

Integrity: When the Cat's Away . . .

Straight Talk – Part VII

Selected Scripture

Introduction

Today, we will go through a biblical word study on the word “integrity”. It is, I believe, a species of character that is becoming extinct. This gives us all the more reason to talk about it today.

Definitions of Integrity

Integrity is strictly an Old Testament word; it does not appear in the New Testament. If it did appear in the New Testament, it might be a word such as: honesty, character, reputation, or something of that nature.

The Old Testament Hebrew word for “integrity” is “tom,” which means, “honesty; free from corruption; a blameless lifestyle”. It is such that no one could look at a person with integrity and say, “There is something amiss; there is something that needs to be corrected.”

This, by the way, is an ideal. None of us have ever or will ever reach this point. However, it is something we should and must pursue.

We are, as one man wrote, defending the reputation of Jesus Christ. If we took seriously that we are literally, defending the reputation of Christ, it would make a difference as we pursue this character quality of integrity.

A number of people have written on the subject of integrity. In studying this character trait, I have made a list of the qualities of a person of integrity. He or she:

- is honest;
- keeps their word;
- is consistent;
- does not let others down;
- can be recommended for nearly any task;
- loves people;
- admits when they are wrong;
- makes others feel comfortable or challenged when they are around them.

Engstrom gives this definition: “A person of integrity is a person who does what they said they would do.”

Examples of Old Testament Usages

Now there are several uses of the word integrity in the Old Testament. Let us take a look at these.

1. First, integrity is a word used of God.

Obviously, He is, of all, a person of character that is so deep and so without error that we would point, first of all, to Him. Look, for example, at Job 37:16.

God is the epitome of integrity. He always keeps His word. What He says He will do – He will do.

2. Secondly, interestingly enough, the word integrity is also used of Job.

Turn to Job 27:4-5. Job writes,

My lips certainly will not speak unjustly, nor will my tongue mutter deceit. Far be it from me that I should declare you right; till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.

One individual, whose work I read, wrote that there are two tests of integrity. These are:

- the test of prosperity;
- the test of adversity.

These two tests will determine whether or not we are men and women of integrity. Many can handle prosperity, but not adversity. Many can handle adversity, but not prosperity.

What happens when I am in wealth? What happens when I have more than I need? What happens when I am at loss? What happens when I cannot seem to find enough to just make ends meet?

It is these two tests that reveal what a person of integrity is. Job had the test of adversity and he passed.

3. Thirdly, integrity is a word used of the Urim and the Thummim of the high priest.

One thing mentioned in the scriptures that the priest wore was the Thummim (Exodus 28:30, Leviticus 8:8). The word “Thummim” is the plural of “tom,” which literally translated, means “integrity”.

No one really knows what the Thummim is. Some have suggested it is precious gems. Others have suggested it is some kind of marking or saying. However, when the high priest went before God, God would look on him and see integrity. The high priest was an individual of character.

So integrity was used in this reference and, of course, this can easily be applied to us. We should have the quality of integrity robing us.

4. Fourthly, the word integrity is used of the scriptures.

David writes,

The law of the Lord is perfect . . . (Psalm 19:7a)

In other words, the law of the Lord has integrity. It is capable of fulfilling what it declares, obviously, because God is the author.

5. Fifthly, integrity is used of innocency in crime.

Look, for example, at Genesis 20:5. Integrity has, again, the idea of blamelessness.

Implications From Old Testament Usages

A number of passages use the word integrity. They could be summarized several different ways, but let me give two of them.

1. First, integrity must be modeled in the home.

Turn to Psalm 101:1-2. David writes,

I will sing of lovingkindness and justice, to You, O Lord, I will sing praises. I will give heed to the blameless way [way of integrity]. When will You come to me? I will walk within my house in the integrity of my heart.

David had a passion to walk within his own home, so that those who knew him best; those who saw him behind closed doors, would see him as a man of integrity.

Integrity is doing what we said we would do. If I tell my son I will go fishing with him, then I go fishing with him. If I tell my wife I will be home at 5:30, then I will be home at 5:30. If I tell my neighbor I will

return a borrowed item, then I will return it. I will keep my word in my home.

It is no surprise that Solomon, having been raised under the man who wrote this Psalm, would later write, in Proverbs 20:7,

A righteous man who walks in his integrity – how blessed are his sons after him.

Let me add that whether or not your children follow Jesus Christ, they are still blessed because of your integrity. They may not recognize what they have in their heritage, but they have it and, by the grace of God, perhaps one day, they will come to understand it.

