

INTEGRITY IN THE PULPIT

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We all want to preach. We all want to preach well. History affirms that one can preach without integrity, but eternity will reveal that no one ever preached well without it.

What is integrity? What does it look like in a preacher? Perhaps an answer to those questions lies on the other side of an answer to this one: What is the opposite of integrity? Is it compromise? Is it a divided heart or mind? Are there truths that we, even as preachers, simply tip our hats at, but fail to truly believe? We expound them. We can alliterate three points related to them. But do we believe them? How does this relate to integrity in the pulpit?

I have never found a better explanation of integrity than that of Warren Weirsbe in his book *The Integrity Crisis*.

What is integrity? The *Oxford English Dictionary* says that the word come from the Latin *integritas*, which means ‘wholeness,’ ‘entireness,’ ‘completeness.’ The root is *integer*, which means ‘untouched,’ ‘intact,’ ‘entire.’ . . . A person with integrity is not divided (that’s *duplicity*) or merely pretending (that’s *hypocrisy*). He or she is ‘whole’; life is ‘put together,’ and things are working together harmoniously. People with integrity have nothing to hide and nothing to fear. Their lives are open books. They are integers.¹

What, then, does that look like in the pulpit? I have started to ask myself how whole I am in six areas related to my preaching and myself as a preacher.

Integrity with God — *questions about accountability.*

Questions & Queries:

What makes for a “good sermon” in God’s estimation?

What makes for a “good preacher” in God’s estimation?

What issues do you picture God raising about your preaching when you stand for review at the judgement seat of Christ?

What issues do you think God won’t raise that we now concern ourselves with?

We often think of preaching with integrity in terms of our content and its conformity to the truth of God’s Word, what else may come into play as we consider

preaching before God with integrity?

What practical differences does the knowledge of that accountability make?

What does it mean when we say “I’m accountable before God for what I preach?”

Notable & Quotable:

“I know perfectly well that, wherever I go and preach, there are many better preachers known and heard than I am; all that I can say about it is that the Lord uses me.”²

“The preacher—His throne is the pulpit; he stands in Christ’s stead; his message is the Word of God; around him are immortal souls; the Savior, unseen is beside him; the Holy Spirit broods over the congregation; angels gaze upon the scene, and heaven and hell await the issue. What associations and what a vast responsibility!”³

Integrity with Scripture — *questions about authority.*

Questions & Queries:

What does it mean to handle Scripture with integrity?

How may our preaching model integrity with the text of Scripture for our people?

In what ways may we violate integrity with the text of Scripture?

What does integrity with Scripture have to do with the shape and form my sermon take?

How does integrity with Scripture relate to the issue of authorial intent?

Can we say with integrity “This text illustrates the truth that . . .”? as opposed to saying “God’s purpose for having this text written is . . .”?

How does this relate to the work of setting forth a preaching calendar/schedule?

How does this relate to responding to crisis moments in the church?

Preaching a “prophetic” message to a particular situation?

What makes for authority in preaching?

Is our aim to preach with authority? Or to preach a message that has authority?

How can confusing the two potentially jeopardize our integrity?

Notable & Quotable:

“Our authority as preachers sent by God rises and falls with our manifest allegiance to

the text of Scripture. I say ‘manifest’ because there are so many preachers who say they are doing exposition when they do not ground their assertions explicitly—‘manifestly’—in the text. They don’t show their people clearly that the assertions of their preaching are coming from specific, readable words of Scripture that the people can see for themselves.”⁴

“The issue of authority is inescapable. Either the preacher *or* the text will be the operant authority. . . . We are called, not only to *preach*, but to preach *the Word*.”⁵

Integrity with Self — *questions about authenticity.*

Questions & Queries:

Do we preach better than we live?

Do we preach better than we believe?

How does integrity come into play when we know we must preach a passage we know we’ve been struggling to live personally?

How does integrity come into play when we know we must preach a truth that we’ve been having quiet, nagging, doubt-filled questions about?

