

INTEGRITY

INTRODUCTION:

1. Building a Life Without Compromise.
2. God's People Are to Be Unique.
 - A. Deut. 14:2: "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."
3. God Calls His People to Be Separate.
 - A. 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."
4. God Never Compromises His Absolutes.
 - A. Ps. 138:2: "I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name."
5. Solomon Kept His Integrity in Building the Temple.
 - A. 1 Kings 9:3-5: "And the Lord said to him: "I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have sanctified this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'"
6. Listen to David:
 - A. Ps. 15:1-5: "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those

who fear the Lord; he who swears to his own hurt and does not change; he who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.”

DEFINITION OF INTEGRITY

American Heritage Dictionary (Houghton Mifflin, 1992) defines integrity as “steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code,” “the state of being unimpaired; soundness,” or the quality or condition of being whole or undivided; completeness.” It comes from the word *integer*, which means “whole” or “complete.” Integrity essentially means being true to one’s ethical standards, in our case, God’s standards. Its synonyms are honesty, sincerity, incorruptibility. It describes someone without hypocrisy or duplicity--someone who is completely consistent with his or her stated convictions. A person who lacks integrity--someone who says one thing and does another--is a hypocrite.

Nowhere is integrity more critical than in the leadership of the church, because the spiritual leader must maintain integrity.

I. A WORLD WHICH COMPROMISES ITS VALUES.

A. Nothing we hold dear is worth keeping if it means losing Christ.

1. Phil. 3:8, 9-14: “But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

2. 2 Cor. 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”
3. Gal. 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now

live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

- a. We live in a world of compromise--in a society that has abandoned moral standards and Christian principles in favor of expediency or pragmatism. The underlying philosophy is based on accomplishing goals by whatever means are necessary. This self-centered perspective should have as its motto: “If it works for you, do it” -- a notion that inevitably leads to compromise of conscience and convictions. Because compromise is so prevalent in our society, you could say we no longer have a national conscience; guilt and remorse are nonfactors in determining behavior.

B. Apostle Paul describes a former lifestyle of Gentiles.

1. Eph. 4:17-19, 20: “This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ.”
2. James 4:4: “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”
3. Acts 2:40: “And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’”
4. 1 Cor. 2:16: “For ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”
5. 1 Thess. 5:10: “... who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.”
 - a. Politicians, who should be upholding the high ideals of our country, instead are leading the way in compromise. They promote their lofty standards and high ideals prior to their elections but compromise them once they are in office. The same holds true in business, from corporate executives down to

salespeople; in the courts, from judges to attorneys; in sports, from owners to athletes; and in all walks of life. As a result, people learn to lie, cheat, steal, and shade the truth--to do whatever is necessary to get what they want. Thus compromise becomes a way of life.

C. Becoming a person of integrity involves:

1. Eph. 4:22-24: "That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness."

2. A continual process.

a. Titus 3:5: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

b. Col. 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

c. 2 Pet. 1:4: "By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

(i) Unfortunately, the philosophy and practice of compromise has even invaded the church. Because tolerance is the operative ideology in our society, the church adopts a similar perspective to reach the unsaved. Many churches now look for ways to give the Gospel to people without offending them. Yet the very nature of the Gospel is offensive because it confronts sinners with their sin. Ignoring that, many churches willingly compromise God's Word instead of standing firm on the Gospel, and they give the world a watered-down version that can't effect any change.

D. To compromise this "New Self" is a great injustice to God.

1. Rise from baptism to a New Life.
 - a. Rom. 6:4: “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”
 - (i) On an individual basis, the spirit of compromise hits closer to home in your personal interactions. You may have had opportunities to proclaim Christ to unbelievers, yet out of intimidation or lack of confidence, you have kept silent. Perhaps you’ve found yourself compromising God’s Word on some ethical issue at work or in your neighborhood and convinced yourself that such compromise was necessary to maintain your credibility as an employee or neighbor. Yet your Christian testimony is predicated on your complete devotion to God’s Word as the highest authority -- no matter what the consequences may be. God draws the elect into the kingdom through Christians who prove to be different from the world--who reveal their true allegiance by their commitment and obedience to God’s standards.

II. WE MUST NOT COMPROMISE DOCTRINAL INTEGRITY.

- A. Men who hold an uncompromising standard are rare in the church today.
 1. Acts 20:29-30: “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”
 2. Rom. 3:1-2: “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.”
 3. 2 Tim. 4:3: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers.”

- a. The world is a seducer. It seeks to attract our attention and our devotion. It remains so close at hand, so visible, so enticing. It eclipses our view of heaven. What is seen vies for our attention. It entices our eyes lest we look up for a better country whose builder and maker is God. It pleases us--much of the time, anyway--and, alas, we often live our lives to please it. And there is where conflict ensues, for pleasing the world so seldom overlaps with pleasing God.

The divine call we receive is this: “Do not be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). But the world wants us to be partners with it. We are urged to participate in the fullness of it. It presses upon us with the ultimate peer pressure. ([Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1988], 59)

B. Church is the Pillar of the Truth.

1. 1 Tim. 3:15: “But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

Our Lord has no patience for such people. The scribes and Pharisees were frequent subjects of Christ’s blistering attacks on their hypocrisy. Of them He said, “They say things, and do not do them” (Matt. 23:3). That is a lack of integrity--they live by one set of ethics while commanding others to live by another. After pronouncing several woes on them, Jesus offered this final rebuke: “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?” (v.33).

The conclusion is simple: those who maintain a life of integrity will be blessed by God; those who don’t will be cursed, especially those in spiritual leadership.

