

CHIEF MINISTRIES

May 2018

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8 ESV) and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32 ESV).

Some of my earliest childhood memories of going to church, the one church my family started in our home, before we actually broke ground and built Full Gospel Assembly on the end of Main Street in Linton, North Dakota, are filled with good times, also there were times where people would be carrying on and raising their arms and shouting, running, jumping up and down, walking and crying. At the age of 6 or 7, I found this embarrassing. Sometimes I'd walk outside during service without my parents noticing. I guess I didn't like all the noise. Of course, this was before I was “seasoned” in the church and begin to play piano for the services at the ripe old age of 8!

Jesus said that *we must become like a little child if we want to enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3)*. We could say many things about children generally and draw from these characteristics to decide what Jesus meant by this statement. But I am sure of one reason He said this, a child does not repress his expression or take care to say the right thing. It's funny, I'm still accused of doing that! A child can be guileless and completely transparent and honest.

I'm not criticizing the church I grew up in, although I would understand if you thought I was. I was brought up in my Pentecostal church where there was always a hunger for God and a revival atmosphere. That came from a couple of sources : 1) The Azusa Street Revival and 2) The way Pentecostals were known to be in the early twentieth century. On-fire!

As you can imagine, I have thought about this aspect of my church background countless times. I have asked; What was all the fuss about? Why did they shout? Why did they give messages in tongues and have interpretation? Why did they run up and down the church aisles? Why did they cry? Why all the noise?

My honest answer is this: There was something very genuine – I would call it true revival – that originally brought it on. Whether it be the Azusa Street Revival of the early 1900's to the Brownsville Revival at the end of the last century. People were caught up in the presence of an Almighty God and were full of the joy of the Lord. The presence of God was so powerful that people lost their awareness of personal dignity; they did not care what people thought. Remember David becoming even more undignified when the ark of God's presence was brought back? He danced before the Lord and his wife got after him for it and she became unable to have children because of it. Perhaps that's why so many people seem spiritually barren today, because of their criticism of demonstrative worship. People and David expressed their joy in their shouting and laughter and jumping up and down.

The purpose of this letter though is not to assess the validity of manifestations. It's about integrity – the willingness to get to the bottom of the truth no matter where it leads or what it takes to get there.

The pursuit of integrity is about the quest for truth, or facts. It is only the truth that sets one free. It is freedom that demonstrates the true presence of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17). The question is, do we really want the truth? How far are we willing to go to get to the truth?

One thing that should surely bring about acute honesty is the consciousness that we are in God's presence. The appeal to the presence of God is like swearing an oath. If you swear an oath, you'd better be sure you have the authority to do so. The prophet Samuel invoked the presence of God in the declaration of his integrity. *“Here I am; testify against me before the LORD and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you.” (1 Sam 12:3)*. The people testified that Samuel had been transparently honest in his dealings with them.

The prophet Jeremiah had a rival. His name was Hananiah. Jeremiah prophesied that the Babylonian captivity would last 70 years. Hananiah invoked the presence of the Lord to claim the captivity would last only two years. Hananiah boldly proclaimed, *"Thus says the LORD: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations within two years."* But Jeremiah the prophet went his way. (Jeremiah 28:11 ESV) And Jeremiah the prophet said to the prophet Hananiah, *"Listen, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. ^{v16}Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will remove you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the LORD.'" ^{v17}In that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died. (Jeremiah 28:15-17 ESV).*

The point is if one claims to be speaking for God Himself, he had better be sure he is not being deceived. It is a scary thing to say, "Thus says the Lord." It is far better we never do this than to get it wrong.

