

A FATHER'S INTEGRITY

Fathers' Day, 2005

Al Capone and his \$120 million mob empire ruled the streets of Chicago in the late 1920's. It was into this seemingly impossible law enforcement situation that a 26 year old government agent named Eliot Ness was thrown in 1929. Ness was commissioned to bring down the mob king of our country. Eliot had just hand picked 9 trustworthy agents to work with him when he received an unexpected call at his office. An unknown young man walked into the policeman's office and closed the door behind him. He then slowly approached the officer's desk and carefully opened an envelope revealing \$2,000 in cash. *You will receive one of these envelopes every week if you just lay off Capone*, the messenger stated quietly. Now to realize the temptation that this must have been to Eliot Ness, we must remember that his annual salary at this time was \$2,800. So basically he was being offered about 2/3rds of his annual salary every week – almost 40 times his annual pay. In short order, Eliot Ness sent the messenger back to his mob boss. Desiring to make a public point and for accountability, Ness then called a press conference and told the story of Capone's attempted bribe. The headlines in the

Chicago newspapers the next day read, *Ness and his men are untouchable*. The name stuck and this elite Chicago police force became known as the untouchables. Within just 2 years, a federal jury convicted Al Capone of income tax evasion and the king of organized crime was locked away in prison. What broke the back of organized crime in the city of Chicago was the integrity of Eliot Ness and his untouchable men.

Contrast Eliot Ness to the FBI agent that social scientist Charles Sykes tells about in his book released just a couple of years ago. This federal law officer was caught red-handed embezzling \$2,000 from confiscated drug funds. When he was fired for his crime against the government and its people, this agent took the FBI to court and he successfully argued that because the \$2,000 was taken to support his gambling addiction, he should be protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act. He had a disability – it was a gambling addiction, he argued. Therefore, he was not responsible for embezzling the funds, but he was rather a victim of his own gambling disability. Amazingly, our courts agreed with him. The FBI was forced to reinstate him to his position, and he continues as an agent to this day.

Now these 2 scenarios clearly illustrate a change that has taken place in our cultures view of integrity during the past generation. Now this is not to say that everyone who lived a generation ago had integrity and nobody that lives today has it. There were many who had the morality of Al Capone in the past, and there are many who have the morality of Eliot Ness today. But there has been a major change in the public perception of integrity today. The former President that we had admitted cheating on his wife and publicly lying to the American people but still maintained one of the highest job approval ratings in history for American Presidents. This would have been unheard of at any other time in our nation's history. A person would have to be blind to not notice a change in our culture's view of integrity.

As we honor our Fathers on this special day, I would like to talk with you about the importance of integrity because our fathers need to be on the front lines of the battle in this issue. A commitment to integrity is important for men to realize because this is one of those areas where we are in control. We are often not in control of our business careers – some bean counter in some office somewhere makes a decision to cut fat and we lose our jobs in a downsizing move regardless of how well we have

performed in the past. We are sometimes not even in control of our family life – I heard just a short while ago about a family in North Carolina where the wife just walked away from the family leaving her husband and 2 children behind. Robert is a hard-working dairy farmer who loves his family and provides well for them. But Shana just said that she is tired of the daily grind and left the family. There are many situations in life that are beyond our control.

But we are in control of our integrity in life. We control how we respond to situations in life. So I thought it would be profitable for us on this Father's Day to look at the subject of integrity in the book of Proverbs. 5 times the English word *Integrity* is found in the NIV of the Bible. What is integrity? Webster defines integrity as *the quality or state of being complete or whole or entire*. Integrity comes from the same root as the word integer. In math class we were taught that integers were whole numbers as contrasted with fractions. A fraction is just part of a number – a half or quarter or eighth. But an integer is a whole number – one or two or three.

Now there are many people who are like fractions – part of them is missing. They go through life feeling incomplete. People of integrity

have a sense of wholeness or completeness to them. All of the parts of their life fit together. There isn't one part that is hidden or out of step with the rest of their lives. They don't have to carefully guard what they are saying making sure that their statements don't conflict what they said yesterday because they tell the truth. They don't act one way when they are at home and a totally different way when they are in public. They just can be themselves all of the time. They aren't a completely different person when they go to work on Monday morning than they are sitting in church on Sunday morning. They are consistent in their lifestyles.

Now having defined integrity we must readily admit that in the purest sense of the word none of us has complete integrity. There is only one person who ever lived who maintained perfect consistency in his integrity and that was the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He was able to maintain perfect integrity because He had no sin. Everyone else who has ever lived has had a sin nature and has willfully sinned against God. Sin destroys integrity. Sin forces us to live inconsistently. Sin makes us to be less than the complete person that God desires for us to be. So in one sense, perfect integrity is something that none of us will ever achieve.

But having said that, there are great rewards found in striving for integrity in our lives. And I would invite you to look with me at 4 of these that are given in the book of Proverbs.