How blessed I am to be able to look back at my heritage with a man of integrity who lived it in the home. It is a great challenge for me, and it should be for all of us. Integrity must be modeled in the home.

2. Secondly, integrity is demanded among spiritual leaders.

I would say this includes all Christians.

Psalm 78:70-72 says,

He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands.

Now Paul will pick up the same idea in the New Testament, and will translate the word “integrity” with the word “blamelessness”. In I Timothy and Titus, he talks about those who will lead. I think these are not only qualifications for leaders in the church, but of everyone who names Jesus Christ.

The first of these character qualities Paul mentions is that of blamelessness. This word, in the Greek, literally means, “to be a person without a handle”. This is an individual man or woman who is without a handle; that is, when people look, whether it is behind closed doors or openly, they cannot seem to find a handle on their character; they cannot find anything that they can say, “There is blame here.”

Obviously, we are not out with our microscopes looking for all of the little disagreements or whatever. But this is indicating whether we are people of integrity or people with flaws in our character that are obvious to others. If our husbands or wives or

children were asked, would they would say, “Yes, there is a handle. There is something really amiss.”?

This used to be demanded in our own society among those who would lead politically. It is sad that as each administrative era closes, more and more public officials have been brought before the ethics committees – unprecedented numbers in the history of our country.

Someone wrote, “Integrity has been rushed into the emergency room and we’re not sure if it’s going to survive.”

We live in a world that is crying for some kind of example. It looks at the church and finds the same lack of integrity. It looks at the political scene; at the neighborhood, and asks, “Where are the individuals with integrity; where are the people who do what they say they will do – people whose handshake means something?”

George Gallup took a survey recently, and discovered that nearly half of the Americans surveyed distrusted religious leaders.

Now that is stepping on my toes. When we go out in this community and talk to people about Jesus Christ, there is an aura of disrespect. Why? Because there is a lack of reality. What does that mean? There is the lack of integrity.

Illustrations From An Old Testament Character

Now there is no better illustration than an Old Testament character whose middle name was probably, “integrity”. His name is Daniel. We often think of Daniel as the man who ended up in the lions’ den and rarely take time to think about all that occurred to bring him to that point.

Turn to the book of Daniel and today, from Daniel 6, I am going to give five qualities of integrity. I think the Spirit of God will have enough from this, to point His finger at our hearts where it needs to be pointed.

1. The first quality of integrity is that Daniel had an excellent attitude.

Look at Daniel 6:1-2.

It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps [princes] over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom, and over them three commissioners [vice presidents] (of whom Daniel was one), that

these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss.

Note that Daniel, along with the other two vice presidents, has been put in charge of 120 men. So he is responsible for this political arena and all of these men.

What does the verse mean by “that the king might not suffer loss”? In the political arena, this means, “so the king won’t get ripped off.”

There was immorality; there was embezzlement going on in that government, just as there is in our government today. The king appoints Daniel to come in and discover all of the inequities.

Daniel was given this very strategic position, which was a position that would put him out front.

Note Daniel 6:3a.

Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary . . .

Intelligence? No. Because he possessed an extraordinary,

. . . spirit, . . .

Daniel possessed an extraordinary attitude.

Ladies and gentlemen, the word “extraordinary” or “excellent,” used in this verse, is used in our community – and it is abused. Excellence has nothing to do with intelligence; has nothing to do with looks; has nothing to do with knowing someone of prominence. Excellence has everything to do with integrity and that is what was discovered in this man.

Daniel had an excellent attitude. The reason this is so amazing to me, and would be to anyone who has studied this man, is that he had every reason in the world to have a terrible attitude. If anyone had the right to be sour, it was Daniel. He was ripped from his culture, perhaps even observed his parents die, was taken from those that he loved, was deposited in a foreign land, had to be force fed a totally different language and culture, and in this greatest power on earth, had to submit to it. By his integrity, he worked himself up, even as a fifteen-year-old, to a position, in Darius’ kingdom, of leading. He did the same with Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, and then Darius again.

Now we find him as a ninety-five year old man. Is he sour? No. He is a man who is perceived, even

by the pagans he works around, to be a man with an extraordinary attitude.

2. Secondly, Daniel had a consistent work ethic.

Look at Daniel 6:3b.

. . . and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom.

Now tuck this in the back of your mind. Daniel is headed for the biggest promotion in the kingdom.

Note Daniel 6:4a.

Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful . . .

Faithful to who? God? No. These officials could not care less. They were not checking out his spiritual life. They were not looking into his devotional practice. They were not asking him how much of Isaiah he was memorizing. When this verse says, “he was faithful,” it means they were looking at Daniel in light of faithfulness to the kingdom; faithfulness to his employer.

