

## PERSONAL INTEGRITY

---

Bill Hutchison, December 3, 2022

In 1991, the now famous novelist, James Patterson, along with another author Peter Kim, published a book entitled, *The Day America Told the Truth*. The book was a result of a national survey on the private morals of individuals within America on the subjects of sex and crime.

One question in that survey was, “*What are you willing to do for 10 million dollars?*”. Ten million dollars in today’s dollars is 22 million dollars. Interesting, two-thirds of Americans polled, would agree to at least one of the following for 22 million dollars.

Twenty-five percent would abandon their entire family. Twenty-five percent would abandon their church. Twenty-three percent would become prostitutes for a week. Sixteen percent would give up their American citizenship. Since this is about Americans, we’ll leave it at that. Sixteen percent would leave their spouses. Ten percent would withhold testimony and let a murderer go free. Seven percent would kill a stranger, and three percent would put their children up for adoption. This is in 1991. Two-thirds of Americans would sell their integrity for a price. This survey was over 31 years ago.

Can we begin to imagine how many people would do whatever for the money in our world of 2023? We’re very aware when we look around us that most people do not have integrity. Sadly, it is especially difficult to find personal integrity in the majority of political leaders worldwide.

Understanding integrity is important to us as God’s people because our futures depend on it; it’s a requirement. Followers of Christ are called to be kings and priests and God asks for integrity out of His kings and priests:

***1 Kings 9:4* Now if you (Solomon) walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments,**

**5 then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.’**

What is true for David and Solomon is also true for us. We must be people of integrity. Today, we’re going to take a closer look at integrity and discuss how it applies to you and me. To God’s people.

Though integrity is required for our future position, it's interesting that certain studies have shown that there are physical benefits. In an article entitled, *Personal Identity, What is it and Why it Matters* from *Fingerprintforsuccess.com*. Here are a few well-known facts that are footnoted though I won't quote the footnote here. It is well known that intrinsic values such as personal growth are positively associated with happiness. Studies have shown that people who think about their highest values before entering a stressful event experience less stress. Knowing our values improves our ability to distinguish between what seems urgent and what is really important.

More than 50% of the ten largest corporate bankruptcies since 1980, such as Enron, WorldCom, and Lehman Brothers, resulted from unethical business practices. The ethics of a communities' culture plays a significant role in creating and sustaining value in any organization. All that can apply to the Church. All that can apply to us personally. It all deals with integrity.

When we consider the qualities that a person of integrity has, we commonly think of traits like honesty, responsibility, courage, humility, patience, or any other virtue that we consider a strength of character. Integrity is more than a summation of values or virtues. In modern ethics, integrity is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles and moral uprightness. Those are qualities we don't hear about very often. People don't talk about them.

Integrity is a personal choice that holds oneself to a consistent moral, ethical standard. It is not externally driven but it is something intrinsically inside of us that instills integrity that we will follow a certain code. This is why God uses the phrase "integrity of heart" because the heart is the symbol of our feelings. What is the basis of our thoughts? What's the basis of our actions? Its why God uses the word of integrity of heart. It's inward. Though integrity demands honesty as one of its most important traits, integrity has less to do so with honesty with one another, though that is part of it. It is more about an honesty between our heart and our head/brain, within ourselves. That we are honest with ourselves. That we're living up to a moral code or values that we endorse, that we speak about, that we respect but then we don't live by them. There must be a correlation between the two.

Though I would not normally quote from Wikipedia, I found an article they have which has a good definition and a lot of footnotes. I looked at some of the footnotes which are using some very good authorities.

*"In ethics, when discussing behavior and morality, an individual is said to possess integrity if the individual's actions are based upon an internally consistent framework of principles. These principles should in uniformly adhere to a sound logical axioms or postulates. One can describe a person as having ethical integrity to the extent that the individual's actions, beliefs, methods, measures, and principles all derive from a single core group of values."*

There is a certain set core that drives your integrity. For an individual to have integrity, they must first have a consistent framework of principles or a single core group of values.

