

Integrity – Romans 10.5-15

Growing Community - Talk 4

Introduction

Recap of Series

- This term we have been looking at 'Growing Community' – the characteristics a community which is centred on Jesus from Paul's letter to the Romans.
- We have looked at Identity – the importance of knowing who we are, Commitment – being a group utterly committed to each other, and Hope – people who never give up because we are full of hope.
- This evening we are going to be looking at the subject of Integrity.

The Nature of Integrity

- What is integrity?
- The *Oxford Dictionary* describes Integrity as 'the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles'; 'the state of being whole and undivided'; 'internal consistency'.
- It means being consistent: inwardly and outwardly the same person.
- It means being genuine and honest.
- It means not faking it, being trustworthy and upright.

The Importance of Integrity

- Integrity is so important.
- We live in a society where there is a breakdown in trust. A recent MORI poll showed that 70% of people expect politician and those in government to not tell the truth, and even more expect journalists to lie.
- But integrity is vital for a community to flourish.
- All relationships – marriage, friendship, relationships within work - are built on trust.
- When Moses went to his father in law, Jethro for advice about how to lead the Israelites, Jethro advised him to delegate 'to men of integrity.'
- The book of Proverbs says that those with integrity make better decisions.
- Having integrity is better than having wealth. In Proverbs it says, 'Better is the poor man who walks in his integrity, than he who is crooked, though he is rich.'

- It is the basis of good leadership. Dwight Eisenhower, the leader of the Allied forces during the second world war, and later President of the United States, said, 'The supreme quality of leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it no real success is possible, whether it is on the football field, in the army or in an office.'
- And most importantly, integrity pleases God. David says, 'I know my God that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity.'
- If we want to be a healthy and effective community we are going to need integrity, and this will mean doing three things: keeping it real, keeping it simple, and keeping it equal.
- These are the three things that Paul encourages the community in Rome to do in Romans 10.5-15.

1. Keeping it real

- The first key to integrity is keeping it real.
- We find the key to integrity in verse 9:
'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'
- Being a Christian means confessing what we believe, and believing what we confess.
- This is the key to integrity – where what we say matches what we believe.
- Having integrity is about our words matching our hearts.
- It means living without pretence, without faking it.
- It means being inwardly and outwardly the same; having no difference between our front-stage and our back-stage.
- It means saying when we mess up, when we struggle with things, when we don't understand.
- It means having our lives, our words and our hearts all aligned.
- It means being authentic; it means keeping it real.
- It means being the same in our private lives and our public lives.

Believing what we Confess

- Having integrity means ensuring that we are not just a Christian outwardly.
- Being a Christian is not about just going to church, singing the songs, saying the right things. It is about our hearts.

- One of the groups that Jesus used to attack were the hypocrites: those who confessed with their mouths, but didn't believe in their hearts.
- And yet we all find ourselves hiding things we're ashamed of, pretending to be better or more intelligent, or more popular than we are.

(Personal example of saying things which don't match what is really going on). E. g. At university I had a tutor who was very clever and very philosophical and he would say things to me like, 'The number two does not exist' or that it is philosophically possible for a cat to scratch a tree without being physically present at the tree. I would ask him to explain a couple of times and then I found myself pretending I understood.

- But integrity means making sure that the outward appearance is matched with our inner life – that we are not just saying things, but believing them.

Confessing what we Believe

- But being a Christian is not just about being one inwardly.
- For some people being a Christian is something purely inward – no-one knows that they are a Christian. It is completely private.
- But we need not only to believe with our hearts, we also need to confess with our mouths.
- Being a Christian with integrity means being one publically as well as privately.
- It has to be confessed as well as believed.
- We lack integrity if we pretend not to believe something when we do.

(Personal example of not confessing what we believe) E. g. I really like agreeing with people, and don't like to say anything too controversial, so I find it really hard to say what I believe when I know that someone will disagree. Many people feel very strongly that the new Star Wars films are rubbish compared to the originals, but I actually prefer the new ones – but I often don't confess this publically.

- Having integrity as a Christian means both confessing what we believe and believing what we confess.
- If we confess what we don't believe we are hypocrites, and if we believe but don't confess, we are cowards.
- We need to do both – to ensure that our outsides match our insides.

2. Keeping it Simple

- The second way that we grow in integrity as Christians is by keeping it simple.

Deuteronomy 30

- Paul starts this section (verses 5-8) by quoting from Deuteronomy 30.
- It's quite hard to understand these verses without looking at what Moses was saying in the Deuteronomy 30 as a whole.
- The Israelites are about to enter the promised land, and Moses has just spent about 25 chapters reminding the Israelites of what the Law is.
- Then in chapter 30 he tells them that despite the fact that it has taken 25 chapters to go through, the law is really quite simple.
- He says this:

'What I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it.'

- Moses is saying that it's simple really, so don't overcomplicate it.

