

The Integrity Crisis by Warren W. Wiersbe, Oliver-Nelson Books, Nashville, TN, 1988. (36 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. The Church Has a Problem

One of the church fathers said that the church was something like Noah's ark: if it weren't for the judgment on the outside, you could never stand the smell on the inside. [Page 11]

2. Leaders Were Misunderstood

"Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood?" asked Emerson. "Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton."¹ [Page 12]

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance* (New York: Peter Pauper Press, 1967), p. 22.

3. To Reach the World We Need Integrity

God has given us an unprecedented opportunity to reach our world with the gospel, but we can't do it right without personal and organizational integrity. [Page 13]

4. Reputation and Character Are Two Different Things

.... something is radically wrong when evangelical ministry can be so popular and yet at the same time be so weak. Perhaps its popularity is its weakness--after all, reputation and character are two different things. Apparently our right hand doesn't know what our left hand is doing, and as a result, our message and our ministry are divided. [Page 19]

5. Make Things Right

Eugene Peterson: "The task of the prophet is not to smooth things over but to make things right."³ [Page 33]

³ Eugene Peterson, *Run with the Horses* (Downers Grove, m.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), p. 88. This is one of the finest studies I have seen of Jeremiah's ministry and message as it applies to our present-day situation.

6. People Want Something New

Speaking about the people who "love to have it so," Joseph Parker said, "They do not prize Scriptural teaching. They want to hear something fresh, racy, piquant, startling. They do not sit, Bible in hand, testing the speaker by the revelation--and what they ask for they get. They ask for chaff, and they get it."⁵ [Page 35]

⁵ Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible*, vol. 15 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), p. 289.

7. Statistics Criticized

Spurgeon claimed that those who criticized statistics usually had none to report... [Page 45]

8. Be Like Jesus

Saintly Robert Murray McCheyne said, "It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus."² [Page 46] ² Andrew A. Bonar, Robert Murray McCheyne, *Memoir and Remains* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), p. 282.

9. Last Word Is Repent

"The last word of our Lord to the church is not the Great Commission," said Vance Havner. "The Great Commission is indeed our program to the end of the age, but our Lord's last word to the church is 'Repent.'"³ [Page 49]

³ Dennis 1. Hester, *The Vance Havner Quote Book* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), p. 186.

10. Three Ways to Be Faithful

God's servants are divinely appointed stewards who are "entrusted with the gospel." This is a great privilege, but it is also a solemn responsibility. "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). This faithfulness involves at least three elements that must be right: the message ("our exhortation did not come from error"), the motive ("or uncleanness"), and the method ("nor was it in deceit"). [Page 51]

11. Endure the Inconvenience of Being Right

A. W. Tozer: "It appears that too many Christians want to enjoy the thrill of feeling right but are not willing to endure the inconvenience of being right."² [Page 52]

² A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1955), pp.52-53.

12. Happy, Not Holy – Is the Emphasis

The pop gospel of success tries to make us believe that God's greatest concern is to make us happy, not to make us holy, and that He is more concerned about the physical and the material than He is the moral and the spiritual. The "success god" is a celestial errand boy whose only responsibility is to respond to our every call and make sure that we are enjoying life. [Page 52]

13. The Success Gospel Is a Distorted View of God

The success gospel not only presents a distorted view of God, it perverts the biblical doctrine of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. God has every right to pronounce judgment on those who preach a false gospel, because the message of the gospel cost Him His Son! Jesus shed His blood to satisfy the holy law of God so that lost sinners might be forgiven and reconciled to God. Jesus didn't die to make us healthy, wealthy, and happy--He died to make us holy. To turn Calvary into a sanctified credit card that gives us the privilege of a hedonistic shopping spree is to cheapen the most costly thing God ever did. [Page 53-54]

14. The Wrong Message Tears Apart the Truth

When the church preaches the wrong message, it tears things apart, and the ministry loses its integrity. We can't divorce our message from what God is, what God did at Calvary, what God is doing in the world today, and what God will do in the future. But that's just what the success hucksters have done. Once you manufacture your own gospel, it isn't long before you start practicing it, and then you begin to lose your integrity. [Page 55]

