TITLE: INTEGRITY

TEXT: 1 Chr. 29:17; Pr. 10:9; Ps. 41:12; 2 Co. 5:20;

Ro. 2:21-24; 1 Pet. 3:15-18

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about what is probably among the greatest of Christian virtues. Actually it is probably the greatest Human virtue whether you are a Christian or not. And that is Integrity…

Have you ever noticed how many times in life we have the opportunity to test our integrity? Or how many times in life our integrity is tested whether we want it to be or not?

 The death of Richard Nixon and the 20th anniversary of Watergate came pretty close together. At that time the networks were overloaded with revisits to and retrospectives on Watergate.

About this time there was a book written by a psychiatrist named Leo Rangell, who explores what he calls the “compromise of integrity”. He made a careful and articulate analysis of the inner workings in the head and psyche of Richard M. Nixon and several of his closest confidants in a book appropriately called “The Mind of Watergate”.

 Within that book is the transcript of a verbal investigation between Senator Howard Baker and Herbert L Porter, one of those responsible for breaking into the Democratic headquarters at the Watergate hotel that led to the resignation of President Nixon.

 This is a small portion of that conversation…

Senator Baker: Did you have any qualms about what you were doing? Did you ever think of saying, “I don’t think that this is quite right”..Did you ever think that?

Porter, Yes, I did.

Baker: What did you do about it?

Porter: I did not do anything.

Baker: Why didn’t you?

Porter: In all honesty, probably because of the fear of the group pressure that would ensue, of not being a team player.

 How much of that whole nightmare scenario could have been adverted if just one of the men involved would have had the courage to stand up and say, no! This isn’t right!

 If only the fear of doing wrong had been greater than the fear of group pressure, the fear of not being seen as a team player…If only one man would have had the integrity to stand up and say this isn’t right and stop what was being contemplated before the act was done…

 Integrity was tested and the test was failed…

 There is a story that is told of a spider who once built a beautiful web in an old house.

 He kept it clean and shiny so that flies would patronize it. The minute he got a “costumer” he would clean up after him so that the other flies would not get suspicious.

 Then one day this fairly intelligent fly came buzzing by the clean spider web. Old man spider called out, ‘Come in and sit.” But the fairly intelligent fly said: “No sir, I don’t see other flies in your house, and I am not going in alone!

 Then the fly saw on the floor below him a large crowd of flies dancing around on a piece of brown paper. He was delighted! He was not afraid if lots of flies were doing it!

 So he came in for a landing.

 Just before he landed, a bee zoomed by saying, “Don’t land there stupid! That’s fly-paper! But the fairly intelligent fly shouted back, “don’t be silly. Those flies are dancing! There is a big crowd there. Everybody’s doing it! That many flies can’t be wrong!

 Well you know what happened. The fairly intelligent fly landed to his demise…

 Moral of the story… What does it profit a fly (or a person) to escape the web only to end up in the glue…

 Yet that is exactly where peer pressure, following the crowd, being a team player can often lead to!

 Many young people today find themselves under tremendous peer pressure and find their integrity being tested daily.

 It is because of peer pressure that many kids will find themselves experimenting with drugs or alcohol or sexual promiscuity…..

 It is because of the fear of not being seen as a team player that many adults will find themselves in positions of compromise and end up doing shady, illegal or immoral things..

The fact is our integrity will be tested on a daily basis.

 Sometimes, many times a day!

The writer of 1st Chr. Says…
**1 Chr. 29:17 (NIV) 17I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity…..**

 Maintaining our Integrity often may require that we stand alone, stand apart from the crowd, and even at times, be seen as not being a team player..

 But integrity has its rewards….

**Prov. 10:9 (NIV)
9The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.**

 King David says in: **Psa. 41:12 (NIV) 12In my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever.**

The promise of integrity for the Believer is…..

 Maintaining our integrity will help us walk securely through this life and eventually set us in the presence of God forever…

 Integrity is important for all men, but integrity is essential for us as a Christian.

 If we are to walk securely through this life, we need to walk in integrity.

 It is our integrity that upholds us and will set us in God’s presence forever.

 So, when we talk about integrity what exactly are we talking about?

The word Integrity is defined as…

**Steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code. Synonym -- honesty.**

Integrity is steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code.

