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Honor All Relationships



QUESTION 1:

Who has been an example of personal integrity in your life?

THE POINT

Integrity and contentment in Christ form the foundation for good relationships.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

The implosion of a structure can be an amazing thing to watch. One minute you are looking at a fully standing building, bridge, or tunnel, and then within seconds, the entire structure collapses into a pile of ashes and debris.

In the controlled demolition industry, experts place a number of small explosives strategically throughout the structure. Strategic placement is pivotal to destroy the structural integrity of the building without destroying what's around it.

The structural integrity of our lives and relationships matters just as much as it does for a building. It takes only a second for a relationship to implode. One lie can collapse a friendship. One slanderous accusation can destroy people's perception of us. One wrong choice carried out to its fullest can cause a decade of growth to crumble. The Ten Commandments provide a solid foundation—built on honor and contentment—to ensure the structural integrity of our relationships.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

EXODUS 20:15-16

¹⁵ Do not steal. ¹⁶ Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.

A preacher got on a bus one day, gave the bus driver money for the fare, and the driver gave him the change. As the preacher sat down, he counted the coins, and discovered the bus driver gave him too much change. Returning to the front of the bus, he handed the driver two quarters and remarked, “You gave me too much change.”

The bus driver smiled and said, “Pastor, I really appreciate this, because I was in your church service yesterday, and I heard your sermon on honesty. I intentionally gave you too much change to see whether you live by what you preach.”

QUESTION 2:

Why is it so important for believers to be people of integrity?

Integrity ought to be automatic for us. We never know who is watching our actions or listening to our words. Conducting ourselves honorably and with integrity is at the heart of two of the Ten Commandments: “Do not steal” and “Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.” We are to treat others with respect—and that includes respect for their possessions. Our words should also show respect for the other person. These virtues are manifested in love and define a kingdom disciple. Jesus summed it up when He said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Loving one another includes speaking the truth in love at all times (Eph. 4:15). Many people excuse a lie because it is only “a little white lie.” A “little lie” is like being a “little

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pregnant”; it’ll always show up after a while. Lies have a way of creating a boomerang effect and coming right back at us to cause a lot of damage.

Lies always have a way of coming back around. For that reason alone, we ought not to lie. But above that, we need to live with



integrity because our lives have been given to us as a way of bringing glory to God and advancing His kingdom on earth. Our lives should be a mirror of the One who made us. When we operate outside of the virtues of the kingdom, we are not reflecting the truth of who God is. Instead, we are showcasing the deception of Satan, the “father of lies” (John 8:44), whose goal is to thwart the rule of God on earth. When we choose to lie or misrepresent the truth, we are putting Satan’s nature on display instead of God’s.

Living a life of integrity means modeling our thoughts, words, and actions after God. As we do this, we are able to advance His kingdom agenda on earth while bringing glory to Him and good to others.

QUESTION 3:

What are the consequences for society when people don’t live with honesty and integrity?

EXODUS 20:17

¹⁷ Do not covet your neighbor’s house. Do not covet your neighbor’s wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Aesop’s Fables include the story of a dog crossing a bridge with a bone in his mouth. As he looked into the water, he saw a reflection of what he thought was an even larger dog with what seemed like an even larger

bone. Wanting the bigger bone, the dog immediately opened up his mouth to go after it. Yet in the process, the bone in his mouth dropped into the water and quickly sunk to the bottom out of reach. Not only did the dog

fail to get the illusion of the larger bone, but he lost the one he had been enjoying.

Not being satisfied with what you already have is the quickest path toward losing it. Advertisers are well aware of our propensity toward covetousness; they spend an inordinate amount of time and money attempting to make us dissatisfied. They know if we become discontent enough with our current state, we will succumb to their sales pitch. Due to our chronic covetousness, many of us have adopted the motto, “I shop, therefore, I am.” We’re not happy unless we’re constantly obtaining more.

Contentment doesn’t rest on these things. Contentment is realizing that God has met your needs, and coupling that realization with gratitude.