These guys probably got together and formed a little squad. They checked Daniel’s files, they checked his time card, they looked behind all of the closed doors trying to discover where this man was like them; where he had somehow fudged on his taxes; where he had somehow embezzled money; where he was bribing someone. Daniel was the top man in the kingdom, so they thought, “We’ve got to find something.”

We do the same thing in America. When someone runs for office, bless their heart, they might as well hang up their hat. Now I do not mind when things are discovered that should make a person ineligible. However, questions are asked such as, “What did you do when you were three years old?”

This is what these men were doing to Daniel – with intensity. One hundred twenty three men were pursuing this man to try to find something wrong.

What was their conclusion when they got together? They scratched their heads and said, “This man is faithful. He has always told the truth.”

Daniel 5:17 tells us that Daniel refused to be paid off, even when it was, perhaps, justifiable. He would not take a “perk”. He was highly respected.

Once again, I have to be amazed because this man had every reason to slough off. I would love to ask, “Why are you working so hard, Daniel? You have the dreams – Babylon is going down and then, Persia. You know what will happen to Persia. Why are you giving so much of your life and doing such a good job at work, when you know it really does not matter?”

I think Daniel would have responded with something like, “Because this is where God put me. Even in a kingdom that is going down; even around pagans who do not follow Yahweh, I still will be a man of integrity. I’ll still work at my job; I’ll still refuse the bribes when no one is looking.”

Someone said that, “Integrity is doing what you are supposed to do when no one is looking.”

This describes Daniel.

3. The third quality of integrity is that Daniel had a blameless personal life.

Note Daniel 6:4b.

. . . and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him.

The officials turned the spotlight away from his files and away from his job performance and began to look at Daniel as a man. Is this man pure? Is he really qualified to lead on the basis of what he does away from the job? What does he do on the weekends? What does he do at night? What does he do when he is away on a business trip? What is this man like in his character?

They said they could find,

. . . no . . . corruption . . . in him.

The thing that astounds me is that Daniel’s culture was incredibly immoral. Both the Babylonian and the Persian empires were immoral with a capital “I”. We have no record that Daniel ever married. I do not want to put this man on a pedestal because he was human, but we can get a picture of Daniel as a man of incredible integrity. God gave us this record, not to brag on Daniel, but to challenge us.

Now you may remember this story. The officials devised a scheme. Look at Daniel 6:5.

Then these men said, “We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God.”

In other words, “Now let’s look at Daniel’s spiritual life. We’ve looked at his work ethic, we’ve looked at his personal life, so now let’s look at his

devotional life. Let's find out what he is with his God and maybe we'll come up with something."

These men devised a scheme in which they went to Darius and said, "Oh Darius, you're so great and wonderful. Let's proclaim for the next thirty days, that we can only pray to you."

Darius, being a humble man, said, "That sounds wonderful. I'll sign that into existence."

Darius signed this into existence and, according to Daniel 6:10,

. . . Daniel knew that the document was signed . . .

Daniel knew.

4. Fourthly, Daniel had an uncompromising spiritual walk.

Underline these words in Daniel 6:

- verse 5 – *his God*;
- verse 10 – *his God*;
- verse 11 – *his God*;
- verse 16 – *Your God*;
- verse 20 – *your God*;
- verse 22 – *My God*;
- verse 23 – *his God*;
- verse 26 – *the God of Daniel*.

This gives the idea that God was important to this man. Eight times, Daniel either refers to his God or those around him refer to his God. Others knew he was serious about his relationship with his God.

Daniel 6:10 says,

Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.

Note the word "continued," which tells us that Daniel always did this. The consistency of this man was incredible. Does Daniel go into his home and change his prayer life. No.

This is convicting. A death warrant has been signed and Daniel goes into his home and, just as he has been doing, he continues to thank God for what God has done in his life.

This verse does not say that Daniel goes to his bed chamber and bangs the windows open and yells, "Hey, you guys down there, I know you're watching me and I'm about to pray . . . Oh God, forgive these sinners."

Daniel just goes, as he normally had, three times a day, and kneels and prays – knowing that it is going to cost him his head.

Daniel, unlike us, does not know the rest of the chapter. Because he is human, I have to inject at this point, that at least in my own imagination, Daniel had to be a little bit afraid. He knew the practice; he had heard the roar of the lions; he knew the cave; he had probably seen political prisoners thrown there. Perhaps because of his position, he had, in justice, declared that some die there. I do not know what you are like, but I am really not a very brave person and wonder if I would have done what Daniel did.

