

# MOVING TO THE CORE

## Part 8

I have here several bars of **IVORY SOAP** – pure Ivory Soap, that is. However, the question begs to be asked, is Ivory really pure? Actually not. It says right here on the package that it is 99 44/100% pure. Is 99 44/100% totally pure? Almost, but not quite.

So many things today are passed off as being pure but invariably something else is mixed in. Purity is very hard to find even in the church of Jesus Christ.

A while back Oprah Winfrey was interviewing those who were having affairs with married people. One woman who had had a long-standing affair with a married man was talking about how happy she was. I don't know who she was trying to convince. Anyway, someone in the audience questioned her morals. "Wait a minute," the woman protested. "I am a Christian, but my personal life and my religion don't have anything to do with one another. God wants me to be happy, and if I am happy with this man, then God doesn't mind."

What about it? Was the woman 99 44/100% pure? Well I would dare say that her morals certainly left something to be desired. That her level of purity might not have been equal to that of Mother Teresa's.

This morning, I want to talk to you about the issue of integrity.

### **THE CORE OF THE CHURCH IS MADE UP OF PEOPLE OF INTEGRITY.**

No, don't get me wrong. I didn't say that the core is made up of perfect people, I said that it is made up of people of integrity.

- Just to be honest, to be a person of integrity does not mean one has to be perfect.
- It does not mean being without blame, because none of us are totally blameless.
- Neither does it mean being innocent of all wrongdoing.
- It does not mean being a "sissy," a "pushover," or a "wimp."
- It does not mean being a bully or one who wins through intimidation.

Being a person of Christian integrity means that the person is on the way to becoming whole or complete -- a man or a woman who is no longer pulled in ten different directions simultaneously by opposing interests. (Pastor Dan Camp, Germantown United Method Church)

I think that integrity can be illustrated with this line. Notice, the line goes up and it goes down. Regardless, it always goes forward; it always heads toward the goal – Christ Jesus. So it is that the core of the church – people of Christian integrity – also have a bias in the Lord's direction.

### **THE CORE PEOPLE**



## LETS LOOK NOW AT SOME BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF INTEGRITY

The first person that we will look at is **NOAH**. Genesis 6:9 says of him, **“This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.”**

- The brother’s righteousness testifies of his relationship to God.
- Then too, he was **“blameless.”** This speaks of the fact that Noah had no blatant faults. He was a man of moral integrity.
- Next, Scripture points out that Noah **“walked with God.”** By this, we understand that he did **“everything just as God commanded him.”** God and Noah communicated one on one.

Next, the Bible points out that **KING DAVID** was a man of integrity. Psalm 78:72, **“And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.”**

1 Kings 9:4, **“As for you, (Solomon) if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did....”**

David, as you know, had his faults. There were times when he failed miserably. Yet, his heart was always inclined toward the Lord. He always ended up in worship and, if need be, in repentance.

Third, we come to **JOB**. I am sure that you remember the woe-some tale of Job in the Old Testament. Job 1:1, 21 records, **“In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.”** Job 2:3 adds, **“Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no-one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.’”**

Not once, not twice, but in five different passages, the Bible uses the term integrity to describe Job. The brother did not have a price tag attached to his faith. He had determined in his heart that he would serve God come what may -- for richer or poorer, or better or worse.. Job declared, in Job 27:5, **“I will not deny my integrity.”**

Matthew 22:16 describes **THE LORD JESUS** as being a person of **“integrity.”**

Other individuals in Scripture qualify as well.

- I think of Enoch,
- the Prophet Samuel,
- Of Daniel,
- The Apostle Paul, and
- Esther the Queen among others.

These were:

- People of courage,
- Conviction,
- Again, they had a bent toward God,
- They knew where they were going and how to get there.
- They were consistent.

- They were champions of faith,
- They were people of character,
- Of good reputation,
- Committed, and
- Their public lives and their private lives were consistent.

I like what the Apostle Paul said when he stood before the governor in Acts 24:16, **“I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.”**  
That’s integrity.

Simply put, history shows us that integrity is a part of the job description for those who aspire to be a part of the core.

### **I WANT US TO NOW SPEND A FEW MINUTES LOOKING AT THE MEANING OF INTEGRITY. HOW IS IT DEFINED; WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL?**

Seven Covey, in his *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* writes: "...Integrity is, fundamentally, the value we place on ourselves. It's our ability to make and keep commitments to ourselves, to 'walk our talk.'"

Richard Dortch wrote in his book entitled *Integrity*, "Integrity in it's most simple form means wholeness, completeness, entireness. It's from a root word that means intact. It means our hearts are not divided. There is no hidden agenda."

I want to illustrate this point. I have here a piece of clear glass. You will notice that it looks the same from both sides. You can turn it around, turn it upside down, flip-flop it, it doesn't matter. It is clear and complete regardless of the angle. The glass has integrity.