It's simple

- Here Paul makes the same point that Moses has made.
- We have just had nine chapters of complicated teaching about what Jesus has achieved through his death and resurrection.
- But now he says, 'Don't over complicate things. It's actually very simple.'
- He is saying that 'the righteousness that is by faith' - which means having a life lived in relationship with God - is very straightforward.
- It is simply this: verse 9:

'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

Simple faith

- Having integrity as a Christian means keeping your faith really simple.
- It means being undivided and uncomplicated. It means being the same all the way through us.
- It means having our whole lives under the lordship of Jesus.
- John Stott put it like this: 'When Jesus is Lord of our beliefs, opinions, ambitions, standards, values and lifestyle, then we are integrated

Christians; then integrity marks our life. Only when he is Lord do we become whole.'

- We need to keep it simple, but not simplistic.
- It is important to grow in understanding and learning.
- But we shouldn't complicate our faith.
- Karl Barth, one of the 2 or 3 greatest theologians of the twentieth century, was once asked, 'What is the most profound theological insight of your career?' He replied, 'Jesus loves me, this I know, 'cos the Bible tells me so.' Despite being the most brilliant theologian, he kept his faith simple.

Integrity and Simplicity

- If you want to have integrity then keep it simple.
- Be simple in your character.
- Say what you mean and mean what you say.
- Jesus tells his disciples not to swear oaths, but *simply* to let their 'yes' be their 'yes', and their 'no' be their 'no'.

God and Simplicity

- God himself is simple.
- One of the attributes of God which theologians talk about is his simplicity.
- God is what he is.
- When Moses asks God what his name is, he replies, 'I am who I am.'
- He is the model of simplicity – someone who is who is he is.
- He is undivided and uncomplicated; he says what he means.
- And we need to do the same.

3. Keep it Equal

- So integrity means keeping it real, keeping it simple and thirdly, having integrity means keeping it equal.
- Paul writes, verse 12, 'For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who come to him.'
- God treats all people equally, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, men or women, young or old.
- This makes Christianity a source of equality for it teaches that every single person is equally in need of a saviour, and every single person is equally able to be saved.

Equality and Integrity

- God treats us equally, and having integrity means treating other people equally.
- Integrity is ensuring that we don't live lives in compartments, being one thing to one person, and another to others – being one person at church and another at work; one person with friends and another with family.
- Having integrity is about being the same in every area of life, undivided and consistent.

(Personal example of treating different people differently) E. g. I used to work in a shop which sold fitness equipment, and it was all quite expensive so we tended to sell only to people who were reasonably rich. Once a guy came in wearing a tracksuit and asked how much one of our large weights machines cost. It looked a little out of his range, so I just said, 'It's very expensive' and wasn't very helpful. He left and came back a few minutes later with his wife, Davina MacCall, and I realised I should have treated him like everyone else who came in.

My brother worked at the same shop, and once a guy came in who looked a bit like he was living on the streets and he said he needed to go to the loo. My brother took him out through the office at the back to the loo, and then treated him with the same respect and interest that he did everyone, talking to him about the fitness equipment in the shop. He ended up buying about five pieces of equipment which we delivered to his large country house. His name turned out to be Richard Ashcroft, lead singer of The Verve in the 1990s and successful solo artist since.

- Having integrity is about treating people the same, whether they are rich or poor, famous, homeless, attractive or irritating.

Conclusion: Don't keep it to yourself

- So integrity is about keeping it real, ensuring that our hearts are in line with how we appear, keeping it simple, being straightforward in our faith, and keeping it equal, treating all people the same no matter who they are.
- This kind of integrity is the key to the spread of Christianity.

Evangelism and Integrity

- Paul finishes this section by talking about the necessity of evangelism – telling people about the good news of Jesus.
- He asks, 'How will anyone ever know about Jesus unless we tell them?'

- And the key to telling people about Jesus is integrity.
- The way to make sure that evangelism is not forced or unnatural is to do it with integrity.

(Personal Example) A few years ago I went to work in a school in New Zealand. I had just been in Hong Kong, living and working with drug addicts and members of the triad gangs who had become Christians and come off drugs through praying for them. Evangelism was very natural in that context because all I had to do was wait till people asked me what I had been doing before, and then I told them.

- Evangelism should be done with integrity.
- We don't need to pretend that we know more than we do.
- We don't need to pretend that we have the answers for everything.
- We can say we don't know or we don't understand things.
- We don't have to pretend that we are better people than we are, that we don't struggle with things, or mess up, or have things about which we are ashamed.
- All we have to do is ask people to come and see what we do.
- Evangelism is simply about sharing our lives with other people – telling them what Jesus has done for us, and inviting them to come and see.
- It is about being transparent with those around us, treating people equally, and being consistent in every area of our lives.
- This has an effect on those around us.

E. g. I have some friends, called Harriet and Shaun who had a nanny who lived with them for a while, and this girl was so impressed by the couple – because of the integrity of their lives that she longed to know what was behind it, and she did Alpha and became a Christian. All they did was share their lives with her and be themselves. This is the effect of lives lived with integrity – it changes the lives of those around us.