

St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church
2368 Eggert Road Tonawanda, N.Y.

"Integrity" Part Two
Matthew 5:38-48
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Let us pray: Father we thank you for the privilege of serving you. Each day is a gift and a blessing from you. May we being filled with Your Holy Spirit acknowledge with integrity, character and strength, the saving grace that can only be found in Your Son Jesus Christ. And it is in His name we pray. Amen.

Two weeks ago I preached on Matthew 5:21-37 and I titled that sermon, **"Integrity Do You Have It?"** That was going to be a two part sermon and I was going to finish up with Matthew 5: 38-48, which was the assigned readings for last week. But I took a week break so that Fr. Ward, could continue with his excellent sermon series entitled **"2011 and counting."** So what I want to do this week is to stay on the same theme and finish up with part two of, **"Integrity Do You Have It?"**

But first I would like to do a little review to hopefully refresh your memory from two weeks ago. And if you remember, I said that Webster's dictionary defined integrity as, **"The steadfast adherence to moral values and truth."** Simply put, integrity is about character and character defines who we are not only as a person but as a follower of Jesus Christ. Then I read Matthew 5:17-20 ending with Jesus stating, **"For I say to you; that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."** And those listening to Jesus are 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."** And those Antitheses were made in the statement of, **"You have heard it said; But I say."** Jesus is showing that His integrity is not only in His words or actions but throughout His life on earth. He is the creator of integrity and His Word and character are without fault of change. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Proverbs 10:9, **"He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out."** In the book entitled **"The Day America Told the Truth"**, the authors related some amazing results of one question which was asked of average Americans. The question was very simple: What are you willing to do for \$10 million? 2/3 of the people polled said they would do at least one of the following and some said they would do several of the following: 25% would abandon their entire family, 25% would abandon their church, 23% would become prostitutes for a week or more, 16% would give up their American citizenships, 16% would leave their spouses, 10% would withhold testimony and let a murder go free, 7% would murder a stranger, and 3% would put their children up for adoption. Can you believe that? What has happened to our American integrity?

I think Fr. Ward brought to light three areas of concern in today's society. Areas in the daily life of people that seem to be tearing down and unraveling our moral character faster than a runaway train going down a mountain slope with no brakes. He

spoke about those problems that are confronting today's society in part four of his sermon series dealing with the end times and as I said earlier entitled "**2011 and counting.**" So what I would like to do now is to have us try to get a real grasp of the reasons why society is losing its moral character and its integrity. And we do that by going to the only source that has the truth and that is God's Holy and inerrant Word.

So would you please open your pew bibles to page 1192; 2nd Timothy 3:1-4 and follow along as I read those verses? "**But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be Lovers of Self, Lovers of Money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, Lovers of Pleasure rather than lovers of God.**" There you have it.

I believe as Father Ward believes, and that is that those are the three key reasons why today's society has ushered in an era of moral depravity. Once again they are: **lovers of self, lovers of money and lovers of pleasure.** If you noticed, the most important ingredient missing in order to have moral character and integrity is love of God. Deuteronomy 6:5, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all you might.**" I think Mark Twain was right on the mark when he said this about integrity, "**Speaking honestly is better. It takes a lot of stress out of our lives. If you tell the truth you don't have to remember anything, but if you don't tell the truth you have to remember what you said.**"

Integrity, that's one word that seems to have lost its meaning in today's culture. All we have to do is look around at how people treat one another. We have news papers that print outlandish stories about people whether true or false. We have TV shows that promote self image and glorification. But believe it or not there have been a few TV shows from the past that have fostered character and integrity. Let me tell you about one such show. I think it was popular in the 60's or 70's and it starred Robert Stack. For those of you who like law enforcement stories, you may have already guessed the name of the show. Mr. Stack played the lead role of Elliot Ness and the show was called "**The Untouchables**". I would like to tell you how that name came into existence.

It was in Chicago, in 1929 when a 26 year old government agent by the name of Eliot Ness formed an elite team of nine incorruptible men to bring down the reputed king pin of all criminals and his \$120 million mob empire. You have probably already figured out that the mobster was Al Capone. At the time, Ness was making \$2,800 a year working for the government. One day a young man walked into his office and handed Ness an envelope with two one thousand dollar bills and a promise that this would happen weekly if he would lay off Capone. Ness sent the money and the messenger back. Desiring to make a point, Ness called a press conference. Newspapers and newsreels from various agencies were in attendance.

