

ST. Bartholomew's Anglican Church
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“Integrity” Do You Have It?

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Matthew 5:21-37

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Let us pray: Father open our hearts and ears to the reading of Your Word. May we being filled with the Holy Spirit keep our focus on Your Son Jesus Christ? Help us to walk with integrity knowing that our words and actions conform to Your Word and not the worlds. May the Holy Scriptures lead and guide us to eternal life, which can only be found in Jesus Christ. Amen.

For the last two weeks the readings have been taken from Matthew's gospel which is known as, **“The Sermon on The Mount”** and will continue until next week and the close of chapter five. The opening of Matthew's gospel starts with the teaching of Jesus to His disciples with the all familiar **“B Attitudes”**. And they are nine attitudes that start with the words, **“Blessed Are”**. It's the same kind of theme in which Jesus is repeating something that is very important not only for His disciples to hear and know, but also for us to grasp and understand. It is a theme that is paramount for us to know if we to are to be Disciples of Christ. So if we would go back a few verses before today's reading, we will find Jesus affirming God's Old Testament law by saying that it has been fulfilled in Him.

So if you would open your pew bibles to page _____, Matthew 5:17-20 and follow along as I read those verse to get us up to speed. **“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you; that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”**

Now today's reading opens with Jesus stating that He was not altering the terms of the law in any of the passages, but that He was correcting what they had heard and believed. And they were probably wondering how can they be more righteous than the law abiding Pharisees? So Jesus outlines some examples of how, by saying what is known as **“The Six Antitheses.”** Now an Antitheses is a view point that is contrasting to what has already been said and heard. As I have just read in the previous verse, Jesus is stating that He has not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but He

has come to fulfill it. This fulfillment that Jesus is speaking about is a prophetic fulfillment.

In other words Christ is telling them that He is the fulfillment of the Law in all aspects. He fulfilled the moral law by keeping it perfectly. He fulfilled the ceremonial law by being everything the law's types and symbols pointed to. And He fulfilled the judicial law by personifying God's perfect justice. And this antithesis comes in the statements of **"You've heard it said; But I say."** In other words Jesus is saying that the Pharisees have it all wrong. It's not about keeping rules and regulations that bring us to a place of righteousness, but rather it's about our relationships. And it starts with a right relationship with God that will show its self in and through us and how we relate with other people.

I guess you can also say it's about integrity. And perhaps we in this country have to ask the question do we still have integrity in this nation. If you look around at our moral culture and what has happened to it since the 20th century and before, you would have to wonder and ask yourself, what is going on. Are we at a point of no return in this country when it comes to integrity? Have we slipped into that great abyss of moral decay without even a struggle? Let me give you what Webster's dictionary defines as integrity: **"The steadfast adherence to moral values and truth."** Simply put, integrity is more than just telling the truth. Integrity is about character it's about doing what we said we would do. Integrity means keeping our word. Integrity means that our word and our actions are the same at all times. I guess a better way to put it is that, we have to practice what we preach!

I am sure that most of you have listened to or have heard of the radio commentator Paul Harvey? Well he told a story of some young men who were late for class. **"Four high school students were late to their morning class's one-day. They entered the classroom and solemnly told their teacher they were detained due to a flat tire. The sympathetic teacher smiled and told them it was too bad they were late because they had missed a test that morning. But she was willing to let them make it up. She gave them each a piece of paper and a pencil and sent them to four corners of the room. Then she told them they would pass if they could answer just one question: Which tire was flat?"**

Integrity has to be the foundation that we as Christians have to live by. We have to be like Jesus who is our example of unwavering integrity. An example of that can be found in Matt 22:16, where the people are talking about the integrity in the life of Jesus. They say, **"Teacher, we know that You are Truthful, (in other words, You have integrity) and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one, for You are not partial to any."** Integrity for me can be summarized in one word, and

that word is 'Character'. I think that Character is a quality that we in this country have always expected to find in those people who usually dedicate their life for the service of others. Professions like firemen, policemen, doctors and other professions you can think of. Those are people that we expect the best from them and that they will keep their word. Then we have the other side of the spectrum where we have doubts and even mistrust of people and we don't expect them to keep their word anymore. I think one such group of people who has lost their trust to the public is our politicians.

It reminds of a story that is told by a farmer who saw a busload of politicians get involved in an accident. It seems that a busload of politicians were driving down a country road when, all of a sudden, the bus ran off the road and crashed into a tree in an old farmer's field. The old farmer, after seeing what happened, went over to investigate. He then proceeded to dig a hole and bury the politicians. A few days later, the local sheriff came out, saw the crashed bus and asked the old farmer where all the politicians had gone. The old farmer said he had buried them. The sheriff asked the old farmer, **"The coroner wasn't here. Are you sure they were all dead?"** The old farmer replied, **"Well, some of them said they weren't, but you know how them politicians lie."**

Integrity! That is the key word that permeates all through Matthew five. I want to read again verse 20. **"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness (lets replace that word with Integrity), surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."** That's some pretty heavy stuff to take in. And it's with these words that Jesus is explaining to the scribes, Pharisees and even the disciples that His teaching goes beyond not only that of the Torah, but it even goes beyond the Ten Commandments. For people to truly keep the law as God had intended, they could not get by with lip service and with obeying the letter of the law alone. Instead Jesus' teaching reached to the application of the law, into people's motives and attitudes. It was to show their inability to keep the law without having a right relationship with God.

Integrity starts in the heart, a heart that is fully controlled by God. And if you are controlled by God, then you will be able to examine your heart and compare it to your actions. 2nd. Cor. 3:2-3, **"You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts."** We all need to examine our integrity and then live truthfully. We have to go into those Invisible areas of our life. Into those places that no one else can get see but you. Because if we are not truthful with ourselves and with God about those issues in our lives it will take us away from God's grace and our integrity will be destroyed. Maybe now is a good time for us to make a little integrity check in our own life.

And we can do that by asking ourselves a few simple questions. Are we keeping the vows and commitments we have made to Him? When we chose to call Him Lord and Master, we made a decision that He would be the owner of our life, our time, our resources and all that we have. How are we doing on that commitment? What portion of His resources that have been given to us from Him are we using to advance and expand His Kingdom? How much time each day do you spend in a heart to heart conversation with God about the things that are on His agenda and not yours? How often do you lift up your brothers and sisters in prayer? And lastly, are we constantly seeking to bring our lives into alignment with God's will for our lives? Psalm 37:4, **“Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.”**

So if we are going to live in integrity then we need to live by God's truth as found in Heb. 4:12, **“For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edge sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”** Our integrity is directly linked to God's Word. And when we don't live by it, our integrity is being judged. So if you want integrity, start living for God. Amen