A person of integrity is much the same as this piece of glass.

- He/she doesn't, for instance, have a clear public side and a shady private side.
- He/she doesn't have a Sunday face that is directly opposite of his/her weekday face.
- He/she doesn't carry on the work of the Lord on one hand and the work of the devil on the other.
- Integrity speaks of a singleness of purpose, singleness of will, singleness of heart.

I have here my Bible. The Word of God is another excellent example of integrity.

- It doesn't change. It is forever settled in heaven.
  - A rich man can read it and get the same message as can a poor man.
  - The educated will read the same Gospels as one who is uneducated.
  - The red man will read the same truths and will be responsible for them, as will a brown man.
- It is consistently consistent. It has a certain singleness to it which no other book has, or ever will have.

Finally, here, we think of buildings as having integrity -- structural integrity. This simply means that the building will carry it's weight as expected. It is true to the architect's specifications. It is built on a good foundation.

In the last twenty years, tens of thousands of people worldwide have perished in earthquakes due to hundreds of buildings collapsing. Sadly, enough, the structures lacked integrity.

The late golf champion Babe Zacharias was known as a person of integrity. She once disqualified herself from a golf tournament for having hit the wrong ball out of the rough. "But nobody would have known", a friend told her. "I would have known," Babe replied. Babe manifested integrity. She was true both in public and in private.

Let me share with you three things that every person of integrity – every person at the core -- must have.

## 1. A SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG

I want you to give you a list of names. Each of these people will be public figures that you may or may not know. I want you to rate the integrity – as you perceive it – of those that you are acquainted with on a scale of one to ten. One would be that the person has the integrity of a snake, while a ten would mean that the individual has nearly reached perfection. Here goes:

- Dr. Billy Graham
- Entertainer Howard Stern
- President George W. Bush
- Entertainer Oprah Winfrey
- Former President Bill Clinton
- US Senator Hillary Clinton
- Entertainer Madonna
- Former Mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani
- Former President Jimmy Carter
- Civil Rights Activist Jesse Jackson

Now, most of these people are among the most admired folks in America, according to the Gallup Poll. What was it about each person that made you rate him or her high or low?

I would dare say that many of your answers were based on the fact that some of these individuals have struggled with matters of right and wrong.

Dr. James Dobson's once shared this quote in his newsletter: "No matter how you cut it, our most serious national problems stem from an abandonment of traditional standards of morality. Despite what the liberal elite would have us believe, there are moral absolutes, and there's right and wrong. Some behavior is good, and some is wicked. Whether you're a Christian, Jew or atheist, certain behaviors are to be encouraged, while others are to be scorned and condemned." (Walter E. Williams, a professor of economics at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia)

This idea of some behavior being good and some behavior being bad, seems to be a foreign concept to many today. Would you believe that according to a number of surveys, nearly two in three adults believe ethics "vary by situation"? (The Lutheran Brotherhood and published in the *USA Today*.)

*According to Leadership* journal, 48% of American workers admit to taking unethical or illegal actions in the last year. That is nearly one in two!

A week ago the Gazette carried Cal Thomas' column entitled "Reattach Stigma to Sex." Here is a portion of what Thomas had to say: "More than two-thirds of African-American children are born out of wedlock and the number for whites is 25 percent. No culture can remain healthy with statistics-like these. The primary reason for the explosion of easy divorce and "illegitimate children" is the loss of stigma. A generation has been taught that not only does sin no longer exist, but if it did, the only sin left would be suggesting that another person is living the wrong way and that such behavior is not only hurting him or herself, but society at large."

While not on this subject, Thomas made another important point that I want to share with you before I move on. It is important: "As former Clinton adviser William Galston has noted, you need only do three things in this country-to avoid poverty: finish high school, marry before having a child and marry after the age of 20. Among those who follow such advice, only 8 percent are poor, while 79 percent of those who do not are poor."

Several years ago I headed a committee that was charged with the task of drawing up a ministerial code of ethics. As a part of my research for the project, I looked at codes of ethics for a number of religious and secular organizations. One of those institutions was the aerospace giant Lockheed Martin.

I want you to listen to what this company had to say about ethics: "Lockheed Martin aims to set the standard for ethical business conduct. We will achieve this through six virtues: Honesty, Integrity, Respect, Trust, Responsibility, and Citizenship.

**Honesty:** to be truthful in all our endeavors; to be honest and forthright with one another and with our customers, communities, suppliers, and shareholders.

**Integrity:** to say what we mean, to deliver what we promise, and to stand for what is right. (That is a good definition of integrity.)

**Respect:** to treat one another with dignity and fairness, appreciating the diversity of our workforce and the uniqueness of each employee.