Integrity is essential if any believer is to represent God and Christ in this world. Anything less than total devotion to our Lord in both character and conduct amounts to compromise with the world. A mistake often made by well-meaning Christians is to go too far in the other direction--to adhere to the biblical code of conduct without the proper internal motivation. That, too, is hypocrisy.

2. Believe the Doctrine.

- a. Acts 24:14: “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.”
 - b. 2 Cor. 4:13: “But since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak.”
 - c. John 5:24: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”
3. Memorize the Doctrine.
- a. Ps. 119:11: “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”
 - b. 1 Pet. 3:15: “But I sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”
4. Meditate on the Doctrine.
- a. Joshua 1:8: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”
 - b. Ps. 119:97: “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.”
5. Study the Doctrine.
- a. 2 Tim. 2:15: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”
6. Obey the Doctrine.
- a. Luke 11:28: “But He said, ‘More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!’”

- b. John 8:31-32: “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’”

7. Defend the Doctrine.

- a. Phil. 1:16: “The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains.”
- b. Jude 3: “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

The old saying goes, “Every man has his price.” Is that true? Do all of us have moral standards that are valid so long as they accommodate our personal goals and desires? Or are we willing to set aside our desires for the sake of those standards we claim to believe?

Church history is full of people who refused to compromise the biblical standards. As he stood before the Diet of Worms and was ordered to recant his writings or lose his life, Martin Luther did not deny Christ. Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, two English Reformers, were both burned at the stake for their faith in Christ. These men are representative of the people who can’t be bought; no price will cause them to sell out.

THE PRICE OF COMPROMISE

Men who hold to an uncompromising standard are sorely lacking in the church today. Many so-called Christians boast of their moral standards and extol their righteous character, yet abandon their conviction when compromise is more beneficial and expedient. Perhaps you recognize one or more of the following:

1. People say they believe the Bible, yet attend churches where the Bible isn’t taught.
2. People agree that sin must be punished, but not if those sins are committed by their children.

3. People oppose dishonesty and corruption until they must confront their bosses and risk losing their jobs.
 4. People maintain high moral standards until their lusts are kindled by unscriptural relationships.
 5. People are honest until a little dishonesty will save them money.
 6. People hold a conviction until it is challenged by someone they admire or fear.
8. Live the Doctrine.
- a. Titus 2:10: “Not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”
 - b. Col. 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

Sadly, such compromises are not exceptions; they have become the rule. But don't think twentieth-century Christians are the only experts in the art of compromise. Scripture is full of people who compromised, including some very choice servants of God.

1. Adam compromised God's law, followed his wife's sin, and lost paradise (Gen. 3:6,22-24).
2. Abraham compromised the truth, lied about Sarah's relationship to him, and nearly lost his wife (Gen. 12:10-12).
3. Sarah compromised God's Word and sent Abraham to Hagar, who bore Ishmael and destroyed peace in the Middle East (Gen. 16:1-4, 11-12).
4. Moses compromised God's command and lost the privilege of entering the Promised Land (Num. 20:7-12).

5. Samson compromised his devotion as a Nazirite and lost his strength, his eyesight, and his life (Judg. 16:4-6, 16-31).
 6. Israel compromised the commands of the Lord, lived in sin, and, when fighting the Philistines, lost the Ark of God (1 Sam. 4:11). She also compromised the law of God with sin and idolatry and lost her homeland (2 Chron. 36:14-17).
 7. Saul compromised God's divine word by not slaying the animals of his enemy and lost his kingdom (1 Sam. 15:3, 20-28).
 8. David compromised God's standard, committed adultery with Bathsheba, murdered Uriah, and lost his infant son (2 Sam. 11:1--12:23).
 9. Solomon compromised his convictions, married foreign wives, and lost the united kingdom (1 Kings 11:108).
 10. Judas compromised his supposed devotion for Christ for thirty pieces of silver and was separated from Christ eternally (Matt. 26:20-25, 47-49, 27:1-5; cf. John 17:12).
 11. Peter compromised his conviction about Christ, denied Him, and lost his joy (Mark 14:66-72). Later he compromised the truth in order to gain acceptance by the Judaizers and lost his liberty (Gal. 2:11-14).
 12. Ananias and Sapphira compromised their word about their giving, lied to the Holy Spirit, and lost their lives (Acts 5:1-11).
9. Proclaim the Doctrine.
- a. Matt. 28:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

- b. Mark 16:15-16: “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.’”
- c. 2 Tim. 4:2: “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”
- d. Titus 1:3: “But has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior.”
- e. 1 Cor. 1:23-25: “But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”
- f. 1 Cor. 2:1-2: “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

Two observations come to mind from those examples. First, in every case the effect of the compromise was to lose something valuable in exchange for something temporary and unfulfilling, some sinful desire. How contrary that is to what we discovered in the first chapter. There we learned that you gain something valuable (your salvation and relationship with Christ) in exchange for something worthless (your sin and self-righteousness).

Second, note what was compromised in each of those examples: either God’s Word, a command from God, or a conviction about God. Thus the true price of compromise is a rejection of God’s Word, which amounts to rebellion against Him and promotion of self as the final authority.

That is the situation in many churches today. Even in churches that once were genuinely evangelical, where the Bible was the divine standard for belief and living, God’s Word is now compromised. Sometimes it is stripped of its clear

meaning or is relegated to a place of secondary authority. In many churches that once preached sound doctrine, evils that God plainly and repeatedly condemns are touted as acceptable. Scripture is often reinterpreted to accommodate those anti-biblical views. Pragmatism is in; commitment to biblical truth is denigrated as poor marketing strategy.

The fact is, people are content with unbiblical notions that raise their comfort level and either justify or overlook their sins. They are quick to reject as unloving anyone who presumes to hold them accountable to doctrinal beliefs and moral standards they deem outmoded and irrelevant.

