

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	vii
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THE ESSENTIALS OF INTEGRITY

1 Value Unsurpassed	15
2 Doctrinal Integrity	27
3 In Pursuit of Godliness	39

THE EXAMPLES OF INTEGRITY

4 Results of an Uncompromising Life	55
5 Fire and Lions	69
6 In Defense of Integrity	81

THE ETHICS OF INTEGRITY

7 With Fear and Trembling: The Antidote to Hypocrisy	103
8 Render Unto God	115
9 The Responsibilities of Personal Holiness	125
10 The Obligations of Practical Holiness	137
<i>Study Guide</i>	159
<i>Scripture Index</i>	179
<i>General Index</i>	187

VALUE UNSURPASSED

The uncompromising spirit of Olympic sprinter and Scotsman Eric Liddell was made famous by the award-winning film *Chariots of Fire*. For months Liddell trained to run the 100-meter dash at the Paris Olympics in 1924. Sportswriters across Britain predicted he would win. But when the schedules were announced, Liddell discovered that the heats for his race were to be run on a Sunday. Because he believed he would dishonor God by competing on the Lord's Day, he refused to enter the race.

Eric's fans were stunned. Some who previously praised him called him a fool. But he stood firm. Professor Neil Campbell, a fellow student-athlete at the time, describes Liddell's decision:

Liddell was the last person to make a song and dance about that sort of thing. He just said, "I'm not running on a Sunday"—and that was that. And he would have been very upset if anything much had been made of it at the time. We thought it was completely in character, and a lot of the athletes were quietly impressed by it. They felt that here was a man who was prepared to stand for what he thought was right, without interfering with anyone else, and without being dogmatic. (Sally Magnuson, *The Flying Scotsman* [New York: Quartet, 1981], 40)

Unlike the film version, which takes dramatic license with the facts, Liddell knew about the heat schedule months before the

Olympics. He also declined to run in the 4 x 100 and 4 x 400 meter relays, races that he had qualified for, because their heats also were to be run on Sunday. Since he was such a popular athlete, the British Olympic Committee asked if he would train to run in the 400 meters—a race he had performed well in before, but one he'd never considered seriously. He decided to train for it and discovered that he was a natural at that distance. His wife, Florence, says of his decision, "Eric always said that the great thing for him was that when he stood by his principles and refused to run in the 100 metres, he found that the 400 metres was really his race. He would not of known that otherwise" (Magnuson, 45).

Liddell went on to win the 400 meters and set a world record in the process. God honored his uncompromising spirit. But what was there about Eric Liddell that gave him the resolve to stand firm with his decision in spite of the pressure from the authorities and the press? The filmmakers of *Chariots of Fire* unknowingly provide the answer in a scene dramatizing the British Olympic authorities' attempt to change Liddell's mind about running in the 100 meters. After their unsuccessful attempt, one of the men comments, "The lad . . . is a true man of principle and a true athlete. His speed is a mere extension of his life—its force. We sought to sever his running from himself." In spite of the writer's labeling God as a generic "force," the statement is true. The Christian life cannot be lived apart from God. To do so is to compromise your very being.

That's where the power of integrity begins. Only as you and I derive our being from our relationship with Christ can we ever hope to live like He did, to suffer like He did, to withstand adversity like He did, and to die like He did—all without compromising.

The heart and soul of all Christianity is our relationship with Christ. Our salvation begins with Him, our sanctification progresses with Him, and our glorification ends with Him. He is the reason for our being, and thus He is more valuable to us than anyone or anything.

The apostle Paul knew well that the heart of the Christian life is building an intimate knowledge of Christ. That's why he said, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of know-

ing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). That was both his passion and his "goal" (v. 14).

What were the "all things" he considered as loss? They were the ultimate credentials of the works-righteousness religion Paul served before coming to know Christ. He was "circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless" (vv. 5-6). According to the conventional religious wisdom of his day, Paul followed the right rituals, was a member of the right race and tribe, adhered to the right traditions, served the right religion with just the right amount of intensity, and conformed to the right law with self-righteous zeal.

But one day when he was traveling to persecute more Christians, Paul met Jesus Christ (Acts 9). Paul saw Christ in all His glory and majesty, and he realized that all he thought was of value was worthless. So he says, "Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ . . . and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ" (v. 7-8). In Paul's mind, his assets had become liabilities—to such a degree that he considered them trash. Why? Because they couldn't produce what he thought they could—they couldn't produce righteousness, power, or endurance. And they couldn't lead him to eternal life and glory. So Paul gave up all His religious treasure for the treasure of knowing Christ deeply and intimately.

That is the essence of salvation—an exchange of something worthless for something valuable. Jesus illustrated the exchange in this way: "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:44-46). Those two men found something of far greater value than anything they owned. For them the decision was easy: sell all they thought was valuable for what was truly valuable.

That's what happens to those God chooses to bring into His kingdom. The person who comes to God is willing to pay whatever He requires, no matter how high the price. When confronted with his sin in the light of the glory of Christ—when God takes the blinders off his eyes—the repentant sinner suddenly realizes that nothing he held dear is worth keeping if it means losing Christ.

Jesus Christ is our treasure and our pearl. At some point in our lives we discovered that He was far more valuable than anything we had—whether possessions, fame, or desires. They all became valueless in comparison to Christ. So we trashed it all and turned to Him as our Savior and Lord. He became the supreme object of our affections. Our new desire was to know Him, love Him, serve Him, obey Him, and be like Him.

Is that still true of you? Is there anything in your life that competes with Christ? Is there anything in this world that captures your allegiance, devotion, and love more than Him? Do you still desire to know Him as much as you did when He first saved you? If not, you have compromised your relationship with Him and are dallying with the trash of the world. That is the danger of compromise.

If you are not careful to preserve and protect the treasure that is your relationship with Christ, the exuberance and devotion of your first days with Jesus can slowly and subtly turn into complacency and indifference. Eventually cold orthodoxy replaces loving obedience, and the result is a hypocritical life that will compromise with sin.

Fortunately for our sake, God has given us the resources in His Word to combat our tendency to sin and to restore our relationship with Christ. The apostle Paul shows us how by helping us see what we gained when we exchanged the trash for Christ. We have the benefits of a new life and a new relationship.

A NEW LIFE

When you were brought into God's kingdom, you were totally transformed. You became "a new creature; the old things passed

away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17). You didn't just receive something new—you became someone new. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ, and 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 delivered Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

This new nature is not added to the old nature but replaces it—an exchange occurs. The transformed person is completely new. In contrast to the former love of evil, the new self—the deepest, truest part of a Christian—now loves the law of God, longs to fulfill its righteous demands, hates sin, and longs for deliverance from the unredeemed flesh—where sin still resides. Sin no longer controls you as it once did, but it still entices you to obey it instead of the Lord.

Knowing full well the temptation that sin is, Paul addressed the Ephesian Christians regarding their new nature. By contrasting the lifestyle of the wicked unbeliever with that of the spiritual Christian, he sought to demonstrate that a changed nature demands changed behavior. In 4:17-19 Paul describes the former wicked lifestyle we all followed: "Walk no longer as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness." The word "Gentiles" represents all ungodly, unregenerate, pagan people. Like the church in our day, the churches at Ephesus and in almost every non-Palestinian area in New Testament times were surrounded by rank paganism and its attendant immorality.

Centered on Christ

To believers who had fallen back into such degradation Paul writes, "But you did not learn Christ in this way" (Eph. 4:20). The phrase "learn Christ" is a direct reference to salvation. Anyone who makes