



Lecture 5

Spiritual Integrity

THE LINK BETWEEN INTEGRITY & EVANGELISM

In our previous lectures we have looked at some of the many blessings we will experience as we learn to live with integrity. When we seek to imitate Jesus we also bless our Heavenly Father's heart and honour the sacrifice Jesus paid for us. In our final lecture we will study the connection between living with spiritual integrity and our witness to the world.

There are many New Testament passages which teach us that the way in which we live is as powerful a witness to those who do not know Jesus, as the words we speak.

THE POWER OF INTEGRITY

The first letter which the Apostle Peter wrote, was sent to believers who had been scattered "sown as seed" (1 Peter 1:1) throughout the Roman empire. His letter was written shortly after the city of Rome was burned in July A.D. 64. The Romans were devastated. Since the Christians were already hated, because they were seen as being hostile to Roman culture, Nero spread the word that they had started the fires. As a result, vicious persecution began against the Christians in Rome and quickly spread throughout the entire empire. The believers Peter addressed were therefore living among people hostile towards them and looking for reasons to persecute them.

We need to remember that in the ancient Greco-Roman world, polytheism was almost universal. The only exceptions to this were the Jews and Christians, who worshipped one God. The unsaved people living alongside the believers therefore worshipped many gods. It was laughable to them, even offensive, to be told there was only one true God (Acts 4:12). They accused the Christian believers of being hostile to Roman culture and of doing "evil" and watched them closely in order to find reasons to "defame" them and thereby defame their God.

In 1 Peter 2:11-15 (Wuest translation) we read,

"Divinely loved ones [loved by God], I beg of you, please, as aliens and those who have settled down alongside of pagan [unsaved] people should, be constantly holding yourselves back from the passionate cravings which are fleshly by nature [fleshly in that they come from the totally depraved nature] ... ¹² holding your manner of life among the unsaved steadily beautiful in its goodness, in order that in the thing in which they defame you as those who do evil [namely, your Christianity], because of your works beautiful in their goodness which they are constantly, carefully, and attentively watching, they may glorify God in the day of His overseeing care... ¹⁵ for so is the will of God, that by doing good you might be reducing to silence the ignorance of men who are unreflecting and unintelligent..."

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Our world today is no different. In a time when “anything goes” and “all paths lead to god,” the message of Christianity - that salvation comes through Jesus Christ and Him alone - is as offensive as ever.

The world is looking for reasons to defame those who claim to be born-again believers in order to defame the faith we profess and therefore the one true God we represent. In verse 12 Peter wrote, “in the thing in which they defame you as those who do evil [namely, your Christianity]”. More and more it is becoming offensive, even “evil”, to hold and express godly principles and Christian viewpoints. We see this in the laws which make it illegal for Christian ministers to speak God’s truth about issues such as marriage, identity, homosexuality etc. The world may not accuse Christians of “doing evil” in so many words, but when we are forbidden from speaking and living according to the Word, or are accused of being narrow minded or intolerant, we are - like the believers Peter wrote to - being ‘defamed as those who do evil’.

Our call is to live with integrity, to display lives that are “steadily beautiful in their goodness”.

Whether we realise it or not, others are watching how we live, whether our behaviour and lives are consistent with the Word of God and the faith we profess, or whether it’s just “all talk”. In Peter’s words, “they are constantly, carefully, and attentively watching,” (verse 12). When we live with genuine, spiritual integrity we rob the enemy of opportunities to discredit Christ and bring glory to God (1 Peter 2:12). Seeking to live with integrity will therefore have a powerful impact on your witness to the world. When we have integrity and live consistently, people notice. When we radiate the joy and peace of Jesus, they notice even more.

Matthew 5:13-16 (Wuest translation)

“¹³ As for you, you are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its pungency, by what means can its saltiness be restored? For not even one thing is it of use any longer, except, having been thrown out, to be trampled under foot by men. ¹⁴ As for you, you are the light of the world ... ¹⁶ In the same manner let your light shine before men in order that they may see your good works and in order that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

A LIFE THAT HONOURS GOD

Living with integrity among the unsaved doesn’t mean living perfectly and never failing. Remember, integrity is the ‘state of being whole and undivided’. We can make mistakes and yet still be ‘whole and undivided’ in the way we respond amidst our failure. Living with integrity means having the humility to admit our mistakes, ask forgiveness of those we’ve offended (not only of God) and where needed, seek to make restitution.

2 Corinthians 8:21 (Wuest translation)

“for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”

It is often easier to ask God for forgiveness - knowing that by grace, He has already forgiven us at the Cross - than it is to humble ourselves and ask forgiveness from another person or group of people. Our call as believers, ‘sown as seed’ among the unsaved (1 Peter 1:1), is to live lives that are honourable both in God’s sight and in sight of men. In doing so, **OUR LIVES THEMSELVES WILL PREACH A FAR MORE POWERFUL MESSAGE TO THOSE WHO NEED JESUS THAN ANY WORDS WE SPEAK.**