

**Daring
to do
what
is right,
that being
the
sole
reason.**

Death Rattle

the dying gasp of integrity

*My son, if you will receive my sayings,
And treasure my commandments within you,
Make your ear attentive to wisdom,
Incline your heart to understanding;
For if you cry for discernment,
Lift your voice for understanding;
If you seek her as silver,
And search for her as for hidden treasures;
Then you will discern the fear of the Lord,
And discover the knowledge of God.
For the Lord gives wisdom;
From His mouth come knowledge
and understanding.
He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
He is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
Guarding the paths of justice,
And He preserves the way of His godly ones.
Then you will discern righteousness and justice
And equity and every good course.
For wisdom will enter your heart,
And knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;
Discretion will guard you,
Understanding will watch over you.*

Proverbs 2:1-11 nasb



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It was election night, 1904. Theodore Roosevelt was poised to win the White House by an unprecedented landslide. In that moment, at the height of his political power and popularity, he committed one of history's greatest political blunders.

Roosevelt had come into office upon the assassination of his predecessor, William McKinley. Subsequently he had enjoyed more than three years of a popular term, was robustly healthy and, at forty-six, still in the prime of life. In those years, there was no legal limit to the number of terms a President could serve. The 22nd Amendment to the US Constitution, which would have limited Roosevelt to only one elected term, after he had assumed such a large portion of McKinley's term, would not be ratified until 1951. So, though the tradition had been that a President not run for more than two terms, Roosevelt was free to run for two more full terms—or more.

Yet, that night, with his flabbergasted wife and supporters standing off to the side, the President declared to a roomful of reporters that

...he would consider the three-and-a-half years between September 1901 and March 1905 as equivalent to a full first term, in the sense that George Washington had understood such things. "The wise custom which limits the President to two terms regards the substance and not the form," he continued. "Under no circumstances will I be a candidate for, or accept another, nomination."

With that one sentence he signed his political demise, turning himself into a lame duck President before even beginning his first elected term.



Later, writing to a friend, Roosevelt said he would “cut off his right hand if he could just take back those words”. For you see, he *had* said them, said them publicly, and he would stand by those ill-fated words. Though he may have had moments in which he regretted the utterance, there was never any thought given to renegeing on the promise; it simply wasn’t an option.

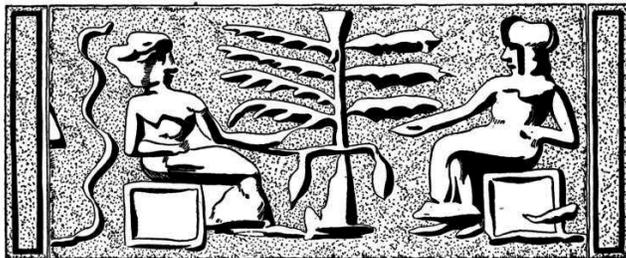
In a letter to his friend, Owen Wister, Roosevelt later wrote:

It is a peculiar gratification to me to have owed my election...to Abraham Lincoln’s ‘plain people’; to the folk who work hard on farm, in shop, or on the railroads, or who own little stores, little businesses which they manage themselves. I would literally, not figuratively, rather cut off my right hand than forfeit by any improper act of mine the trust and regard of these people. I may have to do something of which they will disapprove, because I deem it absolutely right and necessary; but most assuredly I shall endeavor not to merit their disapproval by any act inconsistent with the ideal they have formed of me. (This and the preceding quote are from *T.R.: The Last Romantic* (BasicBooks, 1997), by H.W. Brands.)

as good as your word

This kind of integrity has become almost obsolete. It has become nauseatingly commonplace for people to do quite the opposite of what they have promised. From the hardware store clerk to the mail-order catalog company, from the utility service representative to the plumber who reams out your pipes—we live in a world where a person’s word is only as good as the lawyer one finds to sue them for breach of contract.

Sadly missing now is the kind of integrity demonstrated by Joseph when he was tempted by the sensual enticements of his master’s wife, or the forthright commitment to his civic responsibilities shown by Daniel to King Darius.