- ▶ Contentment is being just as happy driving an old jalopy as you think you’d be driving a brand-new Mercedes®. In both cases you have transportation.
- ▶ Contentment is taking as much pleasure living in an 800-square-foot apartment as in a 4,000-square-foot house. In both cases, you have a roof over your head.
- ▶ Contentment is enjoying a hot dog as much as a T-bone steak. In both cases you are not starving.
- ▶ Contentment is being just as satisfied wearing clothing from a thrift store as you

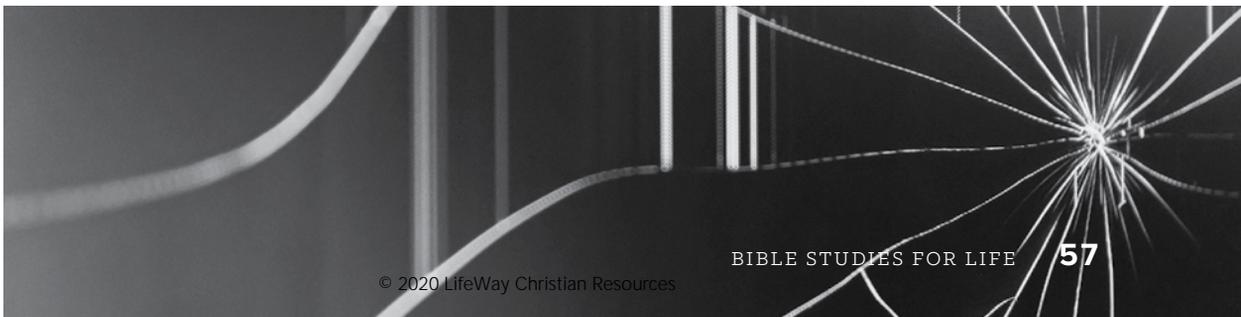
would be decked out in a fancy outfit. In both cases you have clothes on your back.

When we live in a contented mindset, we are acknowledging the goodness of God in His provisions. We allow gratitude to replace a spirit of want. Circumstances or stuff should never drive our contentment. The secret to contentment comes through knowing that all we have and all we can do comes through Christ who strengthens us and provides for us.

Contentment is the key to living a life of integrity because it provides the security necessary to rest in the reality of the moment. When you know that all you have comes from the One who loves you most, you can let go of any scheming, manipulating, lying, slandering, or maneuvering to get ahead. When you let go of all the flawed efforts to get ahead, you can rest in the truth that God’s sovereign providential hand will provide all you need in order to experience life to the fullest. Find contentment in what God provides and you will find the secret to a satisfying life.

QUESTION 4:

What are some practical steps we can take to prevent coveting in our lives?



PSALM 37:1-6

¹ Do not be agitated by evildoers; do not envy those who do wrong. ² For they wither quickly like grass and wilt like tender green plants. ³ Trust in the LORD and do what is good; dwell in the land and live securely. ⁴ Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires. ⁵ Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act, ⁶ making your righteousness shine like the dawn, your justice like the noonday.

These words from King David capture the heart of the commandment not to covet. He began by reminding us not to envy those who do wrong. It's easy to envy those who have no regard for God yet seem to flourish. As another psalmist wrote, "My feet almost slipped; my steps nearly went astray. For I envied the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps. 73:2-3).

The antidote for such envy and dissatisfaction comes from looking to God instead of gawking at the wicked. We are to "trust" and "take delight" in Him and Him alone. All we could ever desire rests in God.

I'll admit I struggled with contentment in the early days of my ministry. I wanted the ministry to grow and expand. I wondered at times how much of that growth rested solely on my shoulders. That may all sound noble, but my attitude caused me to work long hours when I may not have needed to do so. My focus was on my own efforts.

One key piece of advice changed all of this for me. I received this advice from a former seminary classmate of mine who had gone on to a great, impactful ministry of his own.

He said, "Tony, never forget this truth: you only have one Source. God is your Source. Everything else is just a resource." That truth enabled me to rest.

None of us needs to worry or fret about what other people are accomplishing or doing. It's a normal inclination to make comparisons, but that doesn't mean it's healthy. We can let go of competition and embrace our completion in Christ. When you do, you will receive the desires of your heart. You will receive what God has for you—and He never runs out of His provisions! He always has enough. Give Christ your heart by giving Him your allegiance. Then watch Him bring you delight as He delights in you.

QUESTION 5:

What evidence have you seen that God's commands are for our own good?

INTEGRITY AND CONTENTMENT

On a scale of 1-10, mark where you think you are in living a life of integrity and contentment. Then do the same for how others would view your life.

Take any difference that exists to the Lord in prayer.

