

Article 22

Introduction to free article.

This article by Dr. J. Robert Clinton comes from the 1,2 Timothy and Titus leadership commentaries, which are part of the Clinton Biblical Leadership Commentary CD copyrighted 1999. This commentary is available from the Clinton Resources at <http://www.bobbyclinton.com/>. It was also included in the 1,2 Corinthians commentary.

Relevance of the Article to Paul's Corinthian Ministry

Paul demonstrates integrity in his Corinthian ministry. Integrity is the top leadership quality—see Paul's leadership lists in 1 Tim 2 and Titus 1 for his emphasis on integrity and character. In the 2 Co epistle Paul especially reveals his inner values and shows how they are consistent with his practice, both in the past with the Corinthian church and these letters written to them to help them get back on track. It is this consistency between inner values and outward behavior which is at the heart of integrity. This article should be read by every emerging leader. For, it is usually some character issue, not ministry skills, that causes failure in ministry and leads to a poor finish. Integrity is at the heart of character.

22. Integrity—A Top Leadership Quality

Introduction

I have been repeating a number of times in the leadership commentary, for a number of books, a major leadership principle.

Ministry flows out of being.

Being is a term describing a number of factors which refer to the inner life and essence of a person. It refers to at least the following, but is not limited to them: (1) intimacy with God; (2) character; (3) personality; (4) giftedness; (5) destiny; (6) values drawn from experience; (7) conscience, and (8) gender influenced perspectives. The axiom, ministry flows out of being means that one's ministry should be a vital outflow from these inner beingness factors.

It is integrity, the rudder that steers character, that I want to highlight in this discussion. Consider the following two words:

- 1. deception** noun 1.The use of deceit. 2.The fact or state of being deceived. 3. A ruse; a trick. [adapted from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition, 1992.] **Synonyms:** trickery, gulling, lying, juggling, craftiness. **Antonyms:** sincerity, frankness, honesty, openness, truthfulness, trustworthiness, genuineness, earnestness, innocence, candor, veracity, verity, probity, fidelity.
- 2. integrity** The uncompromising adherence to a code of moral, artistic or other values which reveals itself in utter sincerity, honesty, and candor and avoids deception or artificiality (Adapted from Webster). **Synonyms:** honesty, virtue, honor, morality, uprightness, righteousness. **Antonyms:** deception, dishonesty, corruption, infidelity.

The words are opposite.

Few leaders finish well.¹ Most major failures in ministry are dominantly rooted in spiritual formation issues (spirituality) rather than ministerial formation and strategic formation issues.² Most of these failures can ultimately be traced to basic failures of integrity.³ Leaders who fail often do not have integrity but instead have some sort of deception about at least some of their leadership. On the other hand, leaders who finish well, across the board are leaders of integrity.

Let me remind you of the definition of a Christian leader: A Christian leader is a person with a God-given capacity and a God-given responsibility who is influencing a specific group of God's people toward God's purposes for the group. You cannot influence a group very effectively if they don't trust you. And if you are suspected of trickery, gulling, mendacity, juggling, craftiness—they won't trust you and you won't lead them.

At the heart of any assessment of biblical qualifications for leadership lies the concept of integrity—that uncompromising adherence to a code of moral, artistic or other values which reveals itself in utter sincerity, honesty, and candor and avoids deception or artificiality. So if we want to be leaders who finish well we want to be people of integrity. What is integrity? How do we get it?

Definition Integrity, the top leadership character quality, is the consistency of inward beliefs and convictions with outward practice. It is an honesty and wholeness of personality in which one operates with a clear conscience in dealings with self and others.

God develops integrity in leaders. It is at the heart of character. A repeated observation on leaders whom God developed and used for his purposes resulted in the following helpful definition.

Definition An integrity check refers to the special kind of shaping activity (a character test) which God uses to evaluate heart-intent, consistency between inner convictions and outward actions, and which God uses as a foundation from which to expand the leader's capacity to influence. The word check is used in the sense of test—meaning a check or check-up.

I'll come back to this notion of an integrity check and give detailed information on it. But first think with me about Biblical leaders and the notion of integrity.

¹ Of the Biblical leaders for whom there is evidence about finishing well, about one in three finish well. Probably it is even less for contemporary leaders if anecdotal evidence means anything. What do I mean by finish well? I have identified six characteristics of finishing well from a comparative study of leaders who finished well. A given leader will not necessarily demonstrate all six but at least several. These six characteristics include the following: (1) They maintain a personal vibrant relationship with God right up to the end. (2) They maintain a learning posture and can learn from various kinds of sources—life especially. (3) They manifest godliness (especially Christ-like attitudes and behavior) in character as evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. (4) Truth is lived out in their lives so that convictions and promises of God are seen to be real. (5) They leave behind one or more ultimate contributions. (6) They walk with a growing awareness of a sense of destiny and see some or all of it fulfilled.

