Keeping our ethical edge sharp

How to maintain personal integrity that is:

- Honest
- Faithful
- Morally clean

1. Integrity

Why do we work? For most people there are two major motivations:

- **The great quest for personal significance**

  We seek rewards – ego-biscuits that cause hungry dogs to drool!

  Dogs will do all sorts of things to get those biscuits.

  We live in a world addicted to ego biscuits:

  * We seek promotion – a company car – a suit – a big office

  * We seek status – more degrees – proximity to power

  * We seek more money ⟶ success ⟶ power over others

  Performance can always find an **unfavourable comparison**.

  So the search is on for another ego-biscuit.

- **The desire to improve one's lifestyle**

  We want more comfort but this is addictive. You visit the home of someone wealthier than you and you think, *"I deserve what they have! If I had such a nice place I would be happy."* But we never are.

Career achievement is the major idol of the western world.

An idol:

- Defines a person's self-worth
- Is the controlling centre of a person's life
- Is the last in a series of priorities to be abandoned

Even for Christians the Lord Jesus is often the last carriage on the train driven by career success.

All this has a major bearing on **ethics and integrity**.

Integrity involves two issues

i) What is the right thing to do? – **ethics**
ii) What price are you willing to pay to do the right thing? – **integrity**

Man was created to be a co-worker with God in all sorts of work – agriculture, medicine, business, law etc. Work is a gift from God to bring glory to Him. If it is God's work then it must be done in God's way and this requires integrity.

What are the benefits of integrity?

- **Self-respect and a sense of confidence**: it is having a clear conscience.
  You are secure in the knowledge that God smiles upon you!

- **A closer walk with God**: a lack of integrity will poison your walk with God who is the very source of your life and joy. By maintaining your character you will find God drawing closer to you in fellowship.

- **Greater courage to do what is right**: One can get "ethically lonely" out there. The group pressure to conform is often great. The more you maintain integrity the greater your courage grows to continue to maintain it.
- **You can exert moral leadership where you work**: Most cultures are starving for moral leadership – especially in the work place.
- **Effectiveness in evangelism**: The major reason why non-Christians resist the Gospel is the hypocritical 'Christians' they know.
- **A model for your children – the next generation**: Children are impressionable. They need heroes. They usually find their heroes in fantasy. But the best heroes are those closest to you. Your reputation of integrity is a great legacy to leave to your children.
- **Encouragement and restoration if we have blown it**: Everyone fails, but we can be forgiven. At best we develop compassion for others and avoid being a moral policeman.

Habits and Disciplines to build character

Realise it is a war out there!

- Look what has caused the world economic collapse – greed. This started in the USA the country that probably has the highest percentage of believers!
- The 'West' is in an area of moral mud slide that is burying millions.
- As Christians we seem unable to do anything to challenge the 'idol'.
- We too take ethical short cuts.
- We don't pursue excellence.
- $25 billion was stolen world wide in **church-based** crime in 2008 (IBMR January '09) so even in the church our ethical standards are appalling.
- There is a steady erosion of professional ethics – in medicine, the law and especially in business.
- **Executive ethics in USA**: 80% admitted they were often drunk compared to 33% of the general population. The reason given was stress. 35% cheated on their tax returns. 75% said they had stolen from their company.
- **Employee theft**: 4% of all sales are lost to employee theft. Some of this is time theft: long lunch breaks, late arrivals, calling in sick when not sick. The cost to the US economy ~ $500 billion per year. (GM loses 10% of its work through time theft.)
- It is very sad that real believers are not much better than their secular counterparts. 37% of secular people report in sick when they are not sick and ~27% of real believers do the same!
- **Dishonesty**: 92% of employees regularly lie to their bosses. About half of these are serious lies such as falsifying their credentials. Garages frequently fix and charge for things that didn't need to be done.
- **Sexual immorality**: ~ 50% of workers have been involved in "sexual experiences" with colleagues.

We are meant to influence society, but we are being influenced by it!

Integrity is to be our most prized possession

"A good name is to be more desired than great riches; favour is better than gold and silver." Prov. 22:1

[Favour has to do with favour with God.]

"Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked." Ps. 37:16

Integrity is a treasure worth **any price** to preserve.

God is holy – absolutely trustworthy – and because we are His children we are to be holy too.

Moral purity is **not** something we have to get. It is something that is **given to us** because of what Jesus did on the Cross.

Integrity refers to our **authenticity**: "you are for real!" You are obviously the genuine item – blameless – 'without wax'. You are not like a pot that has had a crack cleverly filled up with wax and when it is held up to the light the flaw is evident.

