

Total Honesty

Matthew 5:37

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Christians are to tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth (**Matt. 5:37**: “*But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.*”).
2. Christians are to be honest regardless of the situation or circumstances (**2 Cor. 8:21**: “*Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.*”).
3. The challenge to be honest or dishonest is faced by all men — all can be tempted to dishonesty.
4. The prevailing view of society is ruled by “situation ethics.” This ethic teaches us that whether or not we are honest is left up to our discretion as we see what the circumstances are dictating.
5. But, Christ teaches us to follow the right doctrine (honesty), and also to live the right life (an honest life) all the time, every day regardless of the circumstances or consequences.
6. **3** Today, let’s consider some Scriptures where Jesus Christ taught on total honesty.

II. DISCUSSION:

1. **4** Truth is always the best policy (in fact it is the only policy!):

- A. The Law of Moses taught it was a dishonor to break **any** oath taken in God’s name.
- B. But the scribes and Pharisees perverted the Law of Moses by their false teaching concerning oaths (Matt. 23:16-22).
- C. The New Covenant, the Law of Christ, holds man to a higher standard as it instructs us not to dishonor God by any kind of deceit, dishonesty or duplicity.
- D. Jesus considers three ways of speaking, but only one is accepted by our Lord.

- (1) An oath taken in God’s name under the Law of Moses was meant to confirm the speaker was telling the truth.

Matt. 5:33: “*Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’”*

- (2) Some Jews considered such an oath binding but created “lesser” oaths not considered binding (i.e., that is the point Jesus is making in Matt. 23:16-22).

- (3) In the new kingdom of God, Jesus teaches us to always tell the truth with or without an oath. Tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth. Always!

Matt. 5:34-37: “*But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.*”

2. **5** Jesus commended honesty wherever He found it:

- A. In New Testament times tax collectors were notoriously dishonest (explain); Therefore, Jesus was highly criticized for associating with tax collectors.
 - (1) Jesus criticized tax collectors when they deserved it: **Matt. 5:46-47**: “*For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?*”
 - (2) But He still sought to save them: **Matt. 9:10-13**: “*Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.*”

11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, 'Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' 12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.'"

(3) Society criticized Him for these associations: **Matt. 11:19:** "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."

B. Political correctness demanded Jesus renounce tax collectors, but Jesus commends Zacchaeus, a tax collector, for his commitment to total honesty (**Lk. 19:1-10**).

3. **6** Respected Christians were condemned when caught lying:

A. Barnabas was loved and respected for his great sacrifices (**Acts 4:36-37:** "And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.").

B. Ananias and Sapphira wanted that same love and respect like Barnabas received (**Acts 5:1-11**).

(1) However, unlike Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira wanted that love and respect at a bargain price; so they lied in their attempt to get it (**Acts 5:3:** "But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?").

(2) God left them free to decide how much to give (**Acts 5:4:** "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.").

(3) They made a great gift but God rejected their service because they lied (**Acts 5:4**).

(4) Their death sent a clear signal to all men: Christ teaches total honesty and he will accept nothing less. Great gifts and great service do not excuse lying (**Acts 5:11:** "So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.").

4. **7** We cannot do evil that good may come: **Rom. 3:7-8:** "For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? 8 And why not say, 'Let us do evil that good may come'? — as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just."

A. Paul preached that God is glorified through His plan to forgive our sins.

(1) But Jewish false teachers argued that according to what Paul taught, the more we sin the more God is glorified. Therefore, the gospel Paul preached is false ("a lie," **v. 7**).

(2) According to these false teachers, Paul was teaching, "Let us do evil, that good may come" — i.e., the more we sin, the more God is glorified by forgiving us (**v. 8**).

(3) Obviously, such teaching would provide a rationale or excuse encouraging more sin rather than condemning sin and calling men out of sin.

(4) This philosophy is popular today and always has been among men: "The ends justifies the means!" **Prov. 14:12:** "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death."

(5) Paul responded that false teachers slander the truth of the gospel by misrepresenting him to teach, "Let us do evil, that good may come."

(6) On the contrary, rather than teaching that God received glory when men sin, Paul taught that God condemns the sins of all men, including his own (v.7).

B. Paul repudiated in the strongest terms the rationale which says, "Let us do evil, that good may come."

- C. If we lie or practice any dishonesty excusing ourselves that we're only doing it to advance the gospel, to accomplish good, we are following the rationale, "Let us do evil, that good may come."
 - (1) In the strongest terms, Paul repudiates this rationale as contrary to the gospel, in fact it is a slander against the gospel of Christ.
 - (2) Preachers must remember this lesson when we are tempted to embellish (i.e., lie) about any aspect of our work (reports of our work, reports of baptisms, reports regarding financial support needed or given, reports regarding benevolence needed or given, reports regarding Bibles and other things needed or purchased, etc.). Our lies do not advance the gospel; no lie can advance the truth; lies violate, contradict, and slander it!
- D. If we will follow Christ like Paul, we must repudiate this false rationale and teach total honesty.

