

## LeaderLesson 6: Integrity

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For Coach Cleveland Stroud and the Bulldogs of Rockdale County High School in Conyers, Georgia, it was their championship season: 21 wins and 5 losses on the way to the Georgia boy's basketball tournament, then a dramatic come-from-behind victory in the state finals. But now, the glass trophy case outside the school gym is bare. After the tournament, the Georgia High School Association deprived Rockdale County of the championship after school officials said that a player who was scholastically ineligible had played 45 seconds in the first of the school's five postseason games. "We didn't know he was ineligible at the time; we didn't know it until a few weeks ago," Mr. Stroud said. "Some people have said we should have just kept quiet about it, that it was just 45 seconds and the player wasn't an impact player. But you've got to do what's honest and right and what the rules say. I told my team that people forget the scores of basketball games; they don't ever forget what you're made of."<sup>1</sup> In case we were wondering, that's what integrity looks like in a leader.

Surveys have shown that integrity is the quality that people want to see most in a leader. That makes sense – if someone is going to follow a leader they want assurance that the person can be trusted. They want to know that he or she will keep their promises and follow through with commitments. Leaders with integrity are those whom others are eager to follow.<sup>2</sup> Integrity is vitally important in every area of life and leadership, but for those of us who are church leaders, integrity is even more important. We represent the Lord Jesus Christ in the church. We serve because of His call to us. Therefore, we must strive with all of the spiritual energy God provides to be people of integrity for Jesus' sake, and for the sake of those we serve. This gives Acts 1:8 a new perspective – if we are Jesus' empowered witnesses, part of that witness is the integrity with which we live, speak, act, and serve.

Since this is so important, where do we go for an example? Is there anyone we can really trust? People, including those nearest to us, let us down (and we are among those who let others down). But God will never let us down because He never changes. His promises are good for all eternity! Hebrews 13:8 reminds us of the unchanging integrity of our Lord: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." His character never changes – He never vacillates. Therefore, the Lord's character and the promises He makes are forever worthy of our trust. He does what He says and His love is always dependable. Because of His integrity, He is the ultimately reliable source of hope. This hope is our anchor for the soul, both firm and secure (Hebrews 6:19). God will never compromise His perfect integrity.<sup>3</sup> We can count on Him, and we can learn the ways of integrity by following Jesus' example.

Integrity, ethics, and morality - these words tend to be used interchangeably, but when this is done, some of the distinctives of each are blurred. So, what is integrity, and how is it different from ethics or morality? A clearer understanding of all three words gives a solid grasp to what integrity really is. Ethics refers to a defined standard of right and wrong; good and evil. It's what we say we believe. The Bible, God's Word Written, gives us our standard for ethics. Morality is a lived standard of right and wrong, good and evil. Morality is what you actually do, your lifestyle, your actions. Integrity simply means to be sound, complete, integrated. So, to the extent a person's ethics and morality agree, or are integrated, that person has integrity. The opposite is also true – to the extent a person's ethics and morality are not integrated, that person lacks integrity. If you want to have integrity, you must choose your ethic and then live to match it. A person who claims to be a Christian makes an ethical statement and has committed to a certain morality.<sup>4</sup> To have integrity, the Christian must do what he or she says they believe is right. To do otherwise is hypocrisy.

This is why obedience for the Christian is a necessity. Without obedience to God's Word, we have no integrity. We must not say we believe one thing and do another. We must be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves (James 1:22).

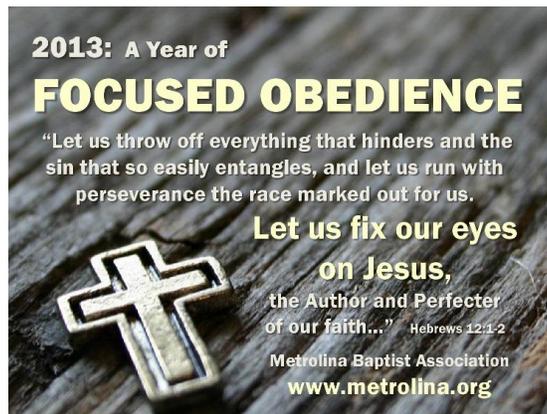
Pause for a moment. Think about where you are personally. Are your ethics and morality integrated? How are you doing in the important area of integrity?

When we realize the absolute integrity of God, and then recognize the failings we have in our own lives, we find ourselves at the place the prophet Isaiah was, when his vision of the Almighty challenged his reality.<sup>5</sup> When Isaiah had a vision of the glorious Creator of the universe, he was overwhelmed by the holiness of God – the Bible says he was undone. R.C. Sproul writes, "To be undone means to come apart at the seams, to be unraveled...he was

experiencing personal disintegration. To disintegrate means exactly that – to ‘dis-integrate.’ To integrate something is to put it into a unified whole. The word integrity suggests a person whose life is whole or wholesome...or as we say, ‘He’s got it all together.’”<sup>6</sup> So, in the light of God’s perfect integration, Isaiah saw his serious need for personal reconstruction, for re-integration. The closer we get to the Lord in personal relationship, the more we see the need in our own lives. The more we discover the matchless holiness of God, the more we discover our lack, our shortcomings. Thankfully, like with Isaiah, the Lord comes to us in those moments of repentance to bring forgiveness, cleansing, and preparation for the task ahead. He empowers us by the Spirit to walk into integrity day by day. Pray with me that we will be leaders of integrity for such a time as this.

O Maker and Sustainer of all things,

Day and night are Yours, heaven and earth declare Your glory;  
but I, a creature of Your power and blessing, have sinned against You  
by resisting the dictates of my conscience, the demands of Your Law, the calls of Your Gospel;  
yet I live under the blessing of a promised hope.  
Deliver me from worldly dispositions, for I am born from above and bound for glory.  
May I view and long after holiness as the beauty and dignity of the soul.  
Let me never slumber, never lose my assurance,  
never fail to wear armor when passing through enemy land.  
Fit me for every scene and circumstance;  
fix my mind upon You and turn my trials to blessings,  
that they may cause me to give thanks and praise.  
Make my obedience to Your will holy, natural, and delightful...  
Sanctify me in every relationship, position, action, and condition of life,  
that if I prosper I may not be unduly exalted,  
if I suffer I may not be overly sorrowful.  
Balance my mind in every circumstance and help me to cultivate a perspective  
that makes every duty a spiritual privilege.  
Thus may I be content, be a praise to You, and be an example to others.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>1</sup> From *Integrity* by Ted Engstrom, included in *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching from Leadership Journal*, Craig Brian Larson, Editor, Baker Books: 1993, page 116.

<sup>2</sup> *Handbook to Leadership: Leadership in the Image of God*, Kenneth Boa, Sid Buzzell, Bill Perkins. Pages 77-78. (This yearlong study is using this text as a primary source. Anyone who would like to go deeper on this journey for leaders is encouraged to get a copy of this excellent resource. It is also available on Kindle.)

<sup>3</sup> *Handbook to Leadership*, pages 79-80.

<sup>4</sup> *Handbook to Leadership*, pages 83-84.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 6:1-7.

<sup>6</sup> *One Holy Passion*, R.C. Sproul, Thomas Nelson, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from “To Be Fit for God” in *Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, page 139.