Integrity is **not** a list of things you **won't do**. It is a large body of values that we aim to do/be always:

- ✓ Show love to everyone
- ✓ Be trustworthy
- ✓ Be honest etc.

The Impact of integrity

On ourselves: freedom from guilt

Many people have the attitude, *"I'd rather be a live coward than a dead hero."* But this leads to a loss of self-respect.

On our families:

"Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household." Prov. 15:27

"The righteous who walks in his integrity – blessed are his children after him." Prov. 20:7

On people around us: The moral climate of the environment will go up. You will give courage to others to do the right thing. Mt. 5:16: ***"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."***

As believers we have a responsibility to speak up and **model** good ethics. Our lifestyle should be blameless – Ps. 15:2-5

There will be a definite impact on evangelism – Titus 2:9-10

Why do we do bad things? The dynamics of compromise

Prov. 7 – **A description of a father warning his son** – specifically about sexual immorality, but it is the same with all ethical temptations.

He starts with a positive exhortation (1-5)

Treasure wisdom – memorise it with physical reminders to avoid forgetting (notes in the bathroom etc.)

The psychology of compromise

- ➢ **Compromise happens when the decision to do right isn't made ahead of time** v. 6-7
  - ✓ A morally immature man – no clear moral standards
  - ✓ A situational ethicist – morally he sits on the fence

- ✓ Like dieting – you need to decide before the meal what you will and will not eat

So at work: I will not lie – I will not steal – I will not cheat on my hours – I will refrain from gossip – I will be morally clean – I will not break the law.

- **Compromise happens when you underestimate evil and flirt with it** v. 8-9
  - ✓ The man is playing with fire – he is in the wrong place at the wrong time
  - ✓ He **has chosen** the path to moral defeat
  - ✓ Don't underestimate the influences of the principalities and powers
  - ✓ The law of the ethical jungle is expediency!
- **Compromise is just a choice away** v. 10-11
  - ✓ Sin is aggressive – always waiting for you – ready to pounce (Gen. 4:7)
  - ✓ There are 3 sources of sin. Never underestimate their power.

    The world – 1 Jn. 2:15-16
    [The world is the culture system of the culture you live in – i.e. success is measured by money.]

    The flesh – Gal. 5:19-21: We are all capable of doing all these things and more: ***"and things like these".***

    The Devil – 1 Pet. 5:8 – ***"like a roaring lion"*** not like a barking poodle! He is on the loose. He is very dangerous and he is very hungry. He is subtle whispering rationalisations into our mind – feeding our anger and inciting us to envy.

    Eph. 6:10-18 tells us how to deal with the devil.
- **Compromise entices through flattery and fantasy** v. 13-17
  - ✓ The youth places himself directly in the path of temptation
  - ✓ She uses **flattery** to entice him – an example: You are a garage mechanic. A lady comes to you who is obviously clueless about cars. Her problem is a corroded battery cable ($20), but you sell her a new battery and cables and make much more money.
  - ✓ The flattery is, *"I am in control and I can rob this woman and she will never know!"*
  - ✓ She uses **fantasy** – she paints a picture of pleasure and delight! The mechanic could think that once he has sold the woman the new battery he can sell her old one and make more money, then he could go out for a nice dinner, pay off a debt, buy a new shirt etc.
- **Compromise ensnares through rationalisation and deception** v. 18-21
  - ✓ The adulteress used **rationalisation** – ***"drinking their fill of love"***
  - ✓ It is nothing of the sort! It is adultery and it is wrong
  - ✓ We all have a genius for coming up with good reasons for bad actions
  - ✓ Some rationalisations:
    - Everybody is doing that
    - It's just bending the rules it's not breaking them
    - They owe me one
    - It's the way the system operates
    - Who's going to know?
    - It's OK because I'm planning to give the money to the church

- ✓ The woman says there will be no consequences if they are not found out!
- ✓ We don't speed when in front of a police car!
- ✓ We reap what we sow. There are **always** consequences – even if we are not 'caught in this life', these things never escape the notice of our Creator!

➢ **Compromise comes when we refuse to think about the rightness of our actions** v. 22

- ✓ Like an ox he **chooses** to go to the slaughter
- ✓ Compromise is always **our** decision – usually a sudden decision made without prayer and without reflecting on the Scripture. We make excuses *"The devil **made** me do it"* [No he didn't]
  "I was only following orders!" [the excuse given in Iraq for torturing prisoners]
- ✓ We fall into sin because we **choose** to sin. No one can make us sin. (James 1:14-15)

➢ **Compromise always costs** v. 23

- ✓ "It will cost him his life."
- ✓ What happened to this youth? We don't know. Perhaps the husband returns home. According to Mosaic Law he would have been executed.
- ✓ Perhaps he contracts a venereal disease.
- ✓ All sin has consequences. We never escape the repercussions of moral compromise.
- ✓ Don't trade your integrity for a few 'ego-biscuits'.