5. **8** Paul's preaching and life always manifested truth:

- A. Why? Because Paul always exalted Christ and not himself (2 Cor. 4:1-5).
- B. Paul rejected every dishonest word, deed, method, or maneuver in his work.
 - (1) He did not let his faith become worn down or discouraged by the trials of life or by the cruel treatment he received from unbelievers and false brethren.
 - (2) Paul did not turn to dishonesty and corruption in desperation or discouragement.
 - (3) He was determined to press forward and "faint not" no matter how severe the tests and trials of life might be (see vv. 1-2: "as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart"; 8-9: "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" 16: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.>").
 - (4) The hope of heaven is greater than any trial or discouragement (vv. 16-18: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.>").
- C. Paul manifested the truth both in his preaching and in his personal life, even though many people rejected the truth because of their blind love of sin (vv. 2-4: "But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.>").
- D. The reason Paul followed a straight line of truth in preaching and life is because he kept the proper focus in his work: To exalt Christ and not himself (v. 5: "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.>").
 - (1) Men resort to lies, distortions of truth, dishonesty, and corruption because of the selfish desire to promote themselves over Christ.
 - (2) It is not that they don't seek to promote the cause of Christ; but their first priority is to seek personal advantage first.

6. **9** Paul provided for honest things in the sight of God and man:

- A. As Paul traveled to Jerusalem with benevolence funds from the churches, Titus and other brethren traveled with him (2 Cor. 8:16-24).

- (1) The churches selected brethren to travel with Paul as “messengers of the churches” (v. 23).
 - (2) Paul made himself an “open book” as he collected these funds and proceeded toward Jerusalem.
 - (3) He did not hide from his brethren anything they had a right to know about his handling of these funds: **2 Cor. 8:21**: “Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”
- B. In this way it was evident to God and also to the brethren that Paul handled the funds properly (vv. 20-21). He did not practice any kind of dishonesty or corruption. We too have to be “open books”; we cannot do anything that could even be perceived as being dishonest! **1 Thess. 5:22**: “Abstain from every form of evil.”

7. **10** The gospel of Christ defeats deception and teaches only truth:

- A. False teachers learn well how to deceive, manipulate, and use people to serve their own selfish purposes.
- Matt. 7:15**: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”
- Matt. 24:4-5**: “And Jesus answered and said to them: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.’”
- 2 Peter 2:1**: “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.”
- Rom. 16:17-18**: “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.”
- B. The gospel of Christ teaches only the truth in love; the result is that people will grow to spiritual maturity in Christ: **Eph. 4:14-15**: “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ —”

8. **11** We are united in Christ as one body:

- A. Every important relationship has trust as its foundation: Christians/God, husband/wife, parent/child, employer/employee, Christian/Christian.
- B. As members of one body, Christ teaches us not to deceive one another.
- C. We all have a great obligation to our fellow brethren: **Eph. 4:24-25**: “and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. 25 Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another.”

9. **12** When we obey the gospel:

- A. We must put off the old man with his lies and put on the new man created in the image of Christ (**Col. 3:9-10**: “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,”).
- B. Old habits can be really hard to break! But break them we must!
- C. An important way to quit lying is to stop doing and saying things that tempt us to lie to cover up our sinful behavior.

D. If we lie, we misrepresent and slander the image of Christ who spoke only the truth (**Matt. 5:13-16**: “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”).

10. **13** When Christians are honest even in small things, we show the beauty of the teaching of Christ:

Titus 2:9-10: “Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”

A. To pilfer is to steal small amounts of money or things of little value (e.g., stealing from the workplace).

B. We may be tempted to steal, lie, or deceive by thinking of it as only a small deed in its meaning.

1 Cor. 4:2: “Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”

Matt. 25:21: “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’”

Lk. 16:10: “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.”

C. If we lie, steal, and deceive, even in small things, we make the teaching of Christ appear dirty and doubtful; we bring shame on Christ and on the gospel; we become a “stumbling block” (**Matt. 18:6**: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”).

D. To adorn is to make beautiful; let us demonstrate the beauty of Christ’s teaching by being honest and truthful in all things.

11. **14** Dishonesty delivers a bitter end:

Rev. 21:8: “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

A. Men tend to think of lying as a small, “white,” or insignificant sin.

B. This passage lists lying with the most heinous and hurtful of sins, it gives God’s estimate of this sin.

C. To die as a liar is to seal our fate as hopeless forever (**Rev. 22:11-15**).

D. Whether we die as unjust or as righteous, at that point our character and destiny will never change. If we are a liar all hope will be lost...F-O-R-E-V-E-R!

E. If we want to change our destiny from hell to heaven we must change our character NOW! **2**

Cor. 6:2: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

III. Conclusion: 15

1. Christ teaches total honesty — we must tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We must not resort to dishonesty and deception of any kind.

2. If we are Christians fallen into the snare of lying, we must confess and correct our sin in order to deliver our soul from death (1 Jn. 1:9; Acts 8:22).

3. If you’ve never obeyed the gospel the time to do so is now (2 Cor. 6:2).

Adapted from a sermon by Ron Halbrook.