

May 13, 2007

Godliness 101 (#5) - Integrity, Trustworthiness, and Caring
I Chronicles 29:10-17 / James 5:1-6 / Job 31:35-40

I need to begin today by doing two things:

FIRST, I need to clarify and assure you that the story I told about the man sleeping in the hammock on my porch is true! I had a two people come up to me after the service and say they thought my comments during the communion service implied that I had simply told it as a joke (that is, that I had made it up and was telling it just to get a laugh).

But though I understand how someone may have understood it that way, that's NOT what I meant by my words. What I meant was that I've told that story hundreds of times as if it were somehow funny when in reality (as I realized last week during the communion service) my treatment of that man was not funny at all — it was sin. In light of the Bible that story (though true, as Nancy will confirm) isn't really funny at all — though in the past I have gotten many a laugh from people as I've told it.

I'm sorry if my choice of words confused anyone. It merely goes to show that the saying Randy taped to my office door is true, which reads: "I know you believe that you understand what you think I said, but I'm not so sure that what you heard is what I meant." It happens a lot when you're a pastor!

And **SECONDLY**, lest you think I'm more depraved than I really am, I need to tell you that my treatment of that man was partially due to the fact that in the previous months the American partner of a man in my church / an employee at the U.S. Embassy / and two close personal friends had been shot (three killed, and one amazingly lived but lost his eye).

Another close friend's family was robbed at gunpoint by six armed men (who were waiting when he returned from jogging around the block), four young missionary teachers were robbed at a restaurant, and two other people were robbed at gunpoint as they were waiting outside the gate of the house where we held our Bible Studies (at which point the head of security at the U.S. Embassy sent two men with shot guns to stand guard at the house where we were meeting).

Not that it justifies my treatment of that man — because it doesn't. But it may help you understand why we were so inhospitable. It was a bad year. In fact, the crime was so bad that the entire church started fasting one day every week for God to stem the violence.

It was so emotionally draining on our family that the church gave me a three month sabbatical to go back to the states from June to September (only to return and have Hurricane Mitch hit on October 30th of that year and devastate the entire country)! That's *"the rest of the story,"* as Paul Harvey used to say!

Now, in terms of our passage for this morning, Job basically summarizes his case. Yet in doing so, he also gives us three other godly virtues — Integrity, Trustworthiness and Caring. So without any further delay, let's take a look at each one individually.

So **FIRST**, let's look at **INTEGRITY**. We covered this a little bit last week when we were going over the whole topic of transparency and confession of sin, and I mentioned that transparency and being a person of integrity were all interwoven — a point that comes out again in this morning's text.

As I mentioned last week, a person of integrity is to a large degree little more than a "fully integrated person" — that's where the word comes from — from the Latin *"integritas"* meaning "whole" or "entire."

And the way we become people of "integrity" is by striving to be in public what we are in private, and even moreso what we are in secret — a process of becoming whole, which as I mentioned last week, comes as we are transparent, and learn to confess our sins, and our struggles, and the temptations we battle with in the center and core of our being.

But there's also another sense in which the word "integrity" applies which I didn't cover last week. It's the sense in which the *"integritas"* — the being whole or entire — means being wholly or entirely committed to God. Striving to let God influence, own, control, or transform the "whole" of who we are.

For instance, allowing God to be Lord of our mind or thought life — how we think and even the things we allow ourselves to think about, as Paul told the Corinthians when he urged them in the 10th chapter of his second Epistle: "Take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ."

Or again in Phil. 4:8 where he said, "Finally brothers, whatsoever is true, whatsoever is noble, whatsoever is right, whatsoever is pure or lovely or admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think on these things."

What's he saying? A Christian is a person who has come under the Lordship of Jesus, and therefore allows their commitment to Him to filter what they will and will not set their minds upon. They are people who allow what pleases Him, and His desires for their sanctification to dictate the things they will and will not think about, entertain or dwell on.

But it's not just the mind. We are also told to "Guard your heart, for it is the well-spring of life." That is, let God and His Christ be the Lord of your will. That's what the "heart" is in biblical terms — the control center of your being — to the point that whatever owns or controls your heart owns or controls you.

Which means Christ must be: Lord of your affections and Lord of your possessions — Lord of your money as well as your mind. "No man can have two masters," says Jesus, "for no one can serve both God and money."

Lord of your dreams and Lord of your desires—Lord of your present and Lord of your future. Lord of your budget and Lord of your diet. Lord of your marriage and Lord of your parenting. Lord of your profession and Lord of your work ethic. Lord of your lifestyle and Lord of your morality.

