

The Integrity Test

by Robb Redman

Recently I watched pastor and author Erwin McManus use a banana and a watermelon to demonstrate how integrity works. While peeling the banana and slicing open the watermelon, Pastor McManus explained that in fruit, the inside fulfills what the outside suggests. Fruit displays integrity. In people, on the other hand, the inside-outside consistency is blocked by sin. The inside often fails to live up to the outside, and integrity, or lack of it, is less obvious.

One integrity indicator shows up in the decisions we make—in particular the decisions for which the Bible gives no clear guidance. God blesses us with remarkable freedom: freedom from sin's bondage, freedom in the Holy Spirit to experience the abundant life that Christ promises We are also free to make choices, large and small, that affect our relationship with God and others. In learning to make good and God-honoring choices, our faith and character grow and our insides more clearly live up to our outsides.

The apostle Paul provides four tests to help guide us in the tough choices that make us feel alone in our final decisions:

1. **The authority test.** Will the result of my choice put me under its power? 1 Cor. 6:12 (NIV): "Everything is permissible for me"—but I will not be mastered by anything."
2. **The sanctification test.** Will the result of my choice make me godlier? In 1 Cor. 10:23 (NIV), Paul writes: "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive.
3. **The edification test.** Will the result of my choice benefit others? "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall" (Rom. 14:19-21 NIV).
4. **The conscience test.** Will the result of my choice make my conscience uneasy? "So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:22-23 NIV).

The good news is that we're not left on our own to guess which choice will most please God. Paul writes that "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). When we come to Christ, He fills us with His Spirit in such a way that we begin to see and hear as He does. His thoughts become our thoughts. His wholeness and integrity heal our brokenness and inconsistency. And His character begins to shine through the choices we make.

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