

LifeWay Family Bible Series for Jan. 2: Integrity is a necessary credential for a Christian_122004

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Integrity is a necessary credential for a Christian

Titus 2:1, 113:8

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Hypocrisy, betrayal, untruthfulness, selfishness and greed are troubling this nation's soul. Common decency is no longer common. A lack of integrity is the emerging pattern in the moral conscience of America. This is the ultimate double cross, the enemy of democracy and of a civil society. A fragile consensus of hope holds our society together in spite of the despair over character. Finding an individual who conducts his affairs with integrity is a great discovery.

Loss of integrity is brought into the church through shenanigans as cruel as any secular misdeed-all too often in the name of God. The integrity of

denominational leaders, of the congregation and the staff has eternal consequences for those who look for life's answers and then turn away in disgust and mockery. An irrelevant gospel is no gospel at all. The only Bible some will see is the life of a Christian acquaintance.



A few years ago, I baptized a man in his mid 70s whose faith rested on his observation of a chaplain in World War II who lived what he preached. He was impressed enough that when given an opportunity by two laymen years later, he invited Christ into his life.

Integrity is an unimpaired, strict adherence to a code of morality. Integrity has the simple idea of being complete or formed and blended into a whole. Integrity, for the Christian, is the incorporation of the complete teachings, lifestyle, thoughts and behavior of Christ into one's own being. Paul defined integrity: "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness 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 us" (Titus 2:7-8).

Integrity comes from God

God the Father, by his nature, character and holiness, is the source of a believer's highest integrity. Paul writes to Titus who is ministering in Crete, a desperate and sinful society. A prophet of Crete said of his peers, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons" (v. 12). Paul, the apostle, defined for Titus the qualities of the Christian life that are pleasing to God and that will reflect the light of the gospel to the nonbeliever in a pagan or secular society.

"But for you ..." (v. 1) highlights the contrast Paul expects between Titus and the false teachers. "Teach" (actually "speak") is an imperative. Titus

was commanded to “teach what is in accord with sound doctrine” (v. 1). These sound teachings are from the heart and voice of God and are placed in our lives as values and principles of living to be practiced every day.

Integrity is possible without being a Christian. However, without the teachings of a moral God, morality is less likely because of the sinful nature of man. Education in goodness is inadequate alone to sustain noble behavior.

Integrity is the necessary credential for the Christian, an outgrowth of the very nature of God. All of the evils of mankind ultimately are defeated through salvation, God's saving grace. Salvation in Christ teaches us “to say 'no' to ungodliness and worldly passion,” “to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives,” motivated in anticipation of the “glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,” who redeems us and purifies us (his church) “for himself” (vv. 11-14).

Titus was told to “encourage” and also “rebuke with all authority” (v. 15). Both are powerful tools of a godly teacher. “Bringing salvation to all men” (v. 11) balances any call for an exclusive Calvinistic doctrine of election favoring salvation for a select few.

Integrity enhances relationships

Cretans often engaged in rebellion against their Roman superiors. Titus was to “keep on reminding” the people to continue to respect rulers in civic and spiritual authority by being submissive and obedient (3:1). Paul, himself, taught and lived the spirit of submission in order to preach the gospel to Gentiles and Jews and “to be ready for every good deed” (v. 1).

Quiet submission is the attitude and obedience is the act for all of God's children in all relationships-men, women, children and slaves (2:5, 9).

Submission and obedience are intrinsic to integrity in order that one can be “peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men” (3:2).

We can safely assume that disobedience to human authority would only be appropriate when obedience would defy God. In verse 3, Paul describes the unregenerate human condition as foolish, senseless, deceived, enslaved, malicious, envious and hateful.

God empowers us to act with integrity

How does God turn his power into the human spiritual fruit of purity, righteousness and holiness? The answer is a classic resolve of Christian theology. God's grace empowers the believer. God releases his power through his own “kindness and love” and because “of his mercy” (vv. 4-5). “He saved us” (v. 5) not because we deserved it but because of his ceaseless mercy in our behalf. “Justified by his grace, we ... become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (v. 7). Clearly, those who trust in the Lord must “be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone” (v. 8). If a person is saved in response to God's grace, then man's grace will help to draw others to God.

Discussion question

- How would you define integrity?

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.