Today the church is full of spiritual babies who are “tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Eph. 4:14)-the antithesis of a spiritually mature Christian. Spiritual babies are in constant danger of falling prey to every new religious fad that comes along. Because they are not anchored in God’s truth, they are subject to every sort of counterfeit truth--humanistic, cultic, pagan, demonic, or whatever. Just as families today are dominated by their children, so are many churches. How tragic when the church’s immature believers are among its most influential teachers and leaders.

C. We must be unwaveringly loyal to Scripture.

1. Titus 1:9: “Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”
2. 1 Tim. 4:6: “If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.”
3. Ezra 7:10: “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

The most valuable pursuit of Paul’s life was “knowing Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:8). To know Christ is not simply to have intellectual knowledge about Him; Paul uses

the Greek verb *ginosko*, which means to know “experientially” or “personally.”

Paul taught the Ephesians that one of the functions of the church is to build up the people in “the knowledge of the Son of God” (4:13). There the word “knowledge” is from *epignosis*, which refers to full knowledge that is correct and accurate. That is the knowing of which Jesus spoke when He said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them” (John 10:27). He was not speaking of merely knowing their identities but of knowing the intimately, and that is the way He wants His people to know Him. Paul’s desire is for every believer to develop this deep knowledge of Christ by building a relationship with Him through prayer and faithful study of and obedience to God’s Word.

Paul desired to “be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil. 3:9). To know Christ is to have His righteousness, His holiness, and His virtue imputed to us, which makes us right before God.”

PROTECTING THE TRUTH

Where does the problem lie? Without question the fault lies primarily in the leadership--both the pastors and lay leaders whose responsibility is to teach, guide, and protect the people of God. As Paul warned the Ephesian elders, “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30). False teachers are a given, and it is up to the leadership to be on the lookout for them.

But there is also a sense in which the people must share some of the blame. God’s Word is available to them as well, and they cannot follow their spiritual leadership blindly. Those who have been built up and strengthened in God’s Word are able to discern truth from error and thus have a duty, for their own spiritual welfare, to be sure their leaders measure up to the standard of Scripture.

All believers must act as guardians of the truth. As Paul discussed the privilege of Israel’s identity he said, “What advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they

were entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:1-2).
God’s primary gift to Israel was His Word. The church is in the same position, for he has entrusted us with the guarding and communicating of His truth.

III. IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE.

- A. Rom. 12:1-2: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”
- B. Eph. 5:8-10: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), proving what is acceptable to the Lord.”
- C. Eph. 5:15-17: “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”
- D. Phil. 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--mediate on these things.”
- E. 1 Thess. 5:21: “Test all things; hold fast what is good.”
- F. Phil. 1:10: “That you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.”
- G. 1 Cor. 10:31-32: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God.”
- H. Matt. 5:16: “Let your light so shine before me, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”
- I. 1 Tim. 4:7: “But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself rather to godliness.”

Every church has the solemn responsibility to steadfastly uphold the truth of God’s Word. The church does not invent the truth, and alters it only at the cost of

judgment. God has entrusted the church with the stewardship of Scripture, and its duty is to support and safeguard the Word as the most precious possession on earth. Churches that tamper with, misrepresent, depreciate, or abandon biblical truth destroy their only reason for existing and experience impotence and judgment.

HOW TO SAFEGUARD THE TRUTH

Although it is the collective responsibility of every local church to support the Word, that can't happen unless each individual believer is committed to that duty. There are several ways to do that.

1. Believe it. Paul gave the following testimony before Felix, the Roman governor of Judea: "I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets" (Acts 24:14). His belief in God's Word extended to the New Testament. He wrote the Corinthians, "We also believe, therefore also we speak" (2 Cor. 4:13). The many exhortations to hear the Word also refer to hearing with faith. Jesus said, "He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). You cannot uphold the Word if you do not hear it and believe.
2. Memorize it. The psalmist wrote, "Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee" (Ps. 119:11). It is not enough to hear the Word--it must be hidden away in your memory. Only then will you "always [be] ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15).
3. Meditate on it. Joshua 1:8 says, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success." The psalmist also professes, "O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97).
4. Study it. Paul urged Timothy to "be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who

does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

5. Obey it. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it” (Luke 11:28), and “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (John 8:31). It does little good to hear the Word, memorize it, meditate on it, and study it if you don’t obey it.
6. Defend it. Paul told the Philippians that he was “appointed for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:16). The truth will always be attacked, and you must be ready to defend it with great vigor. That’s why Jude said, “Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3). The Greek word translated “contend earnestly” is *epagonizo*. It includes the Greek word *agon*, from which we get the English word *agony*. *Agon* originally referred to a stadium. When we enter the stadium to engage in spiritual warfare, we must battle for the purity of the faith.
7. Live it. Paul reminded Titus that believers are to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect” (Titus 2:10). Having a mind controlled by the Word of God produces godly behavior (Col. 3:16).
8. Proclaim it. In obedience to our Lord’s command, we are to “go ... and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Paul charged Timothy to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Tim. 4:2). The apostle wrote to Titus that God “at the proper time manifested ... His Word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior” (Titus 1:3).

Today it is not uncommon to hear evangelical preachers and teachers claim that the simple biblical gospel is not relevant to modern man. They say it needs to be bolstered and adorned by various cultural adaptations to make it more attractive and acceptable. How presumptuous it is to think that an imperfect,

sinful human instrument could improve on God's own message for bringing men to Himself. When the Gospel is clearly preached to sinful men and women, at some point the Holy Spirit will regenerate those whom God has chosen, and they will believe and enter into the full benefit of their election.