Never day to yourself, *"It can't happen to me!"*

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands, <u>take heed</u> lest he fall!" 1 Cor. 10:12

We must be on our guard continuously and decide ahead of time to do the right thing.

Six areas in which to take specific steps to maintain ethical purity:

H – Honesty – don't cheat and don't steal

O – Obey authority – relating to authority

N – No deception – telling the truth

E – Encourage conflict resolution – alternative to bickering

S – Sexual fidelity

T – Trustworthiness

H – Honesty

Being honest means that you don't cheat or steal!

- Having a **good reputation** means you do what is right when someone is looking
- Being honest is what you do when no-one is looking

There are 3 levels of honesty

1. <u>Lowest level</u> – **"out of trouble" honesty** – honest because you are afraid of being found out!

2. <u>Second level</u> – **selective honesty** – you decide which areas of integrity you will obey and which are trivial and can be ignored.

3. Third level – a passionate desire to honour Jesus in everything:
    - ✓ Doing His work His way – this is **progressive honesty**
    - ✓ Knowing the Holy Spirit will gradually unfold sin in our lives – honesty is a path we are on.

Common examples of dishonesty

- Time theft – late for work – excessive breaks
- Energy theft at an emotional level – allowing personal issues and non-work related issues to distract you from giving your full attention to your job.
- Cheating on expense reports – i.e. taking a friend to lunch and calling it a business expense
- Cheating on income tax returns
- Using the work phone – especially long distance – for personal calls
- Stealing supplies – taking food, pens and paper etc. without paying for them
- Choosing to do work that is not necessary and charging for it – surgery or work on vehicles
- Accepting payment for work that has not been done or receiving supplies not paid for
- Accepting a "gift" as a bribe
- Improperly taking a client from a competitor
- Violating copyright laws – illegal copying
- Cheating – i.e. taking an unfair advantage over others – exams etc.

The Bible is clear

"You shall not steal!" Ex. 20:15

"You shall not steal nor deal falsely nor lie to one another. You shall not oppress your neighbour, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you until morning." Lev. 19:11-13)

"Differing weights and differing measures, both of them are abominable to the Lord." Prov. 20:10

In Proverbs there are only a few sins that God ***"hates"***:

- ✓ Cheating and lying
- ✓ Murder (6:16)
- ✓ Evil plans (15:26)

In Proverbs there are many great statements relating to honesty:

"Ill-gotten gains do not profit." (10:2)

"Bread obtained by falsehood is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth will be filled with gravel." (20:17)

Cheating and stealing only bring short-term pleasure! Clearly God cares about stealing and cheating at a small level and at a massive international level.

If we violate our consciences in little things, then we will find it easier to do so in big issues. Every situation has its own unique forms of cheating and stealing. You know them.

What should you do?

Acknowledge you have been wrong.

Accept God's complete forgiveness.

Make restitution. It might be embarrassing but you should do it. Would you rather be a fool before God or men?

"A false balance is an abomination to the Lord but a just weight is His delight!" Prov. 11:2

Keep progressing in honesty and you will feel the sunshine of God's approval.

O – Obey Authority

All authority is an expression of God's authority but not **all** authority is wielded with godliness.

Many governments, officials and employees use their authority in very evil and inhuman ways. But Biblically **God is the ultimate authority**. He has determined that people should not operate in chaos and anarchy and that some type of authority is needed to maintain control.

The forms of control vary hugely from culture to culture and from business to business etc. Some are very informal and others are highly structured and authoritarian.

God commands us:

"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to the governor ……" 1 Pet. 2:13-17

So as believers we should obey **human authorities** that are over us – government, employers, the law etc. Obeying such authority is an expression of our submission to God's authority.

The principle is:

Everyone is accountable to someone and we are all accountable to God.

Two areas of accountability

1) **Submission to government**

   "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God." Rom. 13:1-7

Government is established by God and officials are "servants of God"
[Note: Paul was writing in the time of the Emperor Nero.]

Here are a few principles to keep in mind:

1. **We must always obey laws that are clear and unequivocal**
   Stop at the red light! If it is law we must obey.

2. **By submitting to laws that are clear and unequivocal we give ourselves an advantage how to handle laws that are unclear.**

   This is an advantage at psychological/conscience level. If we **always** obey laws that are clearly understood **then we have made up our minds to obey the law**. This helps us in many grey areas. It strengthens the conscience.