**Trust:** to build confidence through teamwork and open, candid communication.

**Responsibility:** to speak up - without fear of retribution - and report concerns in the work place, including violations of laws, regulations and company policies....

**Citizenship:** to obey all the laws of the United States and the other countries in which we do business....

The Lockheed Martin Code of Ethics then went on to note certain "Warning Signs." The piece pointed out that you are on "thin ethical ice" when you hear:

- "Well, maybe just this once..."
- "No one will ever know..."
- "It doesn't matter how it gets done as long as it gets done."
- "Everyone does it."
- "Shred that document. (shades of Enron)"
- "We can hide it."
- "No one will get hurt."
- "What's in it for me?"
- "This will destroy the competition."
- "We didn't have this conversation."

Then, Lockheed Martin added a "Quick Quiz" to the code of ethics. The quiz consisted of seven questions. I want to also share them with you. When in doubt, ask yourself:

- Are my actions legal?
- Am I being fair and honest?
- Will my action stand the test of time?
- How will I feel about myself afterwards?
- How will it look in the newspaper?
- Will I sleep soundly tonight?
- What would I tell my child to do?"

Lockheed set the standard pretty high. They also seemed to have a pretty good handle on how to determine right from wrong in the workplace.

Scientists now say that a series of slits, not a giant gash, sank the Titanic. The opulent, 900-foot cruise ship sank in 1912 on its first voyage, from England to New York. Fifteen hundred people died in this tragic maritime disaster.

The most widely held theory was that the ship hit an iceberg, which opened a huge gash in the side of the liner. But an international team of divers and scientists recently used sound waves to probe the wreckage, buried in the mud under two-and-a-half miles of water. Their discovery? The damage was surprisingly small. Instead of the huge gash, they found six relatively narrow slits across the six watertight holds. (*Leadership*, Fall, 1997)

Maybe if we would discipline ourselves to ask some of the Lockheed Martin questions, we would avoid some of the tragic slits in our reputation and integrity.

The Apostle Paul cried in Philippians 2:15 (*The Amplified Bible*), **"That you may show yourselves to be blameless and guileless, innocent and uncontaminated, children of God without blemish (faultless and unrebukable) in the midst of a crooked and wicked generation. Among whom you are seen as bright lights -- stars or beacons shining out clearly -- in the dark world."**

The core knows that small damage, invisible to most, can sink not only a great ship but a great reputation as well.

Before I move on from this issue of right and wrong, I want to share one more list. Let's see who can identify it first:

1. **You shall have no other gods before {Or besides} me.**
2. **You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form....**
3. **You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.**
4. **Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.**
5. **Honor your father and your mother**
6. **You shall not murder.**
7. **You shall not commit adultery.**
8. **You shall not steal.**
9. **You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.**
10. **You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."**

What are the Ten Commandments if they are not a list of moral absolutes?

- They set forth standards of conduct.
- They were written by the very finger of God Almighty.

- They apply to all people at all times.
- They are meant to be commands and not suggestions.

If you want to brush up on integrity, this is a great place to get some practice in.

## 2. CHARACTER

Billy Graham has said, "Integrity is the glue that holds our way of life together. We must constantly strive to keep our integrity intact.

- When wealth is lost, nothing is lost;
- when health is lost, something is lost;
- when character is lost, all is lost."

The emphasis in Christianity is generally on DOING. Teach, preach, witness, give, work. DO this or DO that. Yet, my friends, before the DOING must come the BEING! Without the strength of BEING, the DOING is of little value.

To illustrate what I mean here, let me ask you, what if Osama Bin Laden were to donate \$1,000,000 to the 911 Fund? Would people gush over his generous nature and his wondrous deeds? Hardly. His lack of BEING good would over-ride his act of DOING good. Understand?

Jesus spent thirty years of BEING before His three years of DOING. Before He established His credibility as a minister, He settled the issue of character. WHAT HE WAS CAME BEFORE WHAT HE DID!

Hear me, this is important.

- Satan's attack on Jesus during the wilderness temptations was an assault on the character of the Lord. The devil wanted Him to compromise, to show off, to bend the rules.
- The Pharisee's attack on Jesus during the years of His ministry was again an assault on His character. They questioned His adherence to their laws. They challenged His obedience to the Word of God.
- Even the mockery of His trial before Pilate tested His character. Would He deny His office? Would He back down in order to save His skin? Character was the issue!

Satan sought with all of his might to tarnish the character of our savior and in each and every instance he failed! The moral force, the integrity as well as the good reputation of the Lord always prevailed!

You see, BEING proves the sincerity of motive.

BEING reveals one's value base.

BEING shows character.

Granted, the ones who usually grab the headlines are the DOERS. Yet, I believe, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, when the rewards are handed out, the ones with character will stand at the head of the line. In fact, in Scripture, many of the more notable people:

- Joseph of the Old Testament,
- Daniel the prophet,
- Job

- and Enoch, the man who walked with God, were all known more for their BEING than for their DOING.