IV. INTEGRITY REQUIRES DISCIPLINE.

- A. 1 Pet. 2:11: "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul."
- B. Phil. 3:20: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."
- C. 1 John 2:15-17: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."
- D. Heb. 13:14: "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come."
- E. 2 Pet. 1:3-8: "As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- F. 1 Cor. 9:25-27: "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

Note: His preaching is good.

His writing is better.

His living is best of all.

All believers who are controlled by divine love will also want to seek and approve what is excellent. Hence Paul continued his prayer for the Philippians with these words: “So that you may approve the things that are excellent” (Philippians 1:10).

The English word “excellent” here comes from a Greek word that means literally “to differ.” Here Paul goes beyond one’s ability to discern between good and evil, between truth and error. He is now concerned that believers be able to distinguish between what is better and what is best--something few professing Christians seem able to do these days.

Donald Whitney reminds us that great Christians of the past knew the unsurpassed importance of a disciplined life and that this crucial quality cannot be overlooked today:

Godly people are disciplined people. It has always been so. Call to mind some heroes of church history--Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Bunyan, Susanna Wesley, George Whitefield, Lady Huntingdon, Jonathan and Sarah Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, George Muller--they were all disciplined people. In my own pastoral and personal Christian experience, I can’t say that I’ve ever known a man or woman who came to spiritual maturity except through discipline. Godliness comes through discipline. (*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* [Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991], 15).

The apostle Peter put into perspective the fundamental challenge we face in living disciplined lives when he admonished, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). Peter calls us “aliens and strangers” because our true citizenship is in heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20). Heavenly citizenship is a great privilege, but it requires us to live by God’s standard, not the world’s (cf. 1 John 2:15-17).

V. APOSTLE PAUL: EPITOME OF INTEGRITY, DISCIPLINE, AND A LOVE FOR THE LOST.

- A. 2 Cor. 5:15: “And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”
- B. 1 Cor. 10:31: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

- C. 1 Cor. 11:1: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”
- D. Acts 17:16-17: “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.”
- E. Rom. 1:13-16: “Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”
- F. Rom. 9:1-3: “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”
- Rom 10:1: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.”
- G. 1 Tim. 1:15: “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”
- H. Micah 6:8: “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”
- I. Rom. 15:17-20: “Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient--in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, but as it is written: ‘To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand.’”

- J. 1 Cor. 3:6, 10: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ... According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.”

PAUL’S BURDEN FOR THE LOST.

Paul was extremely passionate when it came to reaching the lost for Christ. Seeing people converted by the sovereign power of the gospel message was the ultimate reason for him to continue in ministry. Paul’s burden for the lost, therefore, is the last of his reasons for defending his integrity.

Acts 17:16-17 illustrates the intensity of Paul’s evangelistic burden: “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him so he was beholding the city full of idols. So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.”

Paul writes about this passion for the unsaved in Romans 1:13-16:

I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

Later in his letter to the Roman believers, in perhaps the most telling statements he ever wrote about his burden for lost souls, Paul said:

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ... Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.”

To be men and women of integrity, it’s vital that you be aware of the danger of hypocrisy. You need to know how much God hates it and strive to replace it with godly living. A code of morality or system of ethics that is governed by hypocrisy is nothing more than a charade or a pretense, a game that many people have mastered in their business dealings and social relationships. Sadly, many professing believers are skilled hypocrites when it comes to conduct within the church.

1. Discipline Requires:

a. Separation from the world.

- (i) 2 Cor. 6:14: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”
- (ii) 2 Tim. 3:12: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”
- (iii) 1 Cor. 4:10-11: “We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! Even to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.”

There are four areas of Christian conduct that, if obeyed, will demonstrate that we are people of integrity when we profess to love God above all else.

1. SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

The First command is that we must separate ourselves from the world. The author of Hebrews says, “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Hence, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:12-13).

From those verses we can draw an analogy of the Christian life. Believers follow Christ’s example and separate themselves from a sinful world. Since Jesus died outside Jerusalem, apart from the old system of Judaism and away from the sins of the people, we also should live outside the world, no longer a part of its sinful standards and practices. We must be willing to live apart from the system and at times suffer persecution or ridicule because of our allegiance to Christ.

The apostle Paul reminds us that we have nothing in common with the world: “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). That kind of separation does not mean we should stop all contact with unbelievers or become monastics. If that were the case, we would not be able to minister to those who don’t know

the Lord. Scriptural separation involves having a different attitude and orientation from the world's, and not compromising our standards to fit its customs. However, our attitude toward it cannot be condescending, otherwise we adopt a prideful outlook.

Jesus prayed that God would give us a right attitude and proper relationship to the world: "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (John 17:15-18). The Father and the Son know that we must live in the world, but they want us to be distinct from the habits and attitudes that characterize the world (cf. 1 John 2:15-17).

Living a truly separated life is not easy. The apostle Paul explains the cost of such a life. "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Many believers do not face persecution today simply because so few are living godly lives outside the camp of the world. Too many prefer to compromise righteous integrity in favor of worldly prestige. Paul admonished the worldly Corinthians about that and challenged them to follow his example and accept the difficulties of living a separated life: "We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty; and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless" (1 Cor. 4:10-11).

b. Sacrificial Living.

- (i) Heb. 13:15-16: "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."
- (ii) 1 Thess. 5:18: "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
- (iii) 1 John 3:18: "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."
- (iv) James 1:26-27: "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before

God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

2. SACRIFICIAL LIVING:

All Christians realize that Jesus Christ has offered in Himself the one and only sacrifice for their sins. But many of us often forget that God requires sacrifice from us in the form of praise to Him and service to others. The author of Hebrews writes, “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (13:15-16). That is another attribute that should characterize all believers who wish to live with integrity--the attitude of sacrificial living.

