

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
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SCRIPTURE: *Matthew 5:33-37*

DATE: *March 10th, 2019*

LOCATION: *Auditorium (Bill)*

Series: *Whoever Hears These Words*

SERMON: *“Integrity”*

(Acknowledgment to Scot McKnight and Tim Keller for their insight into this passage)

We’re working our way through the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus addresses everyday life issues for those who have committed to **Knowing, Loving and Following Him**. (Graphic)

We’re in the midst of 6 specific every day issues, and with each one Jesus begins by saying, “You have heard that it was said...” before referring to familiar words found in the Old Testament. He will then say, “But I tell you...” and then introduce His followers to a much deeper level of application.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not murder.’ But I tell you, don’t allow anger to find a home in your heart. You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you, do not allow lust to find a home in your heart.”

Our sermon series is called **Whoever Hears These Words**, and this morning’s topic is **Integrity**.

This may not sound as compelling as what we looked at last week when we talked about lust and adultery...but what we are going to be talking about this morning is incredibly important, and can help either establish our reputation or cause it to crumble...and as followers of Jesus, our reputation is everything.

Our Scripture passage comes from Matthew’s gospel, chapter 5, verses 33 through 37.

Matthew 5:33-37 “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Here’s where we’re headed this morning, we’re first going to see that the Jews had established **Levels of Integrity** when it came to oaths. Jesus will address this directly, but will then take us beyond oaths and talk about **Integrity in Everyday Life**. And we’ll close by talking about how - as followers of Jesus - we go about **Becoming People of Integrity**.

So first, let’s hear what Jesus has to say about these....

1. LEVELS OF INTEGRITY

...that the Jews had developed.

As usual, Jesus begins with these now familiar words... “*You have heard that it was said...*”

Matthew 5:33 “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’

Jesus could be drawing from numerous passages found in the Old Testament. Numbers 30:2 for instance:

Numbers 30:2 “When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.

Keeping an oath was stressed as necessary from the time of Moses. But here’s what developed over time...the Jews began to create these levels of obligation when it came to their words. More obligated here, less obligated there.

And near the end of Jesus' ministry, in the week leading up to the Cross, He confronted the religious leaders about it, telling them...

Matthew 23:16a, 18a, 19a You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath...You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men!

They had created these different levels...I have to keep my word "here" because I swore by "this"...but don't have to keep my word "there" because I swore by "that."

And it caused Jesus to say...

Matthew 5:34-36 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.

You see, how obligated you were to keep a promise was sometimes tied to what you swore by. And the closer it was to God's presence, the greater the obligation. And Jesus says, "*No levels! Don't swear by Heaven (where God is seated)...or by Earth (It may not be His throne, but it's his footstool)...or by Jerusalem (still His city)...or even head). None of that matters. You are obligated to keep every promise you make because the Lord is present everywhere.*"

There was a man who was married which means He had made a commitment to his wife. And yet he was having an affair. On different occasions his wife would go out of town on a business trip, and so the man would have this other woman over to his house.

Now it just so happened that throughout the house there were numerous pictures of the man's wife...on walls, on tables. When having this other woman over he would first go throughout the house and turn those pictures around, as if by doing so, he would not be reminded of her presence and the promises he had made. He was hoping that this would somehow free him from his obligation to keep his wedding vows.

I can't imagine that it worked for him, and I know that when it comes to God, we can't turn Him over, we can't turn Him around...we are always in His presence.

And so here is Jesus sitting on this hillside, letting His listeners know that oaths are not necessary because God is ever present and His followers always tell the truth. But then Jesus takes beyond oaths, and moves on to...

2. INTEGRITY IN EVERY DAY LIFE

He says...

Matthew 5:37 “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

Scot McKnight points out, that **“Jesus language is designed to push us into the deepest levels of human communication.”**

What Jesus does here is broaden the scope of this passage so that it extends to every area of life. Integrity is called for in every day events and not just when we find ourselves in a courtroom. In other words, we don't need a Bible to swear on to obligate us to speak with integrity. We do it no matter what.

As followers of Jesus we'll speak with integrity in the courtroom and we'll speak with integrity in the hallway of the courtroom. We do this as followers of Jesus.

This is interesting...did you know that the word “integrity” comes from the Latin word **“integer”**? Those of you who are good at math, you know that an integer is **a whole number**, as opposed to a fraction. In the same way, **a person who has integrity is a whole person**. The person who lacks integrity is fractured, broken, and no one knows who they really are.

Back in 1966 the movie **“A Man For All Seasons”** won the Academy Award for best picture. It was about Sir Thomas More, who was going to be executed by the king of England because he wouldn't support the king as the supreme head of the church.

