

Marks of an Excellent Shepherd: Integrity

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:2

Code: B130313

Integrity is a nonnegotiable characteristic of a true shepherd of the flock of God. If he is going to lead biblically, he must do so without dishonesty, deception, or duplicity. His character must be consistent, his motivations pure, and his conscience clear.

The apostle Paul understood that integrity is vital for godly shepherds and he repeatedly testified to his own honesty, often confirmed by his clear conscience. To the Romans he wrote, “I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 9:1). He assured the Galatians, “(Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying)” (Galatians 1:20). To Timothy he wrote, “For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth” (1 Timothy 2:7).

When his character was under attack from false apostles who had infiltrated the Corinthian church, Paul did not shy away from defending himself, declaring, “For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you” (2 Corinthians 1:12). The Corinthian believers knew Paul, and they had no good reason to doubt his integrity.

Not only did the claims of the false apostles contradict Paul’s character, they simply didn’t make any sense. If Paul was plotting to defraud the Corinthians, as the false teachers charged, the point of his plot was not immediately obvious. As we’ve already noted previously in this series, he took nothing from them. The idea that he would run a scam that netted him nothing was absurd, and Paul rebuked the Corinthians once again for their naiveté, writing sarcastically, “Nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit” (2 Corinthians 12:16). That was, no doubt, what the false apostles were saying about him.

There wasn’t a hint of corruption in Paul’s ministry—no troubling dots to connect, and no lingering questions that demanded answers. The utter absence of the seeds of scandal in Paul’s character further testifies to his integrity. The conspiracy theory the false apostles concocted rested heavily on the Corinthians’ gullibility and lack of discernment because there wasn’t anything in Paul’s ministry to support their claims.

To get around the glaringly obvious difficulty that Paul had not taken any money from the Corinthians, the false teachers insisted that he had not yet sprung his trap. Paul had already described in detail the collection he was taking for the poor saints at Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8 and 9). That, according to the false apostles, was the point of Paul’s scheme; the money that was collected at Corinth would never reach Jerusalem. Instead, they claimed, it would go to line Paul’s pockets.

After all, that is what they would have done if they were in his place. The false apostles projected their own greedy attitude onto Paul and assumed that he was acting as they would have. They

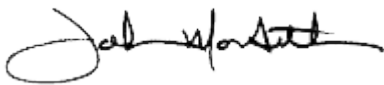
inadvertently exposed the corruption of their own hearts, exemplifying the truth that “to the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled” (Titus 1:15).

In his own defense, Paul needed only to remind the Corinthians of the facts—that other brothers, whose godly character the Corinthians knew well, had also helped with the collection for the Jerusalem church, and they would have had to be complicit in the deception as well (2 Corinthians 8:16-24). Their godly reputations confirmed Paul’s integrity and condemned the false apostles as liars.

An essential goal for any spiritual leader is to gain people’s trust through genuine integrity. Just as with Paul, a leader’s conduct must be trustworthy and consistent with his words. But once a leader proves to be hypocritical in any area of ministry, no matter how seemingly insignificant, he loses everything he has labored for in ministry and sees his credibility destroyed.

But integrity isn’t just vital for shepherds. In a world that’s eagerly looking to call into question and destroy the credibility of God’s Word, as believers we need to diligently guard our own reputations. We need to lead faithful, consistent lives, knowing that our conduct is a testimony to the truth of Scripture—often far stronger than any verbal testimony we can offer. How we live and behave shapes the reputation of the Lord and His truth in the eyes of the world. What does your character say about the transforming work of the Lord in your life?

We need to commit ourselves to living lives marked by integrity and honesty, and join Paul in renouncing “the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the Word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2).



(Adapted from [2 Corinthians: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#).)

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