The authors of the Psalms knew a great deal about the first aspect of a sacrificial attitude: praising God and giving thanks to His name. Here are just three examples:

I will give thanks to the Lord according to His righteousness, and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High. (7:17)

Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him. (43:5)

I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord, among the peoples; and I will sing praises to Thee among the nations. (108:3)

Offering sacrifices of praise should not occur only when we receive some blessing from God; it should characterize us at all times and in all circumstances. Paul instructs us, “In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess. 5:18).

The apostle John cautions us that such speech must accompany a second aspect of sacrificial living, and that is practical service and good deeds to others: “Little children, let us not love with words or with tongue, but in deed and truth” (1 John 3:18). Putting God first in our lives and worshiping Him above all else will, if our faith is authentic, result in actions that honor Him. Mere lip-service to what we know we ought to do is not the mark of a person with integrity (cf James 4:17).

The most practical of New Testament Books, the epistle of James, demonstrates quite directly that words of praise and deeds of service must go together: “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27). First John 4:20 again summarizes the crucial nature of this point and what it really means if we do not obey it: “the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” If our actions do not match our profession of love and praise to God, we have no reason to assume that we’re part of His family.

c. Submission to God’s Will.

- (i) Heb. 13:17: “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.”
- (ii) Acts 20:28: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”
- (iii) 1 Pet. 5:2-3: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by constraint but willingly, nor for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”
- (iv) 1 Thess. 5:12-13: “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.”
- (v) 1 Tim. 5:19-20: “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.”

Note: God has to be first in our lives. We must live a life that is consistent with our calling.

3. A SUBMISSIVE ATTITUDE.

The writer of Hebrews mentions a third key area of attitude and conduct that proves the truth of the believer's integrity before the lord - submission.

To Spiritual Leaders

In addition to the work of His Spirit, God rules through the Spirit-controlled men who lead the church. Hebrews 13:17 declares how this principle is to work: "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

God has designed His church in such a way that qualified, divinely appointed men preside over it and, with God's help, determine its direction, teach the Word, and give guidance and correction to the people. Every New Testament church had these men.

The late Martyn Lloyd-Jones, considered by many to be the most gifted expositor of the twentieth century, wrote the following:

As you go on living this righteous life, and practicing it with all your might and energy, and all your time ... you will find that the process that went on before, in which you went on from bad to worse and became viler and viler, is entirely reversed. You will become cleaner and cleaner, and purer and purer, and holier and holier, and more and more conformed into the image of the Son of God. (Romans: An Exposition of Chapter Six [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1972], 268-69).

A consistently righteous life is the showcase of one's integrity because it reveals your commitment to love and obey God. When your behavior is consistent with who you claim to be--when your deeds match your words--you have integrity. Clearly there is a direct correlation between integrity and biblical holiness. And God leads every believer along the path to holiness through the process of sanctification. As Dr. Lloyd-Jones said, that process culminates in Christian maturity as each believer is conformed into the image of Christ. That is true holiness and integrity.

We can't deny that the path of personal holiness requires disciplined effort and is often difficult. But along the way God provides us all the spiritual strength and scriptural resources we'll ever need to walk the path successfully. Our responsibility to

strive for personal holiness, along with our obligation to give God the preeminence, is simply a step toward building a life without compromise. One final step is to be known as people of integrity among the people our lives touch. And that happens as we treat them according to God's standard.

VI. INTEGRITY INVOLVES PERSONAL HOLINESS.

- A. Eph. 5:1-6: "Therefore be followers of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."
- B. Heb. 13:4: "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."
- C. 1 Cor. 7:2: "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband."
- D. 1 Pet. 3:7: "Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."
- E. 1 Cor. 6:18: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."

VIII. INTEGRITY INVOLVES CONTENTMENT.

- A. Heb. 13:5: "Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
- B. Eccl. 5:10: "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity."
- C. 1 Tim. 6:17: "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy."

- D. Luke 12:15-21: “And he said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.’ Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully, and he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years, take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

IX. INTEGRITY INVOLVES HATING EVIL.

- A. Ps. 1:1-: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.”
- B. 1 Tim. 6:1: “Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.”
- C. 2 Tim. 2:22: “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”
- D. 1 Thess. 5:21-22: “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”
- E. Rom. 12:9: “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.”

X. INTEGRITY REQUIRES THAT WE LOVE.

- A. Rom. 12:10-13: “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.”
- B. John 13:35: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
- C. 1 John 5:1: “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.”

- D. 1 John 4:20: “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”
- E. Phil. 2:3-4: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”
- F. 1 Thess. 4:9: “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.”
- G. 1 John 3:17-18: “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

XI. INTEGRITY INCLUDES DILIGENCE.

- A. Eccl. 9:10: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.”
- B. John 9:4: “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.”
- C. Eph. 5:15-16: “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”
- D. Prov. 18:9: “He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.”
- E. Heb. 6:10-12: “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”
- F. Gal. 6:9: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”
- G. Ps. 15:1-2: “Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart.”

ADDENDA

Carefully consider the contents of this addenda. It is added to cause us to give pause, to consider the truthfulness of the material and to find a place to stand.

Some of the material was gathered by Poll takers, some was taken from the material *The Day That America Told the Truth*. It is hard to believe that our Nation is in the condition that it is. If it is even half true, we are surely in a sad condition.

After having spent some time on this Syllabus on Integrity, it is necessary to look at our great country and ascertain where we are and where we are heading.

It is important that we clearly see the CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY in these matters, and the place that the individual Christian is to stand.

For those who love our children, grandchildren, our church and our communities, we need to say with Joshua of old, 'for me and my house we are going to serve the Lord.'

