

For the Love of the Family Ministries
Missionaries to America's Forgotten Mission Field, the Family
The Difference Between Character and Integrity
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There has been a lot of talk about character recently in our country. Character has not been taught for a couple of generations. I recently happened to be in a public school and there were signs up all over the building saying "Character Counts". There were also several other signs referring to different aspects of character.

One of my great concerns has been, why do so many children who grow up in independent-fundamental Baptist homes not end up serving God? The statistics are staggering and the grief, pain, and agony is great for the parents, children, pastors, churches, and others. Many pastors' children do not end up living for God. Many leaders reluctantly say, "They chose not to live for God" with the look of pain and confusion. Folks, it goes a lot deeper than "they just chose not to live for God". In the work that Kim and I have done through For the Love of the Family, I have stated one of the big reasons children choose not to live for the Lord is ungodly anger in the Christian home, Ephesians 4:31, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice." Many Christians discipline their children in anger and expect God's work to be done in their heart. The Bible is plain, that this will fail. "He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail." Proverbs 22:8. Where does ungodly anger come from? Pride. "Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath." Proverbs 21:24.

There is another aspect which greatly affects our lives and our children's lives. That is the matter of integrity and character. These two words are used pretty much interchangeably in the Bible. However, there is a difference. Character is the foundation of trust. Character has been defined as one's total personality. The Bible gives us several character traits. I have identified several different character traits the Bible teaches. The difference between integrity and character is that integrity is character in the heart. Folks that is one of the reasons that many children which grow up in a Christian home fail to live for the Lord.

The devil, "walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour," I Peter 5:8. The devil is neither omniscient nor omnipresent, but he is a good judge of character. He will look at the character weaknesses in our lives to see where he can do his work, which is to "steal, kill, and destroy", John 10:9-10. Folks, our character and integrity are our destiny. Every spiritual issue

is a heart issue, we must “do the will of God from the heart”, Ephesians 6:6.

Many children grow up in a Christian home and they are taught to dress a certain way, act a certain way, say “yes sir” and “no sir”, etc. Those things are all well and good, but this outward show is in no way a guarantee that the child will grow up to live for and serve the Savior. The things mentioned above are areas of character, but we can train in character and the child still not live for God. The key is integrity. Many parents, who desperately want their children to live for God, have gone to great lengths to train in character. In the end the parents are greatly disappointed and disillusioned because their child has not lived for God after they have worked to try to get them to do so. Remember, integrity is character in the heart. Integrity must be held in the heart. Job 2:3, ...”and still he holdeth fast his integrity”. Job 27:5-6, “God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me. My righteousness I hold (did you notice who holds it) and will not let go: My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.” Proverbs 11:3, “The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.” Psalm 26:1 “Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity.” Psalm 7:8, Psalm 41:12, Proverbs 19:1.

Folks, integrity is not just what people see, integrity is what you are. How can a person hold on to integrity? Only in the heart. If it is not in the heart, then your child will bend in any direction. Many good parents and leaders have missed the point. They believe that we must teach character, but there is a lack of understanding of what integrity is. I realize we have homes that are at different levels. You have homes where there is no character being taught. You also have homes where people are trying to teach some basic character and lastly you have homes that are strictly adhering to trying to teach character. Listen carefully; if character is not in the heart, it is always up for grabs! The devil knows this and is deceptive. Many of God’s people have missed the point. Notice that there is a promise from God on this matter of integrity. Proverbs 20:7, “The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.” So, the blessing of our children is tied to our integrity.

Our testimony is affected by our character and our integrity. What is the ultimate goal of our life Biblically? To glorify God, I Corinthians 6:19-20. If integrity is not in the heart we will never glorify God. God wants to change our life to glorify Him. When we get saved, we become a new creature in Christ, II Corinthians 5:17. Most of us, when we get saved, have come from a habit lifestyle that has been dictated by our old nature. “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” Did you notice the put off and put on? Who is responsible to do that? We are. The big question is how do we do that? As a Christian, I am to find out from God’s word what He says about that area of character. I am to seek Biblical change in my life from the principles of God’s word. I am then to ask God to put that in my heart as a matter of character and integrity. I then ask God to keep this matter in my heart as a matter of godliness, character, and integrity. Remember, character is integrity in the heart.