How does this relate to questions of theology we simply are not certain about? (e.g., rapture)

How do you handle discovering you’ve said something wrong in a sermon?

Notable & Quotable:

“I traveled with him in conventions and what he preached he lived . . . He was the greatest heart preacher I ever listened to. He preached out of his own rich dealings with God.” (Paul Rader speaking of A.B. Simpson)⁶

“It takes a tremendous amount of relationship to God for a man to *be* what he is.”⁷

Integrity with the congregation — *questions about actuality.*

Questions & Queries:

How much of our personal emotional health should be seen in the pulpit?

How might the expression of emotions in the pulpit jeopardize our integrity?

How might the failure to express our emotions in the pulpit jeopardize our integrity?

Notable & Quotable:

“To be persuasive, we must be believable. To be believable, we must be credible. To be credible, we must be truthful.”⁸

“When you are emotionally upset, you may find, while preaching, the tendency to weep.”⁹

Integrity with materials — *questions about acknowledgment.*

Questions & Queries:

When is it “research” and when is it plagiarism?

When does integrity require verbal footnoting?

What are acceptable ways of verbally footnoting a source?

Notable & Quotable:

“. . . it is a good rule never to make use of another’s contribution in a way that would be embarrassing to confess in public if the author were present.”¹⁰

“‘Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,’ declares the Lord, ‘who steal My words from each other.’”¹¹

“I remember when Charles Allen come to preach in the little South Carolina town where I was the pastor of the Baptist church. I had read all of Allen’s books of sermons—and preached most of them. Some of our folks went down to Main Street Methodist to hear Dr. Allen. One of them came back and told me, ‘You’ll never believe it, but that lanky old Methodist is preaching your sermons.’”¹²

Integrity with recognition — *questions about ambition.*

Questions & Queries:

What makes the difference between “holy ambition” and being “wholly ambitious”?

How does ambition relate to ego and pride?

How can we genuinely desire God’s greatest and broadest use of us without falling into the trap of unholy ambition and ego?

Notable & Quotable:

“Integrity is the first step to greatness.”¹³

“. . . the usefulness of our preaching will not be known to us until each fruit on all the branches on all the trees that have sprung up from all the seeds we’ve sown has

fully ripened in the sunshine of eternity.”¹⁴

“. . . you can mark it down that if you are a preacher God will hide from you much of the fruit he causes in your ministry. You will see enough to be assured of his blessing, but not so much as to think you could live without it.”¹⁵

Conclusion:

It was said of the popular 19th century preacher William Arnot, “His preaching is good. His writing is better. His living is best of all.”¹⁶ May we each become so entirely God’s, both in the pulpit and outside of it, that the same might be said of us!

ENDNOTES

¹ Weirsbe, Warren W., *The Integrity Crisis* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 21.

² Moody, D.L., quoted in Larsen, David L., *The Company of the Preachers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1998), 510.

³ Simpson, Matthew, quoted in Larsen, 536.

⁴ Piper, John, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990), 41.

⁵ Mohler, Albert, “A Theology of Preaching,” Michael Duduit, ed., *Handbook on Contemporary Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 15.

⁶ Larsen, David L., *The Company of the Preachers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1998), 659.

⁷ Chambers, Oswald, quoted in *Oswald Chambers: The Best From All His Books* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), 135.

⁸ Murrow, Edward R., quoted in Edythe Draper, *Draper’s Book of Quotations for the Christian World* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), 342.

⁹ Robinson, Haddon, “Bringing Yourself in to the Pulpit,” Bill Hybels, Stuart Briscoe and Haddon Robinson, *Mastering Contemporary Preaching* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1989), 133.

¹⁰ Broadus, John, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), 87.

¹¹ Jeremiah 23:30

¹² Buckingham, Jamie, “Pulpit Plagiarism,” *Leadership* (Summer, 1983): 62-63.

¹³ Simmons, Charles, quoted in Draper, 342.

¹⁴ Piper, 18.

¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶ Quoted in John MacArthur, *The Power of Integrity* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1997), 113.