Paul invited the presence of the Lord when he used his apostolic authority to deliver an incestuous man – a believer – to Satan. *For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. ^{v4}When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ^{v5}you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 5:3 – 5 ESV).*

In other words, whenever we invoke the presence of the Lord, it behooves us absolutely to be people of unquestioned integrity. We had better know what we are doing. I find myself doing that more and more as I come to the end of this prison sentence to fellow "believers" who are living in open sin and would not repent. In fact there always seems to be a justification for their bad behavior. I think it would be a bad thing to invoke the presence of God and not be in pursuit of the truth. It would result in judgment from the throne of God. As it turned out, Paul invoking the presence of God as he did was that the incestuous man came to his senses and repented (2 Corinthians 2:6 – 9). When doing so in prison, yes some have stepped down from their arrogance and eventually came to live godly lives, and some continues to play games.

The issue is whether we are in pursuit of the truth – wherever it leads.

There are those of us who do not want to see a physician because we are afraid of what we might learn about our physical condition. So we delay going to the doctor. But surely this is wrong! Surely we should want to know if there is something wrong.

So too is the pursuit of integrity. We will not begin to achieve it until we do what it takes to get to the truth – about ourselves, about others, about what we teach about the Bible, about our theology, and about anything pertaining to true facts we can find. It means being even-handed, impartial, rising above ourselves, and accepting input from friends and critics in order to arrive at the objective truth. The process can be exceedingly painful. But the liberty that follows is worth the embarrassment we may experience along the way. My early childhood experiences even through my adult years has made me acutely aware of the counterfeit, but keeps me not settling for anything less than the real thing!

We live in a time when at least in some places, there is no theological foundation by which to judge the true and the false. People are swept up by every wind of doctrine. *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,"* said the ancient prophet (Hosea 4:6). It is the lack of knowledge of God's ways, His word, His wisdom that has resulted in the abundance of bubbleheads, flakes and charlatans.

When one watches Christian TV today through the eyes and ears of a non-Christian, if I did not know any better and judged Christianity by what I see on television, I would honestly think that the Christian faith is all about money.

In the early church, it was the Lord that added to the church. Now it seems human manipulation, ingenuity, great audio/video and motivation techniques are often used to bring about growth. Expository preaching has been largely replaced by motivational preaching. Emphasis on the miraculous has been supplanted by prosperity teaching.

Can God use these? Of course He can. My own church background and searching has been far from perfect, but God used it to save me and countless others.

When we think we are in His presence, we cease to care what people think. This is a pretty good rule of thumb for whether we are living in God's presence. If we are overly concerned with what people think of us – always looking over our shoulders for approval – it is likely a dead giveaway that we are not in God's presence as we might be. The more we sense His presence, the less concerned we are with what people think.

Two things are interconnected when it comes to integrity and God's presence – First, integrity will lead us to dwell in His presence. Second, integrity will keep us honest when it comes to assessing whether His true presence is being manifested. To put it another way: integrity leads to the presence of God; the presence of God leads to integrity. But once integrity, for any reason, begins to diminish, so too will the presence of God begin to be sensed less and less. The worst scenario is that if the presence of God is on the wane in stages and we don't recognize it, then we become like Joseph and Mary who continued on without Jesus when they thought they had Him.

There are two possibilities if we leave Jesus behind: either we find Him, or we keep on going and never come back.

There have been some high-profile preachers who once new great power in preaching and healing. When the anointing lifted and these ministers carried on as if the anointing had not lifted, the result was sometimes disaster. Some ended up in financial impropriety, some in sexual immorality, and some in alcoholism.

Integrity is: being governed by the truth, even when it hurts. That's my definition.

According to the psalmist, a blameless man "*Keeps an oath even when it hurts*" (*Psalms 15:4*). In ancient times an oath having been sworn was the zenith of dependability; it was the pinnacle of what one could rely on to be true. A promise might be broken, but never an oath! And yet King Saul swore an oath to his own flesh and blood – his son Jonathan – and broke it (1 Samuel 19:6 – 10)

Jesus told us not to swear at all. A person swears an oath to get credibility. We all want to be believed. Swearing an oath ensures that the truth is being told, that a promise will be kept. Jesus said what He did regarding the oath was for two reasons. First, it was to show His understanding and application of the third command not to misuse God's name. Second, we should always tell the truth without having to back up our statements with an oath. (Matthew 5:33 – 37). We certainly should keep our oath even when it is painful, but we should keep any word we utter even when it may cost us.

