

## YES, I'M A HYPOCRITE

When we live in God's household . . . we are called to integrity

*Ephesians 4:25-5:2*

There's a sermon point preachers have made so often over the years,  
it's beyond cliché.

It goes like this:

If you ask people why they don't go to church,  
one of the main excuses is, the church is full of hypocrites.  
And then the preacher goes on to say what a sorry excuse that is  
for not going to church.

Well, I'm here to say that's *not* just an excuse.

It is a statement of fact.

The church *is*, without a doubt, full and overflowing with hypocrites.

I am one of them.

And so are you. *All* of you.

Being a hypocrite is part of the human condition.

It is common to us all.

We didn't start out as hypocrites.

And by hypocrite, I mean,  
we live with a gap in our lives.

A gap between what we say and what we do.

A separation between what we believe and what we act on.

This separation, this fragmentation,  
is a form of human brokenness, of sin.

But we didn't start out fragmented.

We were created as whole persons.

In the image of God, we were created.

Whole in body, mind, and spirit.

Of course, some among us have been born  
with certain specific limitations in body or mind,  
sometimes *severe* limitations.

Yet in every human life there is the image of God,  
complete and whole as God intended,  
whether or not we are capable of *seeing* it.

But over time, we become less whole.

We make wrong choices.

We sin against our creator, and against each other.

We live in opposition to God's intentions of wholeness.

We disconnect the various parts of ourselves from each other.

And we become fragmented.

In other words, we become hypocrites.

We lose our integrity, our integration, our wholeness.

But you know, being fragmented is hardly seen as a *problem*  
by most people these days.

It's come to be expected.

Especially of any public figure—

athletes, entertainers, politicians.

Even, to some extent, of church leaders.

We've gotten jaded to the fact that one part of a person's life  
is not going to square with another part.

So we give these heroic public figures a free pass.

If we love what they're doing in Washington,

or on the movie screen,

or on the football field,

or in the concert hall,

or in the classroom,

or behind the pulpit . . .

If they're a genius in their respective fields,

we more easily look the other way

when something sleazy shows up in their personal life,

when we learn their lives are not integrated,

that there is a disconnect, a lack of integrity.

The examples are almost infinite,

if we pay attention at all to the news.

Bill Clinton, John Edwards, Mark Sanford,  
Michael Jackson, Britney Spears, Mel Gibson,  
Pete Rose, Michael Vick, Alex Rodriguez,  
Jimmy Swaggart, Ted Haggard,  
. . . or closer to home—John Howard Yoder.

These are just a tiny fraction of the names of  
public figures with private failings that *became* public.

And in nearly every case,  
the person has raving fans that come to their defense,  
and cry foul.

They claim a person's private life  
has nothing to do with their public life.  
That their work, or their art, or their athleticism,  
or their politics, or their intellect,  
should be judged on its own merits.  
What they do behind closed doors is off-limits.

Some of us remember well, during Clinton's presidency,  
the public debate that swirled,  
around whether his private morality  
should be connected to his performance as a president.  
Public opinion polls showed a majority of persons  
believed he lacked personal integrity,  
and was not personally trustworthy.  
But a majority still approved of his job as a president.  
In other words,  
"Okay, so he lies, he cheats on his wife,  
he uses people in his private life.  
But he's a good president, so let's leave him alone."  
And he certainly wasn't the *first* president  
for which people looked the other way,  
when questions of personal morality or integrity were raised.

Two items in sports news in recent weeks, illustrate the same dynamic.  
No sooner did football star Michael Vick finish his prison sentence,  
than sportswriters everywhere  
are calling for his full and immediate reinstatement to the NFL.  
As if just serving his time has rehabilitated him to the point  
where he can again be a public role model for our youth.  
A couple weeks ago it was revealed that  
Red Sox sluggers David Ortiz and Manny Ramirez  
were on a list of players in 2003  
who tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs.  
The same day the news broke,  
Ortiz hits a go-ahead home run,  
and the Sox fans give him a standing ovation

until he came out of the dugout for a curtain call.  
And Ramirez commented it's not a big deal to them or the fans,  
they're just going to keep on hitting the ball.

