

***“Hold Fast to Integrity”***

In his book, *Spirits that Dwell in Deep Woods*, Wyatt Tee Walker lifts up these words from an old spiritual, “Something on the inside working on the outside, I feel a change in my life...Love on the inside, working on the outside; I feel a change in my life...Holy Ghost on the inside, working on the outside, I feel a change in my life.” It is evident that what those souls were declaring from those deep woods, is that every changed life begins within, and works to regulate outward conduct. The dynamic at work in the inner being is the Spirit of Christ.

This is the essence of Apostle Paul’s eloquent prayer to the believers in the church in Ephesus. It is a prayer which stands at the intersection of reflection on what God has done, the church’s obedient discipleship in God’s world, and a steadfastness in the faith that binds us together with all the saints. The prayer stands holy and effective for believers today, and every generation to come until Jesus returns in glory.

The text makes it very clear that our changing and the living do not flow from our will; but is an energy, a gift of God flowing from the Spirit. As disciples of every time and place continue in a joyous, daily indwelling relationship with the living Christ, “integrity of the soul” sets in and we experience the “glorious riches from God which strengthen us with power to be rooted and grounded in God’s perfect love.” Out of this at-oneness, we manifest the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, faith, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, temperance. As faith seeds continue to take root, and as we become firmly established in the soil of God’s purpose, we begin to grasp the extravagant love dimensions to which God has gone to secure our hearts in integrity. Strengthened with power through the Spirit in our inner being, Christ dwells in our hearts through faith, and we mature to comprehend the love of God which is beyond all human knowledge. Then we can, as Eugene Peterson says in *The Message*, “Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.” Now that, sisters and brothers, is worth some “Hallelujah!” praise.

Earlier, we made reference to “integrity of the soul.” What is it? “Integrity of the soul” is the key to our life before God, and is therefore vital to our faith. The word “integrity” comes from the Greek word *integre*,

which means wholeness and completeness. For the Christian, integrity is being whole and complete because there is a heart for God which directs what we do before God. It means we are absorbed in one single, exclusive thought and passion - God. It is moral soundness, especially as it is revealed in dealings that test our steadfastness to truth, trust, purpose, or responsibility. Integrity determines what we do when we think no human being is looking...because we know that God is always watching. It is choosing rightly between what we *ought to do* and what we *want to do*. Integrity defines our life before God...rooted and established in Christ, and nurtured in the Holy Spirit. Pastor Robert Craig says, integrity is not, "being splintered by double-mindedness, or compromised, or eroded by personal dishonesty with ourselves! Integrity is that which keeps the heart soft, sensitive, responsive, and in absolute honesty with God and ourselves." It is taking God so seriously that the mystery of Christ's indwelling through faith consecrates every action every second of our lives. Integrity is essential to assure that *who we say we are* in Christ is *who we really are* in Christ. It indicates whether we meant it when we said, "You can have all this world; but give me Jesus."

Integrity is evidently what was lacking in the lives of some followers when in Matthew 7:23, Jesus said, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoer.'" So, "Whatever we do, in word or deed, let us do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Colossians 3:17).

Walking in wholeness of heart, having a heart for God alone, and desiring to be complete in Christ is a choice. God will not/cannot force faithful discipleship. God chooses to call us in love to Himself. We must then choose to follow with wholeness of heart. And the choice must be complete because faith/Christianity does not come by osmosis. Just as sitting in a chicken-house does not make me a chicken, being in church on Sunday, and doing deeds of religion do not mean I walk in the integrity of a Christ-surrendered life. My life, my deeds, my all must be God-love driven.

Will we fail at times? Absolutely! Although King David did some very unwise and sinful things in his lifetime, this is how Scripture records the **whole** of his life, "God chose His servant David, and took him from the sheepfolds; from tending the nursing ewes He brought him to be the shepherd of His people Jacob, of Israel His inheritance. With upright heart he tended them, and guided them with skillful hand."

Beloved in the Lord, it is God's pleasure to reveal the mystery, the fullness and riches of His grace in Jesus the Christ. May we never relegate Him to a cupboard in the cellar, or desire to feel His presence only an hour on Sunday morning. Let us daily open our hearts wide to the perfect love that becomes something on the inside working on the outside our whole life long. Then, when we come to a crossroad where integrity is at stake, we have God-power to take the road of righteousness, the road Robert Frost defined as "the one less traveled." It is better to walk in the Spirit of Christ and maintain integrity, than to try to recover it. Oh, it will cost us to do the right thing; but it will cost us more in the end when we abandon our Lord to do the wrong thing.

The marvelous, holy mystery of God, the Father from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name," is that He is the God who promises, "When you seek Me, you shall find Me if you search with all your heart. For I know the plans I have for you: plans of welfare, not of evil; plans of hope and a future. I will bring you out of bondage, I will bring you home to Me."

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever (and ever)! Amen.