We should be governed by the truth, then, even when it hurts. The fruit of integrity is four things: 1) Trustworthiness with money, 2) purity in morality, 3) reliability in word, and 4) hunger for the truth – or the facts.

Trustworthiness with money

Jesus had more to say about money than any other subject. John Wesley said that the last part of a person to be converted is his wallet! Voltaire said that when it comes to money every person's religion is the same.

Being squeaky clean with money will keep us out of a lot of trouble. The love of money is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). So transparent honesty with money matters is required of every servant of Christ.

Integrity is not for sale. The one who has integrity cannot be bought off. Balaam was a man who gave the outward appearance of integrity. He boasted, *But Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the LORD my God to do less or more.* (Numbers 22:18 ESV). That sounded so impressive but it was sheer hypocrisy. Balaam did not tell Balak that God had already spoken clearly to him from the start. *God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."* (Numbers 22:12 ESV). Not only that, Balaam further exposed his greed for Balak's money when he said, *So you, too, please stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me.*" (Numbers 22:19 ESV). He hoped that God would somehow change His mind! Balaam tried and tried to gain money from Balak, but God overruled (Numbers 23:1 – 24:14 read it yourself). Overcome by the love of money, Balaam was a tragic figure and was eventually killed by the sword (Numbers 31:7).

Balaam was for sale. The person of integrity cannot be swayed by money, but too many people can be bought if the price is right. It could even influence what they claim to believe.

If taking the road less traveled, as my dad used to tell me to do, means getting to the truth, it is more precious than gold. *The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight. ^{v8} Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. ^{v9} She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.*" (Proverbs 4:7 – 9 ESV).

Purity in morality

Transparent integrity and sexual purity go together. People want their leaders to have their sexual appetites under control. The followers may or may not be so disciplined, but they certainly want their leaders to be disciplined. Fair or unfair, that is the way it is. There is a price to pay for being high profile. Those of us who are out front have a responsibility to set the example. “The price of greatness is responsibility” said Winston Churchill. But we are seeing a lowering of greatness more and more today – at an almost inconceivable level in the church, in politics, in government, in education, in science. I fear that irresponsible people often get to the top. Too many people in top positions have undisciplined private lives; broken marriages, secret affairs, and no strong convictions regarding being sexually pure. The concept of monogamous heterosexual marriage as the biblical norm has disintegrated. More and more children are being raised in single – parent homes, and one of the consequences of this is young people growing up with confused sexual identification.

Some people who emphasize the gifts of the Holy Spirit (as in 1 Corinthians 12:8 – 10) don’t seem to realize that these gifts have little or nothing to do with integrity – that is, one may be devoid of integrity and still see their gifts flourish. It is disappointing that this can be the case, but it should not surprise us, because gifts are “irrevocable” or “without repentance” (Romans 11:29). This means that one’s personal godliness or integrity does not come into play and this explains how King Saul prophesied by the Spirit of God on his way to kill David (1 Samuel 19:23 – 24).

We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of the things we have done, “whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

1 Corinthians 3:14 – 15 include the promise that when a Christian’s works are tested by fire and survive, that Christian will receive a reward, but if the works don’t survive the fire, the Christian will still be saved but “*as one escaping through the flames. All things will be laid bare that day (Romans 2:16).*” If, for example, I received a reward at the judgment seat of Christ, it will not be based on how well known I was on earth, how many worship services I led, or how many books I wrote, but will be related to the kind of man that I am, as a father, husband, and godly person in my personal and private life.