First, a person who has integrity has greater security in life.

*PR 10:9 The man of **integrity** walks securely,*

but he who takes crooked paths will be found out

Now the word that is translated *walks securely* is just one word in the Hebrew language and it literally means go forth with a great deal of confidence. It is used to describe the crawling of a snake in Genesis 3, the prowling of a fox in Lamentations 5, even the sailing of a ship in Genesis 7 and the playing of a trumpet in Exodus 19. Just as a snake or fox or any other wild animal does not move through the forest hesitantly but with all of the confidence and security that God has given instinctively to it and just as the experienced captain of a ship sets his course to a distant port with confidence as he reads his instruments even though he cannot see the port at the time and just as a trumpeter who has practiced musical skills for hours and hours does not blow tentatively into the mouthpiece but with full confidence that a clear tone is going to come out of the bell, so the

person who walks in integrity can walk with security in life. He does not go through life looking over his shoulder fearful that someone is going to find out something about him because there is nothing that he knows of to find out. He does not speak wondering if something that he will say will contradict another lie that he has told because he has consistently told the truth. He knows that if he continues to speak the truth he will not contradict himself. He does not go into the grocery store fearful that he is going to meet someone who he has hurt or wronged in some way because he has a clear conscience before all. The person who walks with integrity walks with security. He walks with confidence. He walks with a clear conscience in life.

Everybody seeks security. Psychologists tell us that the desire for security is one of the 2 most basic desires that every human being has along with the desire to be of value or worth. The desire to be secure leads some teenagers to join special cliques or gangs at school, leads some young adults to get married to the first person who expresses an interest, leads some middle aged people to stay in jobs that they despise. Do you want to walk with security in life? Then walk with integrity – for the wisest person who ever lived wrote *The man of integrity walks securely.*

A second reward of integrity is the guidance and direction that it gives to us in life.

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

It should not surprise us in the least to observe that as integrity has declined in our culture as an appreciated value so has the sense of direction and purpose in the lives of the majority of people. The average American today has no idea of where he is going or how he is going to get there. The average American today has little idea of what is really right or wrong and even doubts whether anything is always right or wrong. The average American today just goes along with the flow, agreeing with the majority in polls, desperately trying to just fit in. As one person expressed to me some time ago when I asked how he was doing, *I try to keep my nose above water and I don't make waves.*

A person who has integrity has a means of guidance and direction in life. One of the speakers at the Pastors' Conference that I attended last month made a statement that I thought was so good that I wrote it down in

my Palm Pilot. He said, *the sailor who is a slave to his compass has the complete freedom of all the oceans.* Just think about that statement for a moment because there is a volume of truth that is contained within it. If a sailor knows how to use his compass aright, then he can sail anywhere in the entire ocean with confidence. But the sailor that doesn't have any dependable source of direction can't leave the sight of shore or he would be hopelessly lost.

A person who has integrity has an inner compass. That compass gives guidance and direction to his life. He knows the right paths to take from the wrong paths. He knows the right way to treat people from the wrong way. He knows the right thing to do from the wrong thing. He doesn't go around in circles in life but rather is guided and directed by his integrity. One of the great blessings of having integrity is the guidance that it offers in life for *the integrity of the upright guides them.*

In the 3rd place, integrity rewards us by guarding and protecting our lives.

*PR 13:6 Righteousness guards the **man of integrity**,*

but wickedness overthrows the sinner.

How does integrity guard a person? It guards a person by its righteousness. You see, in the final analysis that is only one way to maintain integrity and that is through righteous living. And righteousness guards us, it protects us.

One of the greatest lies that the enemy has consistently convinced human beings of is the deceit that God sets up standards for human behavior because He is some kind of kill-joy wanting to rob his creatures of fun and happiness in life. That was the heart of the serpent's original temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. *Has God said that you can't eat of every tree in the garden?* That very question casts doubt upon the goodness of God to Adam and Eve. Implied are the questions what is God trying to keep from you? Why doesn't God really let you be free? Is God trying to keep you from enjoying something very special in life? Eve fell for that temptation, and we often do as well.

Especially when we are continuously bombarded by the enemy portraying those who enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season as being the youngest, smartest, healthiest people who never seem to suffer any adverse consequences. T.V. ads for alcoholic beverages usually feature

athletes who are millionaires many times over in the prime of their lives. I've never seen a T.V. ad for alcoholic beverages show some poor homeless person in a mission who has lost his mind and health and family, have you? And the message is clear. If you don't drink heavily, you are going to miss something in life. Don't worry about the consequences, you will stay young and healthy and vibrant. No wonder binge drinking is one of the major problems at all of our Universities today. Millions of young people are ruining their lives at a young age because of their lack of integrity. They are living one life with their parents at home and another with their friends at school.

