

INTEGRITY
PROVERBS 19:1-29

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INTEGRITY PROVERBS 19:1-29

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I think that oftentimes, we make Christianity complicated, when it was meant to be relatively simple; further, I think that we add another layer of confusion because we allow the world to confuse us as to what is valuable. We spend our time and energy chasing all sorts of things, when the text this morning tells us that God simply expects us to concern ourselves with living lives of integrity. To put this in New Testament terms, God expects us to become more like Jesus everyday.

As we look at our society, it is easy to see that many of the values that our country was founded on have been eroded. We used to do business on our word and a handshake. Recently we have seen many unscrupulous businessmen steal money from major corporations, leaving many common people penniless. We see politicians lie, cheat, and steal. We have even come to the point where we can no longer trust doctors, teachers, and clergy. Why? Because integrity is no longer valued in our culture! However, the Bible sees integrity, living our lives in conformity to Jesus Christ, as the only important task in life for us. Integrity is highly valued by God.

It's easy for us to criticize businessmen, lawyers, politicians, and others, but I think that today's passage invites us to examine what undermines our individual integrity.

Heck, even simple machines can help to undermine our integrity. I know you won't believe this, but I used to have this problem with being competitive. Luining used to yell at me all the time. She said, "You've got to stop being obsessed with being the best at everything." I never listened though, and had to be first at everything.

Until one day, we went to a carnival with a bunch of friends. At the carnival, they had one of these scales/fortune-telling machines that dispensed a card with your weight and your fortune on

a card. Naturally, I had to go first. I stepped on the scale, and the machine printed out the card. Proudly I read my fortune, "You are a born leader with a superior intelligence, a quick wit, a charming manner, a magnetic personality and you are attractive to the opposite sex." I looked at all our friends, handed the card to my wife, and said, "Read it and weep." Luig turned the card over and said, "Yeah, and it has your weight wrong too."

I think today's message is relatively simple and straightforward: **AS CHRISTIANS WE ARE TO REFLECT THE CHARACTER AND NATURE OF GOD. WE SHOULD THEREFORE BE LIVING LIVES OF INTEGRITY.** If we are truly believers, then we should become more like Jesus every day.

I. THE VALUE OF INTEGRITY (Vs. 1-9)
INTEGRITY IS MORE VALUABLE THAN MATERIAL RICHES.

Verses 1-9 describe the value of integrity. To state it simply: **INTEGRITY IS MORE VALUABLE THAN MATERIAL RICHES.** Instead of chasing after money, wealth, status, power, and popularity... things the world values... we should be chasing after integrity because that is what God values.

A. A BALANCE OF SPIRIT AND TRUTH (Vs. 1-3)

Verses 1-3 inform us that it takes a balance of spirit and truth to live lives of integrity. I think that this morning's passage is an excellent illustration why we need to read the Proverbs in the context of the whole chapter. If we were to take individual Proverbs, isolate them and absolutize them, we may come to some wrong conclusions. We are going to deal with several Proverbs that deal with money. These verses will describe the suffering that poor people endure and the ease of life that the rich enjoy. This chapter is not about being rich or poor; it uses the pictures of rich and poor to illustrate the point of integrity. Look at verse 1. It sets the theme for the chapter. Solomon

is not saying it is good to be poor. What he is saying here is that as horrible as it is to be poor, it is better to be poor and live a life with integrity, than to be rich while living a life without integrity. We all understand that. But the problem is that most people, even criminals, think they are living lives of integrity, since criminals have codes of conduct. It would be considered downright evil to rat out another criminal. Fools are the same. They go around making up rules for their lives and their circle of friends. They all expect the rules and as long as they all operate according to the rules, they feel as if they are living lives of integrity.