Let each of us resolve to point our faces toward heaven and never look back, never get side-tracked and resolve to take every other person we can to heaven with us. No one is going to accidentally get into heaven. It will take resolve, tenacity, resoluteness, courage and unwavering faith in the promises of God and a reverent regard for His Word.

If it so be that God calls us home next year, let us resolve that we will go through heaven's gate in 1998.

DISCIPLINE OF INTEGRITY

THE DAY AMERICA TOLD THE TRUTH, a new book based on an extensive opinion survey which guaranteed the anonymity of the participants, reveals an alarming crisis of integrity in America.

Only 13 percent of Americans see all Ten Commandments as binding on us today. Ninety-One percent lie regularly -- at home and at work. In answer to the question, "Whom have you regularly lied to?" the statistics included 86 percent to parents and 75 percent to friends. A third of AIDS carriers admit to not having told their lovers. Most workers admit to goofing off for an average of seven hours--almost one whole day--a week, and half admit that they regularly call in sick when they are perfectly well.

The survey also posed the question, "What are you willing to do for \$10 million?" Twenty-five percent would abandon their families, 23 percent would become a prostitute for a week, and 7 percent would kill a stranger. Think of it! In a gathering of 100 Americans, there are seven who would consider killing you if the price was right. In 1,000 there are seventy!

Even casual observers can see the demise of integrity in the whole range of our culture--with its Watergates, Irangates, Savingsgates, Pearlygates -- the much chronicled dalliances of prominent Senators -- Congressmen perjuring themselves -- the artful embellishment of academic records -- and even the war records of recent Presidents. The straightforward poem/prayer of Fred Holloman, chaplain of the Kansas Senate, comes as no surprise:

Omniscient Father:
Help us to know who is telling
the truth. One side tells us one
thing, and the other just the opposite.
And if neither side is telling the truth, we would like to know that,
too.
And if each side is telling half the truth,
give us the wisdom to put the right halves together.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Truth and integrity have not only proven elusive for many in leadership, but likewise for our future leaders, some of whom are literally schooling themselves in deception. Magazines such as the *New York Times Book Review* and *Rolling Stone* carry ads with such captions as "Term Paper Blues?" and list a toll-free hot line to "Research Assistance" in West Los Angeles: "Our 306 page catalogue contains detailed descriptions of 14,278 research papers, a virtual library of information at your finger tips. Footnote and bibliographic pages are included at no extra cost. Ordering is as easy as picking up your phone. Let this valuable educational aid serve you throughout your college years." They should also add: "Here is your chance to cheapen your education and establish a fraudulent character for life."

Today in American business there is epidemic ethical decline. In 1983 the *Wall Street Journal* asked George Gallup to conduct a now-famous survey among business executives. The study revealed a shocking disparity between top executives and the general population. Eighty percent of the executives confessed to driving while drunk, as compared to 33 percent of the general public. Seventy-eight percent admitted using the company phone for personal long distance calls. Thirty-five percent had cheated on their income tax reports. And 75 percent had stolen work supplies for personal use, as compared to 40 percent of the general populace. The sad truth is, a resident of Beverly Hills as compared with a resident of the impoverished South Bronx is more likely to have used illegal drugs, have committed a crime, or had an extramarital affair.

These are damning statistics for the upscale life, but such numbers by no means let the general populace off the hook. In a paper presented at a symposium on employee theft, sponsored by the American Psychological Association, the authors pointed out that inventory shortages cost department stores and specialty chains \$8 billion every year. Of that, 10 percent is attributed to clerical error, 30 percent to shoplifting, and a whopping 50 percent--or sixteen million dollars a day--to theft by employees. "Phone theft," employees stealing phone service from their companies, is costing industry so much that call accounting has become one of the fastest growing parts of the telecommunications industry.

Significantly the bulk of the blame for declining ethics resides with men, as the authors of *The Day America Told the Truth* are quick to point out:

Our current ethics at work are low, but they'd be a lot lower were it not for the great number of women who've entered the work force in recent years.

When we compared the answers given by the two sexes, we confirmed that women in this country simply behave more ethically than men.

On every question we probed, American women in the workplace held to a higher moral standard than men did....

Less than half as many women as men believe that the only way to get ahead is to cheat, and not as many believe in politics rather than work as the way to success

In addition, women are much less willing to compromise their values to get ahead and somewhat more willing to quit as a matter of principle if they learn that their company is engaging in illegal activities....

If valuable company property is stolen, the thief will be a man six times in seven.

The truth is, American culture is in big trouble. The colossal slide of integrity (especially masculine ethics) has grim spiritual, domestic, and political implications which threaten the survival of life as we know it.

But for the Christian, the most chilling fact is this: there is little statistical difference between the ethical practices of the religious and the nonreligious. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, in their book *Keeping Your Ethical Edge Sharp*, note Gallup's statistics that 43 percent of non-church attenders admit to pilfering work supplies, compared to 37 percent of attenders. Seventeen percent of the unchurched use the company phone for long-distance personal calls, but 13 percent of those who attend worship do likewise.

But is this true of *real* Christians? We may ask. Sherman and Hendricks answer yes. The general ethical conduct of Christians varies only slightly from non-Christians, with grand exceptions, of course.

Sadly, Christians are almost as likely as non-Christians to:

- Falsify their income tax returns.
- Commit plagiarism (teachers especially know this).
- Bribe to obtain a building permit -- "That's the way business is done."
- Ignore construction specs.
- Illegally copy a computer program.
- Steal time.
- Commit phone theft.
- Exaggerate a product.
- Tell people what they want to hear.
- Selectively obey the laws.

Many reasons can be cited for this. A popular culprit is the subjectivism and moral relativism of our day. With people like Justice Harlan giving the doctrinaire statement "[O]ne man's vulgarity is another's lyric" -- with the man in the street appealing to the supreme court of self, "My opinion is as good as your!" -- ethics and integrity suffer.