Secondly, they must consistently follow them. One of the things that we are doing at the conference is defining core values. We get questions, “Where do you see yourself in seven years? You’ve got a nice little group. Where do you think you’re going?” It would be nice to say, these are our core values that make us who we are and that we live by. We witness that people do not live by what they preach in the workplace, among friends and even within the Church. They justify it for other reasons, or they reach out and grab their own core values or someone else’s and justify in their mind what they’re doing.

Consistent and single core mean they’re not wishy-washy. They’re not squeezey. They’re not puffy. It’s something you can hang on to, anchor to. They don’t change with the circumstance, but they source every thought and every action that follows a core value that is anchored in their heart and mind. Written there. Sound familiar?

Personal values imply that the individual upholds their values as the most important thing in their life. Twenty-two million dollars can seem important. It can solve a lot of problems but somebody who has core values and integrity does not measure their success in life by how much money they have in the bank or how big their house is. If they do have a big house, it’s more about how they got it. If they had to do something shady to get whatever it is they wanted, it’s a guilt complex and they realize it is something they need to change. How they feel is the basis of measurement of how successful they are. If you can go to bed and sleep at night knowing you did everything right. Move into that house because you did everything right to get it, it’s much more mentally stable and not wishy-washy. It is something that has been given to you and you know how you got it.

My grandfather got his electricity turned off one time and he lived way out in the holler, if I can say that. He had been raised on fuel oil lights so the fact they were turned off wasn’t much at all. He said, “Hey, you charged me double” and they said, “No, we didn’t. We’re going to turn them off.” He says, “Turn it off.” Thirty years later, somebody knocked on his door and said, “Mr. Hutchison, we found an error and we’d like to take care of this and turn your electricity back on.” He says, “Since you’ve done that, you can turn it on.” He had that principle. I must say my grandfather wasn’t a stubborn man. It’s interesting to think about that. Thirty years. Whether it was based on the right thing, he knew who he was.

In 1 Kings 9:4, the Hebrew word translated integrity, according to the Enhanced Strong’s lexicon means *integrity, completeness, or perfection*. The Theological Word Book of the Old Testament states, it means not only integrity but also *strength*,

*perfection, and uprightness.* As we learn to live within a certain code based on value, the implication is we are moving toward perfection.

**James 3:2 For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.**

The Greek for stumbling is synonymous with “you’re not with the program”. You’re not following. You’ve come off your code of values; you fell away from them. James is referring to speech here, but it flows over to every aspect of life. The world defines an individual as having integrity if they have a set of values and they live by them. The thing is most people in the world have their own rules. Ever heard the saying, *I’m true to myself*. Of course, we understand what’s wrong with that. Who are we true to? What are we true to? For us, our integrity is to be based upon the adherence to God’s law and codes.

**Ephesians 4:11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,**

**12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,**

**13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, (to a man of integrity until) to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;**

Christ was an example when He lived here on earth. He lived according to the will of God. He did not waver from that and therein was His integrity and therein is the perfection. “To a perfect man” is synonymous with being a man of integrity because we focus on the core values of God which lead us to that stature of Christ. If we are true to what we know God is telling us to do, and we do it, we strive though we may stumble, we are still reaching a perfection as the image of Jesus Christ.

The framework of a single core values for us, of course, is the unity of the faith, thinking the same thing, having that mind of Christ and the knowledge of God. Being taught, learning the same things. Knowing God means knowing His framework as we adhere to the basis of these values, we become more complete, not just individually because, as I quoted, one of the things about integrity, it not only strengthens the individual, it strengthens a community. Henceforth, why God says, I’ve got a body. I’ve got a heart in it. It has integrity and it becomes a more complete person. As we as individuals become more perfect, we become more complete as a body of Jesus Christ. The full image of who He is.

Notice again, what Wikipedia states. I’m continuing to quote *An individual must therefore be flexible and willing to adjust these values to maintain consistency when*

*these values are challenged. When as such an expected test result is not congruent with all the observed outcomes.*

I know that is a mouthful but think of it this way, I may have a certain opinion or certain thought process about the values of God. But someone challenges me, is that a proper way to think? Are you being true to the actual meaning of it? If someone challenges it and its true, you're not upset at the messenger, you say, "I've got an intrinsic part of integrity in me that's wrong, I need to change that." That's called repentance and it is tied into integrity.