But notice carefully, the second line of verse 1 doesn't portray a rich man as the opposite of a poor man it portrays a fool who is perverse, which brings us to verses 2-3. In our culture we have come to define passion as the noblest part of our existence. We say, "Follow your heart. Be true to yourself." One of the most devastating places this thought has infiltrated is in the romantic lives of believers. Romantic novels and movies often portray two people in love, and the one obstacle that stands in their way is religion. In the end, one will convert or they will both change, but the message is, love can even conquer faith. Over the years, I can't begin to tell you how many Christians I have seen marry unbelievers ... and how miserable they were afterwards.

The moral of verse 2 is that if you operate on passions and emotions, you will often act impulsively, and make poor choices. Passion should always be subordinated to knowledge. In other words, what we should do, or which course of action we follow should be determined by God's truth. Passion should be the motivator to follow that truth.

Look at verse 3. If we allow our own passions and desires to determine our course of action, we will often find ourselves angry with God, and even raging against Him, there are many Christians who are rebelling against God. Here is how integrity works: We learn what God wants by reading and studying the Bible. Once we know the right course of action, then our love for God

is what motivates us to do the right thing. Living a life of integrity is a balance of spirit and truth. We don't go making up our own rules for life, and we just don't continue to gather truth, we must act on the truth.

B. HOW BAD IS LIFE FOR THE POOR? (Vs. 4 & 7)

Now the poet wants to paint a picture of how foolish it is to rebel against God. He will do it by comparing the quality of life for poor people with the quality of life for a fool. Verse 4 and verse 7 answers the question, "How bad is life for the poor?" The second half of verse 4 says that a poor person's friends leave him they are nowhere to be found. Look at verse 7: Even though the poor person is desperate enough to beg, then not only do his friends and strangers avoid him, his own relatives avoid him. It is a bad state of affairs to be poor; no one wants to help you. In fact no one wants to see you, hear you, or come in contact with you in any way. Let's face it, being poor is downright deplorable.

C. HOW GOOD IS LIFE FOR THE RICH? (Vs. 4 & 6)

On the other hand, verse 4 and verse 6 tells us how good it is to be rich. Verse 4 reminds us that if you are wealthy and have influence, everybody wants to be your friend. In fact, verse 6 reminds us that people want to beg favors of you if you're rich. Wealthy people don't need it, but they are always getting things for free. People kow-tow to them and want to be around them. It's good to be rich.

Now keep this in mind. The poet here is not making any moral judgments about wealth or the lack of it. He is merely saying that from a strictly worldly perspective, being rich makes life enjoyable, being poor does not.

D. WEALTH AND POVERTY DEFINED (Vs. 5, 8, & 9)

It is only in verses 5, 8, & 9 where the poet defines true wealth and poverty for us. Keep in mind how awful life is for a poor person, now look at verses 5 and 9. Someone who lacks integrity is worse off in the spiritual realm than a poor person in the physical world. The liar may get away with lying temporarily; in fact, criminals get away with lying in court every day. We may think we are getting away with stuff by lying, cheating, or pretending that we are something we are not. But we are not. These two verses remind us of two things. First of all, our lying, our pretending, our cheating, and our hypocrisy will find us out. God will make sure of that. Secondly, look at the second line of verse 9, our deceit has eternal consequences. Here is the reasoning: If we are really born again Christians, then we should be living our lives with integrity. If we are lying, cheating, stealing or being hypocrites, then we are not living lives of integrity. If we are not living lives of integrity, then we are not being Christ-like. If we are not becoming Christ-like, then how can we call ourselves Christians? Whatever we have been valuing is certainly not what God values. The Bible's assessment of value is this: **INTEGRITY IS MORE VALUABLE THAN MATERIAL RICHES.**

II. THE LIFE FILLED WITH INTEGRITY (Vs. 10-17)
INTEGRITY IS DEFINED AS LIVING HONESTLY BEFORE GOD AND OTHERS.

We have learned from the first section that integrity is something that God places a high value on. Further we learned that honesty in what we say, how we act, and how we represent ourselves are the keys to integrity. Verses 10-17 will illustrate what the life filled with integrity looks like. Now watch how honesty plays into this: **INTEGRITY IS DEFINED AS LIVING HONESTLY BEFORE GOD AND OTHERS.**

