



Episode 049

Leaders, Maintain Your Personal Integrity

It has been heart-wrenching and disturbing to watch the number of Christian leaders confessing of or found out in their moral failure. Most distressing is the number of well-known global leaders counted in that number. And surely this is only the tip of the iceberg. Today, my key topic is Leaders, Maintain Your Integrity.

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Why are these integrity problems occurring? At the heart of the problem is the lack of personal integrity and the lack of discipleship in this area of Christian living. In HIM we have seen its effect on our past leadership. We must be vigilant in our own hearts and lifestyles. For the Enemy is constantly scheming to undermine our leaders and pastors, in particular.

We live in a world where its values are constantly seeping into ours, if we are not alert to it. This world emphasises success, charisma, power, money, fame, winning, etc. Sadly, part of the church has bought into this as well. Especially those that uphold celebrities. This has been at the expense of higher standards of personal integrity. We must aspire to godly integrity!

DEFINING GODLY INTEGRITY

The word integrity evolved from the Latin adjective integer, meaning whole or complete. It is defined as 'an undivided or unbroken completeness', or 'a state of being complete or whole'. When used to describe a person, it refers to the concept of living by one's values and principles. In other words, we are honest about who we are and what we do, both to ourselves and to others. Our private thoughts, choices and actions are consistent with our outward speech and behaviour. Integrity may be defined as the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles.



As Christ-followers, we need a God-oriented definition. Godly integrity may be defined as the quality of being honest, having strong God-aligned moral principles. God must be our standard. Paul rightly challenges us in 1 Corinthians 11:1 (ESV) Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

WHY WE MUST MAINTAIN PERSONAL INTEGRITY

- **It moves us towards personal wholeness**

This is something I have not heard others talk about, but I believe is crucial to deal with our hearts. As defined earlier, integrity involves consistency between our internal self and our external behaviour. The more we resolve to hold to and live out personal integrity effectively means we are also challenging ourselves towards personal wholeness. For it challenges us to be a better version of ourselves.

What we need to understand is that it is the broken, dysfunctional self that manifests inconsistencies. The greater our brokenness, the greater our inconsistencies. Here lies one of our greatest problems. Too often we gloss over our brokenness, hide it, deny it or suppress it. We are too busy performing while failing to be. Because we win accolades with our performance but few bother to peek beneath the covers. Few are willing to invest into addressing the brokenness. So the performance continues until the fissures in us fracture.

As leaders, we must reconcile our internal self to our public self by crucifying self at the cross. To let Christ live in and through us more and more. That is the only true solution. Self-care, self-discipline, accountability, even counselling, etc can be part of the solution. However, most foundational is we must crucify our flesh and develop in Christ-centredness. In my past podcast on “Becoming A Christ-Centred Leader”, I address some key aspects on journeying towards Christ-centredness.

To maintain personal integrity is not easy to do. It requires much humility and discipline. Again and again, I have to watch my own heart. In choices I make, in thoughts I entertain, in things I say and do. Is it with integrity? Do I have to crucify my heart in that specific area? Again?



- **It is expected of God's leaders**

1 Timothy 3:1–2 (NIV) 1 Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. 2 Now the overseer is to be above reproach...

To be above reproach, one must have godly integrity. So why is godly personal integrity crucial for Christian leaders?

Firstly, it builds trust. When our followers can see our integrity, it gives them confidence to place trust in us, our words, our promises, our intentions. If we lack integrity, eventually the trust will be broken when people discover the truth. This destroys our leadership, our influence. It is extremely difficult to rebuild trust when that happens.

Secondly, it creates a culture of transparency. Because when we show integrity, we are being ourselves, we are being transparent. This helps our group to be transparent as well. To be vulnerable. What I love about Francis Chan is his transparency, his vulnerability. His ability to express himself to reveal his sincerity despite his weaknesses. Can we walk that path too?

Transparency is good because then we walk in the light, rather than in the shadows. It is so much easier to work with one another when we all walk in the light.

- **It honours God and avoids His judgment**

As leaders, we must hold a biblical view of God. God who loves yet is holy. God who is merciful yet will judge His people. As leaders, we will be judged by God for the faithfulness of our leadership. One major motivation we should have to walk with integrity is because we desire to honour God and because we fear Him. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

There are no exceptions to this judgment. Regardless of what level of leadership we hold. But won't God be compassionate? Merciful? Gracious? Sure, God will judge us with all of that. All we do will be judged, as described in 1 Corinthians 3:12–15 (NIV) 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.