When a cultural icon such as Ernest Hemingway (who still arbitrates literary style) was an inveterate liar who lied about everything, including his childhood, his athletic prowess, his military exploits, his liaisons, so that he was,

as one of his wives called him, “the biggest liar since Munchausen” -- how can we expect our culture to be otherwise? If our gods be mendacious frauds, how can we escape?

But the main reason for the integrity crisis is that we humans are fundamentally dishonest. We are congenital liars. Right smack in the middle of the Apostle Paul’s string of observations on the depravity of man in Romans 3, we read, “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit” (v. 13). No one had to instruct us in the art of dishonesty. Even once we are regenerated, if we do not discipline ourselves under the Lordship of Christ, we return to deceit like a duck to water.

Our situation is exacerbated by the subtle seas of deception which surge back and forth over our culture through its media, so much so that we scarcely know where reality is. Many Christian men traffic in delusion. Some who lack integrity do not even know it.

GOD ON INTEGRITY

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) knew they were deceiving the church when they sold some property and agreed to act as if they were giving all when they were only giving part. But the story does not give the impression that they thought what they were doing lacked integrity. After all, they were doing something good and generous.

If it happened today, Ananias would wait until the organ was playing “I Surrender All” and then humbly come forward, laying his check at Peter’s feet, mumbling, “I wish I had more to give, Peter, but this is all I have.”

Imagine the scene in the Early Church Ananias’ heart was thumping rapidly under the thrill of his public display, but Peter was not smiling. Somehow he knew!

“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).

Poor Ananias. His racing heart stopped, and he could not breathe. Peter’s grim visage gave way to darkness as Ananias’ life ended, and the young men came and carried Ananias out -- as they later did his dead widow.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira shocks us because they suffered death for such a “small” infraction. So they misrepresented the percentage they gave of their profits---why death? After all, they did give -- which is more than many people do!

The answer is, the Church cannot prosper with deception among its members--and God wanted to make this clear for all time. Deception wounds the Body of Christ--makes it dysfunctional--and is a sin against God!. This is why Peter cried to Ananias and Sapphira at the moment of their deaths, "You have not lied to men but to God (Acts 5:4).

Integrity is one of the greatest needs of the Church today. The Church needs people who not only refrain from blatant lying, but are free from hypocrisy. Paul says, in fact, that honesty is necessary for growth in the Church: "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Eph. 4:15). Literally, the divine medium for authentic church growth is truthing in love -- speaking and doing truth to one another.

The Church's great need for integrity is directly linked to the needs of our lost world, for the world longs for liberation from honesty. Sure, it cultivates and promotes deception, but deep down inside many people long to escape the pretense. A substantial number of people outside the four walls of the Church will eagerly embrace the faith of believers who model the honesty and integrity for which they long.

Helmut Thielicke, the great German theologian and pastor who maintained his integrity all through Hitler's Third Reich, said: "The avoidance of one small fib ... may be a stronger confession of faith than a whole 'Christian philosophy' championed in lengthy, forceful discussion."

A truthful spirit is a great evangelistic tool. I have known people who were magnetized to Christ because they saw this quality in a church or individual. Integrity will be for some a tantalizing cool drink in the secular desert of delusion.

Men, the experience of Ananias and Sapphira tells us that our integrity matters to God. We need to declare with Job, "[T]ill I die, I will not deny my integrity" (Job 27:5).

THE SHAPE OF INTEGRITY

It is essential that we understand that the Biblical idea of integrity has the root idea of completeness, that a person of integrity is whole. The derivation of our English word *integrity* from the Latin emphasizes the same quality because *integritas* means "wholeness," "entireness," "completeness."

Integrity characterizes the entire person, not just part of him. He is righteous and honest through and through. He is not only that inside, but also in outer action. Psalm 15 celebrates the completeness of the man of integrity:

Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary?
Who may live on your holy hill?
He whose walk is blameless
And who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from his heart
and has no slander on his tongue,
who does his neighbor no wrong
and casts no slur on his fellow man,
who despises a vile man
but honors those who fear the Lord,
who keeps his oath
even when it hurts,
who lends his money without usury
and does not accept a bribe against the innocent.
He who does these things
will never be shaken.

Surveys indicate that usually people lie to cover up something they did wrong. Take, for example, the employee who has negligently jammed the copy machine, then slyly covers himself by calling out, “Ok, who jammed the machine?”

The second most frequent reason for lying is to keep things pleasant emotionally. Have you avoided expressing the truth for the sake of peace?

This does not mean we have license to tell everyone what we think no matter what---a spiritual mandate to always speak our minds. Rather, we are never to deceive others by omissions, or by using unclear talk to save face or avoid offending another. We are to be “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). Integrity demands that all speech be intentionally true. Such speech gives pleasure to God---“The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful” (Proverbs 12:22).

Next, a man of integrity never cheats or defrauds another, never steals. Proverbs tells us: “Differing weights and differing measures---the Lord detests them both” (20:10). “The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight” (11:1). “Food gained by fraud tastes sweet to a man, but he ends up with a mouth full of gravel” (20:17).

There are so many ways to casually steal which the consensus regards as justified: taking office supplies from work, long lunches, extravagant meals, accepting gifts from customers, ignoring copyright laws, claiming improper deductions. But the man of integrity avoids all such temptations, to God’s glory.

The man of God keeps his word. He never promises to do something he does not intend to do. And he follows through--he does not conveniently “forget” what he has promised. One is never “put on” by the man of integrity. Faithfulness, one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), is his trademark. Even

when he discovers that keeping his word is not to his benefit, he does so, for as the Psalmist says, the man of integrity “keeps his oath even when it hurts” (154). This man, the Scripture says, is unique: “Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find?” (Prov. 20:6). Integrity is a rare beauty.