A. INTEGRITY IS FOR GOD'S CHILDREN (V. 10)

Again, to reiterate what we have been saying from the beginning, integrity is for God's children as described in verse 10. The poet is not making any value judgments about keeping

slaves down or the moral superiority of politicians. What he is doing is this: It's hard to picture a fool coming into money. He doesn't even know how to invest the money or live the "good" life. It's comic to think of uneducated people rising to power to rule over the educated. We should not get caught up in the examples. He is simply saying this: It is absurd to take an uneducated, uncultured poor person who has just won the lottery, dress him up in a tuxedo and take him to a formal dinner and expect him to mingle as one of the privileged class. That is how absurd it is to think of an unbeliever with integrity. We have all seen episodes of the "Three Stooges" where they are all dressed up in tuxedos, attending a formal dinner party. By the end of the night, they have caused chaos, a food fight, and a riot. Integrity belongs to believers. But here is the sad state of affairs and it should cause us personal embarrassment: Many unbelievers that we know are living lives filled with more integrity than ours. That in itself is absurd. That's what this verse is trying to get at; integrity is something that should be part of who we are.

B. PATIENCE IS FOR GOD'S CHILDREN (Vs. 11-12)

Verses 11-12 inform us that patience is for God's children. God's children know that God has forgiven us a great deal. If God were impatient with us ... if God had a short fuse ... all of us here this morning wouldn't be here this morning. God would have wiped us off the face of this earth a long time ago. But God is patient. He forgives us of all our sins, and He is always offering us a restored relationship. Further, Jesus laid down His life so we experience all this grace, mercy, and love. If it is in the nature of Jesus to have patience, to love, to forgive, and to restore relationships, and if we are to be Christ-like, and live with integrity, then we need to be patient, to love, to forgive, and to restore broken relationships. We do it for others because Christ did it for us.

C. GIFTS ARE FOR GOD'S CHILDREN (Vs. 13-15)

Verses 13-15 inform us that gifts are for God's children. To have a husband or a wife with integrity is truly a gift from God. To have parents with integrity is a gift from God. To have children with integrity is a gift from God.

Good parents are interested in leaving an inheritance to their children. Parents who work hard and don't squander their money usually have a nice inheritance to pass on to their children. Parents of integrity are a gift from God to children.

On the other side of that same coin, good children are a gift from God to their parents. Like it or not, all of us who are parents will someday be somewhat dependent on our children. If our children are fools, lazy, or just plain self-absorbed, life will be miserable for us in our old age. We have heard plenty of stories where children have taken all their parents' money and property... and then kicked them out ... only to have to survive on welfare and die alone. But good children ... children who have learned to live with integrity are a blessing to their parents in their old age. It is a gift from God to be able to die surrounded by loved ones.

And I have left the best for last. Living with a spouse filled with wisdom and integrity is truly a gift from God. Have any of you ever had a leak in your house? Have you put a pot or pans under the leak? It drips day and night. You hear it constantly, and it drives you nuts until it is fixed and the dripping stops. That's the way it is living with a foolish husband or wife. It's like you wake up in the morning, and the dripping starts. You go to bed at night and the dripping continues. It's annoying to live together with husbands or wives who lack integrity.

On the other hand, it is a joy to live with people filled with integrity. If you know your husband or wife loves you, is always interested in making your life more enjoyable, and is not argumentative, it's a joy to wake up every morning and a joy to come home every night. This message here: If you are a parent, parent with love and integrity, if you're a child, love your parents

with respect and integrity. If you are a husband or wife, love your spouse with integrity. People who live lives filled with integrity are God's gift to others.