My Integrity (as viewed by me):

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My Integrity (as viewed by others):

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My Contentment (as viewed by me):

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My Contentment (as viewed by others):

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My Prayer:

*“Integrity is doing the right thing,
even when no one is watching.”*

C. S. LEWIS



THE ATTRACTION OF IDOLATRY

Randall L. Adkisson

In a field outside a village in central India, a man snuck away from his family and friends. There he set for himself an idol, an image of his chief deity. In the waning light of the day, Goli took a knife, sharp as a razor, and made long cuts into the flesh of his forearm. He lifted his arms; clasped his hands together; hovered them over the idol's form; and let his fresh, warm blood drain over his god.¹

Plain of Er-Rahah, which is at the foot of Mount Sinai. The children of Israel would have camped here while Moses ascended the mountain.





ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ TOM HOOKE (6/6/24)

A WORLD FILLED WITH IDOLS

Though perhaps a shock to the modern sensibilities of some people, idol worship is still common today. In communities, villages, towns, and cities all over the world—in homes, apartments, fields, caves, and on mountains, men and women bow before shrines to honor gods made by hands.

Genesis first hints at the prevalence of idol worship in reporting Rachel stole and then hid her family's idols (Gen. 31:19). The tone of the story seems to indicate that even then, idolatry was not uncommon. In the Old Testament period, people often recognized national, regional, and individual gods and their idol forms.

From the patriarchs through the later prophets, idol worship was a constant temptation for God's people. Neither warnings

The Temple of Apollo at Corinth. Seven of the original 38 Doric columns still stand. In the background is the Acrocorinth (or upper-Corinth). In Paul's day, temples to numerous Greek gods were atop the Acrocorinth.

nor severe punishment broke them of the idol's lure. On Sinai, Moses acquired the Law from God, a primary one stating, "You shall not make for yourself an idol" (Ex. 20:4).² In the camp below, the newly freed Israelites degraded themselves before an idol constructed by Moses' brother (32:2-4).

The lure of idol worship was not limited to ancient Israel. In fact, throughout most of their history, idolatry was a constant draw that enticed God's people—although to a far lesser extent after the exile. History bears witness, though, that the Jews ultimately found the will to turn completely from idol worship during the intertestamental period. Still, idol worship was ubiquitous in the Gentile world of the New Testament.

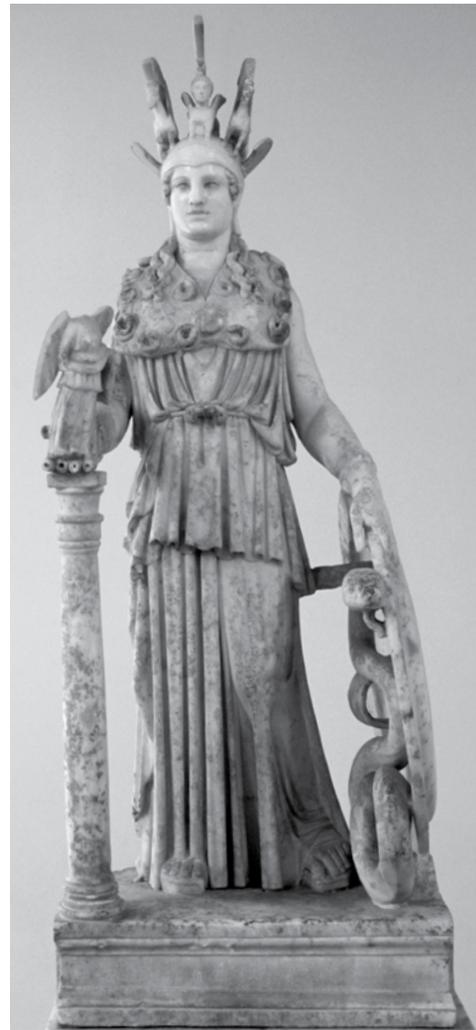
"Every need of life was assumed to be under the watch of some god."

Long-established deities had their place in the temples of Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. To these the first century added new images of worship—images of Roman rulers and the national religions.

The New Testament church faced idol worship as a barrier to their witness and an enticement to their membership. Images of the gods were hot-selling items in the marketplaces of the New Testament world. Paul faced craftsmen's wrath when several people responded to his preaching in Ephesus. The artisans accused Paul of cutting into their ability to market their images and of threatening their profits (Acts 19:23-41).

WHAT WAS (IS) THE ATTRACTION OF IDOLS?

