

# Body of Christ: Integrity of Stance

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 22:24-34; John 10:27-38; Acts 7:49-60

Integrity is a word that seems lost in current society. We are too comfortable with political “spin” and “cover-up” to reclaim speech and living that reflect integrity. What does integrity mean? IMB leadership told me integrity means different things to different people. Integrity is supposed to refer to wholeness that results from the relationship between honesty and upright character. It is being true to one’s beliefs in word and deed. Is that no longer possible?



Micaiah stood for something. His deeds matched his words. He lived in accordance with his convictions. He did not allow the discomfort of opposition to silence him. He lived a life that confessed his beliefs and convictions. He did not go around pointing fingers at all who were in disagreement with him, but he was known for the purity of his stance. He spoke in accordance with his convictions; he also lived according to them. He trusted the validity of his convictions and built his life upon them.

His faith was real. It was true. His confidence in God was more than words to place on paper or to fill the air. His convictions were the basis of his actions. They expressed themselves in the decisions he made. He stood steadfastly for *Yahweh* in the midst of great pressure to conform to what everyone else was saying. The king’s words show that this was a constant for Micaiah, not a one-time thing.

Micaiah was a model for integrity. His beliefs, actions, and words were in harmony. He truly lived and believed what he said. He was the same person through and through. He would not bottle God up, neither would he use God-talk to advance his own agenda. As a whole, His life had meaning. He was what we might call a hero, for he lived faith as we profess it ought to be lived. His words, his beliefs, and his actions were of one accord.

Jesus spoke with integrity about God’s character and identity. He did not adapt his words or deeds to conform to what people wanted to hear. He did not allow social pressure to dictate what he said or did. He stood for what he believed; He taught what he believed; and He matched the truth of His words with the actions he took.

He forced no one to conform to His teaching and beliefs, yet He spoke with conviction and lived in accordance with the teaching on His lips. He challenged others to measure His words and actions and search their own actions, motives, and attitudes. He spoke of being one with the Father. His actions portrayed that unity and purity of heart. He called others to assess His words on the basis of His actions and their relationship to the teachings that He set forth. He expected them to measure the integrity of His teaching by the consistency of His living.

He met resistance along the way. His audience picked up stones one more than one occasion to stone Jesus for teachings they could not accept. They could not comprehend the things He said, but they could not find contradiction in the way he taught and the way he lived. The intimacy that He shared with the Father flowed naturally into His words, for it was real.

Stephen was a man of integrity and faith. He stood for what he believed and spoke honestly of his faith in Christ Jesus. It cost him his life. We call him a martyr, since he died professing his faith in Christ. We tend to overlook that the term “martyr” really means “witness.” It would seem that using the term martyr helps us distance ourselves from using Stephen as an example for our own lives.

We don't want to be martyrs, for we are just not sure that faith is something that we are to die for. Oh, we proclaim that faith is real. We can easily speak of God's love, grace, peace, and comfort. We can wonder how someone could live their lives and face the stresses of cancer, death, separation, and pain without a firm relationship with God. We are just not sure about suffering or dying for the faith we profess.

Hear a few words from Zimbabwe:

I'm a part of the fellowship of the unashamed. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of His and I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed. My present makes sense. My future is secure. I'm done and finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, or first, or tops, or recognized, or praised, or rewarded. I live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by Holy Spirit power.

My face is set. My gait is fast. My goal is heaven. My road may be narrow, my way rough, my companions few, but my guide is reliable and my mission is clear. I will not be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice or hesitate in the presence of the adversary. I will not negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, or let up until I have stayed up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He comes. And when He does come for His own, He'll have no problems recognizing me. My colors will be clear!

The young African pastor who wrote those words was killed for the faith he lived and professed. These were words of integrity—wholeness. His was a full commitment to serve God. Faith was real to him, and it flowed naturally through his words and actions. He was a man of true integrity.

Will we allow integrity to take root in our lives? Do we have the moral courage to make our faith real? When faith is real, it cannot be hid. If it is not real, it is worthless.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*