

Integrity: Wholeness *and* Holiness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 39:6–12; 1 Sam. 24:1–10; Dan. 6:1–10; Matt. 4:1–11; Rom. 1:26, 27; Eph. 3:14–21.*

Memory Text: “In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us” (*Titus 2:7, 8, NIV*).

The preacher was being distracted by noisy children. To make matters worse, they were his own. Finally, he had to stop preaching and tell the children they would be punished when the service was over. Silence descended on not only the children but everyone. The sermon was completed, the service ended, and Sabbath lunch was a delight. Visitors laughed and relaxed, and it was a happy Sabbath.

That evening a pleasant euphoria came over the household. The little daughter, feeling perhaps the freedom of relaxation, came to her preacher dad. “Daddy?” she said. “Yes, dear?” he responded. “Today, you promised to punish me, and you didn’t. You told a lie.”

No question, integrity is a lot easier to talk about than to display. Even the *best* of us find ourselves easily compromised unless we are careful. Truly in the *littlest things* it is so easy to slip.

This week we will take a look at this topic and how it impacts our lives on so many levels.

The Week at a Glance: Moral integrity impacts our health—spiritually, mentally, and physically.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 5.

Jesus in the Wilderness

Compromise is so easy, isn't it? Especially as one gets older, things do not often appear so black and white as they once did. We give in a little here, a little there, and hold firm from our new position. Then, over time, we give in a little here, a little there, and hold firm from our newest position. Then, over time, from this latest position, we give a little here, a little there, and then hold firm. Before long, we find ourselves in a place that we once never would have dreamed we would be in. That is what compromise is all about.

And though sometimes we need to loosen up a bit and be willing to give here and there, oftentimes we do so on the very things that we should not budge on at all!

Read Matthew 4:1–11. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by Satan, what were the three avenues of temptation through which Satan approached Him? How did Jesus refute those temptations, and what can we take away from this account for ourselves?

Satan found Jesus an impregnable wall. No matter what he tried to do, he failed to get Jesus to compromise on anything. Jesus was as impregnable as the Great Wall of China had been for centuries. Only better. And that was because the Great Wall was once breached. What happened? Someone bribed the gatekeeper! All that work, all that masonry, all that stone became almost useless when one single guard stopped doing what he was supposed to.

Yes, compromise is easy. Too easy. Satan will work through our appetite, through our presumption and pride, and through our desire for worldly things, through any avenue he can in order to lead us into sin, to get us to violate our integrity, and to push us away from Jesus. We not only need to be aware of his devices, we need to know how to claim God's promises and not be seduced into doing what we know is wrong. Only through a constant and firm reliance on the power of God, and a willingness to die to self, can we overcome.

In what areas of your life have you compromised what you know is right? How did you feel the first time you did it? Does it bother you less now than at first? Or does it not even bother you at all anymore?

Maintaining Integrity

There are so many temptations out there, temptations that can so often lead to moral compromise. How easy it is for a traveling staff person to pad the expense account. How easy for a man to sneak a few looks at Internet pornography. How easy for children to lie to their parents. How easy for folk to cheat on their taxes. How easy to overindulge in food and drink. How easy to cheat in school. How easy to . . . and the list goes on, and on, and on.

Read the following accounts. In what ways could these men have so easily violated their integrity? What can we learn from these stories? As you read each account, think of the background to these temptations, think of all the pressure on these men to compromise, think about how easily they could have rationalized another choice.

Gen. 39:6–12

1 Sam. 24:1–10

Dan. 6:1–10

If we are honest with ourselves, many of us will admit we are devious or at least less than transparent in many of our dealings. Sometimes we will not tell a lie, but we do not exactly convey the truth. We may believe a situation is not helped by openness. Such behavior can be found in many areas of life. What are ways in which you may have chosen expediency over forthrightness? Why is it so easy to do?

Think about a nonbiblical character, either from history, from the news, or from a personal acquaintance, whom you deem as a person of integrity. What are the traits this person has that you wish you had? How can you seek to emulate those traits better in your own life?

Integrity in Our Spiritual Lives

A young man purchased a pleasure boat with a nice little motor and trailer. The unit appeared clean and satisfactory, and—being purchased secondhand—it was not too expensive. Eager to try out his new acquisition, he took some friends and rode out to the public slip and launched the boat. It ran well, and the group made their way to a small island off the mainland in Lake Ontario.

