



Editor's Note

Enclosed/attached to this issue is our annual index of articles. You can find the archives on our website at www.bible-equip.org. While you are there, check out the other resources and articles available (for free!).

With the start of a new decade, our prayer for you is that you would walk in the Spirit as you shepherd, protect, encourage, teach, build up and love your fellow believers; that you would be a model of godliness and an example of

Christ-likeness. The maxim is true: more is caught than taught—people are watching and imitating you.

Your ministry as an elder has a tremendous impact on the health, vibrancy and effectiveness of the body of Christ. Since no one knows the burdens of an elder except another elder, we need to pray for each other, that the Lord would strengthen, encourage and sustain us. A good new year's resolution: commit to praying for your fellow elders regularly for the next year!

Biblical Qualifications Integrity (part 4)

by Chuck Gianotti

Note: This is the fourth in the series on Integrity, based on Psalm 15.

The man of integrity is introduced to us in Psalm 15:1-2 (NASB) and described in the remaining verses. He is the one who feels at home in God's presence! He is the one ...

Who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the Lord" (Ps 15:4a NIV)

Strong words for a godly man of integrity! One of the most difficult interpretive problems in scripture is how to understand what we call the "imprecatory" psalms. Such portions of the Bible express extreme negative attitudes toward other humans, almost to the point of assaulting our Christian sensibilities. One of these is found in Psalm 15:4 (others include Psalm 139:19-22). This ode to integrity contains the sharp, clear denunciation of sinners in the strongest possible terms. It says that the man who is worthy of dwelling with God (vs. 1) is one "who despises a vile man." Yet elsewhere in the Word we are told to *love* our enemies, not return evil for evil and patiently endure opposition from wicked men. So what gives?

We live in a world that tends to honor vile people. An athlete who excels is honored, even though he lives a reprobate life. A movie star is honored, though she goes through multiple marriages. Worldly thinking allows a person to separate out one aspect of his life from another. That is the opposite of integrity. Yet, a man of God who stands up for righteousness is treated as an eccentric or

intolerant fundamentalist. This reflects a perspective contrary to life as God designed it.

Contrary to a worldly view, the man of integrity has a consistent way of evaluating others. He sees that which is vile and repudiates it in the strongest possible way. He discerns the honorableness of a man and honors him for that. A man of integrity, since he is a unified individual (that is, what he thinks, says and does all exist in harmony) looks for integrity in others. A person who does vile things is a vile person. A man of integrity calls it as it is! A person does vile things because he is a vile person. Therefore, to despise the vile things a

The man of integrity is a unified individual, what he thinks, says and does all exist in harmony.

person does is the same thing as despising the vile person himself. A man of integrity does not play word games with a spiritual veneer. And he treats vileness in way that demonstrates integrity.

Now, as New Testament Christians we are called to the same sense of integrity. This does not negate loving the vile person (see John 3:16 where God's love does not exclude such vile people). We are called upon to both despise evil people *and* to love them. Our model is God Himself, for God loves unbelieving people, yet at the same time unbelieving people are under His wrath and condemnation (John 3:16-18)!

The counterpart to this is to "honor those who fear the Lord." Ironically, Christians often come way short of doing this. For we tend to see the shortcomings in others and therefore hold back the honor. A man of integrity, however, sees with integrity—and he can rec-

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One of the inherent difficulties of a plural leadership is the inevitability of disagreements within the group. Secondary doctrines, cultural practices, ministry methods and personal preferences are just a few of the areas in which disagreements can arise. In this matter, churches with a single authority figure might appear to have the advantage - speed in decision making. It does not take much effort to achieve unanimity in a group of one!

Of course the Lord had deeper things in view when He led the apostles to “appoint elders [plural] in every church [singular]” (Titus 1:5), as illustrated by a verse in Proverbs: “In the multitude of counselors, there is safety” (Prov. 11:14 KJV). Rich spiritual blessings come to those who will work at loving one another in spite of differences. This sets a valuable example before the flock as to what spiritual maturity is all about; it protects the church from the strong willed person; and it brings joy to the Lord when brethren demonstrate a practical ability to “dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133).

Which brings us back to the question of what to do when elders in the same local church disagree on a matter. Incidentally, this implies a further question of how to handle disagreement among elders of different churches, a subject beyond the scope of this article. Suffice to say that the traditional strong emphasis on the autonomy of the local church provides some safeguards here.

Importance of the Subject

This subject of dealing with conflict is of critical importance for church leaders. One of the fundamental building blocks of the church is unity, and it is unrealistic to expect a spirit of unity and harmony in a fellowship where leaders cannot get along.

Does this imply that good elders will hold the same views in every detail of life? Of course not. One of the beauties of the Christian church is the gathering together of people from diverse backgrounds with all sorts of perspectives on most everything in life, and a great deal of Scripture. Despite differences, the

teaching is clear: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). Obviously this cannot mean that we love only those who agree with us, but that we love all those who belong to Christ.

Normally there will be agreement in the fundamental doctrines of the faith, but this still leaves a tremendous range of lesser matters on which good men can and often do differ. How then can wise elders protect themselves from the disruption occasional disagreements can bring?