   Investment brokers deal with lots of grey areas. What is insider dealing? What is permissible and what is not? In medical ethics there are many grey areas.

3. **In striving to maintain integrity when rules are regulations are unclear it is important to seek professional advice as well as Biblical wisdom.**

   Look for honest advisors – people of integrity – often Godly Christian lawyers. Discuss the situation with Christian leaders. **We need the objectivity of others**.

4. **We should not shrink from exercising our right to press for change and justice.**

   Submission is not passivity. If there is injustice we should seek to change the situation. [William Wilberforce and slavery in England.] The guiding principles are **integrity and justice**.

5. **Treat all government officials with respect as 'servants of God'.**
   They have a right to be valued and treated with dignity.

2) **Submission to your employer**

"Slaves obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by the way of eye service …but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men." Col. 3:22-24 and Eph. 6:5-8

Paul is addressing slaves. Often we too feel like slaves! These were real slaves but the guiding principles apply to us too. The clear teaching of the Bible is that we are to submit to our earthly employers.

- Follow their instructions
- Carry out assignments to the **very best** of our ability
- Seek to serve the objectives and goals of the business as if the Lord Jesus was the director of the company
- If there is a dress code – honour it
- Fill out reports and send them in on time
- Maintain standards. If there is an inspection the tendency is to go into overdrive to clean up and then relax into old careless patterns afterwards. That is not Biblical ethics!
- Paul says we should never be 'men-pleasers' – we work in order to please God
- Integrity is maintaining the highest standards when no-one is watching except God.

"Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything …not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they adorn the teaching of our God and Saviour." Titus 2:9-10

Notice that your compliance with authority, the excellence of your work, your trustworthiness and reliability make the teaching about God our Saviour **attractive**! Lack of submission to your employer injures God's reputation! It gives unbelievers a reason to despise the Lord Jesus. This is also true if your employer is a believer:

1 Tim. 6:2 **"……. regard your master with all honour."**

Here are some more principles

1. **No matter how unfair your boss, you have a responsibility to honour and respect his authority – even if you can't respect him as a person.**

   2 Peter 2:18-20 - Believers can be mistreated by their supervisors and this can go to the point of **persecution**. The key is to appreciate God's favour towards us in such situations – remember Joseph.

2. **You must decide up front what you will do and what you will not do regardless of what the authority over you asks.**

   In other words you must maintain your integrity no matter what it costs!

   For example: Will you lie? cheat? steal? deal dishonestly? In the end your integrity is worth more than your job or your life!

How should you decide how to respond in a tight spot?

- **Is this a major issue or a minor one?**
  - ✓ Nor every issue is worthy resigning over
  - ✓ Pick your battles with care and with prayer
  - ✓ You aren't a moral policeman trying to correct every small wrong in the system
- **When should you act?**
  - ✓ When you are called on to do what is clearly wrong
  - ✓ When your own conscience is violated
  - ✓ When it is within your power to avoid evil
  - ✓ When innocent people will be affected
- **How should you approach an unjust or immoral boss?**
  - ✓ Don't march in and quote Scripture. Unbelievers are usually antagonised by such an approach.
  - ✓ Say you have a problem. Lay out the facts as you understand them and then argue on the basis of:
    - Good or bad consequences
    - The reputation of the company
    - Offer/give an alternative course of action

Obeying authority is a really difficult task in a corrupt society. Remember 1 Pet. 3:14-17

"But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience ……"

N - No deception

In Britain it is usual to say you can't trust anyone – except perhaps your spouse and your mother! – not the government and not the media! No one else is telling the truth!

In England lying has become a way of life. We lie for a number of reasons:

- To cover up mistakes – in one sample 93% did so
- To avoid embarrassment – 92%
- To avoid hurting someone's feelings – 89%
- On job applications
- When you are coerced into giving someone a substandard performance
- To get ahead at work –stating you have achieved more than you have – 66%
- On expense forms – overtime, sick days, loan interests, fees, quotes etc.
- Salesmen lie in order to get a sale – often trying to sell a poor product because they will get more money.

Don't lie! Don't attempt to deceive! God hates lies. Why? Because Satan is the father of lies. Scripture says that all liars will be thrown into the lake of fire.

"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight." Prov. 12:22

Remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)

- They sold their land, hung on to some of the proceeds but made it appear to the church that they had given the whole price.
- Why? We don't know, but they lied to make the reason work – not a big lie.
- What was the result? They both died! That is the result of 'abomination'.
- ***"Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No' anything else is from the Evil One."*** (Mt. 5:37)

Remember Zech 8: 16-17

"These are the things you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgements that are true and make for peace. Do not devise evil in your hearts against one another and love no false oath. For all these things I hate declares the Lord."