Even in the simple, more mundane commitments people make every day—“I’ll call you tomorrow.”, “I’ll pick you up at 6:00.”—we are a society in which integrity has become something to snicker at—as one would chuckle at the naiveté of an unsophisticate. To be only fifteen minutes late is now to be on time; to have something more pressing prevent your arrival all together is not to be rude, but now fashionable.

Jesus taught us to follow through on what we say. He said not to depend on trite, meaningless oaths, but for us to just mean and do what we say.

But for many today, this is asking too much. Commitment and courtesy to others has now been replaced by a commitment to self, courtesy shown only to one’s own desires. The standard for all of society has now become that of the high school girl who, at the last minute, breaks her date with the pimple-faced dweeb, because the captain of the football team has just asked her out.

Character and integrity, like all good things, come down from above. They are not built into us from the clay of our substance, but are instilled in us by fathers and mothers, teachers and pastors, and, most of all, by a patient, attentive, righteous God.

So (Potiphar) left in Joseph’s care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he refused. “With me in charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

• • • **Genesis 39:6-10**

• • • *Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.* **Daniel 6:3-4**

• • • • • *“And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”*

Jesus: Matthew 5:36-37

Doing Without the inconvenient right

The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. Prov 11:3

There are few institutions more cutthroat and merciless than the American political scene. Advantage is not only exploited when something unseemly is discovered in the life of an opponent, but unseemliness will also be twisted and manufactured out of whole cloth. It's not enough to use a dirty tidbit to reveal a weakness in one's opponent; his record may be distorted beyond all recognition to create the unfavorable impression.

The rules of the game are vicious: When the opponent is down, he may be kicked and pummeled unmercifully. Reputations, even lives are destroyed to advance one's career—all the while touting one's own good name and pristine character. Underlings are fanned out to dredge up anything and everything that might sully the reputation of the opposition, and when something is found, it is "leaked" to the cooperative press—or a ranking lieutenant holds a sad-faced press conference to announce how "disappointed we all are" to have to release this damning evidence.

an honorable opponent

King Saul, the first king of Israel, hated David son of Jesse with a vengeance. The prophet Samuel had anointed David as a replacement for the corrupt Saul. And though he would periodically remember his affection for the young man who was his son's best friend, King Saul was more powerfully motivated by his jealousy of David, and sought every opportunity to do away with him.



Saul's pursuit of David was rooted in his jealousy of him; his jealousy of David was rooted in the favor God expressed for the young man—against the powerful *disfavor* He expressed for Saul. His reign had been distinguished by gross sin, arrogance and presumption, and outright rebellion against the Lord who had set him on the throne. Not only had the prophet Samuel informed him that he was a marked man, but that his replacement was someone particularly close to the Lord's heart. He told the king, "But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD'S command." (1 Samuel 13:14)

The truth of Samuel's pronouncement was borne out in the behavior of David. Instead of striking back, to rid himself of his persistent nemesis, David repeatedly showed honor and respect for the one God had initially anointed. No matter that Saul was now being rejected by God; He was the king, the Lord's anointed, and David would continue to show the appropriate respect.

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi." So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Craggs of the Wild Goats.

1 Samuel 24:1-2

He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. 24:3-4

It didn't seem like much. Saul didn't even notice that David had crept up silently and cut away a small portion of his robe. He finished his business and went on his way.

But David—because he *was* a man after God's own heart—knew that what he had done was wrong. He was immediately convicted of his offense. . . .

During Saul's long pursuit of David, the younger man had more than one opportunity to kill the king. But he steadfastly refused to take the advantage. No one would have blamed him, had he followed through on the counsel from his men. From a human perspective David had every right to defend himself from the very real threat of death from the king. But because he walked by God's perspective, instead of man's, David refused to go that route.

Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD'S anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

1 Samuel 24:1-7

Too Thin

the price of duplicity

Today image is everything. It would seem that no one really cares to know the truth about anyone else—so long as that person looks and sounds good. Character and integrity have become so thin in the human condition that even our national leaders are now elected based not on who they are, or what they have accomplished, but on how they comport themselves before the camera. Do they say all the things we wish to hear? Do they have quick answers that tickle our personal agendas? Well, then by all means, let's vote for *them!*

No matter how the world conducts itself, God's standards remain the same. The world may now give greater weight to image and sound bites, but God still examines the heart. That's what He said to the prophet Samuel when He sent him to select Israel's second king from the sons of Jesse. . . .

