

September 13, 1015

INTEGRITY

Matthew 5:33-37

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

Most of us can say it from memory, even though we never intentionally memorized it... You’re about to give your testimony in court. The Bailiff holds out a Bible, you put your left hand on it, you raise your right hand, and the Bailiff asks: “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?” And you’re supposed to say, ‘I do.’ You are swearing an oath on the Bible!!! Some, in an effort to convince others of what they’re telling them, will say, “I swear it, on a whole stack of Bibles!” The idea is that, with this sort of oath -- hand on the Bible -- your promise is going to mean more to you than the simple promise that you will tell the truth. (Of course, no one actually knows “the whole truth”). You are promising not to lie. You are promising to be honest. Your words will have integrity.

Integrity is defined as an adherence to a code or standard of values. It’s an unimpaired soundness, wholeness, completeness. An undivided-ness. To have integrity, a testimony must make sense, have logic, and be clearly understandable. “Yes” is “Yes” and “No” is “No.” There is no confusion, no mixture of motives, no doubt, nothing hypocritical, nothing contradictory in what you say... if you speak with integrity.

We could probably create a very long list of people who have lost their integrity. From Bill Clinton to Charlie Sheen to Jimmy Swaggert to Ted Haggard to Casey Anthony. But, of course, pointing our fingers at them doesn’t make us right. What about the lack of integrity revealed by our silence when we know something is wrong and say or do nothing?

I like the idea of integrity being a matter of doing the right thing even when no one is looking. But... the reality is that someone is always watching. That’s why we make oaths. An oath is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality – a commitment, so to speak, that assures others that we mean what we say and we say what we mean. But again... the oath is not an end, it is not the goal – it is a means to an end, a direction sign that helps us reach our goal

Often, we will excuse someone for their little character flaws because we see them as *mostly* virtuous. But that’s like the two men in the canoe after hitting a big rock just beneath the surface of the water. A small hole from the dent has slowly begun to let water seep in. The man paddling in the front says, “We’ve sprung a leak!” But the man in the back says, “I’m not worried. The hole’s not on my end!” One person’s lack of integrity can bring others down to their level. Jesus showed this truth in the story of the adulterous woman brought before Him by those who wanted to stone her to death, when He said, *“Let the one who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her!”* (John 8:7)

Jesus exposed their lack of integrity. And yet that didn’t mean that the woman was not wrong. Part of the challenge is that we cannot condemn others with a perfectly clear conscience. And there’s the key issue – conscience. Integrity and Conscience go together.

Go back to “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” and the fact that you never intentionally memorized it. Another thing we can all probably repeat is: “Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions, on a sesame-seed bun.” When you hear something often enough, it enters your mind. You think it without even trying. It’s like brainwashing. These two examples about “The Truth,” and “The Big Mac,” seem rather harmless. But consider the things we’ve been hearing over and over again that have convinced society that they’re okay. From promiscuous sex to alcohol use to gambling to lying – we’ve become silent because so many people have decided that there’s nothing wrong with those behaviors. We’ve heard and seen them so often that they’re part of

our social conscience...as being okay. And no one will call another on their sin because, in our having been silent for so long... (Martin Luther King, Jr.; called it "the appalling silence of the good people")..., we have become complicit, virtually allowing it to be okay, and therefore, we have no integrity either. It is called *acquiescence*.

When a culture lacks social integrity, individuals in that culture will likewise lack integrity. That is why we, the people of faith, speak about not walking in the way of the world. And even though our spiritual walk may have a bit of a limp to it because most of us are not perfectly whole or complete or undivided; we still want to raise up the challenge of integrity and adhere to a positive standard of values.

What we need to do is say "Yes" to the things about which God says "Yes," and "No" to the things about which God says "No!" Anything more than this comes from evil, from the sin of being complicit, of being acquiescent, of being silent. And, from the sin of claiming our oaths have more weight to them because we swore on the Bible, or, by heaven, or, by the earth, or, by Jerusalem, or, on our own head -- as if to say, "If I am lying then what I swear by must be false as well, and if this can't possibly be false, then I must be telling the truth."

What twisted logic! Let your "Yes" be "Yes" and your "No" be "No!" Live with integrity!