

# **INTEGRITY**

## **What is it all about?**

**By Isak Burger**

I believe that integrity is the foundation of character. Character again, is like the foundation of a building. It is not immediately seen, but becomes evident in the time of temptation, testing and storms. The strength and quality of a person's character is determined by his/her integrity.

Character is not reputation. Reputation is what people think of me – character is what God knows of me. Reputation reflects what I am in the light – character reflects what I am in the dark. DL Moody once said: “If I take care of my character, my reputation will take care of itself.”

There are few people who do not place a high premium on truth and integrity. Yet this most important value and quality are as much under siege as never before. The question can truly be asked - even in the church: WHO CAN I TRUST?

What exactly is integrity? In this dissertation I trust to give you a definition and understanding of INTEGRITY that will not only leave you without any doubt about this most important value, but will also challenge you to live a life of truth and honesty.

### **WHO SPEAKS THE TRUTH?**

According to a survey I've once heard of, a relatively small percentage (+-10%) of any average community ALWAYS speaks the truth. +-15% is usually lying. The vast majority (75%) will either speak the truth or tell a lie - depending on.....whether it will improve or harm their image; whether it will save them problems and keep them out of trouble; and, perhaps more than anything else, whether it will mean more money in their pockets.

Another recently published international research says that an average of 40% of any group of workers can be expected to be dishonest. 15% will be inherently honest and 45% will be fence-sitters which will tend to also become dishonest.

In most cases it has to do with money. Money makes most people twisting or colouring the truth, or lying blatantly – it all depends on how much money is at stake! Few people will speak the truth – if it will cost them! In the final analysis the question is: “What’s your price?”

I know this has always been the case in all parts of the world since the fall of man. Yet it seems that this tendency is more frequent in a materialistically-inclined capitalistic society. Capitalism, with all its advantages, and how much we prefer it and would wish to defend it, exalts materialism and egocentrism as the highest good. Capitalism is really only interested in two questions: "What is in it for me", and: "Are my investments safe?"

Few of us have escaped its tentacles. Few of us really want to. And it is not only the rich who are its willing victims - the poor are equally inclined.

I fully realise that it is not just a matter of making materialism and the love for money the scapegoats. Being deceitful and false has been part of mankind ever since the day of the fall of Adam and Eve. It all originates with Satan, the origin and source, the father of lies: "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: **for he is a liar, and the father of it.**" – John 8:44.

God is on the other extreme. In Him there is, nor was, neither shall ever be a shadow of untruth, falseness or deceit. **God is Truth.** He is the perfect definition of truth, the epitome of truth and the guardian of truth. His Word is called Truth: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." His Spirit is called Truth - John.14:17. Finally, Jesus is called the faithful witness: "And from Jesus Christ, [who is] the faithful witness" - Rev. 1:5. That's why God doesn't company with those who walk in deceit and falseness, but He delights in truth and honours the honest.

The importance of TRUTH is emphasised consistently throughout the Bible. The ten commandments include a warning against falseness: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Ex.20:16). Psalm 24:3+4 asks the question: “Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully.” A pure and genuine heart is more important to God than anything we do.

Even the charismatic gifts of the Old Testament were tainted with falseness – a practice which God strongly condemned: “Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy

lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart.” – Jer.14:14.

Lying, dishonesty - was that not the sin of Ananias and Saffira, who thought that they could lie to the Holy Spirit? See God’s judgement upon them!

A FALSE BALANCE.

To explain the basic thoughts and principles that I have mentioned here, I would like to take you to Prov.11:1, where the Bible uses a picture that will help you once and for all to illuminate, clarify and understand the issue of integrity.

**“A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.”**

Let's first see what a balance in those days looked like. It consisted of a horizontal beam being sustained or suspended in the middle, with a pan hanging on each side - of course in perfect balance. Copies of such are common as ornaments in homes. A picture of a balance is also the trademark of legal societies as a symbol of truth and justice.

Why does God feel so strong about a false balance? In fact, there is hardly a stronger word in the Hebrew language as the one used to express God's disapproval on this matter. The Bible says it is an "abomination" to Him. To understand this we need to understand something about the "falseness" of such a balance.