Beaching the little boat, they explored the island and returned to the boat to head home. A short distance out, a splashing sound alerted them to the fact that they were taking on water. Quickly, the boat capsized, dumping the three friends into the chilly waters. A most fortunate rescue forestalled serious repercussions. What had happened? A single rotted timber was found in the base of the hull that, with the wave action on the beach, had led to a split in the wood. Just one bad piece, out of all the others, was enough to overturn the boat.

How similar it can be in our lives, as well. We might be so solid, so faithful, so firm and unwavering in so many ways, and yet with one area in which we have not surrendered to the Lord, one sinful area we seek to hold on to, we can find ourselves in deep moral, spiritual, and even physical trouble.

Read Ephesians 3:14–21. What is Paul saying to us here? How does this bear on our personal integrity? How can we experience these promises in our own lives?

So much is promised us in these texts. The Holy Spirit can strengthen us from within; that is, He can change us, not like some cosmetic surgery but more like heart surgery, something working deep within us. And this change comes to us by faith, by knowing the reality of God’s love for us. The Lord seeks a complete transformation in our lives; He desires that we be “filled with all the fulness of God.” Notice, too, that unlike many self-help and New Age philosophies, Paul is not talking about our tapping into some innate power found within us. No, the power that “works in us” is the power of God, who can do more than we ask or think. The question is are we allowing Him to, or are we letting our carnal natures rule instead?

What might it mean to be “filled with all the fulness of God”? Be prepared to talk about your answer in class.

Sexual Integrity

Read Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:15–18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Jude 7. What is the basic message of these texts to us today?

Young Megan went off to college. It was her first time away from home for a long period of time. Though she had been taught about sexual immorality, and though she knew what the Bible and her church taught about it, she suddenly found herself in situations where the pressure was very great to give in. She knew it was wrong, she knew this was not what she wanted for her life, she knew that God had something better for her. At first she was strong; at first she resisted. Then, slowly but surely, she compromised, one step at a time. In the beginning, the guilt was terrible; but over time it did not bother her as much as before—not until she found herself with an incurable sexually transmitted disease. Then, and only then, did she start to really ponder the reality of her mistakes.

Sexual immorality in and of itself is bad enough. It is sin, and sin damages our relationship with God and with others. But in this day and age, it can be a very real physical hazard. There are numerous sexually transmitted diseases, from herpes to HIV/AIDS, that can be physically devastating. The surest way to protect yourself from these diseases is to follow biblical principles of sexual morality. Sexual pleasure is for a man and a woman within marriage. Period. Anything outside of that is outside of God's plan and is wrong; even worse, it can lead to some very serious physical consequences, as well. Even some secular organizations agree that sexual abstinence outside of marriage is the best choice a person can make.

And not just physical either. The emotional toll can be terrible, especially for women upon whom the stigma for sexual immorality often falls the heaviest, however unjustly.

Of particular concern today is the question of pornography, which since the rise of the Internet is more prevalent than ever. God alone knows how many millions of lives will be ruined through this terrible scourge. There is help for those who get caught up in it; however, for many the shame seems so great that they are afraid to get the help they need.

What are your temptations, struggles, frustrations, and fears in this area of human life? Whatever your situation, how can you better avail yourself of the promises of God to see you through them?

Acting on Belief

In Romans 12:1, 2, Paul implores the Christian to present himself or herself in wholeness to the Lord in service. The integrity of body, mind, and spirit is brought as a whole to the Lord. This requires integrity in each part of the whole.

Some easily comprehend the importance of pure minds but are lax about their physical bodies. As we have seen, this is not a biblical position. Our bodies are gifts from God, and because of that we are commanded by God to take care of them.

Integrity requires that our actions reflect our belief. Today, there remains little room for debate over the broad principles of healthful living. Medical science teaches what we have known for years now. Exercise is important for the body. If we know this, we show a lack of integrity if we neglect giving our bodies the exercise they need. Fresh, clean water and moderate amounts of sunshine are so very beneficial. Because we know these things, we are called upon to follow them.

