

**“INTEGRITY” AS ONE OF THE VALUES OF THE UPCSA**



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| “*With integrity, you have nothing to fear, since you have nothing to hide. With integrity, you will do the right thing, so you will have no guilt*.” Zig Ziglar“*Integrity means you are the same in public as you are in private*.” Joyce Meyer Here is another dynamic exposition of the UPCSA values. In the month of May, we are focusing on the value - Integrity. This issue comes to you with thanks to the senior ministers of the UPCSA who responded to the call for contributions. I am so indebted to them, knowing their tight schedules.  **PLEASE SHARE WITH THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS THAT ARE NOT ON INTERNET AND YOUR ENTIRE CONGREGATIONS** |

**INTEGRITY BY THE REV ELEANOR GAUNT**

**(Rev Gaunt is a Minister Emeritus residing in the Western Cape)**

**“You desire truth in the inward parts.” Psalm 51:6**

**“I am the way, and the truth and the life.” John 14:6**

**Pilate asked him, “What is truth?” John 18:38**

**“But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him…”Ephesians 4:15**

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament we see the golden thread of truth, and truth-telling, cleaving through a morass of dubious practices – practices common in every culture, then and now. Distinguishing truth from lies is often harder than we think. In this series on values guiding our faith, which our General Secretary has called for so timeously, we are examining what we believe, what we say and what we do. These are very pertinent topics for this article on integrity, because when these three – what we believe, what we say and what we do – are consistent and hold together, then we have integrity.

The Oxford Universal Dictionary defines integrity as:

*“1. Whole; the condition of having no part or element lacking; completeness.*

*2. Unimpaired or uncorrupted state; soundness of moral principle; the character of uncorrupted virtue; uprightness, honesty, sincerity.”*

Biblical values and principles can never be isolated or disassociated from the context of the day. This does not make them rela*tive*, but rele*vant*, and we’ll discover this to be true for Integrity. Just as the Psalmist reminds us (Ps 51:6) that God “desires truth in the inward parts”, so truth and truth-telling are essential in all our relationships, starting within the family and extending to the Body of Christ and beyond into the wider society. A quest for truth leads to …

**Questions from everyday life we can ask ourselves every day.**

**Sunday:** While we say we support and love the poor in our churches and communities, do we “steal/devour widows’ houses” (Matt 23:14; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47) by benefitting from our positions of authority or privilege? Jesus was quick to spot those who exploited the poor, exposing the disconnection between our theology – what we believe about God’s compassion for the poor – and our self-interested behaviour.

**Monday:** Do we cover up our sins, mistakes or lapses when we forget or fail to do something, and then make excuses or blame others for our laziness or failure instead of owning up to the truth about ourselves?

**Tuesday:** Is it possible toremain loyal to a friend or colleague if we know they are involved in wrong-doing while holding onto truth, living the truth ourselves and telling the truth to the friend? If it is not possible, which value do we hold as higher than the other, loyalty or truth?

**Wednesday:** Do we withhold the truth or cover up the truth in return for favours, or bow and scrape to others whom we know to be in the wrong in order to win recognition or promotion for ourselves?

**Thursday:** Do we compromise the principle of fairness by giving jobs to cronies instead of the most suitably qualified candidates?

**Friday:** Do we apply one standard to ourselves and another to others?

**Saturday:** Do we value expedience above integrity – seeking good objectives by unscrupulous and unprincipled means?

**Living the Truth**

*The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe stated, “One of the truest tests of integrity is its blunt refusal to be compromised.”* But, as we all are fully aware, bribery and corruption are a manifestation of compromised integrity that is rife in our country. It includes the private use of public resources, and is a form of improper favouritism. Paying a bribe to secure a contract or favour, or to avoid a fine, is a dishonest practice that compromises the one who pays the bribe as well as the one who receives it.