E – Encourage conflict resolution

We have all worked with people who are difficult to get on with. Some are just impossible! They lie and cheat. They stab others in the back. They create tension and conflict wherever they go! How are we to cope with such people? What are the Biblical principles by which we should resolve conflicts?

We will look at four kinds of conflicts, but firstly the foundation.

The priority of relationships

- The workplace is usually very task oriented. You must get things done. It is easy to treat people in a utilitarian way. You value them for what they can do for you. People become human resources "the pay roll". They become a means to an end.
- God doesn't see it this way at all and neither should we!
- God sees people's intrinsic value completely apart from their performance. He cares deeply for all people. Therefore we should treat people as valuable from the top to the bottom.
- Mt. 22:39, ***"You shall love your neighbour as yourself."*** Our 'neighbour' is all the people we have to deal with. So in the workplace we must do all we can to maintain good, healthy relationships – 360 degrees.
- **Take relationships very seriously**!
- In 1 Cor. 13 we see that our spirituality is hollow if it is not backed up by genuine love for work colleagues.

  " … but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."
- Love is seen not as a feeling, but as **a commitment to do what is best for others.**
- At work you are with your second family. They may see more of you than your family.

Practical suggestions

1. Let your attitude show you like being with your work colleagues – smile – eat lunch – be a good listener outside work time.
2. Show that you want the best for them and that you are willing to sacrifice to see they get the best.
3. Pray regularly for them all and the details of their lives.

This is the way to lay **the base of relationships**. Conflicts tend to erode this base and it needs constant re-enforcing. Remember that we are not responsible for other people's behaviour – only for our own.

"If possible, as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Rom. 12:13

Conflicts will happen. Just make sure you mow the grass on your side of the fence!

Type of conflicts

- **Irritations and insults**
  - ✓ A driver cuts in front of you
  - ✓ A co-worker is late for a meeting or a bus/train is late
  - ✓ Someone borrows a tool and doesn't return it
  - ✓ Your boss is critical of you in front of your peers

What should you do?

Separate the big issues from the little issues. There may be issues that we should complain about, but many issues we simply have to endure without response.

"Know this my beloved brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires." James 1:19-20

The danger of anger

Anger is an emotion that can lead us to a response out of all proportion to what happened – road rage leads to murder!

"Repay no-one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all… Beloved, never avenge yourself but leave it to the wrath of God for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay says the Lord.' " Rom. 12:17, 19.

Anger usually produces a plan to punish the other person.

"Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." Prov. 16:32

Another way to deal with anger is a **passive-aggressive response** – a non-verbal tactic: ignoring the offender – taking them out of the loop – bad-mouthing them to others. This can be worse than angry words and it is cowardice.

"The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of fools pours out folly." Prov. 15:2

Finally, no-one **makes** us angry. It is our choice! Anger causes us to focus on **the offender** and not on ourselves and our response.

<u>What should we do when we are angry</u>?

- ✓ Ask, 'Why am I angry? Is it because of my pride or selfishness?'
- ✓ Forgive! The Lord Jesus has forgiven us so much!

<u>What should we do when we have to correct an employee</u>?

- ✓ Correct him/her with respect
- ✓ Do it graciously but firmly and directly

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver." Prov. 25:11

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Rom. 12:21

- **Injustice**

  I tend to 'boil' when I hear of an injustice to a friend. What should I do with that anger? How can we respond to injustice besides getting very angry?

  Anger is not wrong in itself. But Romans 12 warns us against retaliation and tells us to overcome evil with good. So we should always **aim at reconciliation**. The contrast is bitterness and this is deadly poison.

  "See to it that no-one fails to obtain the grace of God: that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble and by it many become defiled." Heb. 12:15

  Let go of all bitterness. You have been wronged. You may be an innocent victim. You may feel incredible rage and bitterness. God says, 'Let it go!'

  Reconciliation begins with forgiveness. It is hard to forgive someone who has cheated you. But as believers we forgive because we have been forgiven (Mt. 18:21-25). Remember when Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother. The Jewish law said 7 times. Jesus responded with 70 x 7 and then told the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

  "Forgive your brother from your heart".

  "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you." Eph. 4:32

  We also have **an obligation to re-dress injustice** – to right the wrong that has been done.

  - ✓ To some extent we have to live under the consequences of the moral failure of other people – i.e. Palestine
  - ✓ At other times people must be held accountable for their actions – i.e. truth commissions in South Africa, Rwanda etc.
  - ✓ God values justice and righteousness as much as He does love.

  "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause." Is. 1:16-17

  "For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless or the widow or shed innocent blood in this place … then I will let you dwell in this place …." Jer. 7:5-7

  "Seek good and not evil that you may live and so the Lord, the God of Hosts, will be with you as you have said, 'Hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gates …. " Amos 5:14-15

  "Thus says the Lord of Hosts, render true judgements, show kindness and mercy to one another. Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner or the poor. Let none of you devise evil against another in your heart." Zech. 7:9-10

  What about lawsuits?

  See 1 Cor. 6:1-8

  A believer should never go to court against another believer. Paul says this is a disgrace – a display of disunity in the Body of Christ before the world. Clearly church leaders should be involved in arbitration. If there is no resolution, accept the injustice and move on.

  If other people's interests are at stake besides your own or the misdeed is criminal, then I think you should go to court and press for justice. Lawsuits should always be

the last resort. But we have to recognise that we live in an imperfect world where we can't always achieve the ideal.

An example: There is a big company. The CEO is a Christian. A Christian manager embezzles money. The manager is confronted and he denies it.
The CEO says that in that case he will have to press charges in the court. The manager retorts angrily that he can't do that because they are both Christians. The CEO did press charges for 3 reasons:

1) He had financial responsibility to the company to re-coup the money.
2) He needed to demonstrate that theft would not be tolerated by anyone.
3) It was the only way the manager would take the matter seriously.

- **Persecution**

This is very common in the Muslim World. It is real and it is serious! It often involves loss of a job. There may be intensive interrogation and psychological abuse – drugs to make people confused.

Some persecution is likely to come to us all:

"All who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." 2 Tim. 3:12

Read Mt. 5:10-12: With the promise of persecution is God's promise to make it up some day.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you, persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven ….."

Luke's version adds Lk. 6:20-26

"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy for behold you reward is great in heaven."

Then follow four woes:

v. 24 ***"Woe to you who are rich."***

v. 25 ***"Woe to you who are full now."***

v. 26 ***"Woe to you who laugh now."***

v. 27 ***"Woe to you when all people speak well of you."***

Persecution, insults and ostracism all hurt and cost a great deal, but the alternative costs a great deal more! It is to be admired by the crowd but never to know the Lord Jesus as a friend. That's the choice – to be approved by the crowd or to be approved by the Lord Jesus!

"How can you believe when you receive glory one from another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" Jn. 5:44

How do we deal with persecution?

1. Expect it
2. Absorb it with gladness

"But when you do good and suffer for it, endure for this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example so that you may follow in His steps. When He was reviled He did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten in return ….." 1 Pet. 2:20-24

It is much easier for us to bear persecution if we can disengage ourselves from needing the approval of others.

- **Making Apologies**

  You will offend someone! You will make a mistake. You will say something you shouldn't etc. Remember **you are the problem** in a poor relationship and you are going to have to apologise and put it right.

  Some would rather lose their job, split a church and incur huge legal fees than say, *"I am sorry!"* Pride can be so great!

  God takes relationship so seriously that He tells us not to bother to worship Him until we have apologised and done all we can to bring about reconciliation.

  Read Mt. 5:23-24 – Here is a modern example:

  Bill is in church. As the sermon begins he remembers that he has offended Joe. Bill gets up straight away, leaves the church, drives over to the church Joe attends, marches in in the middle of the sermon and hauls Joe out into the church yard and says*, "Joe I am sorry. I was wrong and I apologise. I hope you will forgive me."* They talk a bit and things get put right. They shake hands. Joe goes back into church. Bill gets into his car and drives back to his church just in time for the benediction! He missed the sermon but he has done something worth a thousand sermons. He has obeyed God by reconciling himself to his brother.

  It is important that we resolve conflicts as best we can. A believer who is weak in relationships is a weak believer. Integrity/ethics is also the way we treat people and the quality of our love for them.

S – Sexual Fidelity

What should we talk about?

The Bible says we must not commit adultery (Ex. 20:14).
Remember, ***"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall!"*** (1 Cor. 10:12)

Sexual immorality is not the worst sin but it is very prevalent – at least in my culture:

- Sexual activity in single women is over 80%.
- In the UK teenage pregnancy is the highest in Europe. Recently a 12 yr. old boy became a father.
- Sexual activity at work is a real problem for 50% of all workers – more for women than men.
- Relationships are largely built around work.

Some Principles

- **Make up your mind that sexual immorality is wrong and that sexual purity is right**

  Sex outside marriage is wrong.

  "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh." Gen. 2:24

  "If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbour both the adulteress and the adulterer shall surely be put to death…." Lev. 20:10-16

  "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church…. He who loves his wife loves himself." Eph. 5:25-31

  "This is the will of God … that you abstain from sexual immorality." 1 Thess. 4:2-8

Remember it is not just the act. It is also the thought!

