

Walking in Integrity • Proverbs 10:9, 28:6, 18

Mothers are masters at giving advice, whether you want it or not! Long after I was married my mother still gave me her unsolicited advice on everything from what I wore to what I believed. Most of my mother's advice was pretty easy to understand, even through her British accent and occasionally quaint vocabulary. One bit of advice she told often was originally not her own but from the sages of Proverbs. I always had a sense of what it meant but never could have nailed it down to putting the definition into words. When facing a hard decision or going someplace where temptations to sin might be particularly strong, my mother would often say, "Leith, just remember to walk in your own integrity!"

Five times in the book of Proverbs we are wisely told, "Walk in your integrity." But, what does that mean? The Hebrew word for integrity used in Proverbs is "tom" which means "completeness, entireness, wholeness." In English we talk about integrating things together into a single entity. When that integration successfully takes place we have integrity.

One time our family visited the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. After taking a tour we ended up in the clinic bookstore where I came across a Consumers Report book rating all the cars sold in America. I did just what you would have done. I looked up the cars our family was driving. I was amazed at the accuracy of the rating system. What they said was good and bad about each car matched my own experience exactly. The ratings list included electrical system, engine, transmission, suspension, air conditioning and more. The last item on the ratings list was "integrity"—i.e., how the whole thing hangs together. You can have a great engine and a tough transmission but the car isn't much good to you if the hood flies open and the doors keep falling off. A car is more than good parts and good systems. There has to be integrity—completeness, entireness, wholeness. The whole thing has to hang together.

The person with integrity has submitted every part of life to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

That's precisely what God is talking about in the book of Proverbs when he repeatedly tells us to "walk in our integrity."

Successful living is more than a bunch of good parts and systems. You can be as smart as Einstein, as fast as a gazelle, as tough as diamonds, but it all has to hang together to be any good. The life that hangs together is the life that has integrity—completeness, entireness, wholeness.

Let me tell you how this works. The person with integrity has submitted every part of life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. God is at work in every part of life—family, physical condition, morality, business, church, money, time, everything. You name it, God is at work there. But that doesn't mean there is integrity yet because integrity is not just the individual pieces. Integrity always operates in terms of the whole.

Sound confusing? Maybe some examples will help to explain it.

Tommy is on a business trip to New York City. He's lonely. He just lost a key account and is really in the pits. An attractive woman asks if she can join him at his table. Delightful conversation follows. It's not long before Tommy realizes that she wants to spend the night with him. One part of Tommy says, "Go ahead. Pleasures, enjoyment, satisfaction are all yours for the taking. No one will ever know." But then another part of Tommy says, "That's sin against God. It's harm against your wife whether she ever finds out or not. It's inconsistent with your commitment to Jesus Christ. You may get VD. You could destroy your family."

Tommy must make a decision, a commitment. How will he handle this situation? What will he do? Will he choose one part, the physical part, or will he function in terms of the whole, all that God has made him to be? So it is not just the physical; it is also the spiritual, the mental, the moral. It is family, job and everything all put together and dominated by Jesus Christ. Will he walk in his

own integrity and consider the whole as he makes his decision?

Alice is filling out her 1040 form. Besides the income she must report from her W-2 statements she also had \$5000 in cash income from consulting as an interior decorator. It would not be possible for the IRS to know about that money. If she reports it she will move into a higher tax bracket. Since her divorce, finances have been tough. And she questions the way the government spends money. She is opposed to both expensive social and military programs. But, she is a Christian who knows that the Bible calls us to honesty and to submission to government. What should she do? Integrity requires her to decide from all that she is as a person and as a Christian and not just from a financial perspective.

To walk in your own integrity is to take each of life's steps in terms of all the elements God has built into your life and not walk selectively on the basis of one part at a time.

Some people will say this integrity stuff is stupid. The smart way to travel is to do what's best for the immediate situation. It is situation ethics with self-interest. When it's smart to be honest, be honest; when it's smart to steal, steal. With Christians be a Christian; with heathen be a heathen. Pull out the part of you that fits right now and leave the rest behind for another day.

"Bad advice!" God says. Integrity means ultimately coming out ahead every time.

