by the thousands. We have lost opportunities and many open doors that integrity would have opened for us.
- e) Dishonesty hinders and blocks prosperity and increase that ought to come our way.
 - i) Dishonesty is not what brings the increase.
 - ii) Proverbs 10:22 The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.
 - o True riches are birthed by the blessing of God, not dishonesty. If we have the blessing, we have the riches.
 - iii) Proverbs 10:2 Treasures of wickedness **profit nothing**: but righteousness delivereth from death.
- f) This doctor later returned and opened a hospital in Uganda and who do you think would have been his driver had this young man not walked in dishonesty? This driver lost big time.

The truth is, no one wants dishonest people. Even the thugs and gangs do not like it, especially if it is directed towards them. Integrity will cause us to rise to the top regardless of our circumstances and who we are dealing with. It will always win.

No lesson learned

Proverbs 16:13 Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right.

This same driver later got a job to drive an American. The American who was in the country to complete a child adoption process loved the driver and they became friends. Through the friendship, the American asked the driver if the car he was driving was his intending to buy him

his own had it not been his. Guess what the driver did? He lied. He said that the car was not his, which was dishonest.

He lost the opportunity of a possible 2nd car or even something better, who knows. He blocked his blessing and increase through deception.

Everything depends on Integrity

If we aren't succeeding, one vital area to check is our integrity as it is one of the major keys to our success. Integrity is also the foundation to trust. If we aren't honest, we won't be trusted.

We call numbers and letters characters because they never change. Day or night, winter, fall, or summer, they stay the same. They are whole and complete. They are one not two but one.

Your life, prosperity, and future depend on your character and integrity. Your ministry depends on the same. Your integrity is more important than your charisma, gifts, or talent. The only thing that can protect your talent and gifts is your integrity and character.

Candidates for promotion and leadership

One major characteristic of an individual that is encouraged and prevalent in scripture is integrity. Predominantly you find that integrity, character, conduct, attitude, and speech are the major things sought for in choosing leaders.

a) Candidates

Moses was given advice by Jethro on how to choose men that would help him in as judges of the children of Israel while Moses would deal with the harder issues. Jethro mentioned qualifications for those kinds of men. Not everyone would qualify. Integrity (men of truth) was one of those characteristics of these men.

Exodus 18:21 "Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:"

- i) able men
- ii) fear God

- iii) men of truth
- iv) hating covetousness

b) Selection of Seven men (disciples) to assist the apostles with the daily ministry

Acts 6:1-3 And in those days, when the number of the disciples were multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."

- i) Honest report
- ii) Full of the Holy Ghost

c) Bishops and Deacons

1 Timothy 3:1-13 "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

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| i) Blameless | iv) Sober |
| ii) Husband of one wife | v) Good behaviour |
| iii) Vigilant | vi) Given to hospitality |

- vii) Apt to teach
- viii) Not given to wine
- ix) No striker
- x) Not greedy of filthy lucre
- xi) Patient
- xii) Brawler
- xiii) Not covetous

- xiv) One that ruleth well his own house
- xv) Having his children in subjection with all gravity
- xvi) Novice
- xvii) He must have a good report of them which are without

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