

Integrity - Above Reproach **Matthew 5:17-20**

Story about the integrity of basketball coach, Cleveland Stroud. Coach Stroud discovered that one of his players was academically ineligible when the basketball team played a state semi-final game. From the moment he discovered the violation, he knew what he had to do. He reported the violation, forfeiting the state championship. He never even pondered any alternatives. His priorities had been set long before this. He realized that his team's championship was not as important as their character. "People forget the scores of basketball games," he said. "They don't ever forget what you're made of." Both the coach and team kept their integrity intact and gained an immeasurable amount of trust.

Ethical integrity is an indispensable attribute of a Christlike character. As important as it is to possess sound doctrine and be sound in teaching the truth of the Scriptures, it is as important to be sound in character. To be sound in character means your heart is upright and your obedience to God's moral and ethical laws are consistent.

As a Christian, your moral and ethical standards are to surpass the normal human standards that confront you every day. Matthew 5:20

Christ extended the normal interpretation of the Law which focused on external behavior, to that of the heart or inner man. Christ expects us to emulate Him. Matthew 5:48

Our goal is absolute Christlikeness, which is perfect, ethical consistency. Philippians 3:12-14

Your Reputation

You and I must be concerned about keeping a good reputation.

People are willing to forgive almost any error, negligence, or failure, but a deliberate breach of moral or ethical integrity few people will forget. The stigma of the breach is almost impossible to rise above.

If you are living amid moral and ethical failure, realize this: Every group with whom you associate will carry a tarnished reputation along with you: that includes this church.

You need to be like Zacchaeus: repent and do whatever you can to restore your reputation in the community and in this church. Until you do that, stop representing yourself as a Christian and a member of this church. You are destroying this church's reputation.

Your Character

Jesus' focus on the moral law in Matthew 5 surrounded uprightness of heart as opposed to external behavior. Your heart is the real barometer of who you are. What you think, say and do when no one else is looking and how you handle the promptings of your conscience reflect who you are. The battle to maintain your reputation starts here. Matthew 15:19

The battle for maintaining your integrity is won or lost in your mind. If you lose here, you have already ruined your character. A ruined and therefore corrupt character spoils your reputation.

Your Testimony

Your reputation reflects what people say about you. Your *testimony* is what your character, your behavior, and your words say about God. Your living testimony communicates what you believe is true about God and the Scriptures. Your unethical and immoral life is saying that you do not believe what the Scriptures say is true about God.

-You do not believe that "to do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice." (Proverbs 21:3).

-You do not believe that "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him." (Proverbs 15:8).

-You do not believe that God "delights in truth in the inward being" (Psalm 51:6).

If you do not care about your ethical and moral integrity, then you are telling a lie about God with your life and attitude. You are bearing a false witness. If you call yourself a Christian, but your life does not reflect who God is, then you are taking God's name in vain at the most basic level. You are saying that His name is not representing Him.

Christian, whenever you are tempted to modify your ethical and moral principles for the sake of convenience, remember what you heard today; it isn't worth your reputation, your character, or your testimony.