15. A True Servant Is Concerned about Integrity

In recent years, the church has had too many celebrities and not enough servants, too many people with plenty of medals but no scars. To look at their lives and listen to their messages, you would never know that the gospel was about a humble Jew who was

poor, rejected, and crucified; nor would you ever suspect that He said, "Blessed are you poor, I For yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20), or "But woe to you who are rich, I For you have received your consolation" (Luke 6:24). A religious celebrity manufactures the message that will most enhance his popularity and perhaps increase his income. A true servant is concerned about integrity, both his personal integrity and the integrity of his message. [Pages 56-57]

16. Preaching Is Indispensable

Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Without preaching, a necessary part of its authenticity has been lost. For Christianity is, in its very essence, a religion of the Word of God. John R. Stott [Page 61]

17. Abundance of Celebrities, Not Enough Servants

John was not a compromiser, nor was he a celebrity, enjoying rich clothes and elegant entertainments in kings' palaces. One of the weaknesses of the church in recent years has been the abundance of celebrities and the absence of servants. The way some media preachers have openly flaunted their extravagant lifestyle is a disgrace to them and to the church. However, few religious leaders have dared to criticize them or break fellowship with them. After all, when they attend the same conventions, share the same spotlights, and belong to the same influential committees, it's easy to ignore sin and call our cowardice "tolerance." [Page 68]

18. Live the Gospel as Well as Preach It

The church is not going to solve its integrity crisis until its ministers and members start to live the message of the gospel as well as preach it. The success preachers claim that an affluent lifestyle is a confirmation of the gospel, but I think it's a contradiction of the gospel. Not that God wants all His people to live in poverty, for He does give us "richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6: 17). But in the light of Christ's birth, life, and death, and in the light of the sufferings and needs in our world today, how can the church justify supporting men and movements that waste its resources?

I think that some of our Christian celebrities have gotten into moral and financial problems because they started believing what people were saying about them. It must be difficult for a celebrity to come home to his family after a triumphant meeting or concert and be told to change the baby's diapers or to take out the garbage! [Page 69]

19. Desire Nothing But God

"Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the Kingdom of God on earth. [John Wesley]² [Pages 70-71] ² Tony Castle, compiled *The New Book of Christian Quotations* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), p. 193.

20. Focused on the Cross

Before we follow any man we should look for the oil on his forehead. We are under no spiritual obligation to aid any man in any activity that has not upon it the marks of the cross. A.W. Tozer [Page 72]

20. Work Is a Ministry

Like all good leaders, [Nehemiah] carried more than his share of the burden and took less than his share of the credit. To him, the work was not a job, it was a ministry--and for that reason, he expected to make sacrifices. "Privilege never confers security," said John Henry Jowett. "It rather provides the conditions of the fiercest strife."⁴ [Page 79]

⁴ John Henry Jowett, *The Preacher, His Life and Work* (New York: Harper, 1912), p. 44.

21. A True Leader Begets Leaders

Nehemiah knew how to work with people and how to get people to work for the Lord. Every true leader begets leaders. He doesn't use others to build his authority--he uses his authority to build others. Nehemiah (the younger man) had no problem serving with Ezra (the older man): the administrator and the scribe were as one because both were dedicated to the great work of the Lord. [Page 80]

22. Insulated from Evil

"We are not to be isolated but insulated," said Vance Havner, "moving in the midst of evil but untouched by it,"⁶ [Page 81]

⁶ Hester, op. cit., p. 209.

23. Interceding

God never gives us discernment in order that we may criticize, but that we may intercede. Oswald Chambers [Page 85]

23. Much Is Done Through Prayer

"If the veil of the world's machinery were lifted off," said McCheyne, "how much we would find is done in answer to the prayers of God's children." God makes it clear that we accomplish nothing eternal apart from prayer, no matter how successful we may appear to be. God help the ministry that can get along without believing prayer!

"Whether we like it or not," said Spurgeon, "asking is the rule of the kingdom."²² [Pages 86-87]

²² Castle, op. cit., p. 191.

24. Accustomed to Having Wealth

Most of us are so accustomed to having wealth that we're offended if anybody accuses us of worshipping money. Compared to Christians in other parts of the world, we are wealthy indeed; and in subtle ways we dance around the golden calf and sing our songs of praise. Money is too often our measure of ministry. Like Israel at Sinai, we claim to be worshipping the true God; but our image of that God is - gold.