Continuing, *because such flexibility is a form of accountability.* Think of that. Accountability. We're all held accountable before God of how we act and how we look at His values. It is regarded as a moral responsibility as well as a virtue. A person of integrity does not look at God's laws and say, "I'll follow them if I want to.". It is a statement of integrity. It is something that we are responsible for and see them as virtuous, as good. If we are people of integrity, it demands that we're always testing our thinking and thinking how we need to apply it better to our lives, in our actions. If it doesn't line up, give it the sniff test. If what we are doing doesn't pass the sniff test, something smells, and we need to throw it out. The thing is no one needs to tell us that. if it's intrinsic. Somebody might tell you it stinks. Ok and you must test that it stinks. What do you do? You get rid of it. You don't hang on to it. You understand that it may be a fight within yourself to change, but it becomes a part of you. Of course, understandably, *our* framework of values must change to God's framework of values.

**Hebrews 4:11 Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.**

**12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**

**13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.**

We realize that those values are not ours, they're God's and it is those values that can change us. Whatever is in here (pointing to heart) that is different than what is part of the image of God, we're to use that word, those values, to cut it out. That is moving toward perfection when we do that. That's the completeness. That's the integrity. The integrity and perfection we so desperately need can only come through a close relationship with God. How do we know the heart of God, His laws, if we are not putting those same laws in your heart and the only way we can do that is through a close relationship with Him, who then can actively cut it out. When we allow God to write His laws into our hearts, the integrity of the Father and Jesus Christ is literally being

constructed in us. It is about deconstructing our thoughts and values and putting God's values.

**2 Corinthians 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.**

**4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,**

**5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,**

Cut it out. One last quote from Wikipedia: *An individual's value system provides a framework within which the individual acts in ways that are consistent and expected.* The person expects it from themselves. It's not that other people expect it. You expect it from yourself intrinsically to follow those laws. That framework. *Integrity can be seen as the state or condition of having such a framework and acting congruently within the given framework.* Congruent means the same shape. It looks alike. Congruent circles, they're all circles, and they're all inside each other. Congruency is that when someone looks at a person of integrity, whatever values he reflects, who he is, is that framework that he follows. Henceforth, when people see a person of integrity who follows God's law, who does he see? The image of Jesus Christ.

To be people of integrity, you must build correctly on the right foundation.

**1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.**

**10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.**

**11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**

**12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,**

**13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.**

**14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.**

**15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**

Think of the values for a person of integrity that stands on God's law as the foundation. He only builds upon them.

In architecture and engineering, integrity is used to describe the soundness, the strength, or the usefulness of a structure such as a bridge or a building. In other words, someone comes in and looks at an old bridge. As he looks at it. He'll say, "it has integrity. It will hold that truck as it goes across. Or trucks." Or looking at a framing of a house. I built a deck a few years ago. I had to have it inspected. Each time I dug the holes, they had to be a certain depth and have concrete at the bottom. The city inspected it. When I put the frame together, they wanted to make sure it was attached to the house correctly. That it wouldn't fall when everyone got on top of it. After I put all the decking on and such, they came and inspected again to make sure I had the railings and everything else so that people wouldn't fall off of. Then they declared it as having integrity. That's part of engineering, "integrity" is word they use.

Safety inspectors inspect bridges and buildings and effaces for integrity. The thing is structural integrity can mean the difference between standing or falling. In a sense, integrity literally defines the margin of safety between success and disaster. When we have integrity, we are guaranteed success. If we don't, there could be disaster laying around the corner.

We are spiritual beings. Spiritual buildings. Just as integrity defines the margin between safety and disaster in physical structures, spiritual integrity defines the spiritual margin between spiritual safety, spiritual disaster, falling or standing, but most importantly, between salvation and death.

There are three main aspects of a sound structure. 1. A building has a designed purpose that it must fulfill. 2. A building with integrity has quality materials and workmanship. 3. A building with integrity requires continuous maintenance.

Before any structure is designed or built, the designer needs to know its purpose. For instance, if it's a bridge, he needs to know how long it is, how wide it is, he needs to know how much weight it needs to hold. If the designer engineer does not take into consideration the complete construction integrity, that bridge will fail.