"… but I say to you that everyone who looks on a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Mt. 5:27-28

"But sexual immorality and all impurity must not even be named among you…." Eph. 5:1-4

Sex is intended for married couples only. Sex apart from marriage is wrong! The vast majority of people in the UK would say the Bible is wrong!

So although you might be a small minority, agree with God when He says that sexual purity is right and sexual immorality is wrong.

- **Decide you will fulfil your sexual needs in a healthy way in marriage**

Sex is normal and is a healthy part of being a human being and you **need to decide** that marriage is the only relationship where you will have sexual intimacy. You will be attracted physically, emotionally, intellectually and sexually to others besides your spouse. The Bible warns us very sternly **against acting on that attraction**.

Read 1 Cor. 7:3-5

There is a command for married couples to engage in sex. The quality of your sexual life with your spouse is often a good indication of the **quality of your marriage**. Familiarity can breed distance. **Unless you work hard at maintaining a happy marriage you will be tempted to have a sex life somewhere else.**

How can you do this? Here are two suggestions:

- **Watch out for overwork and emotional exhaustion**

  'Careerism' is a powerful motivating force. In surveys people say that 95% of their emotional energy is put into work. There must be a balance of emotional energy across 5 areas:

  - ✓ Your personal life
  - ✓ Your married life and family
  - ✓ Your work
  - ✓ Your church
  - ✓ Your community

  This balance is especially important if you have **children**.

- **Take care where your needs are met for significance and emotional intimacy**

  Work should be challenging, fulfilling and an emotionally captivating experience. Work is the place where we prove ourselves and show what we can do. We will develop a real bond with our co-workers because they know what it takes to get the job done and what it means when the job is well done.

  The danger comes when those who affirm us are the opposite sex. Acceptance and affirmation from others can make them look very attractive – especially if things are not satisfactory at home!

  A man in middle age – concerned about his appearance and about the value of their work – can be very vulnerable to temptation. His wife may be wrapped up in the needs of teenage kids. He is probably spending more time at work than at home – more time with his secretary and other women than with his wife. **This is a very dangerous situation!** Sexual infidelity almost always begins with emotional infidelity. Cultivate a healthy relationship with your spouse built on affirmation, emotional honesty and trust.

- **Don't flirt with danger**

  "Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? …. So is he who goes in to his neighbour's wife…." Prov. 6:27-29

  Avoid all flirtation with the opposite sex. Be careful not to be in a closed room when there is no-one else present. A good rule is: What would this situation look like if my spouse walked in?

  "Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality…. But put on the Lord Jesus and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires." Rom. 13:13-14

  Be very careful about touching the opposite sex.

  "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." 1 Cor. 7:1

  Touch is a powerful means of communication, so what are you communicating?
  Be careful what you watch.

  "For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions is not from the Father…." 1 Jn. 2:16

  Be careful when alcohol is present. Alcohol is a depressant that lowers inhibitions.

  In general remember Romans 13:14: ***"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires."***

- **Set high standards for dating if you are single**

  I don't envy singles today! If you are single set Godly standards in your daily life and hold to them. Don't date unbelievers or even lukewarm believers. Don't do more than kiss and hug before marriage. You will have to draw the line.

- **Safeguard yourself against temptation**

  When you travel take great care. This can be an occasion for sexual compromise. Devise a plan of what you will do. Boredom is a climate in which immorality can flourish. Plan to read. Think about where you are going – the history, people, culture, church situation friends and colleagues etc.

- **Pray regularly that you will be able to maintain your sexual purity**

  Husbands should care for their wives ***"so that your prayers may not be hindered."*** 1 Pet. 3:7

  Notice the inter-connection between prayer life and sex life. Sexual temptation is a spiritual matter and spiritual resources are required to overcome it.

- **When you face raw temptation – flee!**

  "So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace …." 2 Tim. 2:22

  In your fight against evil there is a time to stand and fight and there is a time to run away as fast as you can! Remember Joseph and Potiphar's wife. If you find yourself in that type of situation – flee!

- **Never forget the consequences of immorality**

  Immorality always results in tears and sometimes in a lifetime of regret and grief. God forgives sexual sins, but sexual compromise often seems to have permanent repercussions.

  Read Prov. 6:32 – the context is warnings against immorality.

  "He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself."

T – Trustworthiness

Integrity is a matter of trust. People know they can rely on you to do the right thing in areas of responsibility and morality. Many believers today abandon this idea and become self-seeking. Their ultimate value is self-fulfilment.