In his book, *Telling the Truth,* Frederick Buechner talks about the challenge of *“speaking out of our times and into our times. It is possible to think of the Gospel and our preaching of it as, above all and at no matter what risk, a speaking of the truth about the way things are.”(*pg 7). He warns how *“To speak the truth with love is to run the risk always of speaking only the truths that people love to hear you speak.”* (pg 34)

**The Edict of Milan and its repercussions**

The agreement in 313 AD between the Western and Eastern Roman Emperors, Constantine and Licinius, known as the Edict of Milan, guaranteed religious freedom to Christians, thus ending a long age of persecution. Its purpose was to give to Christianity equal rights and tolerance along with all other religions, but Constantine and Licinius believed it would give them ‘the Divine favour’. By the end of the 4th Century, Christianity had become the sole official religion of the Roman Empire. In effect this meant that the State used its power to protect the Church and the Church supported the secular powers of the day.

This had disastrous results through history. For example, in Nazi Germany in World War II the State-funded churches turned a blind eye to Adolf Hitler’s policies, and in South Africa the theology of the Church of the ruling Nationalist Government supported the injustices of Apartheid.

If our Church in present day South Africa does not retain its prophetic voice in holding to account whatever government is in power, we will become a useless tool in their hands, for we will have lost all our integrity. We can only retain our institutional and personal integrity by relying on God’s grace revealed in Jesus Christ. Just as the psalmist reminds us that our Lord “desires truth in the inward parts” (Ps 51:6), so also we are assured that “a broken and contrite heart Oh God, you will not despise” (Ps 51:17b). Jesus says “I am the Truth” and is also faithful to forgive us when we fail.

**INTEGRITY BY THE REV PROF GRAHAM DUNCAN**

**(Prof Duncan is a Professor Emeritus from the University of Pretoria**

**and a Past Moderator of the Church)**

Integrity may be described as an overarching value as it includes so much that we might describe under other values.

Integrity is simply saying what you mean, meaning what you say and acting accordingly. It is demonstrated in living the values we claim as our own. The life and witness of Jesus is the supreme example which has been emulated in persons such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa and Steve Biko – to the point of offering their lives. The opposite is hypocrisy which leads to corruption – saying one thing and doing something that is contrary.

Integrity involves holding to one’s beliefs in the face of direct opposition, manipulation, co-option, innuendo, rumour, gossip, hearsay and compromise. Some things cannot be negotiated, e.g. that we are all one in Christ in the face of those who would alienate and isolate those who are ‘diférent’ and ‘Other’, such as those who are women, deviants, black, gay, poor.

It means speaking truth to power in a loving spirit with the consequent risk of rejection and alienation.

Integrity is a matter of conscience. There are situations where people feel that their conscience will not allow them to follow a certain path.  These must be respected but they do not absolve a person from the consequences of breaking the [church] law (see *Westminster Confession of Faith*, XX.ii; Preface to *Scots Confession*).  For instance, the PCUSA states ‘… freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained. And it may not be used to infringe the freedom of conscience of others’. Yet, among our ministers there are those who would deny some that very right.

Integrity is a moral value which includes honesty, honour, decency, trustworthiness, loyalty and solidarity.

Integrity means following your moral or ethical convictions and doing the right thing in all circumstances. Having integrity means you are true to yourself and would do nothing that demeans or dishonours.

The church has to be extremely careful in this regard for it is frequently subjected to the charge of hypocrisy because people do not see the values we proclaim enacted in our lives, particularly in the way that we treat one another within Christ’s body. This is particularly significant for those who are charged with preaching the gospel.

**THE VALUE OF INTEGRITY BY THE REV DR BONGANI B FINCA**

**(The Rev Dr Finca is a Past Moderator of the Church and**

**a Commissioner in the South African Independent Electoral Commission (IEC))**

*“The integrity of the upright shall guide them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity”*

*(Prov. 11: 3)*

I have been requested by the General Secretary to comment very briefly on **INTERGRITY** as one the values. We know that we live, work, and bear witness to our Lord Jesus Christ in an era of the “Credibility Gap”. There is a glaring deficit between word and action, the belief and behavior, the value and the practice. The trait that is most demanded of those who lead, be it in the Church or in Society, is character, trust and consistency. In one word, it is integrity.

Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng, speaking recently on the subject of Ethical Leadership argued, “Generally, elements of integrity rank higher than all other characteristics of leadership … even higher than competence ... otherwise who cares about a competent yet corrupt leader.” He places the foundational principles of integrity at the apex of the chain of values that are to be found in those who lead. I hold a view that the Church is the leader of society in the sense that it must serve *as the light of* the world and as *the house built on a* *hill.*

So why must the Church of Jesus Christ be taken seriously by the rulers and governments,  and be listened to attentively by organs of secular society when it calls on them to take certain actions that they are not inclined to take? On what authority does the Church call society to order? There will be several answers drawn from our understanding of the imperatives given in the Word of God and from the several ages of the experience of the Church. But one of them, in my view, is that the Church of Jesus Christ walks always in the strength of its integrity and speaks out of this value. It never acts out of political opportunism or out of what is popular, or fashionable, or convenient at that time.

The Church learns integrity from the very character and nature of the God that we worship. It is out of the character of God that His action flows naturally. *Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord your God is one.* God is who He says He is. God is integrated and consistent. God is *the same yesterday, today and forever*. As the hymnal puts it beautifully and powerfully for us: “*Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not, as Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.* This is *the anchor for the soul, firm and secure*.”

Biblical integrity cannot be equated to occasional and sporadic statements on what is right. It is about the character and the nature of the Church that is consistently matched or integrated in its confessions/resolutions and its praxis/behavior. To use the words of John Ortberg, “*Christ’s objective for his disciples is to make us disciplined people who do the right thing at the right time in the right way for the right reason.”*  Integrity has been described as the consistency between belief and behavior as opposed to a schizophrenic lifestyle whose values are changed from day to day depending on the circumstances that are prevailing at that particular moment.

During what could be referred to as his farewell speech, after he had provided leadership to the Israelites for many decades, Samuel points singularly to the integrity that had permeated every area of his life as a leader (1 Sam 12: 1 – 4). He lifts up a few hallmarks from his legendary life in leadership - how he treated those that were weaker than himself, how he held himself accountable to the people that he was leading, and how he held himself up for scrutiny. He asks, “*Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed?”*  In very simply practical ways, he defines what the hallmarks of integrity is for him, and he challenges those who have been under his leadership to judge him.

But, who of us can measure up to the standard of Samuel? We know that we are frail, sinful and fallen human beings. Yet, even in this era of mediocrity, corruption and Machiavellian ethics of leaders who employ image consultants and depend on spin-doctors, Jesus calls on his Church to abide in him and to live a life worthy of its high calling. The Church is the Body of Christ and we are individually members thereof. When at any stage we discover that our walk contradicts our talk and our practice is not consistent with our confession, we have a duty to come humbly before the throne of grace, to confess, to repent, and to take the requisite action to reconstitute our lives to reflect the standard of integrity.

It’s important to note that integrity will remain just a concept that is vague, fuzzy and ambiguous, until we define it in succinct terms and we test ourselves in ordinary day to day action. This is what Samuel does in the quote above. The Mission Statement of the Church is written down in clear and simple language so that it is explicitly understood and grasped by every member. So must it be with this value of integrity. Integrity must not be allowed to remain a deeply mysterious theological jargon. Habakkuk 2: 2 encourages us to write down the major objective that is fundamental to us, capture it in plain language, and put it down in a tablet: “*So that the runner may run*”.

In a society in which the value of integrity is in danger of being extinct, the Church of Jesus Christ must profile it prominently and teach on it constantly and effectively. It is the noblest standard that no nation must ever be allowed to jettison or ignore. For without it the nation will self-destruct. Although we will continue to fall short of its lofty standard, it is a value that we must continue to yearn for and desire, as a deer longs for the water. We know that building a reputation of integrity takes years to cultivate, and yet it takes only a few moments to destroy and obliterate. The call is for us to engage in an ongoing and never ending conversation, collectively and individually, on how we grow day by day to the full stature of being persons of integrity and become the Church that integrates word and action, belief and behavior, value and character.

**INTEGRITY BY THE REV ROD BOTSIS**

**(The Rev Botsis is the Minister of Bellville Presbyterian Church**

**and a Past Moderator of the Church)**

Let me make a few personal disclaimers.

1.  As with humility I think it is impossible to write or speak on the subject without an acute awareness of being disqualified to do so.

2. I write this in response to a request from our General Secretary, Lungile. I do not do so with any sense of being able to teach anyone about Integrity. All have sinned and are far short of the glory of God. (If John could describe Christ's glory as being "full of grace and truth" then integrity is found where grace and truth are found in happy and plentiful union. I am in short supply of both.)