² Spiritual formation is the shaping activity in a leader's life which is directed toward instilling godly character and developing inner life (i.e. intimacy with God, character, values drawn from experience, conscience). Strategic formation is the shaping activity in a leader's life which is directed toward having that leader reach full potential and achieve a God-given destiny. Ministerial formation is the shaping activity in a leader's life which is directed toward instilling leadership skills, leadership experience, and developing giftedness for ministry.

³ Studies of leaders who have failed to finish well has identified six major barriers to their finishing well. These include: finances—their use and abuse; power—its abuse; inordinate pride—which leads to a downfall; sex—illicit relationships; family—critical issues; plateauing. At the very heart of most of these major barriers lies an integrity issue.

Biblical Leaders of Integrity

If I were to ask you to name the top two O.T. leaders who demonstrated integrity, who would you suggest? If I were to ask you to name the top two N.T. leaders who demonstrate integrity, who would you suggest?

My top two O.T. leaders who demonstrated integrity are Joseph and Daniel. My top two N.T. leaders who demonstrated integrity are Jesus and Paul (Barnabas is a close second behind Paul).

Both Joseph and Daniel exemplify leaders who were tested by God as to their integrity and passed with flying colors. Joseph in Gen 39 refuses to have an affair with Potiphar's wife. He sees this as wrong. In fact, he states that to do so would be sin against God. God honors this stand and later elevates Joseph to the top administrative post in Egypt (under the Pharaoh). Daniel in Da 1 is tested as to integrity with regard to eating food unacceptable to a Jew. He stands on his convictions. He too is blessed by God and becomes a high administrator under Nebuchadnezzar and eventually becomes the number one administrator under Darius. Jesus throughout his whole ministry demonstrates integrity, always showing unity between outward practice and inward conviction. (See especially the Satanic temptations in Mt 4.) Paul writes a whole epistle defending his integrity. He was being accused of all kinds of deception: lying, craftiness, dishonesty, trickery. The book of 2Co reveals Paul's answers to the accusations of deception. A major Pauline leadership value emerges in 2Co.

Label

Integrity and Openness

Statement of Value

Leaders should not be deceptive in their dealings with followers but should instead be open, honest, forthright, and frank with them.

Paul, throughout 2Co, refutes the accusations of deception in his leadership and lays out for us many principles underlying integrity in a leader.

Paul's instruction to Timothy in 1Ti about leadership qualifications should be noted here. His qualifications for leaders includes character and conscience. Paul's list of qualifications focuses on integrity and deals mainly with character not giftedness. See his three lists⁴ in 1Ti 3:1-7; 8-10; 11-13. All three lists emphasize integrity. And this integrity should be seen by those outside the church as well as those within.

Integrity Check Revisited

God uses life situations to test and build up the inner character of a leader. Integrity is one of the main qualities God shapes in a leader. The *integrity check* is a major way this happens. From comparative study (e.g. Daniel in Da 1,5; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Da 3; Joseph in Gen 39; Abraham in Gen 24; Jephthah in Jdg 11; Paul in Ac 20:22,23 and many others), a list of kinds of integrity checks can be identified. And their use by God can be suggested. Table 1,2 Co 22-1 gives the kinds of integrity checks. Table 1,2 Co 2 lists their uses.

Table 1,2 Co 22-1. Kinds of Integrity Checks

Label	Explanation
temptation (conviction test)	An integrity check frequently is given to allow a leader to identify an inner conviction and to take a stand on it. Such a stand will deepen the conviction in the leader's life. Can a leader really take a stand on some conviction?

⁴ These three lists are apparently list idioms in which the initial item on the list is the main assertion and other items illustrate or clarify the primary item. If so, then the major leadership trait is integrity, a moral characteristic implying a consistency between inner and outer life. The items on the list would then illustrate in the Ephesian culture what moral character, integrity, looks like. So then these items in themselves are not necessarily universal characteristics for a leader but are indicative of what moral character and integrity look like in this culture. The obligatory item is inner integrity, moral character. Paul concludes this small section in vs 7 by returning to this important idea to reemphasize it. This is repeated in descriptions of the lesser leader lists described in vs 8-10, 11-13. Note especially vs 8 and 11. See *list idiom*, **Glossary**.