Taking Practical Steps

Knowing problems will come, it is wise to make provision in advance. Two areas where such forethought can help have to do with:

Rich spiritual blessings come to those who work at loving one another in spite of differences.

1) Agreements Made Before Problems Arise

2) Actions to Take Once a Disagreement is Encountered

Before Problems Arise

Surprisingly, most contentions can be disarmed simply by forging agreements beforehand on how to deal with them. Although I do not often do so, I feel constrained at this point to urge assembly elders in the strongest possible terms: talk about this subject together before problems are encountered. It will make the process so much easier than waiting until the troubles come. This principle is true both in the human family and in the church.

Elders need to discuss in advance the general course of action they will follow when differences of opinion arise. Such discussion may take the form of a step by step protocol for handling difficulties or may be simply an agreement that “God will bring us to oneness through prayer and waiting patiently on Him.” Spoken (verbal) affirmations that each brother is a respected member of the leadership team and that the Spirit of

God is sovereign in whom He will use to guide the group into truth, are especially helpful.

Some of the ideas outlined below may provide material for further discussion.

Once Problems Have Been Encountered

Sadly, most cases will fall under this heading, simply because of the natural tendency to put off discussions about unpleasant subjects until “later,” hoping that “later” never comes. But, sooner or later, in the course of assembly work, elders will come to an impasse in the decision-making process. Surely, it is affirmed by some well meaning brother, Scripture and common sense demand that it must be “this way” and yet one or two other brothers insist that it can only be “a different way.” How shall the deadlock be resolved?

Some guidelines that may help

- Every elder should subscribe to the truth, and earnestly desire, that only the mind of Christ can ultimately be followed. Each elder *must*

be convinced that the mind of Christ is truth, and have a genuine desire to discover that mind and submit to it, thus admitting that such exercise will eclipse any desire to have one’s own way.

- Each must humbly acknowledge that his own perspective might be flawed. This is especially true when there are cherished natural ties at stake such as dealings with family members or long-held traditions. Each must love the unity of the team and the blessing of the church more than getting his own way.

- There should be a prior agreement that waiting on the Lord in prayer will solve the dilemma for submissive hearts. No thought of a majority vote with victory for the majority can be entertained. And don’t be afraid to wait. Waiting on the Lord is not procrastination. It is not time wasted. Time and again, elders have discovered by hindsight that God used a brother’s reluctance to proceed with a course of action, not to kill the idea, but to adjust the timing for the maximum blessing.

- Respect for each individual brother is crucial and will hold the strong leader

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The year 2009 is behind us.

There were joys and sorrows, pleasant experiences and painful ones, happiness and disappointments. Doing God's work year in and year out can be tiring. At times we wonder does anyone notice? The answer is a resounding yes!

"For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love you have demonstrated for His name..." (Heb 6:10a NET Bible)

God does not have a bad memory. Our work done for Him out of a heart of love is never forgotten.

January 2010

The first month of a new year we are aware that challenges will face us. Often in the form of people! Enjoyable, lovely and agreeable people. Also discontented, unhappy and restless ones. All of them

saints. Be encouraged with these words:

"...the love you have demonstrated for His name in having served and continuing to serve the saints." (Heb 6:10b)

God calls us to continue to serve His people, loving them as Christ would.

A fresh year lies ahead. Being passionate and not sluggish in our service for the Lord is important.

The year 2010 is ahead

A fresh year lies ahead. Being passionate and not sluggish in our service for God is important. Maintaining a fervent love for Him and His people requires something far greater than what we as individuals have to offer. It requires a passionate, energetic faith that

is sure of one thing. Jesus! He is our anchor point in all of life's circumstances. He is our faithful intercessor. He is eternal and He has given us promises to live by.

"... passionately demonstrate the same eagerness for the fulfillment of your hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish..." (Heb 6:11b-12a)

God has given us His Son, the source of our energy for serving God.

December 2010

One year from now will we look back over the joys and sorrows of the year and know

that our souls were anchored in Jesus? Will we be aware that He who enabled us to serve the saints will also enable us to love them?

"We have a hope an anchor for the soul sure and steadfast..." (Heb 6:19) 

Resolving Disagreements (cont. from page 2)

back from forcing his own way on the rest of the group to the exclusion of other points of view. Note that true respect is both earned and freely given, and extends to such seemingly small details as the tone of voice and terms used in speaking to one another, and waiting for others to finish speaking while listening sincerely to what they are saying.

- Ask if the issue at hand is the real problem or only a symptom of deeper issues. Sometimes it requires a time of prayer and honest soul searching to determine if the sticking point is but the tip of an iceberg of doctrinal or relational problems that keeps crying out to be cleared up once and for all.

- If an immediate decision is required, search for areas of compromise; agree to test a course of action on a trial basis; and be willing to admit to a mistake if the passing of time shows the decision to be faulty.

Conclusion

There are many examples in the Bible of disagreement among leaders. One of the best known is the "sharp contention" between Paul and Barnabas as to whether John Mark should be allowed to accompany them on the second missionary

journey (Acts 15). Students of scripture have taken both sides and one cannot be dogmatic either way. But it is noteworthy that there is no mention in the record of prayer and waiting on the Lord for guidance.

