

By Oliver Kisaka Simiyu

When a team of warriors from the Pastoralist communities in Africa raids a neighboring tribe and steals their livestock, the raiders consider it heroic. To them all livestock is theirs, they have only taken it back. To tell members of such a group that they have stolen takes a long time of teaching and explanation. Africans are raised as part of communities. Each one belongs not just to a family, but also to a clan and hence a community. That community is completely ordered to cover the whole life of an individual from birth to death. The members of the specific communities are said to be faithful when they obey what the clan requires of them. When one person gets a job, the whole community rejoices because it is their job and they plan to benefit from it. Integrity may therefore not be an easy thing to evaluate in Africa. It is now almost internationally claimed Africans cannot be trusted. The word of an African must be verified through tests of different sorts. The embassies of Western countries and the USA have now intensified the process of scrutiny for all Africans who wish to travel to their countries. They have, in addition to such a process, also levied visa fees upon acceptance.

The apparent lack of ability by the African Church to correct this situation makes it worse. Africans view this differently. They consider themselves victims of circumstances, never having been allowed to be themselves. They see the situation in Africa as caused by others who have left them with no option but to try different options to live. If their simple statements are not accepted and they are very interested in something, the temptation to look for an alternative becomes very high. Is it only Africans who struggle with the demands of integrity? Are there human beings on earth who are never tempted to hypocrisy? We must all seek integrity.

The Meaning of Integrity

The Longman Dictionary of Contem-

porary English defines integrity as "strength and firmness of character or principle, honesty and trustworthiness." A second meaning is "a state of being whole and undivided, that is completeness."

Integrity is the character quality of a person who demonstrates consistency in good character, someone who has been observed over a long time and can be trusted to remain so. Honesty and trustworthiness means one speaks the truth even when it hurts and without exaggeration, the qualities of a true and faithful witness. One can see what the dictionary attempts to capture when it brings in the question of wholesomeness and completeness. The idea is that the person who will consistently exhibit these qualities is one whose life is in some way under control. Such a person is not fearful, disturbed or anxious. His/her approach to life is one of truthfulness rather than personal convenience.

When such an explanation is given, the immediate questions that follow are: "Who can claim integrity?" and "How can one become a person of integrity?" Jeremiah long ago revealed the true nature of the human heart when he wrote, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?*" (Jeremiah 17:9). Jeremiah looks all humans in the eye and asks: "supposing there was no external agent to enforce law, would people remain trustworthy? Would drivers keep speed limits on the roads? Would individuals pay full taxes?" According to God's word, no human being can on his/her own claim integrity because all hearts, without exception, are corrupt.

Integrity Begins with Christ

While external agents cause people to comply with civil law, only Jesus Christ can change the heart of a human being and enable the development of integrity. Integrity as all people know and desire it begins with a wholesome approach to life. Humanity's complete being—spirit, soul and heart—need to

be in harmony. Paul said of Jesus Christ, "He is before all things and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 3:17).

George Fox was a man troubled much in his heart. He searched among priests and professors of the gospel and wrote, "And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,' and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy." Fox became a follower of Christ.

George Fox was little known before 1647, but once Christ came into his life, Fox began to preach and to stand against all manner of wickedness. Once the internal troubles of his heart were sorted out, he was ready to face the outside. A heart change that comes by committing one's life to Christ becomes the only sure foundation for integrity that is above community laws.

Integrity Is Sustained by Prayer and the Word of God

Integrity is consistency, honesty, trustworthiness, dependability and wholesomeness. These character qualities develop in all Christians who walk in obedience to Christ. Quakers are known to be Christians who walk by the Spirit of God. Some have tended to imagine it is possible to walk by the Spirit without the word of God as written in the Bible. Jesus taught His disciples, "It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life" (John 6:63).

When Christians read the Bible prayerfully, God makes the written word come alive in their hearts to feed them spiritually and give them strength to face each new day. Prayer, even intense prayer

such as the early Quakers knew it, yields individuals so involved to the leading and service of God. Their faith is greatly strengthened for whatever circumstances they face. Such Christians will stand on the truth even in the face of adversity.

This single point set the Religious Society of Friends on a downward trend—when we stopped teaching God's word actively. Pastors may be as dry as those that could not help Fox in his search for truth. We must restore the spiritual teaching of God's word in the Quaker churches if we wish to see spiritual growth and a great commitment to integrity. Without it, church is a social club and not a congregation of the spiritual body of Christ. The word of God must once again be taught clearly.

Integrity Is Exhibited by Words and Actions

A Christian walks with integrity when spoken words and actions match. Indeed, what one says reveals whether the person walks in humility or in arrogance. A man or woman of integrity does not think of him/herself more highly than is the case. He/she has a proper estimate of self, is not ashamed of simplicity and so does not steal, bribe or defraud to acquire anything on earth. God will faithfully provide all that is needed at the right time.

A Christian of integrity has no need to impress anyone and so does not make promises that he or she cannot keep.

Such a Christian has no need to support what he says with an oath or by swearing. If someone will not believe his/her simple word, that person will not believe it even if it is supported by an oath.

In Africa, regard for persons has sometimes undermined truth and integrity. Africans avoid embarrassing people, especially if the people are their seniors or elders. Africans tend to be event oriented, rather than budget or time oriented. To call anyone to account is seen as an expression of disrespect rather than one of accountability.

Integrity Begins with Small Matters

Many are agreed that integrity is best tested in money matters and with little money at that. Anyone who cannot be trusted with little money will not do well with large amounts. Christians must practice integrity even in the smallest of issues. Only this will enable them to grow in the character quality of integrity.

This calls for Africans [and everyone] to learn to account for everything.

Integrity is a character quality sought by few. To retain integrity in a world like ours needs men and women who will choose to honor God in their lives, people who seek the Lord's strength in prayer, obey His word as they read it,

stand for truth in church and society, share the gospel of Christ and be part of an accountability fellowship. **Q**

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