We have many testaments to man's ability to build. Have you ever been to the Boulder Dam? They say that will last 150 years. If man was wiped off the map, it would continue to operate for 150 years, the longest of anything if it's not maintained. The Golden Gate Bridge and the Empire State Building were designed with fine detail in their intended purpose. The Golden Gate Bridge is now 85 years old. The Empire State Building is the same age. The amount of concrete inside Boulder Dam is immense. A documentary about the building of Boulder Dam showed years and years of all they had to do in engineering to build it provide even heat inside the concrete. For that to be accomplished, for the integrity of the dam to work, it took great detail and design to be able to do stabilize the concrete.

For us, as people of integrity, we must first understand and clearly see our purpose so that we achieve that purpose. We must keep it in the front of our minds. How we need to be constructed. What traits do we need. What skills do we need. What knowledge and character must we have to be sound buildings. That's all part of integrity to know what it is you are even reaching for. That's part of knowing God's law.

**Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**

**29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

Do we see our purpose as far as a person of integrity. Is that who we are to be? How we're to be built. How we're to be able to operate and do the same things as Jesus Christ. Yes, He's God but integrity is the the goal that we need to strive for.

The second requirement for structural integrity is the use of quality materials and workmanship. While working in New York City, in 1996, I had the opportunity, to go into the Empire State Building. It was a business day and for some reason the top floor was closed. When you walk into that building, the material quality used caused it looked like you were walking back into the 1930's. It looked just as new as the day it was built. In 1945, a B-25 bomber ran into the Empire State Building. It burned out two complete floors, but the building didn't waver. It was built differently than the twin towers. One plane each took out both towers. It had the right workmanship, the right quality of materials allowed the Empire State building to survive. It is not only strong but if you walk in, you see the quality.

As we read earlier in 1 Corinthians, 3:12, we're to build with gold, silver, and precious stones. There's no shortcuts. We need to put the right materials into it.

**Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

**23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.**

When we talk about what we consist of and what is in our heart, and we're looking and we're measuring how strong the materials that we're using are, if we're not gaining the spiritual building block as we are living and trying to build that integrity, we've got the wrong fruits. If I gain great, I must recognize that does not work the righteousness of God. It's working my righteousness. If I'm not showing love, joy, and peace to my fellow man or to Church members especially, that's not good craftsmanship. That is not the right materials by which we should be building. We look at the outcome. The result of what we're building, and we say, is that what it needs to be? Do we rip out what is destructive and put in what is constructive?



This brings us to the third aspect regarding maintenance. Over time, the integrity of any structure changes and weakens. I don't know if you remember but on August 1, 2007, the I-35 bridge collapsed in Minneapolis. When it was built 30 years before, it was sound. It was strong. The number of tractor-trailers, semi's going from the eastern part of the United States to the western part of the United States it carried all those vehicles. Do you know what caused it to fall? It was because of the pigeon dung on the girders that was never swept off. Coating put on to protect. Replacement of anything that is corroded. When it fell, it killed several people and caused a traffic jams often r numbers of times which interrupted the flow of commerce in the northern part of the United States. Maintenance is very, very important. It is the same for us. If we do not continually maintain what has been developed in us, we can't think that it will continually stand. We need to make sure that we're keeping it maintained.

**2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.**

That integrity is kept, if we're always, every day returning to the source. Looking at the values, the framework, and making sure that we're not turning from it. That something doesn't need to be polished or corrected or rewelded. Whatever materials that were used in whatever we see, we must apply it. Our spiritual framework requires constant attention. Constant.

Integrity is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. An upright moral base. Integrity is the person of choice to hold oneself accountable, consistent to morals and to ethical standards. Integrity is having a consistent framework of values and how well our thoughts and actions align to that framework. Integrity is about being honest and of taking those values and looking at our heart and saying, "Are they there or are they not?" Looking back to those values and saying, "Am I doing them and correct it". Integrity is about building God's framework in ourselves. How we construct that framework means the difference between safety and disaster. It's a matter of life and death.

Let's understand and build according to our purpose. Build with quality materials and maintain what we build through continual renewal. Our integrity. Who we are. If we do, we will develop the integrity we need to know. To be and walk in integrity of heart and uprightness. When people see us they need to see that we are developing in ourselves the image as Jesus Christ.