For many centuries, most buying and selling were done by trading. A potential buyer brings a commodity as a "payment" in exchange for something else. For example, someone would bring a bag of olives in exchange say for some spices. In much of this trading a balance was used.

It is clear how it worked. In the one pan of the balance, the weights were placed and the product to be traded in the other. Interestingly enough, the weights were cut from stone and not made of metal, as metal may rust and over a period of time become inaccurate.

Now, there was a very shrewd and cunning way in which some Jewish merchants of those days cheated the people. That was by using more than one set of weights. Say a specific weight is supposed to weigh one kilogram. They would then have one weight of, say .8kg

and one of, say 1.2kg. When someone wants to trade something, he would use the 1.2kg weight (whilst the innocent client is under the impression that it is a kilogram, the merchant gets more than a kilogram.) However, when it is time for the merchant to sell some commodity, he uses the .8kg weight. Again the innocent buyer is cheated as he thinks he is getting a kilograms' worth while in fact it is less. In the process, the merchant scores an unfair gain of .4kg of the relevant commodities.

For unscrupulous businessmen, this may sound like good business, and in many cases even be the name of the game. I indeed wonder how often this principle and practice in some form or the other, is quite common amongst modern day dealers, in buying and selling a wide variety of articles.

Yet God has totally different sentiments about two sets of weights. In Prov.20:23 it says: "Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance is not good." This verse clearly underlines the existing practice of those days.

Prov. 12:22 confirms the warning of Prov. 11:1 by only replacing a "false balance" by "lying lips": "Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight." A false balance, lying lips, diverse weights, they all are an abomination to God. The question that should now be asked is this: "Why does God respond so strongly towards a lifeless, technical instrument? Why would a false balance be an abomination to Him?

God's problem is obviously not with a dead instrument. After all, balances are made by man. And diverse sets of weights are the results of man's deceitful heart. The source of deceit and sin does not per se exist in a false balance or in money as such. Indeed does the Bible say in Jer.17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

A balance is a symbol of truth, honesty, genuineness and justice. A balance is supposed to give you the assurance that truth and justice will prevail. But when the balance is false, when the very instrument that is supposed to secure and guarantee honesty and truth can not be trusted, who then can be trusted - everything becomes uncertain and dubious.

Therefore, a false balance represents anything and anyone WHO PRETENDS TO BE SOMETHING HE/SHE IS NOT. That is what falseness indeed means. It means "**not to be genuine; to pretend what you are not.**" And that, the Bible says, is an abomination to

God. Now we can get a true picture and definition of integrity. **Integrity means "to have only one set of weights"**, to be a true, reliable and trustworthy balance.

It is obvious that the Bible puts a very high premium on truth and genuineness. According to Mica 6:11, falseness cancels all other virtues: "Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?"

The Bible commentator Mathew Henry once wrote these words: "He is not a godly man who is not honest." A person can be imperfect and fail God in more than one way and still be called a man of God, as long as he is at least honest - think of David and the serious sins he committed, and yet he was called "a man after the heart of God." On the other hand, a person can possess every noble virtue you can think of, but if he is not genuine and not to be trusted, he will never qualify to be called a man of God.

The Pharisees in the time of Jesus were typical examples of false balances. Nothing angered Christ more and nobody did He rebuke in stronger terms, than the Pharisees and their hypocrisy. Listen to some of Jesus' harsh words in Mt.23:25: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. 27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead [men's] bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. 33 [Ye] serpents, [ye] generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

Hypocrites are false balances, people with double standards, with two sets of weights. Obviously the Pharisees were wearing masks; they didn't practise what they preached. There is no doubt that **in the eyes of God hypocrisy is worse than unholiness**. The reason is that God can do something for an unholy person, but what can God do for a hypocrite, for that person who covers up his ungodliness, who are not honest about it and do not confess it before God?

Consider the following two examples: Luke. 18:10-14: "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men [are], extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as [his] eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified [rather] than the

other." Jesus here unequivocally announced that there is hope for the unholy who confesses his sin. The tragedy is that the hypocrite is so fooled by his mask and superficial form, that he loses the awareness of his deep-seated sinfulness – and therefore could not be forgiven.

