



Course Name: The Integrity of Shepherds/Elders

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Course description:

Of all the traits needed for leadership, integrity is one of the foremost. In this lesson, you will discuss the meaning of integrity as well as digging into how integrity factors into the role of every elder/shepherd. The course will also discuss several qualities that make up the character of a leader under the umbrella of integrity.

Course Objectives: By the end of this class students will have...

- A. Defined integrity both in your own words and as found in scripture.
- B. Discussed and considered how integrity plays a part of the shepherd's role.
- C. Examined various qualities that characterize integrity for a shepherd.

Outline of the class:

- A. During the first few minutes of the class divide the class into groups of three or four. Then ask each table to take 15-20 minutes to discuss the following.
 1. How would you define "integrity" in your own words?
 2. Make a list of specific characteristics that fall in line with the concepts of integrity as you have defined it.
- B. What is "integrity?"
 1. Integrity is often defined in numerous ways, often depending on the individual and situation.
 - a. Terms often associated with integrity include honesty, fairness, complete, or whole.
 - b. One of the most common definitions is "to do the right thing when no one is watching, even if it costs you something."
 2. Titus 2:7-8 "Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us."
 3. The term *aphthoria* occurs only once in the New Testament. Its basic meaning is "soundness." It refers to not being corrupted. In the context of Titus 2:7-8, teaching that is not tainted by falsehood or by impure motives. It is related to "dignity" and "Sound speech" that is above reproach.

4. Applied to elders/shepherds, integrity means maintaining a high level of honesty and uprightness in relating to the church.
- C. The importance of Integrity
1. To have the trust and support of the church, integrity must be protected at all costs, since without it, you cannot effectively lead. *Credibility with the congregation depends on integrity and cannot exist without it.*
 2. A lack of integrity will inevitably erode the confidence of the church in its leaders and reduce their effectiveness, possibly even lead to disunity or division.
 3. Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 – If you expect people to submit to your spiritual leadership, it is imperative that they be able to trust you. Integrity means consistently demonstrating that they can. (See John 10 – Sheep follow the shepherd because they know – and trust – his voice.) *No one deserves to be trusted simply because of a title.*
 4. Some of the qualifications for elders assume integrity: “above reproach,” “sober-minded,” “well thought of by outsiders,” “upright,” etc.
 5. Once lost, integrity with a congregation is difficult to regain.
- D. How to Maintain Integrity
1. *Humility*
 - a. 1 Peter 5:1-3 The “flock” belongs to God, not to the elders, who serve under the direction of and are answerable to Jesus, the “Chief Shepherd.” Never forget your subordinate role in leading God’s people.
 - b. Authority arises out of *example*, not out of position or title.
 2. *Transparency*
 - a. Give reasons for major decisions concerning the direction of the church, matters that affect the entire congregation, significant changes, etc. Closed-door meetings and major decisions without explanations breed suspicion.
 - b. In financial matters, see to it that a careful accounting is provided to the church (See Paul’s example in 1 Corinthians 16:4; 2 Corinthians 8:16-21).
 - c. Always demonstrate a willingness to meet with those who request it, and to answer all questions openly and honestly, *unless confidentiality forbids it* (see below).
 3. *Consistency*
 - a. Always do what you say you will do. If you cannot do it, go back to the church and explain why, but never assume you can just change course without explanation, to avoid the appearance of just doing whatever you want for reasons unstated.
 - b. To do otherwise will result in suspicion regarding your motives.

4. Confidentiality

- a. Members must be confident what when they discuss something with a shepherd, or with the group, it goes no further, unless it is specifically stated that it can be repeated.
- b. Failure to maintain confidentiality suggests a lack of trustworthiness. Members can feel (and will be) betrayed if personal matters are not kept confidential.
- c. There should be agreement among the elders about sharing sensitive information even with their wives and friends, plus it avoids any accidental betrayal of confidential information.
- d. Maintain a careful balance between Transparency and Confidentiality. Example: In cases of possible disciplinary action. Jesus' instructions (Matthew 18:15-18) suggest keeping the number involved as small as possible, until it reaches the stage of "telling it to the church." But at some point, the church will have to know the reason for the action.
- e. Note: Sometimes people will ask you to keep things confidential that you cannot. Examples: Criminal activity, child or spousal abuse, information that could be harmful to others if withheld, etc. It is best to tell them up front, before the discussion goes further, that this cannot be kept in strict confidence. *Be careful about allowing people to bind you to silence before you know the topic.*
- f. Refuse to listen to negative information from one member about another unless the person being discussed is also brought into the conversation (Matthew 18:15). Beware of people conveying negative information saying, "You need to know this so you can be praying." This is often a way of spreading gossip under the pious guise, and like all gossip, it is sinful both to tell it (Romans 1:29-30; 2 Corinthians 12:20; 1 Timothy 5:13; Proverbs 26:20) and to listen to it (Proverbs 17:4). All Christians should be diligent to avoid being involved in gossip – elders, doubly so. If you allow this to happen, your integrity goes out the window!

5. Service

- a. Avoid thinking that elders are "executives" who make decisions and plan work for others to carry out (Matthew 20:20-28).
- b. Failure to participate in the work you have planned for the congregation suggests a gap between what you say and what you do – i.e., lack of integrity.
- c. You gain respect more from what you do than from what you say (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Conclusion:

- A. Integrity is essential in the role of elders/shepherds. Every leader needs to understand the meaning of integrity and how it factors into their personal and professional life as a leader.
- B. Elders/shepherds are the same. Shepherds need to know each of the five areas that are beginning points for integrity: *Humility, Transparency, Consistency, Confidentiality, and Service*. There are obviously additional areas that could be added, but these are a good foundation for understanding what integrity looks like for a leader.
- C. Take a few minutes each day this week to focus on praying about each of these five areas. Then, each day focus on how to improve in one of these areas, for example: Monday, focus on improving humility, Tuesday, focus on transparency, etc. Before long, these will become second nature in your life and leadership.