So he's waiting to be executed and his daughter Meg comes to him and begs him to lie and stand up for something he doesn't believe in...in order to save his life. And More looks at his daughter and says, *"When a man takes an oath, Meg, he's holding his own self in his own hands. Like water. And if he opens his fingers... then he needn't hope to find himself again."*

He's talking about integrity, and if you have it and live it, no matter what else, you know who you are. And if you don't have it, you have no idea who you are, and what you stand for, and what you believe in.

Theologian Lewis Smedes once made the comment that "Ever since he and his wife married, she's been with 5 different men...and they were all him. He was not the person in his 60's that he was in his 50's...and he was different in his 40's and 30's and 20's. Smedes said the only reason they stayed together through all the change and growth and failures is because of integrity. His feelings changed. Many aspects of who he was changed. But not his word. Not his commitment to integrity. He said, *"I made a commitment when I married. And when I took a job. When I joined a church. And my commitments help me know who I am."*

Do you know who you are? Do others really know who you are? Do others know that whatever words come out of our mouths, that those words are trustworthy and true?

If not, if our words lack integrity, and our reputation as a follower of Jesus is severely damaged.

Tim Keller shares the story of talking to a woman some years ago who had left a church...Keller said it was a well-known church and the pastor was extremely skilled, he was very well regarded, when he spoke it was inspiring and moved you to tears...but the woman said the problem was, I knew his wife and I also knew that he was cold to her, that he was indifferent to her, he was often harsh to her to the point of being verbally abusive to her, and so there was a lack of integrity.

There was a disconnect between what he said and how he presented himself...and who he was in private. And it caught up to him. And this type of thing will catch up to any of us if we are not living with integrity, because people are watching...people are observing.

So let me ask you...if you say 'yes' over here, is it a 'no' over there? In other words, are you the same person in public that you are in private? If you knew that every word you spoke today would be recorded and then shown to the public tomorrow, would it change the way you speak? I think everyone of us would say 'yes', which means we have some work to do. And it's work we must do if we want to become whole - not broken – and a follower of Jesus.

Here are a few areas that we all can think about as we look to put into practice what Jesus is saying:

Do we try to create ourselves rather than be ourselves? Social media is one of those areas where it's easy to try to portray ourselves as something we're not.

Another area that I've been reading more about these days is the padding of resumes. Putting down something on a resume in regards to education or experience that just isn't true. Creating ourselves rather than being ourselves.

Do we embellish or exaggerate conversations or stories? Look, we love a good story, don't we? We love good story telling, and part of good story telling includes introducing humor and drama. But what I'm talking about is distorting a story in order to make someone look bad, or in order to get our way.

I've seen it happen and I'll be you have too. Sometimes we have an agenda, and if we can slant a story a certain way, it helps us to accomplish our goal.

Do we manipulate numbers for financial gain? Here's one that many who have made a decision to follow Jesus have to wrestle with. Claiming taxable income. We like our money, and while we understand why we pay tax, not sure that many of us look forward to that chunk coming out of our pay. The thing is, this is an area where Jesus has really helped people to do what they know is right. Similar thing when it comes to hours worked. Integrity when it comes to what time we started, what time we wrapped up...and the work that we did in between.

Do we manipulate people with words in order to get them to like us? Everybody likes to be liked, and it's tempting to resort to false flattery in order to make this happen. "Hey, nice outfit." " Boy, you really sing well." "Your son, your daughter is so well behaved."

Sometimes, hopefully most of the time the things we say are true. We really mean it. But the temptation always exists to say something we really don't mean in order to be liked. Sometimes it's better just to say nothing.

Now, before we move on and talk about becoming people of integrity, let me say this: Do you remember 2 weeks ago when Pastor Shaun was talking about how The Letter of the Law is not always adhered to in order to carry out The Spirit of the Law? For example we talked about Speed Limits – the signs along the road give us The Letter of the Law. But sometimes we look to ambulances and firetrucks and police cars to carry out the Spirit of the Law...a safe and healthy community...and so there are times they are not bound by the Letter of the Law.

And so, when talking about integrity and "Let your 'yes' be 'yes'... we should pose the question: ***"Is it ever acceptable to lie?"*** Here's an example that will be posed at times: *"What if someone was hiding in your basement, and someone who wanted to harm this person came knocking and asked you if you were hiding them?"*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who was a devoted follower of Christ and who - as some of you know - participated in a conspiracy against Hitler. The conspiracy was uncovered and Bonhoeffer was hanged just before the Nazi regime collapsed.

Before he died, Bonhoeffer argued that there may be certain scenario's that must be measured by what he calls "Living truth" and it requires discernment in regards to what to say and the limits of how far we can go. The example of hiding someone in our basement is not one that we are presently faced with...but the question "is it ever acceptable to lie" ...raises other real-life examples that we come face to face with.