3. I am not sure I even have the courage to face my sins; in this case, the times I have had no integrity, let my integrity be compromised or chose a path I thought was right, noble, and full of integrity but later realized it was all self-interest at work, covered in self-protection, and self-righteousness.

4. One last disclaimer: you do not have to be holy to recognize integrity. To my shame I confess while I may not have integrity I can feel it, smell it, taste it and see it.

This I will try to describe to you.

Close to death David reminds his hearers that God had told him "When one rules over people in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after the rain that brings the grass from the earth". (2 Sam 23: 3-4). You can see it. You can smell it. It is so real you can almost touch integrity. And it produces life.

I once had to apologize to a colleague and I wrote him a long letter saying how sorry I was. His reply was brief and swift, "Accepted, Rod, but long apologies rarely are sincere”.  My letter to him was not the bight morning light on a cloudless day. It was clouded with self-protection and in retrospect I still feel ashamed at my lack of integrity.

Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no". Jesus points out the lack of integrity in the long prayers of the Pharisees, especially in public. We should take note that long prayers like long apologies cloud things and raise questions about motive, preparation, self-interest, being an example and all of these raise question marks about our integrity.

Laziness, and trying to "wing it", especially with regard to Sunday worship preparation spotlights the absence of integrity quicker than we have the courage to believe.

David again, this time in Psalm 25:21, prays "May integrity and uprightness protect me because my hope is in you". He could have stopped at "...protect me" and we would have thought "That is a good and noble prayer". But David had a heart after God's and knew, in the end, only God's opinion counts. If our hope is in Him then we realize He sees all, knows all, and “from Him no secrets are hid". So integrity and uprightness do not just protect us from people's opinion of us but they protect us from false behaviour and self-delusions, and self-deception before God. If we say there is no sin in us we deceive ourselves and make the Holy Spirit to be liar. (1 John 1). That is so empty of integrity it is offensive.

There is a graphic absence of integrity in those of us who are slow to apologise and repent but who are quick to justify and explain our behaviour. Brother and sister ministers, how transparent are you really, really, before your Session? And Elders, does your integrity and uprightness shine like bright and strong armour?

Psalm 78:72 informs us that David shepherded the flock of Israel "with integrity of heart and with skilful hands he led them". Quite the opposite of "the double minded man who is unsure in all his ways" as James puts it. Some of us are like paper clips: we give the impression we can hold things together but we are bent all over. And while some people forgive us and others are fooled/blinded by us we know, WE KNOW, before God integrity has sprung a leak.

In Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2 both Paul and Peter tell us we are shepherds of "God's flock". Urging us to be full of integrity of heart and skilful in our jobs, they both direct us to watch over ourselves, to not be greedy for money and to be examples to others. And to remember we have to give an account to Christ Jesus. Ouch! Brothers and sisters do the accounts, please, and where you are short do not pretend. Integrity demands we ask for help and prayer. It is no wonder that James called us to confess to each other or we will become sick...soul sick, faith sick, skill sick and as integrity drains out of our lives, we will be left smelly sick. The people we work with are God's precious ones and the same Spirit lives in them and they have antenna to pick up grace and truth. How silly to think they cannot see through us, and into us.

My long involvement with alcoholics, especially through those brave ones at ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, has made me stand in awe and give respect to the integrity in someone who neither brags of his failings nor tries to make small of them and simply says "I am Rod and I am addicted" and then submits to an intense personal inventory of what needs to be fixed.

As the UPCSA we chose INTEGRITY as one of our values. Perhaps we did so because we could feel, sense, see, smell and knew we have fallen short. I am happy to think that recognition was an expression of integrity itself.

**If you have found this too wordy, too long or you know the writer is a poor example and you still want to get the feel of integrity go and visit your colleagues who seldom draw attention to themselves, whose families are content and whose company is like a breath of fresh air and a ray of bright light.**



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| **Once again, thanks to the contributors of these reflections.****I continue to make an appeal to the colleagues to consider sending their reflections on the values of the UPCSA. Values play a pivotal role in aligning the members of the body with its vision and mission – THE CORE BUSINESS. In June, we shall focus on the value of ‘SPIRITUAL GROWTH’.** **LUNGILE MPETSHENI** |