Reliability in Word

This means that what you say is true, and what you say you will do. You do not overclaim; that is, claim more to be true than is true. Neither do you promise to do what you know you cannot do. You can therefore be depended on to tell the truth; you can also be relied on to keep your promise. *A Psalm of David. O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? ^{v2} He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; ^{v3} who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; ^{v4} in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; (Psalms 15:1 – 4 ESV).*

Hunger for the truth – or the facts

How much do we want the truth? Are we willing to do what it takes to find what is true? What if it means having to abandon certain cherished positions that may or may not be true? Are we willing for our position to be challenged?

Walking in the Spirit not only means we will tell the truth; walking in the Spirit also means walking in the light. Walking in the light means walking into what may be undiscovered truth for us. It is not easy to climb down from a view for which we have become known, but the question is, what is more important to us – and increased anointing, which is an offer if we walk in the light, or staying where we are to save face?

But there is more – something very important. We must come to the truth but equally come into graciousness. That means overlooking faults. It’s total forgiveness. It’s keeping no record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5). Jesus was full of grace and truth (John 1:17). Some are full of truth but not full of grace. Some are full of grace but short on truth. Is this possible? Yes. This should caution us that we should aspire to graciousness as much as we do the truth. The consequence will be meekness – a rare jewel. If we are meek we welcome criticism. We won’t retort or become offensively defensive.

The expression “real deal” comes to mind. People will ask me of a certain person.... “Is he (or she) the real deal?” People want to believe that their heroes are genuine. Real. That they won’t become the center of a scandal at some point down the road.

Let us do all in our strength to be the real deal by living with transparent integrity.

The essence of integrity is an unfeigned love for the truth – whatever it is or wherever it leads – but truth with graciousness. The proof of integrity is that we will do what it takes, go where we must, and pay whatever the cost in order to arrive at the truth that sets us free.

That is where the presence of God is found – where truth is.

I have long been gripped by Paul’s words that those who would believe a lie and consequently perish are traceable to not receiving “the love of the truth” in order to be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:10 – 12). The issue is do we receive the love of the truth? In other words, do we love the truth whatever that truth may be? Jesus said that if any of us does the Father’s will, we will come to the truth (John 7:17). That is the bottom line. Is the truth what we want?

People with integrity want the truth more than anything in the world.

Whatever happened to integrity?

The danger of integrity is that one can become self-righteous about it. Integrity alone gives no guarantee of a happy ending or finishing well. Self-righteousness is always nearby to squeeze itself in. Self-righteousness is the hardest thing to see in ourselves but so easy to see in others.

You and I must strive to maintain integrity without taking ourselves so seriously. Self-righteousness and integrity don’t mix well. Self-righteousness coming along-side integrity is like a dead fly giving perfume “a bad smell”, much in the way that “*a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor*” (*Ecclesiastics 10:1*). Never forget that the person with the highest level of integrity still has a heart that is vile, deceitful, and capable of being obnoxious. Let us allow this for our heroes.

Job is a good example. He was blameless, as perfect as one could be – for a while! But when the pressure was on, Job’s self-righteousness began to seep through the cracks until he became unbearable to be around. He said to those who were taunting him “*I will never admit you are in the right, till I die, I will not deny my integrity. I will maintain my innocence and never let it go, my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live*” (*Job 27:5 – 6*).

This is kind of sad, but fortunately God had mercy on him and he came to his senses. Never forget that self-righteousness is as vile in God’s sight as any sin you can think of is in our sight!

Maintaining integrity requires that we are always seeking the truth and graciousness. We need to be open to how self-righteous and set in our ways we are as we seek what is true. That should keep us humble. If we want to get to the bottom of things, we must see our selfishness while being open to the truth that may surprise us. We do this; if possible, to get to the facts. It is not enough that we did it yesterday, we must do it today.

The reward for integrity is the manifest presence of God. The reward for dwelling in His presence is integrity.

That’s a pretty good deal if you ask me.

Be men of integrity,

Chief

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Christ’s

Heart

In

Every

Felon