Integrity (Abridged)

By Ricky Jenkins

I confess that I have been troubled by what I see in our country and, sadly, even among God's people. Much of my concern centers on one word: integrity.

Across our nation, and sometimes within local churches, integrity appears increasingly negotiable. The financial collapse of 2008 exposed what happens when greed replaces honesty. Yet compromise is hardly limited to corporate executives or politicians. Scandals surround us. Leaders of both political parties sometimes seem more interested in personal advantage than public service. Worse, moral compromise can be found in pews, pulpits, and even elderships.

Paul warned Timothy that difficult times would come, describing people who possessed an appearance of godliness while denying its power (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Too often, those appointed to feed the sheep exploit them instead. Too often, worldly attitudes shape Christians more visibly than Christ does.



What, then, is integrity?

One dictionary definition describes it as an "unimpaired condition." The Hebrew word tom conveys completeness or soundness. Integrity means being whole, consistent, and trustworthy. It is finishing the job when nobody watches, keeping promises when nobody checks, and telling the truth when dishonesty would be easier.

Integrity rejects duplicity and hypocrisy. It embraces financial accountability, personal reliability, and moral purity. It refuses to manipulate others for selfish gain. Rather than resisting correction, it welcomes necessary criticism because accountability strengthens character.

Integrity is rocklike. It stands firm when standing alone and withstands pressure without surrendering principle. It does not fear examination because it has nothing deliberately concealed. Scripture offers examples in Joseph, Mary, Paul, Timothy, and, supremely, Jesus Christ.

Someone once described the combination of courage, character, integrity, and principle with a distinctly American word: "guts."

I appreciate that description. Integrity requires the guts to speak truth when doing so is uncomfortable. Paul demonstrated it when he confronted Peter at Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14). John demonstrated it when he exposed the arrogance of Diotrephes (3 John 9-10). A student demonstrates it by refusing to cheat, even when cheating promises a better grade.

Yet integrity is not sinless perfection. No human being achieves that. The person of integrity admits wrongdoing, accepts responsibility, seeks forgiveness, and makes things right. Hypocrisy hides sin; integrity brings it into the light.

Integrity matters in the church, the marketplace, and the home. Proverbs 20:7 declares, "The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him." What a legacy parents leave when their children witness honesty practiced consistently! I call it a father's thumbprint. Blessed are those whose parents taught them integrity not merely through words, but through example.



Integrity also transforms ordinary work into service to God. Whether you practice medicine, repair automobiles, install electrical wiring, teach students, or handle someone's finances, your character matters as much as your competence. A skilled professional without principles can cause tremendous harm. Ability becomes dangerous when separated from conscience.

Perhaps your work is unnoticed. Perhaps nobody praises your careful effort. Nevertheless, the Lord sees. Colossians 3:23 urges us to work heartily, "as for the Lord and not for men." That instruction applies equally to the employee, employer, student, parent, preacher, and elder.

Integrity cannot be reserved for Sunday worship or public appearances. It must govern our conversations, decisions, relationships, and responsibilities throughout every ordinary day of life.

Ask yourself some difficult questions. Do I honor my commitments? Am I honest with money? Do I treat my spouse faithfully? Do I admit mistakes? Am I the same person privately that I appear to be publicly?

The world has seen enough religious hypocrisy. It needs Christians whose conduct confirms their confession.

Want to shock the world? Have the guts to do what is right when nobody is looking. Stand for truth when compromise would be convenient. Practice integrity today, and let your life show what genuine faith looks like.