



The Inescapable Ought

Andy Stanley

Scripture: Romans 2:14–15; Mark 12:34

Introduction

[Today, we begin a new series entitled:]

Graphic: Title slide for *Your Integrity, Our World*

[Integrity is the resolve and courage to do what's right and noble because it's right and noble. You do it when it benefits you and when it costs you because people of integrity do the right thing. You do it when it costs something or even when there was a less costly alternative. You're familiar with the concept of Structural Integrity as it relates to building science.]

Structural Integrity

The ability of a **structure** to withstand its **intended load** without failing due to **fracture** or **fatigue**

[We've seen devastation when structural integrity is compromised. Damage isn't isolated to the compromised beam or column. The entire structure is affected because...]

When a load-bearing structure **fails**, the load is **transferred** to and potentially **overloads** surrounding support structures.

[The failure of one part adds stress to other parts, and the entire structure is compromised. This same dynamic is true for each of us.]

A failure of **personal** integrity adds stress to the **persons** around us.

[Integrity failure in one family member transfers stress to other family members. If you're a teacher or school administrator, you get this. When a student's grades suddenly plummet, your first guess is that something must be going on in their home.]

[Marital stress can be created by a child's behavior. Entire companies have imploded because of integrity failure by the CEO or leadership team, and hundreds of people lose their jobs.]



[Foster parents see firsthand how a parent's integrity collapse fuels generational poverty or drug addiction.]

The **load** is always **transferred**.

[The consequences are never isolated. Your integrity failure impacts some other persons. But when you maintain your integrity, it impacts others as well. It's a big deal! When we think about our families, communities, nation, and world, I can't think of anything more important. Thus, our title for this series is Your Integrity, Our World.]

[We've all been on the receiving end of this. It's one reason integrity is a...]

Integrity

Universal **Expectation**

[We may opt for loopholes and make excuses with our personal decisions, but we expect integrity from our spouse, parents, boss, leaders, or employees.]

[Thieves don't expect to be stolen from. Unfaithful spouses don't expect to be cheated on. A student who cheats expects their teacher to grade fairly. Employees who waste hours at work expect to be paid for their whole scheduled time. This inescapable expectation points to something significant.]

Integrity assumes an **ought to** we readily **appeal to** that we assume everybody around us is **accountable to**.

["You lied to me!" The implication is: "Though we've never discussed the pros and cons of lying, I assume you know it's wrong. I didn't decide it's wrong." You didn't decide. Everybody just knows. You rarely hear...]

"Yes, I **lied** to you. So what?"

[If there is no objective outside of us—a standard of right and wrong—why make excuses for our behavior? "I cheated. So what?" What we usually hear is, "I didn't lie!" The implication is that lying is wrong. We lie about lying, so people won't think we're lying. We may hear...]

"The **reason** I lied is..."

[But why not decide there's nothing wrong with lying? Because we know better.]



There is an **ought to** that stands **outside of you** and **over you** that didn't **originate** with you.

[... Or with me. We can't escape it. We may deny the existence of "ought to" with our actions but never our reactions. We react and appeal to a universal ought to when we or a loved one is mistreated. What does this have to do with integrity?]

If there is no **ought to** that stands **outside** of you and holds sway **over** you,

integrity is merely a **tool** you use to **get your way** until it **gets in the way**.

[Then we throw it away and do what we please. "But you promised!" "I did, and I meant it. But I don't want to do this anymore."]

[When integrity is anchored to nothing but courtesy or societal expectation, we discard it when it's inconvenient. Why not?]

["You signed a contract?" "I did. And I intended to follow through, but another bigger job came along, so I'm out." Think about this at the national level.]

If there is no **ought to** that stands **outside** of us and holds sway **over** us, integrity is reduced to a **tool** government uses to **get its way** until it **gets in the way**.

[So, determining what's at the bottom and what our concept of integrity is built on and based on has huge ramifications. If integrity is not connected to, supported by, and grounded in anything other than the divine, let's not kid ourselves.]

Integrity...

[What's right, wrong, ought, ought not, virtuous, noble, and just...]

... is **fluid**. It will be **defined** and **refined** by **personal** and **public opinion**.

[It will be defined by majority rule. Let me ask you this: Should women be allowed to vote? Based on what? For me, based on I don't want to be locked out of the house. Once upon a time, the majority said no. Then the opinion changed to yes. Is there nothing more to that issue than majority opinion?]