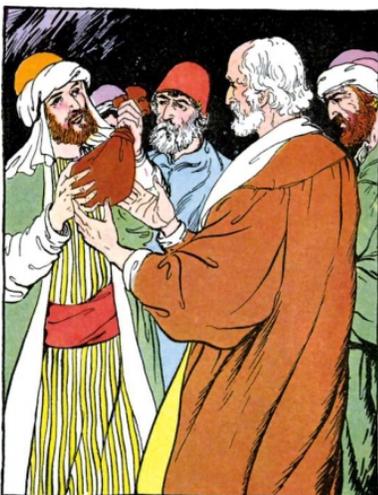
And God was looking at the heart—not the outward appearance—when He passed judgement on two members of the early church: Ananias and Sapphira.

The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.
Prov 12:22

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." **1 Samuel 16:7**

swift judgement

Extravagant generosity was heavy in the air during those first heady days of the Christian church. Luke tells us that "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." (Acts 2:44-46) More than just trinkets and inconsequentials, the believers were selling even their homes and real estate: "There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or



Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. **Acts 5:1-2**

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

Acts 5:3-4

houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need." (4:34-35)

• • • But there were some in the church who reckoned that the appearance of sacrifice would suffice, that all they need do was say that they were giving to the church the entire proceeds from the sale of their property.

Their deception bore a heavy consequence. The leader of the church, Peter, knew immediately that they were lying to him and the rest of the church.

• • More than that, they were lying to God and the Holy Spirit. It was God who judged them—and judgement was swift.



When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

Acts 5:5-6

Because she was in cahoots with her husband, part of the conspiracy from the beginning, Sapphira met with the same fate.

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. **5:7-10**

God's swift judgement seems harsh to us, but that opinion says more about our descending standards, than the standards of an unchanging God.

We say we live in the "New Testament era," an epoch under God's grace—and we do. But who's to say that God's righteous hand no longer carries out justice in this world? Who can say with authority that when someone suddenly drops dead, or experiences a sudden run of 'bad luck,' that he or she has not been visited upon by the judgement of a holy God?



Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand—
The shadow of a mighty Rock
Within a weary land;
A home within the wilderness,
A rest upon the way,
From the burning of the
noontide heat,
And the burden of the day.

Upon that cross of Jesus
Mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One
Who suffered there for me;
And from my smitten heart
with tears
Two wonders I confess—
The wonders of redeeming love
And my unworthiness.

I take, O cross, thy shadow
For my abiding-place;
I ask no other sunshine than
The sunshine of His face;
Content to let the world go by,
To know no gain nor loss,
My sinful self my only shame,
My glory all the cross.
Elizabeth C. Clephane

The Real Thing people of substance

People should think less about what they ought to do and more about what they ought to be. If only their being were good, their works would shine forth brightly. Do not imagine that you can ground your salvation upon actions; it must rest on what you are. The ground upon which good character rests is the very same ground from which man's work derives its value, namely, a mind wholly turned to God. Verily, if you were so minded, you might tread on a stone and it would be a more pious work than if you, simply for your own profit, were to receive the Body of the Lord and were wanting in spiritual detachment. **Meister Eckhart**



Our society has become so inured to a life constructed of Styrofoam and tinsel, that when the real thing comes along we're not sure how to react. People have become so accustomed to the paper and balsam wood fronts erected by so many, thinking that construction to be the real thing, that when someone of true substance happens along, they're left feeling ill-at-ease, awkward, wishing only to return quickly to their more comfortable Land of Illusions.

When members of the press—that inbred fraternity so accustomed to hype and spin and well-rehearsed sound bites—are presented with someone of real depth and substance, such as a Mother Teresa or Billy Graham, they trip all over themselves struggling to report the story in their typical fashion. But they're left the fool, since plastic is a poor companion to rich mahogany.

signs and wonders

The early persecution of the young church of the First Century, by such figures as Saul of Tarsus, caused the rapid dissemination of the gospel. As the followers of Christ escaped the intense persecution around Jerusalem, they carried the Good News with them to many who had not yet seen or heard the truth about Jesus.