Last, a man of integrity is a man of principle. We must understand that being a man of principle means more than having principles. It means having the courage to stand up for your convictions when it costs you. At present, Brian and Holly Hoch, and their three children have been looking for housing in Vienna, Austria for four months, largely because housing is scarce, and because the owners of the few they have found want them to sign a document which falsely states they are paying less for the apartment than they would really be paying. This family is at this point victims of their integrity -- an enviable victimization.

THE BENEFITS OF INTEGRITY

Integrity can cost you a relationship, reputation, promotion, job, even your life. But integrity also has its benefits.

Character

There can be no doubt that integrity is its own reward, for it produces character, and notwithstanding divine intervention, character determines the course of one’s life here on earth. Even more, it will glorify God for eternity by His grace.

Conscience

Closely aligned with this is the parallel benefit of a clear conscience. This is a prime benefit, because if you have a clear conscience you will be able to stand firmly in the storms that swirl around you. If your heart does not condemn you, but affirms you, you can be a tower of strength. “The man of integrity walks securely” (Proverbs 10:9).

Intimacy

But the benefits of integrity go even farther, because integrity of soul assures a deep intimacy with God. God desires truth in the inward parts (Psalm 51:6), and when it is there He rejoices in the fellowship with that heart. A transparent, honest soul is a haven for the Spirit of God.

Elevation

There are also outward benefits of integrity, for integrity elevates the lives of believers. Integrity encourages more integrity, ethical conduct spawns further ethical conduct, honesty leads to honesty, character produces character! “The

righteous man leads a blameless life,” says Solomon; “blessed are his children after him” (Proverbs 20:7).

Evangelism

Lastly, as before, we mention the evangelistic magnetism of integrity. The following ad appeared in *The East African Standard* in Nairobi:

ALL DEBTS TO BE PAID
I ALLAN HARANGUI ALIAS WANIEK HARANGUI, of
P. O. BOX 40380, Nairobi, have dedicated services to the
Lord Jesus Christ. I must put right all my wrongs. If I owe
you any debt or damage personally or any of the companies
I have been director or partner i.e.
GUARANTEED SERVICES LTD.
WATERPUMPS ELECTRICAL
AND GENERAL CO. SALES AND SERVICES
Please contact me or my advocates J.K. Kibicho and Company,
Advocates, P.O. Box 73137, Nairobi for a settlement. No
amount will be disputed.
GOD AND HIS SON JESUS CHRIST BE GLORIFIED.

For a golden moment all of the great city of Nairobi took note that Jesus Christ had made an ethical difference in a man's life. And no doubt souls were turned to Christ as a result. Integrity and evangelism are a potent combination.

We can hardly overstate the importance of integrity to a generation of believers which is so much like the world in its ethical conduct. The world is dying for us to have integrity! Its enviable benefit of *character, a clear conscience, deep intimacy with God, the elevation of others, and the winning of the lost* all powerfully argue its importance.

And the stilled hearts of Ananias and Sapphira declare its urgency.

THE DISCIPLINE OF INTEGRITY

The urgency and importance of integrity suggests one thing to the serious heart -- the necessity of discipline. God wants us to be men of principle. G.K. Chesterton said, “Morality, like art, consists in drawing a line somewhere.” We must let God's Word draw the line, not culture. The elevated ethics of Holy Scripture must be kept at all costs, even though culture thinks them quaint and impossible. And we must discipline ourselves through the power of the Holy Spirit to maintain them.

Here UPI correspondent Wesley Pippert offers wise advice:

One of the most effective disciplines I know is not to do something that first time--for repetition will come far

easier...Not doing something for the first time is a tremendous bulwark against not doing it later. As moral philosopher Sissela Bok has said in her book, *Lying* (New York: Pantheon, 1978, p. 28), "It is easy to tell a lie but hard to tell only one." Discipline will help us avoid the guilt that we often experience by dabbling in things we shouldn't. An important fruit of discipline is integrity. Few things are more important than whether one has a good reputation, a "good name." Not all people are gregarious or outgoing. Not all people are sought after or loveable. But everyone can have integrity. Integrity flows more out of a disciplined character than a daring personality."

We must discipline ourselves to be truthful in all that we say. The Scriptures' intent is not to rule out having fun with our friends, indulging in playful exaggeration, or even telling fanciful tales. But God's Word does call us to be honest through and through, to never lie or equivocate to save face or to stay in the good graces of others.

We must never be careless about the truth. We must measure our words. If we deceive we must immediately admit it, because deception can become a habit. William James, in his classic *Principles of Psychology*, put it this way:

Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke or virtue or vice leaves its ever so little scar. The drunken Rip Van Winkle, in Jefferson's play, excuses himself for every fresh dereliction by saying "I won't count this time!" Well! He may not count it, but it is being counted nonetheless. Down among his nerve cells and fibers the molecules are counting it, registering and storing it up to be used against him when the next temptation comes. Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. Of course, this has its good side as well as its bad one."

We must discipline ourselves to tell the truth, for truth can become a habit -- something we do without thinking.

Habitual honesty -- integrity -- must be the goal in all our dealings. We must discipline ourselves not to succumb to the so-called "small things": the occasional phone theft, or time stealing, or misappropriating the office supplies, or indulging ourselves in the largesse of an expense account, or estimating mileage to our favor, or twisting the truth ever so slightly.

If this discipline becomes habitual, the “big things” will take care of themselves.

Sow an act,
 And you reap a habit.
Sow a habit
 And you reap a character.
Sow a character
 And you reap a destiny for yourself,
 Your family,
 Your church,
 Your world.