

Grow in Christlikeness (4): Honesty

Leviticus 19:11 New American Standard Bible (NASB).

‘You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.

Acts 24:16 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

In view of this I also do my best to maintain a blameless conscience both before God and before other people, always.

Introduction

A fellow in Long Branch went into a fried chicken franchise to get some chicken for himself and the young lady with him. She waited in the car while he went in to pick up the chicken. Inadvertently the manager of the store handed the guy the box in which he had placed the financial proceeds of the day instead of the box of chicken. You see, he was going to make a deposit and had camouflaged it by putting the money in a fried chicken box. The fellow took his box, went back to the car, and the two of them drove away. When they got to the park and opened the box, they discovered they had a box full of money. Now that was a very vulnerable moment for the average individual. However, realizing the mistake, he got back in his car and returned to the place and gave the money back to the manager. Well, the manager was elated! He was so pleased that he told the young man, “Stick around, I want to call the newspaper and have them take your picture. You’re the most honest guy in town.” “Oh, no, don’t do that!” said the fellow. “Why not?” asked the manager. “Well,” he

said, “you see, I’m married, and the woman I’m with is not my wife!” (Dallas Times Herald, September 23, 1966)

In the past three Sundays, we focused on Christ-like character such as love, humility, and purity. Today, we are going to think about growing like Him in honesty.

Content

If there’s one area where we all can do a better job, it would be honesty. In our society, there is plenty of corruption in leadership (political, religious, and financial), cheating in marriage, cheating at work and in school (especially high school and college). It gets worse every day; we suffer from poor work ethic and performance, distrust, manipulation, and more corruption. Left undealt with, in the end, dishonesty will bring down our entire nation. And God calls us to stand in the gap on behalf of our society.

Let’s do some numbers first around the world.

The least corrupt countries in the world (2024):

Every year Transparency.org ranks nation’s integrity “based on a number of surveys that seek to gauge hard-to-find metrics like bribes paid to government officials or transparency in corporate reporting.” In 2024, the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranks 180 countries and territories worldwide by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. The results are given on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). In 2024, the top 5: Denmark (90),

Finland (88), Singapore (84), New Zealand (83), Luxemburg, Norway, Switzerland tied (81). The USA (65—Rank #28). In 2012, the US's number was 74, so we are getting worse.

(<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024/>)

How honest are Americans at work?

“Anyone looking for an honest man or woman in the U.S. today would have lots of problems, according to Lousig-Nont and Associates, Nevada. Out of 7,443 people it tested for honesty in 1993, 52% were ranked as low desirability for employment because they admitted to stealing or thinking about stealing regularly or said they would steal if they thought they had a good enough reason. 14.5% stated that the temptation to steal can be too hard to resist; 12.2% admitted to prior job dishonesty and rationalized this behavior; 11.2% said they would not give lost money back to the owner even if they knew who he or she was; 10.7% indicated that they would steal if they knew for sure they would not get caught; 9.3% admitted that they would bribe a police officer; 6.8% believe you can have a good reason to steal from work; and 5.9% feel they have a good reason to steal from work.”

(<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/How+honest+are+Americans%3f-a016227269>) (***You can't be honest in one way and dishonest in another.***)

In 2013, another survey, “How focused are you during the workday?” found that almost one third (29%) visits Facebook each

day while they're at work. (<https://mashable.com/archive/facebook-workday>)

Definition:

Let's check out a standard definition of honesty. Honesty is "the quality of always telling the truth, and never stealing or cheating" (*Oxford Dictionary*). Here's a biblical definition: the quality of being truthful to God and people in word and action.

Why Be Honest?

If your child asks you why she needs to be honest, especially when many others at school cheat on tests, how would you answer her? We would answer it is wrong to cheat. We would say God wants all people, especially His children, to live an honest life. For those who want to know more than just "it is God's command," here are three reasons I found in the Scriptures for why we should be honest.

1. *Honesty is to the glory of God:* dishonesty is to the glory of Satan. God commands us to deal with each other with honesty so as to please Him and to bring Him the glory. Remember our God is the God of truth. He is the God of light. He cannot stand dishonesty, falsehood, or darkness. Imagine every Christian in our society tells a lie. Our Heavenly Father wouldn't be pleased with us at all, would He? Dishonesty has no place before God. It has no place in our family or church, either. Why? Because, it belongs to darkness and we the

children of light must have nothing to do with it. If we are dishonest, it will actually honor our enemy Satan and help him to gain more territory over our society. The Bible says it right about the devil: he is a liar and the father of all lies (John 8:44).

2. *Honesty protects individuals from vices.* It keeps us from unwanted troubles such as more lies, cover ups, slanders, and future embarrassments. Honesty morphs us into a character of virtue. It also builds more trust and credibility around us among peers. Furthermore, God will reward you when you walk uprightly. He will withhold no good thing from you (Psalm 84:11). E.g., “which tire was flat?” the professor asked when two cheating students rescheduled the test due to “flat tire” on their way to school.

3. *Honesty preserves society.* It keeps our society healthy and sound. Honesty strengthens our families. It also protects us from God’s judgment. E.g., Jeremiah 5:1. God looks for ONE person honest and upright to spare the entire city of Jerusalem. E.g.2. Abraham’s plea for Sodom and Gomorrah / 10 righteous people would have prevented the divine judgment (Genesis 18:32). Christians are the light and salt of the world. We are standing in the gap on behalf of our society. We are called to keep our society from getting darker. We are called to preserve our society from corruption. Honesty does that job.

How can we be honest?

Before we ask how we can be honest, perhaps we need to ask what makes people dishonest? What makes people cheat?

-Fear: My first lie about my brother's necklace.

-Greed: Jacob lied to his father to steal blessings from his brother (Genesis 27:19).

-Hatred/Envy/Jealousy: Joseph's brothers (Genesis 37:9, 32) lied to their father after they sold Joseph to slavery out of hatred.

-Desires (ambition, lust) for success without hard works (e.g. students cheating on tests).

What would help us to live a life of honesty? Three things.

1. Awareness of God: God watches over you. E.g., Joseph the son of Jacob—"How can I do evil" to fellow people and sin against God (Genesis 39:8, 9)?

2. Accountability to God: God is my witness in all I do and say. On the Day of Judgment, He will hold us accountable for whatever we have done. Think before you act. Begin with the end in mind.

3. God's commands: Love God? Obey His commandments. Follow the principle of honesty in every intent (Genesis 20:5—*everything in the integrity of heart and the innocence of hands*), words (Proverbs 12:17—be a truthful witness), lifestyle (Acts 24:16—*maintain a blameless conscience both before God and before people*) and business practices (Leviticus 19:36—*use honest scales and weights*).

What if I struggle with honesty?

Check on those fear factors that keep you from being honest. Trust in God. God will take good care of you. Be content with what you have (E.g., Wall Street bankers). Do no harm to others. Love others and stick to God's principles. Ask for God's help. Repent if you haven't been truthful to your loved ones. Practice being honest on small things first. Repeat it. Before long, you will become a character of honesty and be able to be honest in everything to the glory of God. One more thing.

Don't despair. You are not alone. You are not any worse than many people in the Bible. God will teach you throughout your life and help you to grow up, one lesson at a time until you get it. Embrace His training with gratitude and trust. E.g., Abraham. After lying twice, he learned to trust in God over fear. Jacob. Stop being manipulative and start being truthful to others. God will train you through and through in your life until honesty becomes a part of you. You can count on His faithfulness and patience.

Conclusion

God commands us, "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another." Let us honor Him by being truthful always in all we do and say. Amen.