

Walking in Integrity • Proverbs 10:9 and 28:6 & 18

Mothers are masters at giving advice - - - whether you want it or not! My mother still gives me her unsolicited advice on everything from what I wear to what I believe.

Most of my mother's advice is pretty easy to understand, even through her British accent and occasionally quaint vocabulary. One bit of advice she used to tell me often was originally not her own but from the sages of Proverbs. I always had a feeling for what it meant but never could have nailed it down into words for definition.

When facing a hard decision or going somewhere where temptations to sin may be particularly strong, my mother would often say, "Leith, just remember to walk in your own integrity!"

Five times in the Old Testament book of Proverbs we are wisely told to walk in integrity.

But what does that mean? What is this integrity about which the sages of Proverbs speak?

The Hebrew word used in Proverbs is "tom" and it means "completeness, entireness, wholeness". In English we talk about "integrating" a whole bunch of things together into a single entity. When that integration successfully takes place, we have integrity.

Awhile back I was browsing in a bookstore and came across a Consumer Report book rating all the cars sold in America. I did just what you would do. I looked up the cars our family drives. 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 list of items rated included engine, transmission, electrical system, suspension, air-conditioning and more. The last item on the ratings list was "integrity" - - - how the whole thing hangs together. You can have a great en-

gine 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. There has to be completeness, entireness, wholeness. The whole thing has to hang together.

That's precisely what God is talking about in the Book of Proverbs when he talks about our having 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.

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Let me explain 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 - - - family, physical condition, morality, business, church, money, time. Everything! You name it; God is at work there.

Now that doesn't mean there is integrity yet. Integrity means always operating in terms of the whole and not in terms of individual parts.

Sounds confusing, doesn't it? Maybe some examples will help.

Tommy is on a business trip to New York City. He's lonely. He just lost a key account. He's really down. 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

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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."

So Tommy faces a decision about which way he will walk. He may walk in the way one part of him directs, but it is far wiser to walk in the way all of him says he should go . . . walking in his own integrity.

Alice is filling out her income tax return. Besides the amounts of income she must report from W-2 statements she also had \$5,000 in cash income from consulting as an interior decorator. There is no possible way the IRS could know about that money. If she reports it she will move into a higher tax bracket. Since her divorce, finances have been tough. She questions the way the government spends money anyway. 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 of the elements God has built into your life and not just walk selectively on the basis of one part at a time.

Some people will tell you that this integrity stuff is stupid. The smart way to travel is doing what's best for the immediate situation. When it's smart to be honest, be honest; when it's smart to steal, steal. With Christians be a Christian; with heathens 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. "The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out," according to Proverbs 10:9.

The Hebrew word translated "securely" means "confidently, 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.

A classic example of this proverb can be seen in the Watergate break-in. Then-President Richard Nixon and his cohorts did not walk in their integrity. They had one set of explanations that were given to the public and they had another set of conversations that took place behind closed doors in the Oval Office. At first it seemed as if that would work, but eventually the truth was found out and proved again Proverbs 10:9, "The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out." Lack of integrity led to the resignation of the President of the United States!

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

In Proverbs 28:6 we find that it is better to be a person of integrity than a person of wealth. There we read: "Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a rich man whose ways are perverse."

The popular assumption is that if the price gets high enough we will do whatever the buyer wants. What is your price? At what dollar level would you "can" integrity and go the way of the highest bidder?

Lots of people do this all the time . . . in marriage, in business, even in church. But God says that it is better to be "whole", to "walk in integrity", than it is to be incredibly wealthy. Think about that the next time it comes to a choice between integrity and sales commission, between integrity and lower taxes, between integrity and big bucks. We're better off poor with integrity intact than rich with integrity broken.

Later on, in Proverbs 28:18, the Lord gives us another bit of wisdom, telling us, "He whose walk is blameless is kept safe, but he whose ways are perverse will suddenly fall." Here is a person who ignores 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 Old Testament example of this is the story of Haman. He was a powerful man in the court of the Persian king, Xerxes. But Haman had an irritant, a Jew named Mordecai. So, rather than walk in his integrity, Haman plotted to have Mordecai killed. In fact, he had special gallows built for that very purpose. What he never figured on was the discovery that Mordecai was the guardian who had raised Esther the Queen of Persia. The result? Haman was hanged on his own gallows.

“He whose walk is blameless is kept safe, but he whose ways are perverse will suddenly fall.”

The classic Old Testament example of the first part of Proverbs 28:18 comes from the story of Job. Job had everything going for him. And then everything went wrong. He lost his fortune, his children all died in one tragic day and he became painfully ill. All the counselors around him urged him to forsake his integrity, but godly Job replied in Job 27:5, “. . . till I die, I will not deny my integrity.” And Job was delivered and restored by God!

“He whose walk is blameless is kept safe, but he whose ways are perverse will suddenly

fall.”

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

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

I have good news for you! The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the marvelous truth that Jesus came and died on the cross for you so that you can get it all together. The new birth is a new beginning. He gives to you his integrity to be-

come your own!

Would you like that integrity? Then I encourage you right now to ask God for it through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He will forgive all your brokenness and put you all together. You can use your own words, but you can say something like this:

Lord, I’m a sinner. I don’t have it together. There’s no integrity in which I can walk. Please forgive my sin. I’m trusting in you from now on to put me all together, to give to me eternal life. I want Jesus today to be my Savior and Lord. In Jesus’ name, amen.

When you place your trust in Jesus, he gives to you integrity and eternal life. Now . . . walk in it!

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