Lord of your relationships and Lord of your recreation. Lord of your psyche and Lord of your conscience. Lord of your goals and Lord of your priorities. Lord of your entertainment and Lord of your education. Lord of your waking, and Lord of your sleeping. Lord of your whole, entire, life — nothing consciously held back from Him.

To be a Christian is to be a person of integrity and a person of integrity seeks to bring all of life under the Lordship of Christ. It is to have His presence, and the precepts of His Word, and His known will, and the influences of His grace and Spirit so permeate and guide, and direct and rule your life that all you are and do comes under, and is integrated together, in Jesus.

And I say that because too many Christians are dis-integrated. That is, they have consciously consecrated and brought certain parts of their life under the Lordship of Jesus, while at the same time consciously choosing not to consecrate or bring other parts under that same Lordship. They have submitted certain areas of their life to Jesus, but not other areas.

What happened in the conversion and baptism of the Germanic tribes by St. Boniface around 720 A.D. is not all that unusual. They had been a very aggressive people — so much so that when Boniface translated the Bible into German, he left out the OT passages on war because he felt

they were already too warlike! And when he baptized them en masse, they agreed under one condition — that they could hold their fighting arm (the arm they held their sword with) above the water as they went down into the river to be baptized. So the story goes.

It was their way of saying what many people since then have also said: “You can have these parts of me Jesus (I’ll submit to your teaching in these areas of my life), but I reserve these other parts for myself.”

One man in my church in Honduras (who was a Baptist) put it in a humorous but pointed way when he criticized the Presbyterians for baptizing infants. “They get baptized as babies before they have any money,” he said, “and so they grow up thinking everything they make after that belongs to them!” But then he paused and said, “Of course, the Presbyterians say that since we get baptized as adults we take our wallets out and throw them on the ground before we walk down into the water to get baptized.” The inference in both cases is that many Christians seem to think that their money is something that doesn’t come under the rubric of Christ’s Lordship.

With others it’s their sexuality. I was reminded of that in *Borders* a few months back when I saw a book entitled, “Saved, Single, and Sexually active.” The Bible obviously teaches sexual purity and abstinence until marriage, but in many cases Christians look more to the values of society for their sexual ethic than they do to the clear teachings of Jesus and the Bible. Which means that in that sense they are divided people, and dis-integrated people who fall short of being people of “integrity” whose life is fully integrated or established on Jesus.

And the list could go on, and on, and on. Because none of us is fully integrated in our faith — though that is the goal — to bring every part of our being under Jesus.

As we have seen in this chapter alone, Job was a very well-integrated person: *He brought his sexual views and practices in line with divine revelation (vv. 1-4, and 9-12); his views of honesty, truth-telling, and the need to refrain from lies (vv. 5-6); the need to discipline his will, and be consistent and determined, with a resolve to be holy (vv. 7-8); his views on being just and fair, generous and responsible to care for the poor and underprivileged (vv. 13-23); his rejection of greed and idolatry (vv. 24-28); showing love to his enemies, compassion to family and strangers, and hospitality to travelers.*

There was not one aspect of his being that he didn’t seek to bring under the Lordship of God: His sexuality / his personal ethics and morality / his inner desires and urges / his heart resolve

and determination of will / his money and the use of his possessions / his treatment of his family and employees / his thinking and acting in public and private / his view of God, man and society / his view of wealth, poverty, justice, economics, social responsibility, love for friend and foe, compassion, respect, courtesy, honesty, transparency, confession of sin, and care for the fatherless, widow and orphan. His thinking and feeling; his conscience and worldview; his actions and attitudes; his body, soul and spirit — it was all integrated in, under and through his faith relationship with God.

Frances Ridley Havergal spoke of this kind of “integrity” (or a fully surrendered life) when she wrote in her famous hymn: “Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee...” Take my moments and my days... Take my hands... Take my feet... Take my voice... Take my lips... Take my silver and my gold... Take my intellect... Take my heart and will and love — Take my self and I will be ever only all for Thee.”

Can you say the same? Have you consecrated every part of your being to God, or are you still withholding certain things for yourself, or the world, or the pleasures of sin?

Are you a person of “integrity” — with your whole being fully consecrated and integrated by your faith in God, and submission to His Lordship, or are you still consciously dis-integrated — serving two masters, divided by numerous conflicting loyalties, torn by the pull of two or more competing sources of authority?

Because so long as you are you will never be whole or entire (*“integritas”* — a person of integrity). Not really. Job was because he had surrendered every aspect of his life to God. That’s what made him a man of integrity. Have you? Will you? Will you now resolve to do so knowing God wants all of you, not just little selected parts of you?