D. GENEROSITY IS FOR GOD'S CHILDREN (Vs. 16-17)

So far we have learned that a person of integrity is honest, loving, patient, forgiving, gracious, and gifted. Verses 16-17 add generosity to that list of characteristics. Generosity is for God's children. Since we understand that everything we have comes as a gift from God, we should be generous. Living with integrity means that we have a concern for the poor and hurting around us. I would say one of the ways we can test whether or not we are Christians is how we handle our money. Jesus commanded us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger. How our hearts are moved to reach out to others financially, emotionally, spiritually, and physically is a test to which we attribute all our possessions. If we believe that all we have is from God and if we believe that all people are created in the image of God, then integrity demands that we share what we have. Now I realize that is overly simple stated. For example, the Bible lays down guidelines for the poor to receive help. They must be righteous, diligent, and willing to work. The Bible never instructs us to simply give money to someone because they are poor. But we should have hearts willing to help the poor, and we should expect no praise or special mention for doing it. It is expected of those who live with integrity. Besides, God will make sure we are rewarded. Living a life of integrity is pretty simple: **INTEGRITY IS DEFINED AS LIVING HONESTLY BEFORE GOD AND OTHERS.**

III. THE REWARDS OF INTEGRITY (Vs. 18-29)

INTEGRITY'S REWARD IS BEING AT PEACE WITH GOD AND GENERALLY WELL RESPECTED BY OTHERS.

Please don't quit listening here because verses 18-29 emphatically describe the rewards of integrity: **INTEGRITY'S REWARD IS BEING AT PEACE WITH GOD AND**

GENERALLY WELL RESPECTED BY OTHERS. If you were to go back and look up all the appearances of God's name in this chapter, you would see that people without integrity are at war with God. Their end is destruction. On the other hand people living with integrity are enhancing their relationship with God as well as other human beings. The reward is living at peace with God.

A. PARENTING WITH INTEGRITY (Vs. 18-19)

That is why parenting with integrity is so important in verses 18-19. Since there is so much at stake, parents should work very hard at teaching their children to live with integrity. Here is the problem most of us face; we don't want to parent the way God has designed parenting. It is clear in these two verses that we should parent by teaching our children the meaning of consequences. For example, when our children forget to buy a poster board for their project due tomorrow, we put on our coats at 10 o'clock at night, find a 24 hour Walgreens, and pick up the poster board. If we really wanted them to grow and mature, we would not have gone to buy the poster board. We would let them fail the project and suffer the consequences. I don't care if the behavior is big or little, if we keep rescuing our children from the consequences of their poor behavior, they will never learn to live lives of integrity. Learn to parent by allowing consequences to kick in. That's how we learn what integrity is all about.

B. LIVING WITH INTEGRITY (Vs. 20-24)

Verses 20-24 illustrate what living with integrity is all about. Verse 20 states that people grow in integrity by being humble, they are willing to submit themselves to God's teaching. They are willing to be open to learning more about what God expects of us.

Secondly, verse 21 describes submission as an asset to living with integrity. If we are willing to accept what God brings into our lives, good or bad, we will learn to live with integrity. People of integrity are able to live with the same integrity through bad times as well as good. It's

easy to do the right thing when everything is going our way, but it's a little more difficult to display integrity when things are going badly. We must be willing to submit our wills and our desires to God's plan for our lives.

Next, verse 22 again states the need to be honest. We need to be honest with ourselves, honest with others, and honest before God.

Verse 23 states that the pursuit of righteousness demonstrates who we love and fear. The saying goes that if we truly fear God, we will not be afraid of anything or anyone else.

And finally, in verse 24, we are reminded that living a life filled with integrity is not just a hobby. It is something that we have to work at and pursue diligently. I love this proverb: Picture verse 24 in your mind, the lazy fool puts his fork in the dish and scoops some food in it ... but he is too lazy to even raise the fork to his mouth. So he just looks at his hand with the fork in it and just stares at it because it's too much work to raise it to his mouth. That's how many Christians approach their spiritual life. The Bible is right in front of them with all sorts of food in it ... but alas, most Christians are too lazy to open and read it. If we don't read and study our bibles, then this picture in verse 24 describes us. So living with integrity is described as being humble, submissive, honest, righteous, and diligent. And this leads to a life of peace.