It is because of God's mercy that our salvation is not put before the Judgment seat. But our rewards will. However, we should fear God's judgment more than any man's judgment. Because His judgments will have eternal implications while man's judgment is only temporal. I certainly do not wish to face God's judgment and watch all my sweat and tears, my hard work, my accomplishments burnt up because I lacked integrity.

So a crucial question for us today. How high a view do we have of God? That would deeply motivate us to honour Him? To fear Him even? Unfortunately, I think some leaders do not hold to such a high view of God in their hearts, even though they may say they do publicly. Thus, the shifting sands upon which their integrity perished.

- **It protects us against the Enemy's schemes**

The lack of integrity introduces shadows in our hearts and in actions. The Devil does His best work in the shadows. Where people still think there is enough light, but the Devil has enough darkness to achieve His greatest mischief. We have seen the fallen leaders who thought they could keep some shadow without falling into darkness. They were deceived to fall into darkness while thinking they were still in the shadows. Run from such shadows!

- **It enables our witness for Christ**

Our integrity enables us to be effective witnesses for Christ. People are drawn to honesty and sincerity in our leadership. It makes a huge difference.

SOME THOUGHTS ON HOW TO MAINTAIN PERSONAL INTEGRITY.

1. Be honest about who you are and your achievements

- Don't try to seem to be who you are not. Be secure in God! It is better to focus on internal transformation than public acclamation.
- Don't exaggerate your accomplishments. It will bite you one day, causing more damage to your reputation than its worth whatever you think you gain by this exaggeration. Nowadays, anything you make public is forever in the internet.



- Be as transparent, yet as wisely as possible. For we do not wish to stumble people nor open ourselves to unnecessary attacks from those with ungodly intentions.
- Be willing to humbly admit fault or weaknesses rather than cover it up.
- Humbly listen to others, allowing them to tell of their perceptions of you. It can be helpful if we learn from it and improve.

2. Be careful about relationships with opposite gender

- Keep your eyes to yourself. Don't watch what you should not. Don't get tempted!
- Keep your hands to yourself. Careful about being touchy. That is how Bill Hybel fell. He hugged too long. He was perhaps looking for emotional affirmation during the years of trouble in his marriage. We should learn from Joseph who ran from Potiphar's wife's advances!
- Keep your social media to yourself. Too much intimacy and unwise words/photos will undo you. Matt Chandler of The Village Church got into trouble because of his texts with a women member getting a touch too personal. There are also very clever scams. Almost every month, I get suspicious enquiries from women. Some are using AI to find ways to connect with us.
- Keep interactions platonic. Don't put yourself into situations where you develop emotional intimacy with opposite gender. That is why Lai Ling gets involved in women issues. Not me. I will not counsel women personally beyond the type of counselling I do at altar calls or at church public meetings. I do not hang around women, single or married. We minister in nations where it is normal to hug each other and even give pecks. Be very wise. Keep things above reproach.
- Keep out of questionable activities. Don't visit the opposite gender in private places. Rick Warren famously would not go into a lift with another woman alone. A bit much? But he is such a famous pastor that he would be a big target for the Enemy! I make sure when I meet with women, my office door remains open.



3. Be careful about relationships with same gender.

- Unfortunately, we have to be careful in today's environment. I am not suggesting being paranoid about this but we do have to be aware of potential connotations.
- By all means, be buddies but be aware of misunderstandings or misperceptions from this ungodly world.

CONCLUSION

Your integrity is crucial to your leadership. It is crucial as God's representative. It is crucial before God's eyes. Therefore, walk with utmost integrity before God! Walk with honesty and wisdom. You will be richly rewarded.



Discussion Questions

These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. Which aspect in this topic challenges you to live a life of integrity? Why?
2. Which aspect of maintaining personal integrity do you need to improve on? Why?

Actionable Steps

Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. Which aspects of maintaining personal integrity do you lack conviction in? What can you do to grow your convictions in those areas.
2. What specific action plan do you need to take in order to improve your personal integrity? Start by identifying why you need to take those steps. Work out the specific steps involved to improve. Identify someone you need to be accountable to in order to fully implement it.





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