Then **SECOND**, we come to **TRUSTWORTHINESS**. Which only makes sense since there is probably no person more “TRUSTWORTHY” than a person of integrity! A person who invites divine and human scrutiny in every aspect of their life. A person who could say to anyone, like Job basically says here (and I’ll make it a bit more contemporary): *“Ok, follow me around. I’ll give you an account of everything I do (v. 37). Put secret surveillance cameras anywhere you want! Check every website I’ve ever visited on my computer! Read every correspondence I’ve ever written! Check every video I’ve ever rented, every book I’ve ever read, every word I’ve ever said — read my mind and search my heart — because you won’t find anything there that I haven’t already told you about.”*

Could you say the same? Probably few of us could. We've all failed to some degree. We've all gossiped, embellished the truth, fallen to temptation, despised someone in our heart, entertained sinful thoughts, and so on. But that's not the issue. The issue is not the *past*, the issue is the *future!* Not what you have done, but what you will seek to do from here on in. The past is the past — unchangeable, yet forgiven when confessed and put behind us. But the future is wide open.

"Trustworthy men hate dishonest gain," says Moses. "Trustworthy men," says Nehemiah, "are given oversight and responsibility." "A trustworthy man," says Solomon, "keeps a secret." (Pr. 11:13) "A trustworthy man refreshes the spirit." (Pr. 25:13) "A trustworthy messenger," he says, "brings healing." (Pr. 13:17). Daniel we are told, was "a trustworthy man, neither corrupt nor negligent." In fact, says Jesus, only if you've been trustworthy with little things, will he give you oversight over much, "For whoever is dishonest with little will be dishonest with much."

"Character, Integrity or trustworthiness" as one person once put it, "is all about who you are when no one is looking and when you know no one will find out."

Job had been given oversight over much, and in the end will be given oversight over twice as much as he had before! WHY? Because he'd shown himself to be a "trustworthy" man — trustworthy with the things God had given into his care as a steward of divine blessings.

The **LAST**, we find Job's **CARING CONCERN** for the poor and underprivileged. People he could have taken advantage of or exploited — the day laborer who worked his fields, or the poor land tenants who had no land of their own, and lived in tents or houses owned by Job. Job lived in a day where you had wealthy landholders and poor land-workers (similar to the "serfs" or "peasants" during the feudal system of the middle ages who worked the fields of the "nobility" who lived in their huge castles and owned all the land).

He lived in a day when there were no unions; no legislated minimum wage; no laws about how many hours a day, or days a week, you could make a person work — a day when people worked from sunrise to sunset, and overtime pay and pensions were unheard of commodities.

A day when the rich made up the rules and the poor had no choice but to abide by them — a day when it would have been easy and even considered acceptable to abuse and exploit your poor day laborers — like the robber barons did here in the States using child labor in their massive sweat shops at the beginning of the industrial era.

Job could have done the same and no one would have thought any less of him for doing it — but he didn't. *He couldn't. His conscience wouldn't allow him to, because he knew it just wasn't right, no matter what others may have done, said or condoned.*

It didn't matter what was acceptable in society, because if it was unacceptable to God, unloving, or inhumane, Job rejected it. He didn't go by what was legal, because many legal things are immoral. He went by what was morally upright and just in the sight of God, knowing that many people will stand before God on the Judgment Day and say: "But I didn't do anything illegal." And God will reply, "Yes, but legal or not you know it was neither fair, nor loving, nor right."

Abortion is legal, but it's not right. Buying companies in order to pilfer and pillage the pensions plans which employees have paid into for years, and depend on for their retirement, is legal, though it is nothing but sheer evil. Exaggerating or lying about product effectiveness is legal (and considered good salesmanship by many), but God will judge such people for their purposeful deception.

Job says, "If my land cries out against me, and all its furrows are wet with tears; if I have devoured its yield without payment, or broken the spirit of the tenants" (and he means "wet with tears" because of overwork or abusive treatment, profiteering from their sweat and toil without paying them for it, or breaking their spirit by tricking them — promising benefits he had no intention of following through on, or not paying them enough to even provide for their families)...if I've done that, says Job, "then let briars come up instead of wheat and weeds instead of barley."

You see, Job cared more about people than profit. / More about being just than being rich. / More about being loving than simply being within the scope of laws of the land in which he lived. He cared more about doing what was right in the sight of a holy and just God, than what was "legal" by the standards of a fallen world!

Because Christians are called to be godly, ours is a higher standard — the law of love and not simply the laws of the land. Theirs is the standard of a heart that refuses to do what's wrong and unfair and unloving even when society says it's "ok," or "permissible" or "legal."