

INTEGRITY IN MINISTRY

What God Expects of His Ministers

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There is an increasing need for integrity in the ministry. “We are facing an integrity crisis. Not only is the conduct of the church in question, but so is the very character of the church” (Warren Wiersbe, *The Integrity Crisis*, p. 171).

A morality crisis exists in the ministry. An integrity crisis faces the servants of God. Immorality has reached a pandemic stage in the evangelical community both in the pulpit and in the pew. Respect for the man of God has reached an all time low. The secular media exploits every failure. The man in the street pokes fun with jokes depicting ministers as interested only in women, money, power and prestige. The Church of God reels in heartbreak, confusion and distrust as once respected leaders are repeatedly exposed in sin and shame. The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is in critical condition. The situation calls for quick and decisive action. It is essential, therefore, that we determine 1) the cause of the crisis, 2) the cost of the crisis, and finally, 3) the cure for the crisis in ministry.

1. The Cause of the Integrity/Morality Crisis in Ministry

Our present problem has been in the making for many years. The root cause is simply sin and the evil located in the human heart (Jer. 17:9; Matt. 15:19). Satan, working in concert with the flesh, has utilized some effective weapons to destroy many men of God. A secular culture, together with its values, has affected the church more than the church has affected it. Four specific areas have been especially alluring to those whom God has called to the ministry.

1) *Materialism* is fast becoming a problem in ministry. Many men today are driven not by God but by gold. They are motivated not by the Savior but by silver and self interest. God wants His ministers to receive adequate provision and that they should not be paupers (1 Cor. 9:7-14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). However, too many of God’s ministers view themselves in the model of the corporate CEO rather than a shepherd-servant or pastor-teacher of His flock. They lose personal perspective and usually find themselves pursuing worldly desires and spending less and less time with their spouses and families. The fallout has been tragic and devastating.

2) *Egotism* or pride has also become rampant in our ranks. Personal power, position, and prestige are often justified by sanctimonious words of “reaching more through bigger and better ministries for Christ.” We have forgotten that our God always opposes pride in any form (James 4:6-10). An important question every minister should ask is, “to whom are people drawn as the ministry grows - me, a particular ministry or the Master?”

3) *Exaggeration* of accomplishments and even outright lying have also infested the pulpit. “Ministerially speaking” means nothing more than speaking a falsehood. “Fudging” the stats to get ahead happens far too often. If we would regain respect, we must, of necessity, go the extra mile in truthful behavior and honest speech (Proverbs 6:16,19).

4) *Shallow theology* and false ideas of spirituality have also led to failure in the ministry. Biblical exposition is the exception rather than the rule. Emphasizing holiness and sacrifice are seldom heard. Feel good/self esteem sermons is the spiritual junk food often served to many congregations. Because of anemic biblical instruction, many overemphasize legalism on the one hand or emotionalism on the other. The sad end of all of this is an unstable doctrinal foundation that ultimately will collapse under pressure.

One might raise a question at this point, “I see how these things are related to integrity, but what is their connection with immorality?” The answer is this: when a man is consumed with a desire for more in one area (e.g., materialism), it often leads to desire for more in another (sex). When a man deceives himself into thinking that he deserves and is entitled to the power, position, and prestige that often accompany a successful ministry, he may also deceive himself into thinking that accessibility and entitlement to a liaison with a woman other than his wife is his option, maybe even his right.

Finally, and most importantly, if a man is dishonest in one area of his life (lying and exaggerating his own accomplishments), he will likely be dishonest in other areas, including faithfulness to his wife and ultimately faithfulness to his Savior. The causes for such failures can be boiled down to three basics: 1) a loss of a devotional walk with the Savior; 2) a loss of continual meditation in the Scriptures; and, 3) a loss of personal intimacy with one’s spouse.

2. The Cost of the Integrity/Morality Crisis in Ministry

The cost of sexual immorality is high, especially for those whose sin has been exposed. The cause of Christ is harmed and the purity of the Gospel veiled. One’s reputation is permanently soiled and in some sense, irreparably damaged. In most instances, the fallen one’s position is lost, and he can be assured of never again flying as high as he once did, if he ever flies again at all.