Another example is the case in John 8, where the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery. Whilst their own hearts were filled with murderous thoughts towards Jesus, they didn't hesitate to use this woman as "bait" to get Jesus on the hook: vs. 6: "This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him." While she was guilty of adultery, they harboured murder and hatred in their hearts.

Jesus, who knew their hearts, challenged them with His famous words: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."(vs.7)

Again in this case, here are hypocrites and an unholy person in the presence of the Holy One. The sin of the unholy one was revealed. The sins of the others were concealed. And again it was the unholy one who was forgiven and cleansed: "Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." (vs.11). Isn't it significant that the Pharisees left while the woman remained. That is the danger of hypocrisy - instead of acknowledging their own sinfulness (after all, not one of them qualified to pick up a stone!), and confessing their sin before the only One who can forgive them and save them, they rather left and continued with a life of hypocrisy.

## MASKS.

We live in a world where artificial substitutes are the order of the day. Much of what we eat and use are artificial imitations of the real thing. To a certain extent this is also true of people. It is taken for granted that people in general wear masks. The problem is that you oftentimes don't know that a person is wearing a mask, and further, how trustworthy is a person who wears a mask?

Let me dwell on this concept for a moment. What do I actually imply by wearing a mask? Is there something I want to hide? What is it? What one is actually saying by wearing a mask is: "What you see is not really me".

People wear masks for different reasons. Some wear them to hide pain and wounds from the past and in this way try to protect themselves from being hurt again.

Sometimes they hide behind a mask of a “clown”, others behind a bulwark of indifference and rashness.

Others are simply not genuine because of evil and sin they are hiding. They cannot dare to be genuine because the real picture would be too shocking. It is amazing how many of

these have cleverly invented a “religious” mask. I’ve learned over the years to be alert when people appear to be overly religious.

A mask-wearer can never be a free person. Lies and falseness enslave you. It is only the truth that can truly set you free. After all, we can’t fool God – He sees right through our masks. To experience freedom, means that one must play open cards with God. With God, I’m fooling myself when I keep my cards against my chest. To walk in the light, means to walk in truth. And the truth does not set God free, it sets me free! If my relationship with God is true and genuine, it filters through to the rest of my life and relationships.

I am convinced that true Christians ought not to wear masks. What is it that a true Christian wants to hide? Are we not supposed to have Christ living in us? Is the indwelling Christ not altogether wonderful and beautiful and something not to be hidden at all? Mask-wearing Christians - is this not one of the main reasons why the church has lost so much credibility in the world? It all boils down to false balances – pretending what you are not.

Another expression that we use to indicate that a person is not what he pretends to be, is that of “skeletons in the closet.” This saying speaks for itself. It compares my life to a house. If you would inspect it, you may be impressed by what you see on the outside, but somewhere in a room is a closet with a closed door. What I cherish and lock away there, will shock and disappoint you.

How many of us, Christians, have such a “skeleton” somewhere hidden in our lives? If it is some gross sin from our past, we needn’t have to give it shelter and walk around with a guilty conscience for the rest of our lives. We ought to confess it before God and where necessary do restitution, and accept that it is then covered by the blood of Jesus and cast in the sea of His forgetfulness.

Any other sin, evil or destructive habit that I continue to hide in my life and do not want to get rid of, is an abomination to God and will make me meet with His judgement and not His mercy.

## GENUINE BALANCES IN THE CHURCH.

The credibility of the church and Christians in general is more at stake than ever before. Post-modern man does not have much tolerance for the “weaknesses” of church-people – especially where lack of integrity is involved. In fact, post-modern man, however critical we may be, places an extremely high premium on genuineness. Let’s take an honest look at our Christian activities.

There is a certain tendency that every believer must be wary of. It happens almost unnoticeable and seems almost unavoidable. After one has started off your walk with God in joy, love and enthusiasm, one tends to gradually lose that original fervour and commitment. It happened with every church and revival movement through the ages. The second generation usually does not have the zeal and passion of the first. The church in Ephesus was only 43 years old when Jesus had to admonish them in Rev. 2:4: “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”

As individual believers we must always be aware of the fact that we so easily fall into religious habits and traditions, saying and doing the right things, going through the motions and performing the liturgical actions. In short, we soon find ourselves having the right form – but without content. And let us stop thinking that it is only the traditional liturgical churches who are guilty of this – As Pentecostal and charismatic churches, we have just as many examples of tradition, of form without content.

