

EDITORIAL: Time for integrity to make a stand

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Is it too much to ask people to behave the same in private as they do in public?

I posed this question in a blog the other day and started by writing about Michael Phelps. You remember the Golden Boy of the 2008 Olympics. If you visited news websites in the past week, you probably saw a picture of Phelps with his face in a marijuana bong. As soon as that photo circulated, he owned up to his mistake. But he simultaneously forgave himself for acting “in a youthful and inappropriate way.” Phelps’ effort would fail to earn a bronze medal in the apology games. It sounds dispiritingly like the “I’m sorry if my actions offended you” line we hear so often. If you can’t apologize more earnestly than that, just don’t.

Editor Marv Knox

When I got home that night, my wife, Joanna, informed me I was disproportionately hard on young Phelps. He’s the greatest swimmer since Flipper, and his use of marijuana was wrong. But he’s only 23, and his actions were tame compared to many athletes his age. “You should have focused more intently on the politicians and business tycoons who have shamed themselves lately. They really should know better,” Jo said. As usual, she was right.

If we were playing the Who’s Hypocritical? game, you wouldn’t break a sweat to come up with a list. In fact, working together, we probably couldn’t keep up with all the new revelations.

We could start with politicians who have been bounced out of and/or otherwise embarrassed the Obama administration: Tom Daschle,

nominated for secretary of health and human services, who failed to pay \$146,000 in taxes; Nancy Killefer, up for chief White House performance officer, who didn't pay taxes for a household employee; Bill Richardson, picked for commerce secretary but derailed by a federal investigation into his ties to a company that has done business with the state of New Mexico, where he is governor; and Timothy Geithner, who became treasury secretary despite failure to pay \$34,000 in taxes a few years back.

The troubling thing about all these failures is that they aren't a big surprise. Democrats are disappointed; Republicans are repulsed (and thrilled). But no matter who is in power, we eventually encounter a cadre of so-called leaders who live above laws they don't particularly like. If these high-profile politicians—who should know the whole world watches them—skim on their taxes and break laws, it makes you wonder who else is skimming and breaking, too.

I could write reams about financial indiscretions of the titans of business and industry. A list of sexual failures by all kinds of famous people would fill a book. But you know their stories. And I'm trying to avoid a headache.

So, here's the deal about ethics: We don't expect much anymore. The unspoken-yet-acknowledged postmodern mantra seems to be, "Rules are made to be broken."

Ironically, this could be a golden age for ethical Christian behavior. Why don't we all come to understand that if we live lives of honesty, integrity and transparency, we validate the faith we proclaim?

One of my favorite Bible stories is recorded in Genesis 39. A young man named Joseph matured beyond his self-centered adolescence. When the world's first cougar, Mrs. Potiphar, tried to seduce him, he literally ran the other way. He could have slept with his owner's wife, and yet he did the right thing. Nobody would have known, and yet he did the right thing. It

cost him dearly, and yet he did the right thing.

The rest of Joseph's story describes how God honors integrity. Because Joseph stood for what was right, God enabled him to save Egypt and his entire family from famine—and perpetuate the line of people through whom God would send Jesus Christ into the world.

I wonder how many lives could be turned toward Christ if all Christians lived lives of honesty and integrity.

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