

Integrity--Designed for Dignity **Genesis 9:1-6; Psalm 8; Isaiah 58:6-12; James 3:3-12**

Most cultures throughout time have viewed the deliberate murder of another human being as a punishable crime. Why? Because of what God said in Gen. 9. God makes a distinction between animals, birds, and fish on the one hand and human beings on the other.

People have a special status in the eyes of God, for *they were created in His image - the image of God*. Therefore, it is not right to murder them, for they are like God. They have the spark of the Creator in them. Psalm 8 tells us that God has crowned all people with glory and honor.

He has designed all of us for dignity and respect, because we are like Him. He expects humanity to treat Him with glory and honor, and as Psalm 8 reminds us, He promises to treat us the same; and he expects you and me to treat others, regardless of who they are, with dignity and respect, with glory and honor.

Our integrity is not only living by moral and ethical principles, but it is also about how we view and treat other human beings. Our standard of integrity is God, and if he treats humans with dignity and respect, so should we. To fail here, is to fail in our integrity.

Our Integrity - How We View Others

Our integrity in the dignity of others starts where everything else in life starts - heart.

“Heart” is the scriptural term used to identify the inner man, which includes your character, thoughts, attitudes, desires, attributes, nature, will and the like - who you are as a person.

What happens here dictates how you view other people.

When Adam sinned, his heart was corrupted and the image of God in him was tarnished. He no longer desired to be like God, reflecting his character, but instead he wanted to be God. He wanted to be sovereign, a law to himself.

Hence, he and all his offspring were cursed - and evil, not good, ruled his heart.

One of the consequences of that action is that you and I now viewed others with contempt. You and I want to reign and rule over them. We want the right and power to judge them according to our heart, and to praise or condemn them according to that selfish, evil heart. We want to decide their worth or worthiness.

We who have been saved through faith in Jesus Christ, have the ability, and through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the desire to see people as God sees them - harassed and helpless, lost in their sin, and struggling to find dignity and respect in a world that despises them- and God has compassion on them.

What is your attitude toward people, or groups of people?

You and I hold some contempt for people because of their staunch defense of sin, and we feel compelled to confront them. And they should be confronted, but we are still to treat them with dignity and respect in our confrontation.

Our Integrity - How We Treat People

It is impossible to discuss every way that we should show dignity towards others. One area, however, that needs to be addressed surrounds anger, impatience, and harsh words.

In Matthew 6, Jesus equates anger with murder. Just as murder destroys physical life, so anger destroys the worth and dignity of the one who receives the anger. You communicate that they are a lesser being than you.

One of the ways in which our anger attacks and sometimes destroys dignity in others is in the use of our speech. James says that with the same tongue we bless God and curse people who are made in His image. You and I

have no right to use harsh or unkind words towards anyone. We have no right to denounce or curse others. You and I have no right to humiliate others with our anger.

Christ said, out of the abundance of the heart does the mouth speak. If anger is controlling your heart, it will be seen, often in your words.

The same goes for anger demonstrated through actions. Hitting, slapping, pushing, and the like out of anger humiliates the other and destroys their dignity. You are not respecting them.

You are telling them that they are inferior to you. You have made yourself God. God respects all people, but he is not a respecter of people. He shows no favoritism as we understand favoritism.

Remember that the one with whom we are angry is made in the image of God, perhaps we would be able, with patience, calmness, and humility, bringing reconciliation to the relationship. We are to build people with our speech. We are to be gentle and kind, slow to speak and quick to listen. We are to be moved with compassion for the other person.

If you struggle with this, there is hope. First, admit your sin to the one you have offended and ask for forgiveness. Then ask Christ for forgiveness and for transformation.

We can also show dignity and respect by helping those who cannot help themselves. In Isaiah 58, God is tired of His people's hypocritical worship, for they are more concerned about putting on a good front, then they are about a pure and right relationship with God and with others. God tells them that if they want His presence and blessing, then their individual and corporate lifestyle must be one of selfless living.

Your actions reflect what is in your heart. If you are more concerned about doing things the right way when you come to worship (looking good) then you are about what or who you worship, then you will never find God, nor will you be blessed.

Your actions outside of worship show who is on the throne of your heart. If you want to honor people in an important way, do the little things and help meet their basic needs.

Our Integrity - When Dignity is Threatened

If you live in a situation where your dignity is threatened every day, I have this to say to you.

First, you need to confront the individual or individuals who are attacking your dignity. You either need to do this yourself or someone else needs to help you do it. You cannot remain in this situation.

For those of you who know that someone is being treated in a less than dignified manner, you need to speak up. Be proactive! Be involved in that person's life and even in a smaller way with organizations that are working to restore dignity to the weak and helpless.

All of us must realize that we live on a social island. We interact everyday directly or indirectly with people. Whatever the circumstances and nature of the interaction, let us seek to treat all people with dignity and respect, recognizing that every human being has been created in the image of God. Galatians 6:10