The Bible does not attribute even one miracle to any one of these fellows.

So much of what we find today is cheap and flimsy. It has no real value.

- Oh sure, on the outside it looks good.
- The wrapping glitters.
- People ooh and ah when they see the package.

But any child will tell you that it is not the outside of the package that counts. What really matters is that which is on the inside!

So, how is your character?

- Are you honest?
- Are you devout?
- Are you merciful?
- Are you blameless?
- Are you pure in heart?
- Are you sincere?
- Are you loving?

These are but a few of the Biblical ingredients of character.

Vanderbilt University has an honor code. Freshmen pledge to do their own academic work with integrity and to report those who do not to the student-run honor council. The students' signatures remain on display in the lobby of the Sarratt Student Center throughout their four years at the university. Alongside the signatures is found not only a statement of the honor code itself, but also the often-quoted words of the man for whom the building is named, Madison Sarratt. The longtime dean of men and a teacher in the mathematics department said: "Today I am going to give you two examinations, one in trigonometry and one in honesty. I hope you will pass them both, but if you must fail one, let it be trigonometry, for there are many good [people] in this world today who cannot pass an examination in trigonometry, but there are no good [people] in the world who cannot pass an examination in honesty." (Gaynelle Doll, *Vanderbilt Today* (Summer/Fall 1999))

Integrity is not what we do so much as who we are. And who we are, in turn, determines what we do.

### 3. EXAMPLE

Someone once pointed out, "No matter what you teach the child, he insists on behaving like his parents." Frightening thought, right?

Yet, someone else wisely noted that example is not the main thing, it is the only thing.

The Bible has much to say about the core and examples. Titus 1:6 says (*New Testament in Modern English*), "**They** (the spiritual leaders in the church) **were to be men of unquestioned integrity....**"

1 Timothy 3:2 adds (*The Living Bible*), "**For a pastor must be a good man whose life cannot be spoken against.**"

People of the core let me speak to you for a moment. Some wise soul once noted that "Every Christian ministry must be validated by the character of the minister and not by the success of that ministry." That applies to pastoring, or to being a deacon, teaching Sunday school, or whatever role you might be called to fill.

The Didache (an early church teaching manual) noted, "Not everyone who speaks in the Spirit is a prophet; he is only a prophet if he walks in the ways of the Lord."

Therefore, no Christian is more powerful than the example he or she sets. Our children, our friends, our neighbors -- all are affected by how well we have grasped and put into practice sound Christian principles.

Man and woman of God, I want to challenge you this morning to lead by example:

- Pray.
- Read your Bible.
- Love your enemies.
- Don't do anything that would bring harm to your family or to this fellowship.
- Love God.
- Be honest.
- Pay your bills on time.
- Be faithful to your spouse.
- Fulfill your service to the Lord and His Church.

These are good things; elementary things.

Mark Cuban, owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, offered WGN Chicago Radio sports-talk host David Kaplan \$50,000 last year to change his name legally to "Dallas Maverick." When Kaplan politely declined, Cuban sweetened the offer. Cuban would pay Kaplan \$100,000 and donate \$100,000 to Kaplan's favorite charity if he took the name for one year. After some soul searching, and being bombarded by e-mails from listeners who said he was crazy to turn down the money, Kaplan held firm and told Cuban no. Kaplan explained: "I'd be saying I'd do anything for money, and that bothers me. My name is my birthright. I'd like to preserve my integrity and credibility." Skip Bayless, *Chicago Tribune* (1/10/01)

Today, the world is trying to get you to compromise your integrity.

- To buy into a moral relativism – situation ethics, in other words,
- To be coy about character,
- To play loose with example.
- To change your name from Christian to maverick or whatever.

Don't buy into it! Again, Job said that he would not deny his integrity. Let's dare to follow his lead! Our children, the church, even the world is watching. Let's set a worthy example for them to follow.

**IN CLOSING**, I opened this message with a bar of soap, I want to close it with one as well.

If you have traded away your integrity, if you have blown it big time, if you have unforgiven sin on your record, then I have just the thing for you. It is a fairly new product -- the Wash Away Your Sins Cleansing Soap. (Show bar) It is not cheap, mind you. I paid \$8.50 for my bar. However...

- It is for all "seven deadly sins".

- It reduces guilt by “98.9% or more”.
- It has been tested and approved and is easy to use. (Read back of box)
- It is the better cleanser for liars, cheaters, and wrong-doers.
- By the way, for vulgarities: Insert in mouth, scrub, spit out, flush with water.
- The box says right here that it is a “sinners necessity”!

In light of what you get, it sounds like a bargain. Right?

You don't buy it, do you? Well, you are right.

What can wash away our sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

**“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9**