C. LIVING WITHOUT INTEGRITY (Vs. 25-29)

On the other hand, verses 25-29 describe what living without integrity looks like. Verse 25 reminds us that fools live without discipline. Look carefully at verse 25. It does not say, "Flog the mocker and he will learn." It says, "Flog the mocker and the simple will learn." The mocker will never learn. The mocker is undisciplined and lazy. He will never learn. But the verse is saying that if the mocker is publicly humiliated, maybe some simple person may see that and wake up.

But mockers are undisciplined. They are lazy and they can never live a life of integrity. You can't trust them, and God certainly doesn't trust them.

Second, verse 26 reminds us that fools have no shame. They should. People who rob their father and drive their mothers out bring shame and disgrace to their parents. For example, as we talked about earlier, the parents of these kids who stole their money and houses and left them destitute are not only physically destitute, but these parents are now ashamed and disgraced because they have no money. And they are also shamed and disgraced that their children could do this to them. But the problem is that the children are the ones who should feel the shame and disgrace but they don't ... because they don't have integrity. People without integrity have no shame.

In addition, verse 27 says that fools have no direction. Since God is not their anchor, their own lusts and desires guide them. They are carried off in all directions and never really get anything accomplished. This is quickly becoming a characteristic of this upcoming generation. It is yet one more step in removing integrity from our society.

Verse 28 also puts another nail in the coffin of our society's integrity: There is no truth for the fool. In fact, our society has given up the search for absolute truth. Everything has become relative and, therefore, if there is no absolute truth then integrity has become relative as well.

Verse 29 describes the consequences of a living without integrity: There is no joy. There really is no enjoyment in life without integrity. The reason is that we are not at peace with God and we are not at peace with one another. We are not at peace with one another because if there is no such thing as truth, then we don't know what to expect from one another.

In a life without integrity, there is no discipline, no shame, no direction, no truth, and in the end, no joy. On the other hand a life filled with integrity is a life filled with joy: **INTEGRITY'S**

REWARD IS BEING AT PEACE WITH GOD AND GENERALLY WELL RESPECTED BY OTHERS.

I want us to think about living lives of integrity. It is something that has virtually disappeared from our society. However, integrity has not disappeared from God's character and His commands: **AS CHRISTIANS WE ARE TO REFLECT THE CHARACTER AND NATURE OF GOD. WE SHOULD THEREFORE BE LIVING LIVES OF INTEGRITY.** The Proverbs always put these lessons in the context of a family, if parents want their children to live lives of integrity the best way is to model integrity in their own lives. We must all ask ourselves what is valuable to us.

Listen to this story about a father and son conversation. I don't know who wrote it but it nicely illustrates how we are to live and communicate integrity.

"A grown man awaiting surgery in the hospital was talking with his father. 'Dad,' he said, 'I sure hope I can be home for Father's Day. I felt awful years ago when I was 10, because I never gave you a gift that year.'

The father replied, 'Mark, I remember that Saturday before Father's Day. I saw you in the store. I watched as you picked up the cigars and stuffed them in your pocket. I knew you had no money, and I was sad because I thought you were going to run out of the store without paying. But as soon as you hid the cigars, you pulled them out and put them back.

'When you stayed out playing all the next day because you had no present, you probably thought I was hurt. You're wrong. When you put the cigars back and decided not to break the law, Mark, you gave me the best present I ever received.'"

Lives of integrity, becoming more like Jesus everyday, that's what makes our heavenly Father happy. The Apostle Paul summed up like this:

"I urge you brothers and sisters ... in view of God's mercy ... to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your

mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- His good, pleasing, and perfect will"

(Romans 12:1-2).