Individuals desire to be "normal," to be perceived by others as regular, as part of typical society. Readers today may not understand how far from normal were the demands of God and therefore the people of God. Every group of people with whom Israel related, fought, or came into contact believed in multiple gods and practiced idol worship. These people believed every need of life was under the watch of some god or the other. Procreation of livestock, fields, and family was assured or denied based upon the favor of a god.



Statue of Athena, patron goddess of the city of Athens. This is a replica of the original, which was made of gold, silver, and ivory and stood in the Parthenon. Her crown has a sphinx in the center with a griffin on either side. Her breastplate has an image of Medusa on it. The god Victory is in her right hand; a spear and shield are in her left. The serpent near her feet is Erichthonius, a mythological creature born of the earth and supposed early ruler of the city of Athens. Even the patron goddess honored other mythological deities.

Israel often succumbed to the lure of the land in which they resided, whether Egypt, Babylon, or Canaan. Interaction with the surrounding peoples through trade, marriage, and government could not help but entwine God's people with idols. To the New Testament church the apostle Paul would write, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'" (1 Cor. 15:33).

As today, influence of culture and family too easily swayed the people of God. Another draw to idol worship was its simplicity of form and promise of results. According to one Old Testament scholar, Pagan idolatry was attractive to the ancients because, among other things, it was based on an assumption that frequency and generosity of worship (bringing a lot of food to an idol's shrine) would establish a good relationship with one's god or goddess. Ethical living was not required.³

Thus a religion that required only simple forms of payment and ritualistic worship rather than taxing demands of moral standards held a lure for sinful mankind. The Book of Numbers records the simplicity with which Israel could enter into idol worship and remain enmeshed with immorality (see ch. 25).

Idols were pleasing, both visibly and to the touch. Israel struggled to restrict their worship to a God whom no one could see or touch. Although people could experience Yahweh's



Exterior of the Pantheon in Rome. Marcus Agrippa commissioned the original structure as a tribute to all of the Roman gods in 27–25 BC. Emperor Hadrian (reigned AD 117–138) rebuilt the current structure, which still stands today. Although almost 2,000 years old, the building has the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world.

presence in: (1) creation, (2) His moral obligations communicated through the Law, and (3) His personal intervention recorded in national history, they still could not touch, handle, or see Him.

The allure of a god that could be handled, decorated, bowed to, and transported overcame for many the contradiction of worshipping an item created by the hands of the worshiper. Like present day charms, crystals, and amulets, the convenience and imminence of idols captured people's imaginations. Worshipers felt they could be assured of a god's presence if they could touch or see its image.

"Sex sells" was as true in the ancient world as it is in the modern. Idol worship incorporated many forms of sexual vice. Craftsmen often shaped idolatrous symbols to resemble sexual organs or to resemble humans with exaggerated genitalia. The Scripture speaks

of Asherah, a pole or tree representing a sex goddess in the Old Testament. Greeks and the Romans worshiped Artemis and Diana, represented by a multi-breasted idol.

Because many forms of idol worship sought to assure the fertility of the soil and the womb, ritualistic sexual practices were often a part of pagan temple worship. People believed temple prostitution would excite the voyeuristic gods into procreative activities, which supposedly assured successful multiplication of earthy crops, herds, and people.

The images and language of the Old Testament often allude to the sexual nature of idol worship. The prophets' words of whoring, adultery, and chasing after the gods of the pagans are blunt and condemning; for instance: "Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there" (Jer. 3:6b).

STILL AN ISSUE

Both ancient Israel and the early church stood in danger of being seduced by the gratification and promises of gods that could be fashioned by and in the likeness of mankind. Judgment for their sin at times was corporal punishment, as well as the inherent loss of purpose, witness, and influence in their communities. Perhaps the saddest form of judgment's gavel was the loss of generations who watched the compromise of their parents and national leaders and followed them along paths of alienation from a relationship with their true God (Ex. 34:7).

Idol worship in many forms still permeates the land. Today false religions incorporate chants, talismans, and charms in worship. Images of gods reside in Hindu closets and new age shrines. Christians too have long been lured by horoscopes and good luck charms. Amazingly, modern idols retain their attractions.



Asherah figurine. Mentioned throughout the Old Testament, Asherah was the primary goddess of Syria and Canaan. The people believed she was the wife of the Canaanite god El and also mother to 70 other gods, the most famous being Baal.

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1. This story came from an experience I had with someone I met during an international mission trip to India.
 2. All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Version (NASB).
 3. Douglas K. Stuart, Exodus, vol. 2 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 45.