restitution (honesty testing)	Some integrity checks force a leader to make right things done wrong in the past, particularly those with on-going ramifications. This is particularly seen in money matters where in the past someone was defrauded. Will a leader be honest, especially about the past?
value check (ultimate value clarification)	Situations frequently force leaders to think through their beliefs about something so that they can identify explicitly a value(s). This value once identified can be evaluated. It can be used more strongly. It may be modified. It may be discarded as not really valid. Can a leader identify the underlying value in a situation?
loyalty (allegiance testing)	God must be first in a life. Frequently, other things become first in a leader's life with perhaps it not even being known by the leader. God can bring to light those things which take His rightful place in our hearts and lives. Who is really first in our lives?
Guidance (alternative testing—a better offer after Holy Spirit led commitment to some course of action)	Frequently a leader is led by God to declare for a certain thing (a ministry, a choice, some option). It is clear that God has led the leader to that choice. After making the choice God may well bring an alternative which looks easier or better simply to test the follow-through on the original decision. Can a leader stick to God's former sure guidance when other challenging guidance comes along?
conflict against ministry vision (guidance/faith testing)	Frequently, a leader will be led into a situation and even have follower support in it. But down the line in the midst of the decision being worked out, particularly when negative ramifications arise, followers or others will oppose the situation. Conflict arises. Note that conflict is a mighty weapon in the hand of God. Usually this integrity check will enforce faith in the leader. Can a leader maintain guidance and believe God will under gird some ministry vision?
word conflict or obedience conflict (complexity testing usually in guidance)	Sometimes a leader will get a word from God or be challenged to obey God in some particular way. Usually this has to do with guidance. Conflict arises as in the previous description. Can a leader trust in his/her ability to hear from God? Or will a leader obey, even if conflict arises?

Table 1,2 Co 22-2. The Ways that God Uses Integrity Checks

Identifying Label	Why It Is Used
Follow Through	to see follow-through on a promise or vow
Deepening Burden	to insure burden for a ministry or vision
Edification	to allow confirmation of inner-character strength
Faith Builder	to build faith
Value Clarifying	to establish inner values very important to later leadership which will follow
Lordship	to teach submission
Warnings	to warn others of the seriousness of obeying God

Often the integrity check happens completely unknown to people around the leader. That is because of its inward nature. The secondary causes may be events, people, etc. They may not even know that they are sources. The primary causal source is inward through the conscience. The Holy Spirit shapes the conscience.⁵

There is a three step pattern to an integrity check which is passed positively: (1) the challenge to consistency with inner convictions, (2) the response to the challenge, and (3) the resulting expansion. Sometimes the expansion may be delayed or take place over a period of time but it can definitely be seen to stem from the integrity check. Delayed expansion is seen in Joseph's classic test with Potiphar's wife. Immediate expansion is seen in Daniel's wine test.⁶

There is also a three part pattern to an integrity check which is failed: (1) the challenge to consistency with inner convictions, (2) the response to the challenge, and (3) the remedial testing. God will frequently

⁵ Conscience refers to the inner sense of right or wrong which is innate in a human being but which also is modified by values imbibed from a culture. This innate sense can also be modified by the Spirit of God. See **Article, 7. Conscience, Paul's Use of.**

⁶ See testing patterns, positive and negative, **Glossary.** See **Article, Daniel Four Positive Testing Patterns.**

repeat an integrity check until a leader gets it or will take more drastic action. Instead of remedial testing there may be discipline, or setting aside from ministry, or even death.

Conclusion

Character is crucial to leadership. Integrity is the foundational trait of character in a leader. Let me summarize some observations, principles and values suggested by the importance of integrity in a leader.

- a. Ministry flows out of being of which character is a major component and integrity the dominant necessary leadership trait within character.
- b. Leaders without character cannot be trusted and will be followed only to the extent that they have coercive power to back up their leadership claims.
- c. A leader must be conscious of what others think of him/her, character-wise. Integrity is universal and occurs in every culture as a notion. But it will take on cultural manifestations peculiar to a culture that demonstrate to those in the culture what integrity is.⁷
- d. A leader must seek to have a testimony respected by others (within the bounds of God's ministry assignments).⁸
- e. Even though the source of some character trial may be Satanic, a leader should use it to purge impure character traits and rest in God's overriding purposes through the testing.⁹
- f. A leader should recognize that character integrity checks will be used by God as foundational training for increased usefulness.¹⁰

Do the people you influence see you as deceptive or a person of integrity? Do the people outside your ministry see you as deceptive or a person of integrity? Conscience is the inner governor of character—and especially integrity. Remember Paul's challenging statement.

Because I believe in an ultimate accounting before God, I make every effort always to keep my conscience clear before God and man. Ac 24:16

⁷ For example, oath-keeping was a high value of integrity in the Hebrew O.T.

⁸ Paul repeats this notion over and over in 1Ti when advising Timothy about his consulting ministry with the Ephesian church.

⁹ Job shows us that behind the apparent things happening to us there may be an unseen spiritual source causing it (Satanic). But even where bad things happen, God can use them to shape character.

¹⁰ A basic understanding of integrity checks can aid one in recognizing much earlier and giving a godly response to them. Forewarned is forearmed.