Any of us who are devoted fans of a public figure with private failings,  
have to ask ourselves,  
are we content to keep accepting this clear separation  
between private morality and public performance  
that our society has come to view as normal?

Integrity—that is, wholeness, integration of public and private life—  
ought to *mean something*.  
There is something wrong with carving up our human experience  
into separate and disconnected parts,  
which have separate and disconnected standards of behavior.  
Over here is how we think.  
And over here is how we act.  
Over here is our private life.  
And over here is our public life.  
Over here is how we relate to ourselves.  
And over here is how we relate to other people.  
And over there is how we relate to God.  
When these segments of our lives  
get disconnected from each other,  
what we have is a state of brokenness.  
A lack of wholeness. Absence of shalom. Dis-integration. Sin.

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The message of Ephesians is good news for the dis-integrated.  
Because it announces the wholeness we can have, in Jesus Christ.  
In Jesus we have the perfect example of perfect integrity.  
Jesus was a whole person.  
What he believed he lived.  
How he understood himself,  
squared with how he related to others,  
which squared with how he related to God.  
There was consistency and completeness in the person of Jesus.  
He lived out what God intended for us all,  
when God created us in God's own image.

So if we, as Christian believers, take on Christ,  
we take on wholeness, integrity.  
Or to put it in the words of Ephesians,  
we “clothe ourselves with the new self,  
created according to the likeness of God  
in true righteousness and holiness.”

This *new* righteousness, which we have *in Christ*,  
is one that speaks truth rather than falsehood.  
We find this in the first verse of today’s text from Ephesians.  
Chapter 4, verse 25.

In this verse, and the ones that come after it  
(you might want to follow along),  
the apostle issues all kinds of directives.  
*Do this, but do not do that.*  
*Take on this, but put away that.*

I count fourteen distinct commands in these few verses.  
But the fascinating thing is,  
the apostle is not just dictating a set of rules.  
He is presenting an argument.  
He is making a rational case,  
for living a life of full integrity.

He says, “Don’t lie.”  
but not because lying is on a list of bad things to do,  
not because it’s one of the Ten Commandments.  
No, he says don’t lie, *because*, and I quote,  
“we are members of one another.”  
Lying separates us from others.  
It creates distance, pulls us apart.  
It destroys integrity.  
We speak truthfully because we belong to each other,  
and we take that belonging seriously.

And going down the list, we see the same thing with all 14 commands.  
This list of wrongdoings—  
they separate, they undermine integrity, they dis-integrate us.

V. 26, be angry, but don’t sin.  
Don’t let the resentment build up.  
Don’t let the sun go down on your anger,  
because it will get in the way of your relationships.  
And because, v. 27, it will “make room for the devil,”  
the Great Dis-Integrator.

V. 28, don’t steal.  
Because when we work honestly with our own hands, he says,  
we will have enough that we can share with the needy.  
Working honestly strengthens bonds.  
Thievery destroys bonds. Destroys integrity.  
Working and sharing with each other builds integrity.

And v. 29, concerning evil talk, don’t do it because it tears down.  
Instead, (quote) “speak only what is useful for building up . . .  
so that your words may give grace to those who hear.”

V. 30, do not grieve the Holy Spirit,  
because the Spirit intends to redeem you,  
to return you to wholeness.  
So don’t do anything to undermine God’s good design on you.

V. 31-32, put away all those things that drive a wedge  
between yourself and others—  
bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, and all malice.  
But reach out toward the other, open yourself to the other,  
(quote) “be kind to one another, tenderhearted,  
forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.”  
Because . . . forgiveness rebuilds the bonds,  
it rebuilds that integrity that God designed for you.

Imitate God, (v.1 of ch. 5) live in love,  
because Christ loves us,  
because Christ, the Redeemer, the Great Integrator,  
gave up everything for our wholeness, for our integration.

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But it’s not just in the Bible that we hear these calls to integrity.