How brave are you? I can always tell how brave I am by the way I respond to the noises that go "thump" in the night. We recently moved into our home and, as you may know, every house has noises. After you have lived there a while, you know that they are just noises. You may not know where they come from, but you know that the house is "talking" and you know what is going on.

Last night, I got an hour and a half of sleep. The reason was that around 11:30, I heard a, "Bang! Thump!" I did not know if it came from upstairs or outside or underneath the house – I only knew that I heard a, "Bang! Thump!"

I stopped breathing, and noticed my wife had stopped breathing, and we just listened. I looked at her and she looked at me with a look like, "Don't ask me to go look." – so I did not even try.

I got out of bed and slowly went to the bedroom door and opened it. I stood there a while, and there was no sound. So I got back in the bed.

Fifteen minutes later, "Boom! Thump!" I looked at Marsha, and she was not moving. I got out of bed again, and decided that I would just stand still and listen. Then, Marsha said, "Why don't you go upstairs and look in the closet of the boys room?"

Our boys are in Atlanta, so they were not in their room.

What kind of man does she think I am? You have got to be kidding me! No way! It is dark up there! So I said, and I am baring all here, "Okay, I will, if

you'll walk with me and stand at the foot of the stairs."

She said, "You're kidding."

I said, "I'm not going to die up there and no one know. You walk down there by the stairs."

So she did and I walked upstairs. No one was there. I guess it was just one of the house noises.

I am a chicken. If someone was up there that I knew would take my life, I would not go up there.

Would I pray if I knew that by praying, I would lose my life? Yes, but I would do real quick prayers and hope the sum total worked!

Daniel, however, continues the same way as before – three times. It is as if he is saying, "I don't want you to miss me. I'm here praying. I'm not changing. My relationship with my God is not going to budge."

As you may remember, Daniel ended up in the lions' den and his good friend Darius, could not stop it. An angel came and closed the mouths of the lions. Look at Daniel 6:19-20 – Darius could hardly wait until the next morning.

Then the king arose with the dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den. When he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

What an epitaph, "whom you constantly serve"! Darius knew it; everyone knew it.

Now I would like to be Daniel. This is the time I would like to trade places.

There are three possible responses at this point. These include:

- Number one, Daniel could have really strutted and said something like, "Darius, don't you know who I am? Don't you know the God I serve is all-powerful. Did you really think that throwing me into . . ."
- Number two, Daniel could have responded nonchalantly, like this never bothered him in the least, and said something like, "I didn't lose a wink of sleep. In fact, why don't you come back in an hour, I'm just getting to

know these lions. I've named them Cuddles and Princess and . . ."

- Number three, Daniel could have given the credit for what had happened to someone other than God. He could have said, "God answered my prayer," if he prayed it. But Daniel 6:21-22 tells us,

Then Daniel spoke to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime."

5. The fifth quality of integrity is that Daniel had a humble spirit.

In all humility, Daniel gave credit for this miracle to the One to whom the credit belonged.

Application – Principles From An Old Testament Word

Let me give you two applications; two principles from this Old Testament word "integrity".

1. First, integrity is purity in the face of immorality.

Integrity is purity when no one else is pure. It is credibility when no one else is credible. It is honesty when no one else is honest. It is purity in the face of immorality.

2. Secondly, integrity is obedience in the midst of uncertainty.

This is tough. Daniel did not know the rest of the chapter, yet in the middle of that kind of uncertainty, when God was not really giving him the rest of the plan, he was obedient.

Daniel was doing what he said he would do. He said he would follow God and, even in his situation, he followed God. He probably said, to himself and to others, "I trust the living God and I serve Him."

When the chips were down, and when he had every opportunity not to, he did trust God.

Integrity is honesty; it is fulfilling what we say we will fulfill.

One man I have always admired is Douglas MacArthur. Do you remember his story during World War II? In the Pacific war theater, the Philippine islands were being approached by the enemy and one

by one, were falling. In 1942, Douglas MacArthur got into an escape boat and headed to Australia. However, as he stood on that boat, he turned and said three words to the Philippine leaders, "I shall return." Three years later, Douglas MacArthur was back. He had defended them and they had won the war. The first words he said to these people were, "I have returned."

The example of integrity is Jesus Christ, who always does what He says He will do. As we model His character and pursue His character qualities, we will also be individuals of our word. That is the example.

The motivation is that we believe Jesus Christ will keep His word and He will what? He will return. We know that He said, "Those who honor Me while I am away, when I come back, I will honor them." Jesus will return.

David wrote some challenging words in Psalm 15:1-2a.

O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity . . .