

Is Integrity Worth the Cost?

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

Can you imagine a tongue screw becoming a symbol of integrity? It became so in the city of Antwerp, Holland in the year 1577. Hans Bret, a young bakery worker, lived in Antwerp with his widowed mother during a time of perilous Protestant persecution in Europe. Hans was an eager student of Scripture, teaching new Christians and preparing them for baptism in the Protestant church.

One evening, Hans answered a knock at the bakery door to find he was surrounded by a delegation of officers who quickly dragged him off to prison. For months he was interrogated and tortured by the state church, trying to break his spirit and silence his tongue. But he remained unwaveringly true to Jesus Christ. He would not deny the faith.

If they could not break him, then they would bury him! On a raw January morning, 1577, Hans was tortured for the last time. The executioners did not want to chance Hans preaching at his own execution, so they clamped an iron tongue screw tightly into the soft, pink flesh of his tongue. Then they seared the end of his tongue with a red-hot iron so it would swell around the screw, insuring it could not slip off. They then dragged him to the marketplace, chained him to a stake and burned him alive.

From the ashes, Han's pastor retrieved the charred tongue screw and lovingly tucked it inside his coat. A short time later, he married Han's mother. Since then, Han's tongue screw has been passed down from generation to generation – a symbol of **faithfulness** and **integrity**.*

Integrity is defined as *being undivided*. In Scripture it is used for righteousness, uprightness, refusal to waver, blamelessness and singleness of heart. Hans Bret was a man of integrity. Because of his faithfulness and singleness of heart (and many others like him), we have the freedom to hold the Word of God in our hands without fear of sharing his fate. Our faith is built on the blood of righteous men and women who refused to waver. But integrity is not the life or death choice for us as it was for them. Or is it?

It is imperative that Christians live lives that are obviously righteous, upright, unwavering, blameless and single-hearted.

David cried, *Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O most High* (Psalm 7:8). What if God held all of us to that prayer? What would He find to judge in our lives...in our hearts...in our homes? In a day when we often hear that character doesn't count, that tolerance, not integrity, is the key to life, Jesus still proclaims, *Blessed are the pure in heart [hearts full of integrity], for **they** will see God* (Matthew 5:8).

Professor Robert Simon, a philosophy instructor at Hamilton College, has taught for thirty years. He is alarmed by the growing number of students who have overdosed on political correctness to the point they make **no moral judgments** about anything – not cheating, stealing or lying – nothing. In fact, they can not even bring themselves to judge the Holocaust as being immoral. As one student told him, "Of course I

dislike the Nazis, but who is to say they are morally wrong."** These students haven't a clue about integrity. They not only have none in themselves, but they do not seem able to even recognize it in others. In an age of such callousness, it is all the more imperative that we as Christians live lives of integrity – lives that are **obviously** righteous, upright, unwavering, blameless and single-hearted.

The apostle Paul reminds the Christians at Thessalonica about his own integrity in 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6. *For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.* Through Paul's negative description, we can tell a lot about what **integrity** does not involve. Let's take a closer look at his description.

- **Not spring from error** – Paul is not self-deluded. He tells the truth.
- **Impure motives** – He is not a user of people. He does not exploit others for his own gratification.
- **Not trying to trick you** – He does not try to deceive with pretty words. He is honest.
- **Not trying to please men** – Paul does not compromise his message so that people will think well of him.

- **Never used flattery** – He does not say nice things to people in order to gain an advantage. He is sincere.
- **No mask of greed** – He is not self-seeking. His humility is real, not a façade.
- **Not looking for praise** – Paul does not seek prestige or honor. He doesn't need to be popular.

Paul was an example to the Thessalonian Christians. He showed them how they should live as people of integrity. People *tested* and *approved by God*. Throughout 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul uses phrases like “you know,” “You remember,” “you are witnesses.” He was sure they knew who he really was; they knew him well enough to know his motives. When we have integrity and uprightness, it stamps us all the way through, clear down to our motives. It's part of our **whole life**.

When we have integrity and uprightness, it stamps us all the way through, clear down to our motives.

It's the way we treat everybody, especially our mate and children. The same way Paul treated the Thessalonians. So we are **honest** with them. We do not **use them** for our own purposes. We don't try to **deceive** them, but are **genuine** and **sincere**; not **self-seeking**, not giving

because of **what we can get back**. That is **integrity!**

There are rumbles around the country that it is perfectly permissible not to have integrity in our personal lives, as long as we have integrity in our business and public lives. Can this be true? With the few Scriptures we have quoted fresh in your mind, could you honestly think that premise has even the slightest possibility of being true? Of course not!

The way we live as husbands and wives, the kind of parents we are to the children He has loaned us, our intimate integrity – these things are of utmost importance to God. That is why David*** promised, *I will be careful to lead a blameless life (integrity)...I will walk in my house with blameless heart (integrity). I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil* (Psalm 101:2-4). God wants us to walk in integrity with the people who are closest to us – in the privacy of our own homes. We must not allow our eyes to linger on base (immoral) things – whether on TV, videos, magazines or the Internet. When we see people who live faithless (crooked) lives, lives without integrity, we must not allow their behavior to rub off on us. We must determine not to be buddies

with people with perverse hearts (that is, people who twist the truth – spin doctors). If we have **nothing to do with evil**, then we really can **walk in our houses** with integrity.

God wants us to walk in integrity with the people who are closest to us – in the privacy of our own homes.

Having integrity is an active way of life, isn't it? It is living life **purposefully** obeying God's Word and honoring Him...when it is convenient and when it is not, when it takes more effort than we think we can give, when it means being berated for being “goody-goody,” when it means foregoing self-gratification, even when it means torture or death. Others like Hans Bret paid a high price for integrity. We pray it would be that valuable to all of us. Worth even a tongue screw.

* This story was taken from *On This Day*, by Robert Morgan, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

** "That's Outrageous," page 75, Reader's Digest, February 1998.

***Note: David made this promise at the beginning of his reign as king of Israel. He wanted to be a man of integrity, a leader his people could look up to, not like Saul. David did not always “walk in his house with integrity.” He certainly broke this promise when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. But he was also quick to own up to his sin and confess it to God. Psalm 101 is inspired Scripture whose author is the Holy Spirit, even though the writer – David – failed.

Growing Toward Oneness Marriage Ministries provides books, CD's and other marriage resources and services to enrich your marriage.

Please visit their website at www.marriages.net

If you would like to order the above resources or receive more information contact:

GTO Marriage Ministries, 2436 Haskell Drive, Antioch, TN 37013

TOLL-FREE order line: **1-615-283-8363** or order online at www.marriages.net

Email: gtocentral@marriages.net

This is a publication of **GTO Marriages Ministries** and may be copied and distributed without permission.

GTO Marriage Ministries is a non-profit ministry supported by charitable donations from individuals and churches.

If you would like to contribute to this marriage ministry, got to www.marriages.net and click the "**Donate Now**" button.