You see, the problem is that most people really don't believe that the wages of sin is death. And they really don't believe that God so loved the world. God hasn't given to us commandments and instructions in the Bible to limit our freedoms. He has rather given to us His law so that we might have greater freedom. For the sailor who is a slave to his compass has the freedom of the entire ocean. If we voluntarily submit ourselves to God's commandments and laws, we will then be free to enjoy all of life as God has designed it, our life will be guarded. But if we allow some lie of

the enemy to enslave us, then we will lose our protection. Some addiction will eventually control our lives.

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Finally, I would invite you to note with the reward of persecution that integrity gives to us. Now I know what you are thinking here – what kind of a reward is that? Who wants to be persecuted? Walking with confidence and security in life, having guidance and direction in life, being protected and guarded from evil, these are all great blessings to be valued and treasured. But persecution, hardship, trials – I mean, this is one of the main reasons why people don't have integrity? How many workers know in their hearts that giving a full day's work for a full day's pay is the right thing to do but take long breaks anyway because if they don't fellow workers are going to get on them by criticizing – *what are you trying to do, make us look bad?* How many students know in their hearts that it is wrong to drink that beer or smoke that joint but they do it anyway because they want to be accepted by their peer group – they don't want to face rejection. Solomon was not naïve to the price that having

integrity pays. Listen to what Proverbs says here as we look at our final 2 places where the word integrity is found in Proverbs:

*PR 29:10 Bloodthirsty men hate a **man of integrity** and seek to kill the upright.*

*PR 17:26 It is not good to punish an innocent man, or to flog officials for their **integrity**.*

People who have strived for integrity have always paid a price. Wicked people have always aimed their weapons at people of integrity. Sometimes those weapons have been words of criticism, sometimes those weapons have been ostracism, sometimes those weapons have involved physical violence.

*Joseph was sold into slavery because of his integrity

*Ruth worked like a slave because of her integrity

*Daniel was thrown into a den of lions because of his integrity

*Esther risked her life because of her integrity

*Paul was beaten and thrown into jail because of his integrity

*Mary faced gossip and criticism because of her integrity

In each case, integrity always demanded a price. Yes, the blessings made the integrity worth striving for, but there was always a price to be paid as well.

Why is the price that integrity exacts worth the persecution that must necessarily be endured? Well, integrity is worth the price because of blessings received both now and later.

The person who really wants to grow in the character of the Lord will need to accept some of the persecution that comes along with a quest for integrity. The Apostle Paul realized this process in his own life and this helped him cope with many of the trials that he had to endure. Listen to his litany of persecutions that he gave to the church at Corinth:

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in

danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. (2 Cor. 11:23-28)

All of this that Paul suffered was because of his integrity. Why was Paul so willing to suffer for his integrity? Paul understood part of the process of spiritual growth that many Christians never realize. Listen to his summary of his life obsession found in Phil. 3:10-13:

¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

PHP 3:12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and

straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

You see, Paul realized the priority of sharing in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul realized the privilege that this is and the value that it is to our personal lives. As I mentioned at the beginning of the message, there is really only one person who has lived upon this earth who had complete integrity – that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet Jesus suffered more intensely throughout his life than any of us have. He was criticized, he was rejected, he was severely tempted by the enemy, he was deserted by his friends, he was physically abused and killed in the most inhumane manner possible. Christ suffered all of these things because of His integrity. When we suffer for our integrity – as small as those sufferings are compared to those the Lord Jesus Christ suffered – we are sharing in his sufferings. There is great value in this for there are certain levels of growth in our lives that cannot be achieved any other way.

But the majority of the blessings of integrity are not received in this life. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said in His great sermon on the mount:

MT 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

MT 5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Do you want to have great reward in heaven? Not just reward, but great reward? You will have according to the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ if you suffer for your integrity.

In ancient China, the citizens desired security from the barbaric hordes to the north. So at great expense and effort, a wall was constructed to keep the barbarians out of China. This wall was so high – over 30 feet - that the barbarians couldn't climb over it and so thick – some 20 feet -that they couldn't break it down. Guard towers about 40 feet high stand every 100-200 yards or so. This great wall of China remains the longest human structure ever built, some 4,000 miles long, and it was all constructed by hand. During the first 100 years of the Great Wall of China's existence,

China was invaded 3 times by the barbarians. Not once did the barbarians climb over the wall or break through the wall. Each of the 3 times China was invaded, the barbarians bribed the gatekeeper who let them march right through the gates.

We can have the greatest defense system in the world. We can have a military superior to any other army. We can have the most sophisticated weapons that technology can offer. But unless we have integrity, we will never be safe. For it is integrity that allows us to walk securely; it is integrity that gives direction and guidance; it is integrity guards and protects; and it is integrity that brings blessing and reward even out of persecution.

The challenge for Christian men in America today is the challenge to be men of integrity.