

## Integrity – Light in a Dark World

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I was told a story some years ago about a company that wanted to change its image. The company was a family run business and now they were in the third generation of the family running the business. The original owner took pride in his company and he believed if his name was going to be on the product, he wanted to make the best product. Of course, this cost money. The owner was happy with the profit he did make on the product, but he was more proud of the quality of the product his company made. If someone got a defective product, he took it personally and made sure the customer was made happy. After the third generation of the family took over the company, no longer was a quality product important. It was all about making more profit so the third generation of owners could retire early. To make a long story short, the third generation of owners were not happy with the profit margin. So they sold the company to a bigger company. The third generation did not want to follow in the same footsteps as their grandfather who had good work and business ethics. The third generation allowed themselves to be shaped by the unethical business practices of our culture, which is all about making a profit no matter who gets hurt in the process. The very first owner had something the third generation didn't have – "integrity". What is "integrity"? If you Google the word, you can find this definition: the quality of being honest and having a strong moral principles that you refuse to change (Cambridge Dictionary). We live in a culture that no longer embraces this character trait. We see it in the business world as well as in sports, Hollywood, media, and the list can go on and on. I like the second part of the definition: having strong moral principles that one refuses to change. It's amazing how people are caving into doing unmoral acts. In Hollywood, if you do immoral acts you are a good person in their eyes. People are buckling under the pressure of the culture and it's getting harder and harder to find people with integrity or who is honest and have strong moral character.

Is having integrity or being honest important for Christians? Does the Lord want us to be a people with integrity? Jesus, when He walked the earth, told many parables to those who gathered around Him. One time, Jesus told a parable

about seeds being planted to different kinds of soil. His disciples had a hard time understanding this parable and Jesus had to explain it to them. When Jesus gets to the last seeds in good soil, Jesus makes this statement, "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience (KJV). In other words, those with an honest heart will hear the Word of God and well produce fruit for the Kingdom of God. They are the good seed planted in good ground. The Greek term used here is "kalos" which means to be good, right, excellent, honest, and beautiful (Strong's Concordance). Integrity and honestly go together and we see that this is what Jesus wants from us. We are to be good, right, excellent, honest, and beautiful. I find "beautiful" as an interesting term used in this Greek term. It sounds like God thinks people with integrity are beautiful people. I don't know about you, but I enjoy being around people who are "kalos". People with "kalos" are light in a dark world and Jesus wants us to have this character trait within us. I looked for someone who had this trait and who refused to change just to please the culture they lived in. I found such a person in the Old Testament who was a man of integrity and who lived an honest life in a culture that was very pagan – like ours today.

We've been looking at Jeremiah and Ezekiel for the past month who had to make a stand against the culture of their day. They were light in a dark world. We'll now move to another person in the Old Testament who was salt to those around them. We'll now look at Daniel. Let's turn to Daniel 1: 8 – 20. Daniel is one of the Jewish people taken captive to Babylon. The King of Babylon would take some of the young men for service within the kingdom. They would go through a three year training period. Part of this training period involved eating the food the king wanted them to eat. This is what happens to Daniel over the new food program, "But Daniel made up his mind not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief official for permission to eat other things instead. Now God had given the chief official great respect for Daniel. But he was alarmed by Daniel's suggestion. 'If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded for neglecting my duties.' Daniel talked it over with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief official to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 'Test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and

water,' Daniel said. 'At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king's rich food. Then you can decide whether or not to let us continue eating our diet.' So the attendant agreed to Daniel's suggestion and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the rich foods and wines. God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for learning the literature and science of the time. And God gave Daniel special ability in understanding the meanings of visions and dreams. When the three-year training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief official brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with each of them, and none of them impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they were appointed to his regular staff of advisers. In all matters requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, the king found the advice of these young men to be ten times better than that of all the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom (NLT, 1263)."

The first thing we see here is Daniel following the Word of God about eating. Leviticus 11 gives all the instructions to the Jewish race what to eat and not to eat. If they ate anything that was not allowed to eat, they were defiled. After the Lord gave the food instruction in Leviticus 11, God states this in Leviticus 11: 44, "After all, I, the Lord, am your God. You must be holy because I am holy. So do not defile yourselves by touching any of these animals. (NLT, 172)" God did not want them to eat certain food because He wanted them to be holy. The people of Babylon did not follow the laws of the God of Israel. Daniel knew the law of God and he knew all about Leviticus. Plus, some say Babylon ate food that was used as sacrifice to their false gods. Scripture tells us that Daniel had "made up his mind" to not eat food that God had told Israel not to eat. In other words, Daniel had a choice to make and he decided to follow God even though he was in a different land. We, as Americans, like to say "do as the Romans do" when we are away from home. When we are driving and not sure what the traffic laws are in a different state, we just do what the vehicle does in front of us. No matter if they do wrong. Daniel made a choice to follow God's law even though he was living away from home. In the culture we live in today, we have to make a choice either to follow the culture or don't follow our culture, and follow the Lord. Paul makes

it very plain in Romans 12:2 when he tells us through the Holy Spirit, “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think (NLT, 1790).” Paul and Daniel had made the decision to not allow the culture to shape them, but to allow God to shape them. In fact, Paul tells us that if we decide to follow God instead of following the culture, He will change us into a new person by the way we think. Daniel and his friends did just this and God changed their thinking. In verse 20 of Daniel, we see that Daniel and his friends were given wisdom and balanced judgment to handle things because they followed the Word of God and not the culture. Daniel and his friends showed integrity because they followed God instead of the culture. They allowed themselves to be shaped by the Word of God which gives us reason to be a people of integrity.

When we do this, God will be with us. I like verse 9 where we read, “Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel. (NIV)” When we make the choice to follow Him instead of the culture, God will give us the ability to live a life of integrity. God will get involved in our life and will open up situations so our integrity can shine out which will give the Lord glory. Some may say Daniel should have gone ahead and follow the culture concerning food – what’s the big deal? We see that Daniel loved the Lord more than the culture and more than his own life. When we love the Lord more than our culture, it’s easier to live out a life of integrity. We want to live a life of excellence out of love for the Lord. Why is the Church of today so eager to please our culture? It’s because of the lack of love for the Lord. Daniel loved the Lord more than life itself. Do we?

If we really look into this story, we really see how God is working throughout this story. God allowed the special diet of veggies to make Daniel and his friends healthier than the others. It was God who gave them special abilities. In verse 17, we read, “To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. (NIV)” Since these young men of integrity had made the choice to follow God, God gave them the ability to understand things and understand visions. If we go back to what Jesus said about the good seed in good soil, He tells us we can produce good fruit when we don’t allow our culture to shape us when we live out God’s Word in our life. These young men impressed a pagan king in Babylon. These young men were true salt in Babylon. Our Lord wants to work

through us to be an example of people of integrity because without us, who else will be people of integrity? Daniel refused to buckle under the pressure of his new culture he was living in. We must refuse to buckle as well.

We don't have to follow the culture. The business I talked about earlier, allowed themselves to follow the culture and they no longer were able to show business integrity. If we decide to follow our culture, we will no longer be a people of honesty and integrity and honor. God wants us to be like Daniel and He will help us in every way through His Spirit. God's way is the best way. When we live out our lives with integrity with the help of His Spirit, we will become light in a dark world.

*NLT Life Application Study Bible.* Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.: Wheaton, 1996

*The Strongest Strong's Concordance.* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001