In a time when an epidemic of obesity sweeps many nations, few would refute the dangers of gluttony. We must make choices that only we as individuals can make, regarding how much food we eat and the kind we eat, especially if we are having problems with weight. Tobacco is recognized by nearly all as being the world's most rampant killer. The use of substances ranging from alcohol and marijuana to cocaine has gutted the productive lives of millions. The Spirit of Prophecy no longer stands alone in advocating fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and nuts. Even government departments of agriculture recommend a reduction in the consumption of many high-fat flesh foods. In short, how much better to follow a vegetarian diet, especially when we know how much better it is for us.

“True religion and the laws of health go hand in hand. It is impossible to work for the salvation of men and women without presenting to them the need of breaking away from sinful gratifications, which destroy the health, debase the soul, and prevent divine truth from impressing the mind. Men and women must be taught to take a careful view of every habit and every practice and at once put away those things that cause an unhealthy condition of the body, and thus cast a dark shadow over the mind. God desires His light bearers ever to keep a high standard before them. By precept and example they must hold their perfect standard high above Satan's false standard, which, if followed, will lead to misery, degradation, disease, and death for both body and soul.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 480.

Review all of your personal health habits. Are you living up to all the light you have? If not, what is keeping you from making the kinds of changes that can do you only good?

Further Study: “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 57.

“There is work for us to do—stern, earnest work. All our habits, tastes, and inclinations must be educated in harmony with the laws of life and health. By this means we may secure the very best physical conditions, and have mental clearness to discern between the evil and the good.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 28.

“Our danger is not from scarcity, but from abundance. We are constantly tempted to excess. Those who would preserve their powers unimpaired for the service of God, must observe strict temperance in the use of His bounties, as well as total abstinence from every injurious or debasing indulgence.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 29.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at the last Ellen G. White quote in Friday’s study. What does she mean when she writes that our danger is from excess?
- 2 Sunlight is an important component of good health. Here, too, however, we need a balance: a few minutes of sunlight each day can be a great blessing for us; on the other hand, overexposure can lead to health problems. How do we find the right balance here as with everything else?
- 3 What can your local church do to help with the problem of HIV/AIDS in your local community? Though in some parts of the world, the problem is greater than in others, we all can do at least a small part.
- 4 What can you do to encourage the young people in your church to abstain from sexual activity outside of marriage? Why is this so important? How can the church help, not just in sexuality but in other things, as well, that the young struggle with? How can you help the young (or old, for that matter) make the right choices when it comes to drugs, alcohol, and tobacco? It is one thing to give them dire warnings; it is another actually to do things to help them avoid making the wrong choice or to give them help if they do make mistakes.

Treasure in the Street

by HILARIO CATUKU

As I walked along the street in Luanda, the capital city of Angola, one day, I noticed a folded paper fluttering on the ground. I picked it up and read the title. “Three Angels’ Messages,” it said. Later at home I read the tract. It spoke about spiritual Babylon, a term that I didn’t know.

I asked some church members what “spiritual Babylon” meant, but no one knew. I read the tract again, and asked God to show me what lesson He had for me from this tract.

One day I felt impressed to ask a classmate about the Ten Commandments. As we talked, he recited the Ten Commandments. When he got to the fourth commandment, I asked him to tell me more about it. He explained that Jesus kept the Sabbath.

I sensed that this was what God was trying to tell me through the tract. But I didn’t know of any church that worshiped on Saturday. Then my classmate invited me to worship with him on Sabbath. I was curious, so I went. I was impressed with the way the members talked about the Bible issues. The pastor’s message touched my heart too.

After the worship service, I met the church elder, who gave me some Bible study guides and information on the Sabbath to read during the week. I continued worshiping with my friend on Sabbath.

Several weeks later I told my aunt, with whom I live, that I was attending the Seventh-day Adventist church. She told me that Sabbath is a Jewish tradition; Christians don’t keep the Sabbath. I read Hebrews 4:8–10 to her and explained that this was written after Christ died, meaning that the Sabbath is still valid. She felt betrayed and urged me to give up these false beliefs. But I felt I had found something precious.

I attended school at night, and my classes didn’t end until after sunset on Fridays. I talked to the principal, who allowed me to take my exams earlier on Fridays. But sometimes I still couldn’t finish before the sun set. So I left the remaining answers blank. In spite of this, I passed. I know that God used these experiences to lead me to a deeper faith.

Angola has more than 300,000 Adventist believers, but many more need to hear God’s call out of “spiritual Babylon.” Your offerings help us reach more people for Christ in Angola.

HILARIO CATUKU is a teenager who lives in Luanda, Angola.