Folks, we need to be putting on new habits that would accurately demonstrate the character and nature of God so He would be glorified. All of us have come from a habit life style built around flesh gratification and senses orientation. Behavior has to be changed God’s way, as a matter of the heart through the Holy Spirit’s work through God’s word. So, why do many children grow up in a Christian home and do not end up serving God? One of the reasons is a lack of integrity or a lack of teaching character and integrity by the parents. We fail to understand it is a matter

of the heart. Many Christian parents desire for their children to live for the Savior. However, many of us are ill equipped to do the Biblical child training God has described in His word. Much of what our children will be is what we are. Who knows more about us than anyone else? Our husband, wives, and children. So many parents are so disappointed when they find out that their lack of putting off the old man has determined the destiny of their children. Remember character and integrity is our destiny. How many young ladies and been sorely disappointed and had their lives ruined because they marry a person who professes to be saved but has not integrity. Ten years down the road he takes off and she is left with a destroyed life. I have taught my daughters to be looking for certain aspects of character and integrity. Otherwise, get as far away from him or her as you possibly can.

We can tell people what we are, but what we are will always show up in the lives of our children. II Corinthians, 7:1-3, Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6:4, Deuteronomy 6:5-7, 17.

What happens to children who grow up in a home with parents who lack in character and integrity or character and integrity were not taught in the home? Maybe parents tried to teach character, but failed to understand that character is integrity in the heart. The Bible tells us six things will happen in their lives. They are grievous things. As a pastor for many years, I have seen it many times. Also, in each instance it is very important to notice their sins will be against, their parents! I do not know how many times I have heard, "I just do not understand why this child does what they do. We sent them to a Christian school, we home schooled them, we took them to church, we had family devotions, we prayed with them. I just do not understand." Watch what the Bible says about them and what they will be:

1. Stubborn and rebellious, Deuteronomy 21:18-21, "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his mother, and that when they have chastened him will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto he elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard, And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear and fear".
2. Scorner, Proverbs 30:17, "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it."
3. Robbers, Proverbs 28:24-26, "Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer. He that is proud of heart stirreth up strife; but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool; but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered". Let me point out there are many ways for a child to rob his or her parents. Did you notice in the verse the child has no conscience about it? In our lives today, many children rob their parents by manipulation. They are only interested in what they want and did you notice here it is a matter of the heart? The devil is the destroyer and the child is his companion.
4. Smiters, Exodus 21:15, "And he that smiteth his father or his mother, shall surely be put to death."
5. Cursers, Exodus 21: 17, "And he that curseth his father, or his mother shall surely be put to death". You may also see Leviticus 20:9.
6. Fornicator and Adulterer, I Corinthians 5:1, "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife." You may also see I Corinthians 5:9, 11-

13, 6:9-10, 18-20.

Integrity and character must be taught in the home and the Christian school. The failure to do so will create disastrous results. Again, it is important to point out these sins were against their parents, and God takes the matter extremely seriously. The grief that comes to a parent's life because they have failed to teach their children character and integrity comes back through their children sinning grievously against the parents. The sadness is the parents rarely understand why the children are like they are.

The purpose of this article is to help those who are rearing their children right now. I have had many parents tell me after reading an article on For the Love of the Family, "I never knew that. I am so glad I heard that now, so I will not do more damage than I have already done."

When we teach character, we have to understand that children and many adults outwardly conform. They have failed to understand that true character is called integrity and the place you hold it is in the heart. As a parent, are you asking "heart" questions of your children? As a husband, are you asking "heart" questions of your wife? As a wife, are you asking "heart" questions of your husband? The only way to deal with what is in the heart is to draw it out by asking questions. Start asking early because it can become a lot more serious issue to deal with later.

Many Christians go to church faithfully, hoping that that will be enough. When the home is not a place where true character and integrity are taught, the marriage and the children are headed to a disaster. Most Christians are going through the motions of their every day hectic busy life. They spend time working at the church or doing other religious good things, but fail in the issues of the heart (disaster).

Any Christian, who fails in the issues of the heart, is capable of doing all the sins of Galatians 5:19-21. The end result is deception and disaster, Galatians 6:7-8, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting".

You see folks, integrity and character are a matter of the heart. Integrity is character in the heart, Ephesians 6:6. Let me encourage you to go through your Bible and look for character traits that God wants you to develop in your life and the lives of your children. As an example, truthfulness, Ephesians 4:25, obedience, II Corinthians 10:5, self control, Galatians 5:24-25, discretion, Proverbs 22:3, dependability, Psalm 15:4 flexibility, Colossians 3:23 and endurance, Galatians 6:9 would be some examples. Remember, these not only have to be developed in your life, but put in your heart. Character and integrity are our destiny and the destiny of our children.

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