Many believe, based upon the qualifications for ministry laid down in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, that such a one is disqualified permanently from the office of pastor. The one who has sinned and repented should be restored to fellowship (2 Cor. 2:5-11), but there is good scriptural evidence that this does not necessarily include restoration to leadership. Forgiveness from the Savior and the saints is not the same and fitness for service! Amazingly, the lost world seems to understand this better than the Church. Could it be, incredible as it sounds, that the world has a higher and more biblically based standard than the saints?

In addition, there is the certain loss of God’s blessing and the potential loss of one’s God-given family. These are the harsh realities of the cost of sin. Sin extracts a tremendous toll. A few moments of physical pleasure may produce a lifetime debt of shame and heartbreak. The cost is too great, the resulting pain not worth it.

3. The Cure for the Integrity/Morality Crisis in Ministry

The best cure is always a preventive one. What can we do to maintain our marriage vows and keep our ministerial commitments to our Savior?

1) Theologically, we must regain the biblical standard for the man in ministry. Four major texts address God's qualifications for service: Acts 20:28-35; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Pet. 5:1-4. It is essential that we adopt the biblical model as opposed to the secular model for ministry. Spiritual leaders must repent of the sin of failure to follow the biblical pattern of a shepherd-leader and pastor-teacher, and then determine deep within with fervent conviction and courage never again to deviate from the divine pattern. This will mean taking very seriously the charge to be a "one woman kind of man" and to be one "who manages his own household well," and to be one who has "a good testimony among those who are outside" the church (1 Tim. 3:1-7). It will mean pursuing diligently God's call to holiness and sexual purity (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

2) A man commits adultery because he loses his walk with God and his intimacy with his spouse. This does not just happen in a day but grows gradually over a period of time, beginning perhaps with an almost imperceptible slide into an environment in which adultery can occur. Therefore, what must we do practically to see that this never happens to us?

First, carefully guard your thought life. Ultimately, the battle for sexual purity is won or lost in the mind (Rom. 12:2). Those things which could erode the thought life must be avoided.

Second, make sure that your best time goes to your wife and family. To say one cannot be a great pastor as well as a great husband and father is to perpetuate a lie. Indeed, only great husbands and fathers are truly great pastors in the sight of God.

Third, resolve never to be alone personally or to be involved emotionally with a woman who is not your wife, sister, mother or grandmother. Simply stated, if you are never alone with another woman, it is going to be difficult, yea, impossible, to have an adulterous affair. This principle would include personal counseling and private conversations, even on the telephone. Emotionally, you are to bond with only one woman and that is your wife. One might say this is too restrictive, too legislative, too narrow. So be it! It is better to be accused of legalistic puritanism and maintain marital purity than to be guilty of sexual sin and suffer the embarrassment and disgrace of adultery.

Fourth, remember the cost of sin. A big, beautiful home may attract my eye, but reflection upon its long-term cost will cause me to continue down the road. Likewise, I can appreciate an attractive woman, but knowing the cost of getting involved with her will send me on my way to my own house!

Finally, recognize your own vulnerability. Not one of us is above sexual temptation. The wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time will inevitably result in the wrong action: adultery. The tragic story of David and Bathsheba should never be forgotten. A man after God's own heart committed both adultery and murder because of a woman to whom he was not married. Anyone can fall to this temptation. All of us are capable of any sin. Therefore, beware of yourself and take the necessary steps to prevent adultery from even being in your path. "Flee sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18).

1 Pet. 4:17 says, "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God." God's church is in need of discipline and judgment. She is sick and dirty, weak and sinful. Her genuine impact on society is basically nil. Perhaps God has decided it is time to clean her up so that she will be as she ought (Eph. 5:26-27). If this is so, what better place for Him to begin than at the top with His ministers, His undershepherds.

An effective minister must be a holy minister. An effective church must be a holy, consecrated church. Our God is able and working. We must be ready and willing. May our Lord restore integrity and respect to His prophetic voices in these challenging days.