What is the result? You can't trust them to do what they say they will do. You know they will only do what is going to be best for them. This means that all commitments are contingency commitments. They agree to do something until something better comes along. We all know people who have made promises to us but have never fulfilled them. Sadly some of these people are believers.

In the Bible 'trustworthiness' contains two ideas: **faithfulness** and **responsibility**

1) **Faithfulness**

> ***"Who swears to his own hurt and does not change…."*** Ps. 15:3-4

When a trustworthy person makes an agreement – a promise – it is a done deal! This is also true of our spiritual commitments.

> ***"When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."*** Eccl. 5:4-5

2) **Reliability**

> ***"Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy man?"*** Prov. 20:6

Reliability means dependability. Biblical trustworthiness means that when I am given a task or make a commitment to do something, then I follow through on the assignment to the best of my ability sticking with it until it is done and done in the best way possible. This must be our 'work style'.

A Biblical case study: King Saul in 1 Samuel

King Saul was the first king of God's Old Testament people. In 1 Sam. 15:3 Saul is told, ***"Go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has and do not spare him."***

The Amalekites were a nomadic people – descendants of Esau (not Edomites). Over a period of forty years they constantly attacked the People of God. They attacked and killed the weary that were lagging behind – see Deut. 25:17-19.

You can read the story in 1 Samuel 15. Samuel had an enormous army of 200,000 men. He told the People of God living among the Amalekites to leave, which they did. Then he attacked, killed the people, captured the king and all the sheep, oxen and all things useful and good. It was a great victory, but it was **incomplete obedience.**

God says some very sad words, ***"I regret that I have made Saul king for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commandment."*** 1 Sam. 15:13

Saul could not be trusted. Samuel arrives and asks, ***"What is this bleating of sheep in my ears…?"*** (v.14) Saul tells a lie. He blames the people. But Samuel says, ***"Obedience is better than sacrifice"***. He tells Saul God has rejected him as king.

There is no substitute for obedience.

Two lessons to learn from this story

- **Our trustworthiness is a good measure of our spirituality.**
  - Our commitment to follow through on our promises says a great deal about our commitment to the Lord Jesus.
  - Faithfulness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit – Gal. 5:23.

- A faithful person is showing that the Holy Spirit is in control of his life.
- If you miss an appointment, break a promise etc. it means you are not letting God be in control of your life and that His standards of trustworthiness are not being applied to your life.

➢ **Partial obedience is not obedience**

- This is often seen as partial fulfilment of an assigned task or a job done poorly.
- This is duplicity and a break of integrity.

Some general principles

1. Be careful what you promise!

- God takes your commitments very seriously – so must you!
- Many people have a hard time saying, 'No'. This is especially true in Arab culture. A suitable response might be:

  "Oh, this sounds like a great opportunity but I need to reflect on it before I agree to be involved. If I do participate, I want to be able to give everything in time and effort. That is why I need to think about whether I will be able to do that."
- Work your way out of the habit of just saying, *'Yes'*. If you don't, you will ruin your integrity.
- Ask yourself*, "Do I need to take on this task, engagement? What will I have to drop in order to take on this task?"* A juggler can only keep so many balls in the air at once.
- If it involves money, ask yourself, *"Can I afford it?"*
- Can someone else do it better?
- What exactly will be your participation in this task?
- Don't be rushed into commitments. Take time to pray.
- It is not a bad idea to have a 'diary committee' – people who help you prioritise the tasks etc. you can be committed to.

2. Commit to excellence of effort rather than excellence of results

- We are not to be workaholics striving to achieve perfection!
- True success before God means faithfully pleasing Him with the resources and responsibilities He has given us.
- This is taught in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25.
  5 talents became 10 and 2 talents became 4. Both were praised and both were rewarded similarly.
- God rewards us on the basis of our faithfulness and not our productivity. There are always a host of factors beyond our control that may prevent us from achieving our objectives.

3. Use extreme caution in contracts and partnerships

Business involves contractual obligations. Trustworthiness is assumed! This means you should be extremely cautious before you sign anything.

- Do very careful checks on companies/people until you are completely satisfied about their trustworthiness.
- Scripture discourages legal commitments with unbelievers.

  2 Cor. 6:14-18 ***"Don't be bound together with unbelievers ……"***

- I **don't** think this means that we should only do business with believers.
  I think it's a warning against getting our affairs so intertwined with the affairs of unbelievers that we **lose control over the ethical direction of the partnership**.
- We should also beware of doing business with believers who are not walking with God.

Some general principles of business

- Pay back borrowed money. [There is no Scripture that we shouldn't borrow.]
- The Bible does discourage us from going into debt – Proverbs 22:26-27
- If you are in debt get help in structuring your debts as best you can and as soon as you can.