For example, we boast about our budgets. Peter confessed openly, "Silver and gold I do not have" (Acts 3:6); and Paul wrote, "As poor, yet making many rich" (2 Cor. 6: 10). If the average pastor talked like that today, his members would probably blush with shame. A big budget is a sign that God is blessing! [Page 88]

25. Ministry Is Now for Sale

It's also disturbing to see that ministry is now for sale the way any other service is for sale. If you want certain "Christian music artists:" you sign a contract and agree to pay a fixed fee, which is usually high. I haven't met any preachers who follow this policy, but I suspect there are some. I doubt that the apostles or prophets ever charged a fee. [Page 89]

26. Morals, Money, and then the Message

During this integrity crisis, the focus of attention has been on morals, money, and message, in that order... [Page 94]

27. TV Add to Ministry?

If the most important work of the church is the preaching of the Word, and the greatest need of the lost world is the hearing of the Word, why should we glorify a medium like television that emphasizes seeing rather than hearing? What does TV add to our ministry? I say it adds nothing to our ministry, but it can take a great deal away. TV puts God's people and God's Word into a context that can rob the message of reality. [Page 99]

28. The Bible Does Not Encourage Celebrities

The Bible doesn't encourage the celebrity approach. "We find that Scripture is sparing in the information that it gives on people while it is lavish in what it tells us about God" writes Eugene Peterson. "It refuses to feed our lust for hero worship. It will not pander to our adolescent desire to join a fan club. The reason is, I think, clear enough. Fan clubs encourage secondhand living."¹⁰ [Page 101]

¹⁰ Peterson, op. cit., p. 12.

29. Keep Hands Cleans with Regard to Money

It's possible to be wealthy but not worldly. Both the Bible and Christian history tell us about rich people who walked with God and brought blessing to others through their wealth. But I've noticed that the leaders in scripture were careful to keep their hands clean when it came to money, and they didn't use their stature or authority to exploit others. [Page 107]

30. Communicate Needs

In the early church, God's servants paid their bills by working, by accepting support from individuals, or by receiving gifts from local churches. Paul wasn't at all embarrassed to tell people his needs and ask for their prayer help. No doubt some of his friends did more than pray; they sent him gifts to assist in his work. I see nothing wrong with writing letters to friends who want to hear about our work and giving them accurate information that can guide them in their praying and giving. Communication is one thing; manipulation is quite something else. [Page 115]

31. The Kingdom of God

What then is the kingdom of God? It is Jesus Christ and, through the Church, the uniting of all things in him. Howard A. Snyder [Page 116]

32. Today, Leadership Is Based on Charisma

In the New Testament churches, leadership was based on commitment, character, and conduct. You had to meet definite biblical qualifications before the church would ordain you and submit to your leadership. In the church today, leadership is too often based on personal charisma: the "gifted" person, not the godly person, gets a following and builds a religious kingdom for himself. Too often, the important thing is personality, not spirituality. [Page 118]

33. Worship Is Submission of Our Nature to God

True biblical worship so satisfies our total personality that we don't have to shop around for man-made substitutes. William Temple made this clear in his masterful definition of worship:

For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose - and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin. ² [Page 119]

² William Temple, *Readings In St. John's Gospel*, 1st ser. (London: Macmillan, 1939), p. 68. For further discussion of the importance of worship, see my *Real Worship: It Will Transform Your Life* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson, 1986). The serious student will find the bibliography helpful.

34. Difficult Times

Difficult times produce both giants and midgets. "When small men cast long shadows, it's a sign the sun is setting." [Page 128]

35. Revival Is Being in Love with Christ

"A revival is the church falling in love with Jesus Christ all over again," wrote Vance Havner. "We are in love with ourselves, in love with our particular crowd, in love with our fundamentalism, maybe, but not in love with Him."² [Page 130]

² Hester, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

36. What Pleases the Lord

Let's return to the fundamental principles of the Word of God, the familiar truths we talk about but don't always practice. In our preaching, our fundraising, our promotion, our management, let's be Christians first and executives second. Let's have more prayer meetings and fewer committee meetings, more time in the Word, more personal concern for one another: Let's find out what pleases the Lord, not what tickles the ears of the Christian public. [Page 133]

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