As a Christian the moral and ethical code that we are to strictly adhere to, to maintain and promote our integrity, is the Word of God-- The only absolute standard for rightness that we have in this world.

Integrity is steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code.

 It is to be honest even when it may be inconvenient or unpopular to do so..

**Example:** One lesson of integrity that I remember from my childhood was one time when we were on vacation. I think we were going up to see my aunt Irma and her family when they lived in Northern Minnesota. We had stopped at a roadside diner to eat and when we had finished eating my dad had went to the cash register to pay the bill and just hurriedly stuck the change in his pocket and we left and got back on the road. We got about 20 or 30 miles from the diner when dad got into his pocket and noticed that he had received too much change back at the diner. I think that the waitress had given him something like $5.00 or $10.00 too much money back in change. My dad was worried that she may have to pay that money herself if her cash register came up short.

 What I will always remember is that dad turned the car around and drove all the way back to that diner to return the money.

 Some will say well, that was their problem. They should have given the correct change. Or, it would be too inconvenient to turn around and go back when you got that far down the road. Or just keep it, who will ever know…

 What this really was, was a test of integrity! And that day my dad passed it with flying colors..

 More importantly, it made a very strong impression on a young mind of the importance of integrity and honesty in life. I still have vivid memories of that event but have no idea what I ate for lunch that day.

 One day when I stopped at the grocery store to get 4-5 items and I checked out through their express lane. The cashier rang up the total and I wrote out my check and it hit me that something wasn’t quite right. The total didn’t sound quite right.

 As I was about to leave I looked at the receipt and saw that one of the items, a package of meat, didn’t get rung up. My bill was something like 6 or 8 dollars less than it should have been.

 I will have to admit I had a fleeting thought to just go on and say nothing. After all, it was not my mistake but the cashiers. Who would ever know… But instantly I had the thought of the time when dad turned the car around and drove all the way back to that diner….

 This also was a test of integrity. So I went back to the cashier and pointed out her error and I left 6 or 8 dollars poorer but I left with my integrity in tact..

 And the thing is, even if no one else would ever know, I would know and God would know …

 As a Christian integrity is essential! Maintaining our integrity is essential if we are going to do and be what God has called us to do and be.

 God has called us to be His ambassadors to our world.

**2 Cor. 5:20 (NIV)
20We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.**

**We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.**

 Do you know what an ambassador is?

 An ambassador is someone who is sent to represent someone else, represent the one who sent them!

Dictionary: Ambassador…

**A diplomatic official of the highest rank appointed and accredited as representative in residence by one government or sovereign to another. 3. An authorized messenger or representative.**

If you were an ambassador of the United States to China then you would be sent to China to represent the United States.

 If on any given issue you didn’t agree with the position of the United States you would still be expected to take that position regardless of how you felt about it!

 Because you are there to represent the United States not yourself!

 That is what the duty of an ambassador is! To represent the thoughts and views and will of the one who sent you even if you may not agree with them personally.

 You are sent, not to represent yourself, but represent the one who sent you..

 As Christians our position in this world in which we live is the position of an ambassador..

 **We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.**

 We are to represent, not ourselves, but represent Jesus to our world.

 Everything that we do, everything that we say, reflects back upon Him because it is He who we represent.

 If we call ourselves by His name, if we call ourselves Christian, then we are personally identifying ourselves with Jesus.

 The term Christian literally means a Christ-like one or one who is like Christ.

 As a Christian, what we say and what we do directly reflects back upon Jesus because we are called by His name.

 Whether we do good or do bad it is a reflection upon Him.

**Rom. 2:21 -24 (NIV)
21you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? 22You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?**

 **24As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”**

It is a sad thing to have Gods name blasphemed among non-believers because of the behavior and actions of those who are believers…

There is a story of a prosperous young Wall Street stock broker who met and fell in love with a very beautiful rising young actress. He frequently escorted her about town and wanted to marry her. But being a cautious man, he decided that before proposing marriage he should have a private investigating agency check her background and present activities. After all, he reminded himself, I have both a growing fortune and my reputation to protect against a marital misadventure.

 The young man requested that the agency was not to reveal his identity to the investigator making the report on the actress.

