

## What's the Big Deal?

You are a golden person. You look at your life and you think about the weight of the greatness of the fact that you are standing in this very spot with a chance to get an education and create a future for yourself from the simple building blocks that have been given to you. You carry so many expectations on your back, foremost the expectations of others, your parents, and yourself; so much is riding on your personal success and on you doing well in school.

All that being said, sometimes you may encounter a situation where you have the opportunity to do something so small, to make the tiniest compromise that could yield a ton of success with almost no effort. It would save you so much and actually allow you to use your energy on something that actually matters. With this tremendous weight riding on your shoulders, you may ask yourself, what is the big deal? What's the big deal if during a quiz or an exam I take a small glance at the person's paper right next to me? What's the big deal if we all gather as a group and do an online assessment together? What's the big deal if someone sends me their homework and I change a word or two and resubmit? What's the big deal if the person who took a quiz or an exam before me tells me what questions are going to be asked? What's the big deal if someone takes my clicker to class and does my attendance check for me? What's the big deal if I change my location to make it look like I'm in class? I mean, essentially, no one is getting hurt, right?

No. Not right. In fact, it is the exact opposite of right (some call this wrong). Why so? The Bible teaches us in many places about the type of people whom God dwells among and works through. It says that, "I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity" (1 Chronicles 29:17). Sometimes we operate by a false pretense of holiness. We label certain sins as "bad sins" and other sins as "okay sins" and as long as we stay away from the "bad sins" and kind of towards the "okay sins", then we're good. If only God saw it this way. God defines holiness as fighting to keep "oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:26). Meaning, fighting to remove from one's heart, even the smallest lurking of dishonest intention. What is the reward for this? "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will SEE God" (Matthew 5:8). Those who hold tight will get to experience Him in this life and see Him in the next life. And those who don't? Those who refuse will live a life where they're constantly wondering what is separating them from experiencing Him to the fullest level, not realizing that the small passing decisions they're making are stealing God away from them.

Someone may be in a situation where they really NEED an A on an exam. In their mind, this A can be achieved very easily by glancing at the paper next to them, and no one gets hurt. So they look at the paper next to them and get the question right and subsequently the A. Why do they do this? They do this because they would rather get the A, even if it means losing the

presence of God in their life, rather than hold tight to their integrity and take the B+.... but what about the A? Forget the A! Lose the A! Lose everything in this life if it means you don't lose the divine accompaniment of God. Where are the people in this world that look at God and say, "Lord, I don't care. I don't care if every single person around me is getting a good grade because they're cheating and not getting caught. I don't care if I lose the grades and the success and the friends and everything. If I lose all these things Lord I will be very sad, but if I lose You O Lord, I am finished. Please let me not lose You."

Be very careful because spiritual death happens one small compromise at a time. When Nebuchadnezzar asked the three saintly youth to make a small compromise by bowing to a statue that very clearly wasn't divine, for the preservation of their lives, they looked him in the face and told him, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." (Daniel 3:16-18). In other words, they said we know if we are faithful, God will protect us and give us a path to prosperity, but even if we fail, let it be so, but let us not sadden God's heart. Many people would characterize the three saintly youth *avoiding* the fire as a success. Many people would characterize Daniel *avoiding* the lions' den as a success. Many people would characterize Joseph *avoiding* prison by sleeping with Potiphar's wife as a success. Be very careful what you define as success and what motivates your decisions.

Let's conclude with a story. A few decades ago in Egypt, there was an engineering student who was very dedicated to the church service. He reached his final year of his degree and had to take a huge final exam to earn the degree. He studied really hard but failed the exam two times. The university had a rule that if you failed the exam three times, you would be dropped from the program with no chance to get the degree or get remediation. He studied for the exam for many weeks and he went to the final exam room with other fellow students who had failed the exam previously. When he got the exam, he looked through it and realized the material was unusually difficult. The professor proctoring the exam felt bad for the students and wanted to help them out. In the middle of the exam, he stood up and told them, "I'm going to step out of the room for a short while, 'manage yourselves' and I will be right back," and he left the room. Everyone immediately began to cheat and compare answers. The engineering student's heart was broken; he knew he was going to fail and lose the degree but his conscience would not allow him to cheat. He kept trying his best and went up after a while to hand up the exam. The professor proctoring it, having come back, took the paper from him and looked at it for a bit and told him, "This is a failing grade." The student told him, "It is what it is, this is my best." The professor handed him back the paper and told him, "Go back to your seat

immediately and cheat like your fellow students.” But the student refused and told him his conscience will not let him cheat and that he would rather fail. The professor was so impressed by his integrity. He reached out to the department and they made a one time exception to give him an easy remediation exam which he subsequently ended up passing, earning his degree. May God grant us the integrity of heart to hold fast to what is honest and good so that we can achieve our true goal, which is to do what is pleasing to Him at all times. Amen.

“The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them.” (Proverbs 11:3).