Let's look at those five references from Proverbs on integrity. The first is Proverbs 10:9: "*He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his way will be found out.*" The Hebrew word translated "securely" means "confidently" or "carefree." The man who walks in integrity can be confident and carefree because he is consistent. He always operates from the same rules, the same morality. By contrast, the man who picks and chooses which self-interest to apply in each situation will get caught in his own lies and inconsistencies. Sooner or later he will be found out.

Here is someone who can walk into any group or circumstance and have a confident attitude because he does not have to be on guard about what he is going to say. He says the same thing no matter who he's with. He doesn't have to be careful about which secrets are spoken and which ones

are kept because he has the same approach no matter where he is or who he is with.

A classic example of this proverb is Watergate. Richard Nixon and his cohorts did not walk in their integrity. They said one thing to the nation in public and something else to each other in private.

God's wise advice is simple and good: walk in your integrity and you will have nothing to hide and nothing to fear. Head off on a perverse road and sooner or later you will get caught!

A second reference to integrity is in Proverbs 28:6: "*Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is perverse in his ways.*" The idea here is that the person who walks in integrity is better than someone who is well off financially.

One time several people from Wooddale Church told me they had dreamed that I sang a solo in church. (Actually, that would be a nightmare!) This led to a discussion at our family breakfast table about what it would take to get me to sing a solo in church. \$1000? \$1,000,000? The discussion was based on the popular assumption that if the price gets high enough we will turn our backs on integrity and do whatever the buyer wants. (Sorry, I won't tell you my answer. You will have to talk to my agent!)

So, what is your price? At what dollar value would you forget integrity and go the way of the highest bidder? Lots of people do this all the time—in marriage, in business, even in church.

God says that it is better to be "whole", to "walk in integrity", than to be rich and forsake integrity. Think about that the next time it comes to a choice between integrity and getting a sales commission, between integrity and lower taxes, between integrity and big bucks. God says we are better off with our integrity intact than rich with our integrity broken.

In Proverbs 28:18 the Lord gives us another bit of wisdom, telling us, "*He who walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is perverse in his ways will fall into a pit.*" The expression "into a pit" is not in the Hebrew Bible. The original writing just says, "He who is perverse will fall in one." In one what? Well, in one of his perverse ways! In other words, here is a person who forsakes integrity and ethics and picks a bad way to go to satisfy an immediate desire. God says that

person will end up being a loser in the very area where he went astray.

The classic biblical example illustrating the second half of Proverbs 28:18 is the Old Testament story of Haman. He was a big shot in the court of Xerxes, the king of Persia. Haman was jealously irritated by the Jew Mordecai. So, rather than walk in his integrity, Haman plotted to get Mordecai hung. In fact, he had special gallows built. What he never figured on was the discovery that Mordecai was the guardian who raised Esther the queen of Persia. The result? Haman was hanged on his own gallows. *“He who walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is perverse in his ways will fall into a pit.”*

The classic biblical illustration of the first part of Proverbs 28:18 was Job. Job had everything going for him. He was a patriarch with children, wealth and prestige. But then everything went wrong. In one day he lost all of his wealth, his children and, as if that were not enough, he became painfully ill. All of his counselors, even his wife, told him to forsake his integrity, but godly Job replied in Job 27:5, “. . . till I die, I will not put my integrity away from me.” In other words, he was saying, “I don’t care what happens to me. Even if you take everything, including my life, I will walk in my integrity.” And Job was de-

livered and restored by God proving for all of history that *“He who walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is perverse in his ways will fall into a pit.”*

Do you want to be a winner? Then walk in integrity!

“Ah,” you say, “great, wise advice . . . but I have no integrity in which to walk. I don’t have it all together. My life is just broken pieces.”

Do I have good news for you! The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the marvelous truth that Jesus came and died for you so that you can get it all together. The new birth is a new beginning. Jesus gives you his integrity to become your very own!

Would you like to have Jesus Christ forgive all your brokenness and put you all together? Then I suggest you pray to him right now:

Lord, I’m a sinner. I don’t have it all together. There is no integrity in which I can walk. Please forgive my sin. Lord, I am trusting in you to put me all together and give to me eternal life. I want you to be my Savior and my Lord today.

When you place our trust in Jesus and talk to him as you just have, he gives to you integrity and eternal life! Now . . . walk in your integrity!

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