 In due time the investigator's report came back. It said the actress had an unblemished past, a spotless reputation, and her friends and associates were of the best repute. The report concluded, "The only shadow is that she is often seen around town in the company of a young stockbroker of dubious business practices and principles."

When we fail to walk the talk as a Christian, we can give reason for non-believers to talk ill of God.

And we have all heard it before. They are a Christian and they talk like that! They call themselves a Christian and yet they do this or that!

If a non-believer messes up people just say that, so and so, messed up! But if a Christian messes up then it is not just the person that messes up but the name of Christ is often brought into the equation. They are a Christian and they did this or that.

They may say; I don’t even do that and I am not a Christian so why would I want to become one..

Do you see what happens here? **“God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of us…..”**

When we do things that bring our integrity into question Christ is not honored by our life but is actually dishonored by our life.. We bring shame, not honor to the name that we bear.. We can drive men away from Christ, not draw them to Him!

Church, **We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.**

God has chosen to reach the lost of this world through us! Through us as His ambassadors, His representatives!

 That is God’s plan A! God has no plan B!

If we don’t do it then it will not get done..

Will Rogers once said, *live in such a way that you would not be ashamed to sell your parrot to the town gossip.*

What good advice for us as Christians!

 To live our lives in such a way that we would not be ashamed to sell our parrot to the town gossip.

 Plato once said;

When men speak ill of you, so live that nobody will believe them.

When men speak ill of you so live your life that no one will believe them…

 One of the most comforting parts of a funeral service to the family is often the eulogy…The things that are said about the departed….

 I heard about one time when they were burying a rather unsavory character who had never been near a place of worship in his life. The services were being conducted by a minister who had never met the man, had never even heard of him.

 (I have had this experience a few times when someone without a Church preference will die and the funeral home will call around to find a minister to do the service for the family…It is not easy to do a eulogy for someone who you do not know….)

 Anyway, carried away by the occasion, the minister poured on praise for the departed man. After ten minutes of describing the person being eulogized as a good father, a loving husband, and an honest boss, the widow, whose expression had grown more and more puzzled, nudged her son next to her and whispered: "Go up there and make sure it's your father."

 What will be the words that are said about us after we are gone by those who have known us the best?

 As our life is reflected upon will it be a life that has brought honor to the name of Christ or a life that has dishonored His name?

 A life that has drawn others to the Savior or a life lived making the savior irrelevant.

 At those times in life when our integrity is tested will we past the test?

I read about a national spelling contest in Washington where an incident occurred that made me feel good--and made me wonder at the same time.

 In the fourth round of the contest, Rosalie Elliot, then an eleven-year-old from South Carolina was asked to spell the word avowal. In her soft Southern accent she spelled it. But did the seventh grader use an a or an e as the next to last letter? The judges couldn't decide. For several minutes they listened to tape recording playbacks, but the critical letter was accent-blurred. Chief Judge John Lloyd finally put the question to the only person who knew the answer, "Was the letter an a or was it an e? he asked Rosalie. Surrounded by whispering young spellers, she knew by now the correct spelling of the word. Without hesitating, she replied she had misspelled it. She walked from the stage.

 The entire audience stood and applauded, including two dozen newspaper reporters, one of whom was heard to remark that Judge Lloyd had put quite a burden on an eleven-year-old.

 Rosalie rated a hand of applause and it must have been a heartwarming and proud moment for her parents.

 But the most important thing that happened that day was that integrity was tested and this young lady passed the test. She may have lost the spelling contest but she left that place with her integrity in tact.

 When I first heard this story it made me feel good but then I also felt puzzled by the audience response of a standing ovation for someone who simply told the truth…Has truth become so rare that when we see it displayed we applaud it?

 The next time that your integrity is tested, and it will be, will you pass the test and leave the moment with your integrity intact?

 Will you stand up to the test as an ambassador of Christ?

 Not representing yourself but representing Jesus to the world in which you have been sent?

**1 Pet. 3:15 -18 (NIV)
15But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.**

 **But do this with gentleness and respect, 16keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 18For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.**

 This morning, in your heart have you set apart Christ as Lord?

 If you have, if you are, setting Christ apart as Lord then when the time of integrities testing comes you will pass the test and bring honor and praise to the name of Christ that you bear.

**We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.**

**We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.**