I was in my car last Tuesday when I heard it on WMRA,  
on “Talk of the Nation.”  
Neal Conan was interviewing psychologist Robert Feldman, author of  
*The Liar in Your Life: The Way to Truthful Relationships*.  
He says we all engage in what are known as “little white lies,”  
lies that function as a social lubricant.  
Like, “Doing fine, thanks for asking.” Even when you’re not.  
Or saying, “Hey, it was really great to see you,”  
as you pull yourself away from an awkward, unwelcomed encounter.

Let me quote a little of what Feldman said on the radio,  
which I got off the transcript later.  
I quote: “Little white lies do matter . . . [they lead to] lack of authenticity  
in our everyday life.  
We don’t really know where we stand.  
We don’t really ever get a good sense of who we are  
and what our strengths and weaknesses are . . .  
if people are constantly not telling us the truth . . .  
[Lies] take a toll in social relationships . . .  
By asking others to tell us the truth—  
and I think you *do* have to go *out of your way*  
to ask others to be truthful to you—  
you’re going to have a better understanding of who you are  
and you’re going to end up leading a more authentic life.”  
End of quote.

It’s not so surprising, and perhaps not even troubling,  
that we all experience a certain lack of authenticity in our lives.  
We are hypocrites.  
We are human beings,  
and it’s part of the human condition.  
The troubling thing about lying is not that we do it.  
It’s that doing it has become perfectly acceptable.  
We don’t *expect* people to live with whole integrity anymore.  
We expect the play-acting, the games, the white lies.  
And the more we accept and excuse,  
the larger the lies become,  
the bigger the betrayal, the darker the deceit,  
until the most offensive public behavior

hardly gets a reaction.

With the writer of Ephesians,  
I appeal to all of us hypocrites, *myself included*,  
to raise the standard again,  
to bring back together what has been separated,  
to close the gap.  
I challenge us to expect deeper honesty  
in our communications with each other.  
And as we do so,  
to also expect a more generous grace  
and forbearance of one another.  
Honesty must be accompanied by grace.

We avoid complete honesty  
because we think we are protecting others.  
But in that act of concealing the truth,  
we distance ourselves from others.  
And integrity suffers, because we are members of each other.

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God has given us a wonderful gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.  
That salvation is whole salvation.  
It is salvation of spirit, of body, of mind, of relationships.  
In Jesus Christ, God saves us  
from being broken and fragmented  
and alienated and abandoned.  
In Jesus Christ, God makes us whole.  
God restores the wholeness he created us with.  
God recreates in us the image of God.  
We are made new  
as we give ourselves over to God who makes all things new.

Will you join me in prayer?

Creator God, who by your love made us whole,  
we come to you this morning aware of continuing brokenness.  
By your love, will you continue to make us whole?  
We confess that we have lost integrity,

that we are disconnected  
from ourselves, from each other, and from you.  
We act in ways that are inconsistent with what we say.  
We say things that are inconsistent with what we believe.  
And we have drifted apart from each other,  
we have become strangers to our true selves,  
and we have offended you, our Creator.  
Lord, in the silence of these moments,  
bring to our minds those areas of our lives  
where integrity has suffered.

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God of all wholeness,  
God who offers to make us new in Christ Jesus,  
we are repenting.  
We are turning from that which fragments us,  
and turning toward that which makes us whole.

Slowly turning, ever turning *from* our lovelessness like ice,  
from our unforgiving spirit, from the grip of envy's vice,  
Slowly turning, ever turning *toward* the lavish life of spring,  
toward the word of warmth and pardon, toward the mercy welcoming.

Slowly turning, ever turning *from* our ego-centered gaze,  
from our self-enclosing circle, from our narrow, petty ways,  
Slowly turning, ever turning *toward* the foreigner as friend,  
toward the city without ghetto, toward the greatness without end.

Slowly turning, ever turning *from* our fear of death and loss,  
from our terror of the darkness, from our scorning of the cross,  
Slowly turning, ever turning *toward* the true and faithful one,  
toward the light of daybreak dawning, toward the phoenix-risen sun!

Amen.

Let us sing together #23, in *Sing the Journey*.

—Phil Kniss, August 9, 2009