THE IMPORTANCE OF HONESTY

INTRODUCTION

Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God? That's the courtroom oath every witness must take just before their testimony. It would be good if we could start every day with that oath ringing in our ears. That's because "dishonesty" can be so sneaky, and there are so many reasons dishonesty is advantageous. We exaggerate and make something seem better than it really is. We pass on information that we haven't taken time to verify, because it supports what we want to think and what we want others to think.

COMMENTARY: THE IMPORTANCE OF HONESTY

But honesty or dishonesty is not only a matter of what you say, it's also a matter of what you don't say. A teenage boy gets in a fender bender on his way home from school with some of his friends in the car. He tells his parents: *I wasn't goofing around at all. The guy in front of me just all of a sudden slammed on his brakes, and I couldn't stop.* But what he chose **not** to mention was that he was texting at the time.

This is why the courtroom oath sets the standard of telling the truth **and** the whole truth.

But wait there's more. If you're honest, you can't let people assume something that isn't true. We're quick to correct the record if someone blames us for something that wasn't our fault. But we're not so quick if they assume we deserve credit for something we don't deserve, or if they think more highly of us than they should, or if they think we share their opinion if we don't.

Can you see why honesty is perhaps the most challenging of all the character traits. It definitely requires the most diligence. But in one sense it may be the trait most needed to love like Jesus. Why? If you love someone you will want to be as trustworthy as possible. People have to be able to believe every word that comes out of your mouth. They have to believe you aren't hiding anything, holding anything back. You'll never want to blindside them.

Every day I like to take you to a key scripture passage. Today is no different, but it is by far the shortest key passage. Paul wrote in Romans 12, the important chapter that begins with a challenge to not be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind:

Love must be sincere. (Romans 12:9)

Obviously, sincerity and honesty are verbal cousins, meaning much the same thing. But the background to the word "sincere" adds a memorable insight. It is a compound word formed by two Latin words *sine* and *cera,* meaning without wax. Love must be without wax? What's going on?

In those days masons who cut marble slabs for construction or sculpting, or potters who made pots and bowls, might do all their work and have it turn out with a flaw, a crack in the marble or the bowl giving it less value or usefulness. Not wanting to lose money, they would fill the crack with wax attempting to hide it from potential customers, only to have the customer discover it sometime after their purchase. So products like that would be labeled *sine cera* to assure customers "what you see is what you get." There are no flaws being masked. Love must be sincere. Whether or not a person is sincere is a matter of character. And love requires it!

With that in mind here's the definition of honesty we need to work with: ***conscientiously preventing others from believing what you know is untrue.*** That covers everything doesn't it? What you say and don't say.

REFLECTION:

So it's a good time for some quiet thinking. Here's a great prayer to pray any time you need to be honest with yourself.

> ***Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.***

This prayer is so important, because we are not trustworthy enough or wise enough to search ourselves. We've got too much self-esteem at stake to be as thorough in self-examination as we need to be. So we ask the Lord to do the searching. As a side benefit that approach also protects us from feeling guilty when we actually haven't done anything wrong. He searches. He convicts when necessary. And He always does that with love and a concern for our best interest.

So now, are you ready for a few questions?

- *How honest are you?*
- *Do you exaggerate?*
- *Shade the truth?*
- *Leave people with false impressions?*
- *Cheat on reports like time sheets, reimbursement forms, taxes?*
- *Secretly buy things you shouldn't buy?*
- *Hold back information because you're afraid another person won't approve?*

Next question: ***Ironically, sometimes the best way to build your trait of honesty and resulting trustworthiness is to confess to someone when you haven't been completely honest.***

- *Is there someone you need to go to to set the record straight?*
- *Something you haven't been completely honest about?*

There is no better way to strengthen the trait of honesty than to come clean in some area of dishonesty.

And one more question. It's the same one we ask almost every day. **Who's the most honest person you know? The person that you trust completely to tell the truth?**

PRAYER:

Dear Heavenly Father, when it comes to the matter of honesty it seems fitting that I should approach You, Lord, as my loving Father. You know my heart. I am Your child. You know that I want to be an honest person, but You also know my weaknesses. I am so prone to self-protection, so I will sometimes shade the truth or outright lie to keep from facing some unpleasant consequence. You know I am often very concerned about what people think of me, so I can easily be tempted to put on false impressions about what I think or feel. You know I don't want to let people down, so I will sometimes say I've done something they wanted to me to do when I really hadn't. There are all sorts of ways I am not completely true and honest. And right now, I'm even having a hard time being honest about how dishonest I can often be. But You know all that too. Please forgive me, and give me the spirit of repentance and courage that is required if Your Spirit directs me to go to someone—or even more than just one person—to set the record straight about some matter. That will be hard, but it's what I want to do. I want a strong conviction so that a commitment to honesty will grip my heart and mind, and shape my character into Your likeness. Because that's what You're like, Lord. You are true in all Your ways. Your love is always sincere. Thank you Lord. Amen.