Too often, the flesh argues either for a quick decision or indefinite waiting (procrastination). Good leaders who will not allow the work of the Lord to stagnate or rush into possible shipwreck, are a priceless gift to the church.

However, such skill does not just happen, but comes from spending time together in the Word, prayer, patience, good communication, and a firm resolve to get the situation cleared up, thus allowing the work to move forward.

This whole business is never easy work, but it is good work and usually fruitful. And it is all the better if elders have held quiet discussions in advance so that they are prepared when ministry encounters stormy seas.

Editor's Note: For related articles, see the ESN archives for the following:

"When Elders Disagree" (Vol 5, No 1)

"Great Leaders Accept Disagreement" (Vol 6, No 2)

"Removing An Elder" (Vol 9, No 5). 

From the Q-File

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 the worst maritime disaster of the time.

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 ten years ago 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. (from a *USA Today* article, April 9, 1997).

Small damage, invisible to most, can sink not only a great ship but also a person's integrity!

What qualities in employees irritate bosses the most? Burke Marketing Research asked executives in 100 of the nation's 1000 largest companies. At the top of the list was dishonesty. Marc Silbert, whose temporary employee firm commissioned the study, says, "If a company believes that an employee lacks integrity, all positive qualities--ranging from skill and experience to productivity and intelligence--become meaningless." *The Pryor Report*, Vol. 6, Number 1A, 1989.

Integrity (cont. from page 1)

ognize those who live their lives in the fear of the Lord. Of course, the scripture means by this “fear of the Lord” a life lived with profound sense of accountability to God, following His instructions for life. While we recognize that no one is perfect in their fear of the Lord, there is a very real sense of distinction between those who do fear the Lord and those who do not fear Him.

In short, a man of integrity “calls it as it is.” Or, as A.F. Kirkpatrick says, “The truthfulness of his character is shown in his estimate of men.”

Keeps his oath even when it hurts

This is reflected in the modern comment describing the man who “says what he means and means what he says.” This is one who keeps his promises, no matter the unforeseen inconvenience to himself. Similar descriptive phrases are frequently

spoken but rarely true, such as: “He’s consistent as clockwork,” or “You can count on him”, or “He’s as good as his word.” Everyone recognizes the high value of such a commitment to integrity. In practical terms, this means not finding a pretext for breaking your word when keeping it means accepting unanticipated complications or discomforts. How often do you or I as an elder leave promises unfilled, arrive late for appointments or commit to pray for someone and then “forget.”

Thirty-five years ago a visiting speaker promised to send me some follow up information about his subject. A year came and went, but the materials never arrived. Again, he was the visiting speaker and this time addressed the subject of integrity, of all things. In the middle of his message, he noticed me sitting in the audience and stopped cold.

He publically acknowledged my presence and asked me in front of everyone if I remembered the promise he made to me the previous year. When I acknowledged that I did, he went on to confess to everyone that the Lord had just convicted him of not keeping his word. Needless to say, he renewed his commitment to keep his word, even at the expense of his own “hurt” (namely, exposing himself publically for failing to live up to what he was just then preaching). To my joy, within one week, the said resources arrived in the mail. Was he a man of integrity? Yes, as demonstrated in his public confession and in his finally following through on his promise. Oh, that there would be more of us who would be men of our word!

Note: For more on the “Imprecatory Psalms” read the article at www.bible-equip.org/articles/biblical-theological/Psalms.pdf. 

Truth and Integrity

by C.H. Spurgeon

The truth was in Gaius, and Gaius walked in the truth (3 John 1). If the first had not been the case, the second could never have occurred; and if the second could not be said of him the first would have been a mere pretense. Truth must enter into the soul, penetrate and saturate it, or else it is of no value. Doctrines held as a matter of creed are like bread in the hand, which ministers no nourishment to the frame; but doctrine accepted by the heart, is as food digested, which, by assimilation, sustains and builds up the body. In us, truth must be a living force, an active energy, an indwelling reality, a part of the woof and warp of our being. If it be

in us, we cannot henceforth part with it. A man may lose his garments or his limbs, but his inward parts are vital, and cannot be torn away without absolute loss of life. A Christian can die, but he cannot deny the truth.

Now it is a rule of nature that the inward affects the outward, as light shines from the centre of the lantern through the glass: when, therefore, the truth is kindled within, its brightness soon beams forth in the outward life and conversation.

It is said that the food of certain worms colours the cocoons of silk which they spin: and just so the nutriment upon which a man’s inward nature

lives gives a tinge to every word and deed proceeding from him. To walk in the truth imports a life of integrity, holiness, faithfulness, and simplicity—the natural product of those principles of truth which the gospel teaches, and which the Spirit of God enables us to receive. We may judge of the secrets of the soul by their manifestation in the man’s conversation.

Be it ours today, O gracious Spirit, to be ruled and governed by thy divine authority, so that nothing false or sinful may reign in our hearts, lest it extend its malignant influence to our daily walk among men. (Taken from *Morning and evening: Daily readings*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.) 

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