Ness told the story of Capone's attempted bribe and his response to it. The next day, headlines read, "Ness and his men are **"UNTOUCHABLE."** Another side note to that story is that Ness's men also became known as, "**G Men**", government agents. So

when you have integrity and character you will be following in the footsteps of the Prophet Micah who said, **“O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God”**. And when you do that, you too will become an ‘Untouchable’. Proverbs 13:6, **“Righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner.”**

A pompous looking Sunday school teacher was trying to impress upon his Sunday school class of boys, the importance of living the Christian life. He asked the question, **“Why do people call me a Christian?”** After a moment’s pause, one of the youngster’s said, **“Maybe it’s because they don’t know you!”** You see our actions are what support and back up our words. Without our actions, how can anyone know that our words are trust worthy and true? Let me give you one example of how are actions speak louder than our words.

Abraham Lincoln had been known for his integrity because of the way he lived. At the age of twenty-four, Lincoln served as the postmaster of New Salem, Illinois, for which he was paid an annual salary of \$55.70. Even then, twenty –four years before he entered the White House, the rail-splitter was showing the character that earned him the title of **“Honest Abe.”** The New Salem post office was closed in 1836, but it was several years before an agent arrived from Shington to settle accounts with ex-postmaster Lincoln, who at this time in his life was a struggling lawyer and not doing very well. The agent informed him that \$17 was due the government. Lincoln crossed the room, opened an old trunk and took out a yellow cotton rag, bound with a string. Untying it, he spread out the cloth and there was the \$17. He had been holding it untouched for all these years. Lincoln said to the new agent, **“I never use any man’s money but my own.”**

Integrity! Your word is your bond! Whatever happened to that philosophy? We only have to go back to the 1900s, to see that integrity was still alive and well. Do you remember when someone would commit to a packed or an agreement with another person and how that was completed? It was completed with the simplest form of agreements, a hand shake. That’s because your word and a handshake were backed by your integrity. Now look at today and how far we have drifted from that handshake. We have to have policies and contracts to bind us and hold us to the agreements we make because our integrity is not binding enough.

As Christians, and as people who hold their citizenship with our Lord in heaven, I want to encourage each and every one of us to show to those around us that our integrity can be seen in our words and actions. Let me give you three areas of integrity that we as Christians need to live by. **First, integrity in our words:** Matthew 5:37, **“Let your Yes be Yes and your No be No, anything beyond that is evil.”** In other words when we say that we are Christians do we really mean it? **Second, integrity in our actions:** James 1:22, **“But prove your selves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”** In other words like that old adage affirms, ‘If you talk the talk, than walk the walk.’ **Third, integrity in our lives:** As Christians we are to be living in expectation and that expectation is found in the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

1st Thessalonians 4:16-17, **“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.”** Why as Christians are we sold on the fact that Jesus will return one day to take us with Him? On simple word, **“Integrity”** and Jesus has integrity.

If we are going to be men and women of integrity then we have to pass on a heritage of wisdom. I want to close with a story about a Pastor who lived in a small town in the mid-west. It seems the church he was pasturing was small in number and finances. So in order for him to make ends meet for his family he took on a job at the local feed mill in order to supplement his income. His job wasn't very pleasant and consisted of mixing grain. He says that for a period of about two weeks, each day that he came home from the feed mill his two boys ages 2 and 3 would look at him, smile and would say, **‘Boy, dad, you sure are dusty!’** And he would reply, **‘Yes, I sure am dusty.’** Then He would get cleaned up.

He said he didn't think much of it at the time, but one day when he was washing the car he saw his oldest son doing something very strange. He was picking up gravel and stones that were in the driveway and began rubbing them into his pants. He asked him, **‘What are you doing?’** He replied, **‘I want to be dusty like you dad!’** It was then that he realized that if a child would look up to his father for being dusty and wanted to copy his father, a child could look up to his father and follow him for anything.”

Proverbs 20:7, **“A righteous man who walks in his integrity; how blessed are his sons after him.”** If there is only one thing you remember from this sermon, let it be that the quality of our life is only as strong as our integrity dictates. Amen.