Leaving Jerusalem, Philip traveled to Samaria, and there began proclaiming Christ, working miracles, and baptizing the new believers. Among them was a magician named Simon who had developed a considerable following in the area. Through his sorcery and grand showmanship, people regarded him (at his considerable coaxing) as a messiah in his own right—even referring to Simon as the “Great Power of God.” But, according to Luke, even this man believed the word about Jesus Christ as preached by Philip, was baptized, and became a camp follower of the disciple.

But there are different shades of ‘believing.’ The magician was less enamored of Jesus Christ, than of the miracles and crowd-pleasing wonders being performed in His name. Simon may have believed *some* of what Philip was teaching, but for the most part he was more impressed by the disciple's success in drawing crowds, and thought that if he hung around long enough, he'd discover a way to cash in on the whole enterprise.

That opportunity presented itself when Peter and John arrived in Samaria to complete the conversion process. Though we may not understand—or agree upon—the details, somehow the Samaritan's conversion to Christ had been

*A faithful man
will be
richly blessed,
but
one eager
to get rich
will
not go
unpunished.
Prov 28:20*

But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

• • • **Acts 8:9-11 nkjv**

*They followed (Simon) because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. **Acts 8:11-13***

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. **Acts 8:14-17**

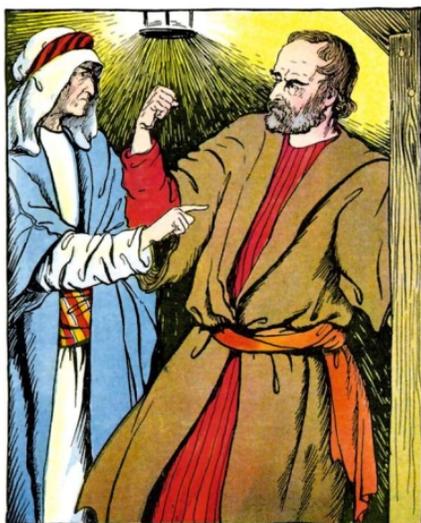
accomplished without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The two apostles came from Jerusalem to confirm what had been done so far, and to pray that the new believers would now receive the Holy Spirit.

Peter and John began laying hands on the people, and they received the Holy Spirit. And Simon the magician didn't miss a beat. Here at last was his chance to cash in on the spread of this new faith. He had already shown that he could talk the talk, and work slights of hand to pass himself off as someone from God—even God himself—to the gullible in the area. But he knew that on his own he couldn't pull off this business of bestowing the Holy Spirit on new converts. Simon figured people would pay good money for that, and, being a good businessman, he was willing to spend money to make money.

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." (8:18-19)

righteous indignation

There's no mistaking Peter's temper in his response to Simon. He, better than anyone else, knew that faith in Jesus Christ was to be total. One could not believe just a little bit, or pick and choose only the best parts. One could not defend Christ one day and betray Him the next, and still consider himself a true believer. And one could not call himself a follower of Christ while selling off the good parts to an ignorant people. It was *Jesus* who paid the ransom.



Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." (8:20-23)

In confirmation of the shallow depth of his faith—if any faith at all—Simon's reply was, essentially, "Repent and pray to the Lord? *You* do it." If he couldn't turn a profit on this new-fangled 'Christian' stuff, then he wasn't interested.

It does not matter how much or how little you know about Jesus Christ. It does not matter how you have come to that knowledge. If your faith is not a living power, leading to love and self-surrender, it is really nought. One thing only unites to God—a faith which cleanses the heart, a faith which lays hold on Christ with will and conscience, a faith which, resting on penitent acknowledgement of sin, trusts wholly to His great mercy. **Alexander Maclaren**

God is looking for people who are the real thing. The world may be perfectly willing to settle for the glitter and nonsense of a plastic faith, but the Lord God is not so simple-minded. He prefers to work with people of substance, people of good character. Not those who are perfect, by any definition, but those who are willing to live with the consequences of their promises—those who are fully committed to serving Him with integrity.



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