The danger is always that we, like the Pharisees of old, may become so obsessed with our traditions and forms of the past, that we forget that God is Spirit, and what impresses Him, is not the outside appearance (the form), but how it looks inside (the content).

There are few things more beautiful and touching than a genuine move of God’s Spirit, but there are few things that put a serious seeker off more easily than when we try to pretend a Pentecostal form without the content; when we are having church while Jesus is knocking at the door (Rev.3:20); when there is false fire burning on the altar.

To cling to a form or specific tradition, is no guarantee that it still has content. There was a time when the temple was still standing in all its grandeur, but the presence of God had left.



In Mt. 5 Jesus takes some of the Old Testament laws one by one and showed to the Pharisees how they superficially cling to the outward application of the laws while they have totally missed the true essence of it – e.g. Vss. 27+28: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, *‘You shall not commit adultery’*. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” He also points out their falseness in Mt. 15: 1-6.

He comes to the heart of worship when He quotes the Old Testament in Mt.15:7+8: “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: *‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.’*”

In John 4, Jesus met with the woman at the well in Samaria. When it became clear to her that He knew too much about her sinful past, she tried to divert the discussion into a theological dispute as to which temple is the right place to worship God at. Jesus refused to be drawn into a theological argument but comes to the point by saying in vs. 24: “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

When is worship “in spirit and in truth”? It is when heart and lips agree; when the content determines the form. How much of our liturgy, praise and worship, has become lip service because our hearts are not in it? Because God is Spirit, He is not in the first place impressed with our outward demonstrations and expressions. What He looks at, is where man cannot see – into the heart. That’s why it is not primarily a matter of loud or soft, slow or quick, long or short – the question is: What is going on in your heart? God is not impressed by words, but by the sincerity and genuineness of our hearts.

Let us honestly consider our religious activities and liturgies in the light of the above. Let’s even test our charismatic and Pentecostal manifestations in the light thereof. The tongues we are speaking, is it just a repetition of the same few words and sounds? Our prophesies, is there anything new and fresh that comes as a revelation from God? So much of what we consider typical “Pentecostal” have become barren and lifeless.

Just introducing new “forms” will do us no good. We need to go back to the basics. Seek the presence of God; get back to our first love. In short let’s place the highest premium on being genuine and honest in our dealings with God – being true and faithful balances. Steer away from empty rhetoric, and superficial, high-pressure methods and man-made gimmicks, trying to achieve a desired outcome. Wait upon the Lord and trust the Holy Spirit for His pure and genuine moving. The absence of genuineness smothers a true move of the Spirit. True Pentecost cannot afford this. True church is not a play.

Genuineness in the church has become a greater requirement than ever before – pastors who are genuine in the pulpit as well as in their daily living; who respond to other preachers and worship-leaders as they expect them to do when they are presiding. Genuineness, integrity is needed – in our relationship with God, when we are in our prayer-closet, on the pulpit, between people and with our spouses. Having only one set of weights; using the same standard everywhere. “Let our YES be YES and our NO be NO...”

Much of the confusion and rebellion amongst the children of Christians, can be ascribed to the double standards in their lives. If we are getting upset when people display double standards, how do we expect our children to digest when we have different sets of weights at church and at home? How often have I heard children - and even spouses, say: “The person you admire in church, is not the person we know at home.” That is what integrity is all about: Having one set of weights, the same standards in church as in the home and in business and on holiday. Such a lifestyle creates the right values with our children and produces solid characters.

You would admit that some of our greatest disappointments in life, were when we discovered falseness with a brother, that someone was not what he/she pretended to be. Do we do what we say and when? Some have left the church and have a generally dim view of the church, because a brother(s) failed the integrity-test.

And eventually, we will all land up on God’s balance, a balance with only one set of weights – TRUTH. May we then not hear those dreadful words: “You were weighed and found wanting.”