It's your birthday, or your wedding shower, baby shower...or it's Christmas and the person whose gift you are opening is just beaming with anticipation of your reaction. And you open it and your heart sinks because it's just not you. Or you already have one. What do you do?

I have always said to Oliva, whenever you are given something, whenever you are served something, whenever you are asked something and the answer is difficult, above all, be gracious. Express appreciation for what was done, what was served, appreciation that your opinion was sought after.

We don't want to take what Bonhoeffer calls "Living Truth" and run with it...but this helps us to see the value of community as we talk and discuss and discern together, seeing the value of the letter of the law but not wanting to have it supersede the spirit of the law. **Love for God...love for others.**

Okay, let's talk about how you and I can go about...

3. BECOMING PEOPLE OF INTEGRITY

What is interesting is that in verse 33 the word "keep" actually means "pay." **"Do not break your oath, but keep pay the oaths you have made to the Lord..."**

To speak with integrity, sometimes there is a cost involved. There is a price to pay. Some people may not like what we said and thus may not like us. Paying the taxes the law says we should pay.

Let's look at both Jesus and Peter to see how they handled "the cost" as the stakes grew incredibly high.

Just hours before Jesus was arrested, He told His disciples, including Peter, that they would all desert Him. Peter looked straight at Jesus and insisted that rather than deny Him, he would be willing to die alongside of him. Peter said, "No cost is too great."

Well, Jesus was arrested that night and taken before the high priest. There He was questioned about His teachings, perhaps about some of the very things we have been looking at. Jesus responded by saying, *"I have spoken openly in many different places...why not question those who have heard me speak?"*

John 18:22-23 When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. “Is this the way you answer the high priest?” he demanded.

“If I have said something wrong,” (*if I have not spoken with integrity*) testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?”

For speaking the truth, Jesus was bound and taken to appear before the Sanhedrin...a group of rabbi's who had been given the authority to judge. Once Jesus arrived...

Matthew 26:59-60 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Eventually two men came forward and testified that they heard Jesus say that He would destroy the temple, and then rebuild it in three days. The high priest looked to Jesus and demanded a response, but Jesus remained silent.

Matthew 26:63b The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”

Finally Jesus spoke.

Matthew 26:64a “Yes, it is as you say.”

For speaking the truth, they spit in His face, struck him with their fists, and led Him off to appear before Pontius Pilate.

Now, as the Sanhedrin is questioning Jesus, Peter stands outside in the courtyard. And many of you know what happened there. The promise that he made to Jesus – “I’m willing to die with you!”.....the cost turned out to be more than he was willing to pay. Three times to three different people Peter denied that he even knew Jesus. And he went away, crying bitterly.

Meanwhile Jesus was taken to Pilate, who questioned Jesus, wanting to know exactly what He had done, and asking specifically if He was a king.

John 18:37b Jesus said, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”

And **for speaking the truth, they nailed Him to a cross.**

Every time...before the high priest, before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, Jesus spoke with integrity. He knew what it would cost Him...He knew that He would pay with His life, and unlike Peter, He saw it through. It was a price He was willing to pay.

I'd like to stand up here and tell you I'm more like Jesus, speaking and living with integrity and following Jesus no matter the cost. But unfortunately, I'm more like Peter. He's the one I can relate to.

But three things I know and I want you to know them as well before we walk out of here this morning.

First, for those times when we have not lived or spoken with integrity, **there is forgiveness** on the part of Jesus. Jesus forgave Peter and offered Peter a fresh start, and Peter received it.

For you and for I, there is a forgiveness on the part of Jesus. If you have deserted Him, if you have denied Him, this morning there is forgiveness and the offer of a fresh start. May you receive it as well.

Second, once Peter was restored, He became fully aware that **what he gained by following Jesus far outweighed the cost.**

And what did He gain? The third thing...

The presence and the power of Jesus.

And it changed His life. You think about who he was the first time he met Jesus. “Go away Lord, I am a sinful man.” Three years later he's weeping bitterly because he deserted Jesus. But once He was forgiven, restored and experienced the presence and power of Jesus, he was never the same again. Read I and II Peter and be amazed at the life change.

What Peter gained by following Jesus far outweighed the cost.

My prayer is that you will see that what you gain by following Jesus far outweighs the cost. You gain His presence, and not just His presence, but His power at work in your life. You are not left on your own. You and I, we can do this! We *can* resist anger, we *can* resist lust, we *can* speak with integrity....

You will be amazed at how your life changes.

All because Jesus is with us, He is for us...He will help us.

This awareness is how we become people of integrity.