[What about the Constitution? Are the rights guaranteed by our Constitution anchored to anything other than the opinion of the authors?]

[What about slavery? Many thought and still think that it's right, moral, and natural that some people were born to be ruled and others to be rulers. We don't. But who's to say?]

[What if the majority swung the other way? Would you swing? If not, why not? Are you better than or righter than those who disagree? Do you think you're morally superior to them? Based on what?]

Our outrage at the very **thought** is an appeal to an **ought!**

[Which brings me to this:]

Does your **outrage** rest on anything more **substantial** and **less fluid** than your **personal opinion**?

[Or a...]

Personal **conviction**?

[Or your...]

Life **experience**?

[If there is no ought and ought not that stands outside of us and holds sway over us, then right and wrong and just and unjust are determined by...]

Majority Rule

[In the case of a democracy, but it's determined by...]

Minority Rule

[... in the case of a dictatorship, theocracy, or fascist regime. People with power just make stuff up. But it's worse than that. The people in power can't be held responsible. We can't judge them because there's no objective standard by which to judge.]

If all there is is **matter**, they had no actual **choice** in the matter.



[Matter doesn't decide. Matter just is. Choice requires free will. In a purely material world, free will is an illusion. In the end, it's...]

Survival of the **fittest**

Evolution by natural **de**-selection

[If there is no divine lawgiver, it's just a self-serving opinion. Integrity becomes a useful tool... until it's not. In the end...]

Ought to is up to you.

[But we know better. There's something on the outside of you bearing down on you.]

The moment we **attempt** to **justify** a behavior in our **minds**...

[The moment we acknowledge the tension. "I shouldn't do this but..."]

... we acknowledge the **divine**.

[... whether we believe it or not. You acknowledge accountability to something we didn't create and can't shake.]

[Paul explained it this way to Jesus following first-century Jews who wondered how Gentiles who didn't know the law of Moses could become God followers.]

Romans 2:14 (Paraphrased by Andy Stanley)

When Gentiles, who do not **have** the law...

do instinctively things **required** by the law...

[They don't lie, steal, commit adultery, cheat, or murder. They just know those are wrong.]

they are a law **for themselves**, even though they do not have **the** law.

[They have a law even though they don't have the law or the Torah. But how? Where did that come from?]



Romans 2:15

They show that the **requirements** of the law are **written on their hearts**, their **consciences** also bearing witness,

and their **thoughts** sometimes **accusing** them and at other times even **defending** them.

[Gentiles, who don't have the Ten Commandments, are condemned by their conscience when they break a universal one.]

[Ought to isn't completely up to you. There's an outside agent.]

The moment we attempt to **justify** a behavior in our **minds**, we acknowledge the **law of God** written on our **hearts**.

[Everyone should consider following Jesus because he came to initiate the kingdom of God on the earth. He placed his law in our hearts. When you choose what's right, you participate in it. These are Jesus's words:]

Mark 12:34 (Paraphrased by Andy Stanley)

"You're not far from it."

[Integrity is anchored to something beyond our fluid opinions and beyond a majority opinion. It's informed by a value system that stands outside of us and that puts pressure on us. It represents what's best for the people around us and us. You know it's best for you when someone treats you the way they ought not, and you appeal to the law of God in your heart and hope is in their heart too. It's more than being a good person. It's living in sync with God's will.]

When you do what's **right**, and it **costs** you, you declare the rule of God **over** you.

[You participate in the kingdom of God whether you meant to or not. And when you insist other people treat people right, justly, and with dignity, you do so as well.]

INTEGRITY

We **expect** it.

We **celebrate** it.



We can't **escape** it.

[But how do you get it? How do you get it back? How do you guard and model it? That's what this series is about.]

[So, don't miss Part 2 of Your Integrity, Our World when we discuss how to position integrity as a guide. See you then.]

[Before you go, here are three questions to keep the conversation going:]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever done the **right thing** because it was the right thing and **paid a price** as a result? Was it worth it?
2. Have you **suffered personally** because of someone else's lack of integrity?
3. Would you commit Proverbs 11:3 to memory?

Proverbs 11:3 (NASB 1995)

The **integrity** of the **upright** will **guide** them, but the crookedness of the treacherous will **destroy** them.

[This is a big deal. It's as big as our lives, our community, and our country. In addition to discussing it, perhaps you should share it. It may make all the difference for somebody you know, somebody who's on the verge of deciding yes when they should decide no.]

Prayer