

Why Encourage Integrity?

A number of years ago, there was a church in a metropolitan area that ran over 400 in Sunday School. The pastor preached the Word of God and led his church with genuine integrity. Eventually, he was called away to a new position of ministry in another city. The pastor that succeeded him decided that God's rules of fair play did not apply to him. He refused to work with the proven church leaders and developed a new group who would support his desires. A significant split developed in the church. The strength of the church declined so much that he finally decided to leave as pastor. A new man accepted the position of pastor. For a while things showed the promise of new growth. Then he was accused of sexually molesting a child in the church. Information was uncovered that indicated he had demonstrated the same type of behavior in a past church position. After he was finally convicted and sent to prison, the remaining church members disbanded and closed the doors. Their reputation in the community as a church was now damaged too much to continue. Two men who failed to serve with integrity had destroyed an entire congregation. Not all pastoral moral failures are this evident, but too many pastors have failed to serve their congregations with integrity.

One purpose of our ministry at Shepherd's Rest is to encourage true integrity in ministry. We believe that God is the author of integrity. The following describes a few of the reasons that integrity is vital to successful ministry.

How amazing are the deeds of the Lord! All who delight in Him should ponder them. All He does is just and good, and all His commandments are trustworthy. They are forever true, to be obeyed faithfully and with integrity. Psalm 111:2,7-8, NLT

First, God's very nature is one of integrity. He is absolutely trustworthy. The Old Testament presents Him as the great "I Am" which is descriptive of his immutable character and righteousness. He has worked throughout history to share that righteousness with us, culminating in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If we are going to represent God to the world and let our light shine, how can we be effective without building our lives on truth and honesty? Long-term effectiveness in ministry is dependent upon integrity. Today, we live in an increasingly secular society that has lost the joy of a close relationship with God. If we compromise God's standards in our own lives we

become indistinguishable from the rest of the world. How can we do that and hope to make a difference? In the days of the early Church, most Christians came out of a pagan society. Paul consistently called upon them to stay faithful to the transformed life of faith in Christ as a witness to others. Today, when we build our lives on the solid rock of a genuine faith in Christ our ministries will stand the challenges of life. Because of God's integrity at work in our lives, those lives count for something special and lasting. We may never see all the fruit of our ministry, but it will be well-preserved in eternity.

"In everything set [the young men] 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, NIV

Moral, ethical and spiritual purity are essential qualities that are required in the life of a minister. Church members often see their pastor as nearly perfect. This can set the stage for temptations of the flesh and attitude. Like some celebrities we can begin to believe we are as "special" as people say we are. This can lead to self-serving leadership. God's chief complaint with the ancient priests was their tendency to lead the people into idolatry. Jesus confronted the religious leaders of His day over their faithlessness. They looked righteous on the outside, but were corrupted spiritually. Every minister faces this temptation. We are called to ministry but face normal temptations to compromise our integrity. Paul wrote in Romans 7 of the struggle

Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. Romans 7:24-25, NLT

every Christian faces in life between his old sinful nature and his new nature in Christ.

Paul's faith in Christ is what kept him going. He said, "*I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*" (Philippians 3:14) Let us not be like

the religious leaders who failed to serve God and his people with integrity. Let us be honest

with ourselves and with God. We need what only He can give before we can serve His people.

God's call to ministry truly sets us apart for something special. Jesus spoke of the work we do as being much like a shepherd. A shepherd cares for his sheep. He rescues the lost and provides protection for the flock. A shepherd never abuses the sheep. He leads them to water

and green pastures. He cares for them with every fiber of his being. They come to know his voice and trust it. That trust must never be broken. When God's truth is proclaimed by the mouth of a dedicated minister, it stands the test of time and affects eternity.

Finally, integrity is realized through a proper relationship with Christ. He is the pattern of integrity for our lives. In Luke 9:23 Jesus instructed us in how to keep the light of truth shining in our lives. *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."* That is our pattern for integrity. As we minister we walk with our Savior on a daily basis. *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* (Ephesians 2:10). That walk is to be one that is worthy of the calling we have (Eph. 4:1); one that demonstrates a transformed life (Eph. 4:17); one marked by genuine love (Eph. 5:2); one that lets the light of Christ shine (Eph. 5:8); and one evidenced by wisdom (Eph. 5:15). The walk Paul described is the walk of integrity. It is the only way to change the world around us. Put on the spiritual armor of God today and WALK in INTEGRITY!

For the Lord grants wisdom!
From His mouth come knowledge and
understanding.
He grants a treasure of common sense to the
honest.
He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.
He guards the paths of the just and protects
those who are faithful to Him.
Proverbs 2:6-8, NLT

I He who walks in
Integrity
walks securely.
Proverbs 9:10

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