



The New Life in Christ

Lesson 9

Truthfulness and Honesty in our Lives

The Faithfulness of God

In the book of Deuteronomy we have the last words of Moses, spoken just before he died. Nearly forty years before he had seen the goodness of God who had passed by him and proclaimed:

“The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and **truth**...”
Exodus 34:6 (KJV)

Now, in Deuteronomy, Moses describes God to the Israelites who will cross over the River Jordan and enter the Promised Land. This is what he says:

“I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a **God of truth** and without iniquity, just and right is he.”
Deuteronomy 32:3-4 (KJV)

In both of these quotations God is described as truthful. For Moses, God was like a rock, absolutely dependable in all His ways and in everything He said. David also used this expression to describe God in one of his Psalms.

“Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD **God of truth**.”

Psalm 31:5 (KJV)

We know that the first part of this verse was quoted by Jesus, indeed they were the very last words he spoke on the cross, just before he died, and they tell us of his absolute trust in God. It is possible that the second part of the verse was the phrase he spoke immediately he was resurrected from the dead. For Jesus, every word God spoke was true, God had promised to raise him from the dead and his resurrection showed that God could be trusted absolutely.

It is interesting that, in some modern versions of the Bible, the word ‘truth’ is translated as ‘faithfulness’. The apostle Paul picked up this idea when he wrote to the Corinthians that ‘God is faithful’, he was reminding them that God would keep His word; He can be trusted and He will bring His children to His Kingdom. Paul took this from the book of Deuteronomy, look at this verse.

“Know therefore that the LORD your God is **God, the faithful God** who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations...”
Deuteronomy 7:9

Disciples of the Lord Jesus depend absolutely on this aspect of God’s character. We believe with all our hearts that He is faithful and true, that He will never lie to us or deceive us. Indeed, Paul wrote ‘Let God be true though every man be false’; even if every man in the world is a dishonest liar, God will remain true! (See also Titus 1:2)

Honesty is Essential

These ideas about the truthfulness of God are important for God wants us to be like Him, our characters like His character or as He says:

“You shall be holy; for I the LORD your God am holy.”
Leviticus 19:2

Being holy means being separated from the world around us and dedicated to God. We are holy when we obey Him and when we use our tongue to speak only honest words. God also told Israel that if they disobeyed these laws then they would profane (dishonour) His holy name.

This chapter in Leviticus (chapter 19) develops the principles behind the Ten Commandments and shows how the Children of Israel were to apply them in their lives. We should note how many of

God's commandments relate to truthfulness and honesty in their lives and our lives. God is true and honest and He wants us to be like this also.

- You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. (Verse 11)
- You shall not oppress your neighbour or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. (Verse 13)
- You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour. (Verse 15)
- You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people. (Verse 16)
- You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights. (Verses 35-36)

Honesty is an essential part of a believer's life. If we cannot trust each other then it becomes impossible to live and worship together. It is important to realise that the Bible tells us of the importance of truthfulness in our actions, not just our words. For example, the next chapter in Leviticus goes on to tell us about the need to be faithful and true to our wife or husband. It is just as dishonest to have sex with another man's wife or another woman's husband as to steal or lie. God demands that we are honest in all our ways.

"Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who **act faithfully** are his delight."
Proverbs 12:22

There are many examples in the Bible of men and women who were dishonest before God and who had to learn the lesson that this is unacceptable to Him. One such example is in Genesis 27 where we read how Jacob, and his mother, Rebekah, deceived Isaac, his father. He pretended to be his brother Esau; he lied to his father to gain something that was not his by right. The consequences were severe. Esau became his enemy for the rest of his life. He had to flee from the family home and never saw his mother again. When Jacob later became the father of many sons, they in their turn lied to him, telling him that his favourite son, Joseph, was dead. We learn from this example that, if we lie and cheat in our lives, we may cause terrible pain and distress in our families. If we do this we may have to live with the consequences for many years and our bad example may be followed in turn by our children.

Honesty before God

When we lie, we do so because we think we can 'get away with it'. We think that no-one will know that we have not told the truth. However, God *always* knows what we *do* – and indeed, what we *think* in our hearts.

"O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue behold, O LORD, you know it altogether."
Psalm 139:1-4

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read about a man and wife who thought they could cheat their brothers and sisters in the ecclesia and cheat God.

"But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.
But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?
While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? **You have not lied to men but to God.**"
When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it."
Acts 5:1-5

These people appeared to be doing good. To their brothers and sisters in the ecclesia in Jerusalem they must have seemed righteous because they gave money to help others. But they lied about the amount of money; they boasted that they had given everything from the sale of the property when they gave just part of the money to God - they deceived their brothers and sisters.

It is very easy to appear righteous as a disciple of Jesus Christ when really we are lying in our hearts. We must not pretend to give God everything but hold back part for ourselves. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not a lack of generosity, if they had said 'we are giving God half of the money and keeping half for ourselves' then this would have been honest, and God would have accepted it. What was wrong was to lie to Peter and to God.

When we sin, it may hurt other people but the real consequence is that we sin against God. When we lie, we may think we are just lying to another man or woman, but we need to recognise that we are trying to deceive God.

The problem is that some people do not believe this. They know that many are dishonest and get away with it – God does not strike dishonest people dead today as He did Ananias and his wife, Sapphira. However, dishonesty does get noticed and when it occurs amongst disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ it causes serious spiritual damage both to the people who are lied to and to the one who has told the lie.

David recognised this and wrote about it in Psalm 37.

"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.

But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace."

Psalm 37:7-11

When Jesus returns to set up God's kingdom, dishonest people will be punished just as surely as God judged Ananias and Sapphira.

Honesty in Everyday Life

The Bible teaches us to be honest not just in big things but in things which may seem very small and trivial. Some people think that it is acceptable to tell little lies; they say that they do not matter. The Bible makes no such distinction, God says:

"No one who practises deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes."

Psalm 101:7

All lies are wrong and if we are continually untruthful people we shall not find a place in God's Kingdom, He will not allow us into His presence.

Consider these words from Proverbs.

"A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight."

Proverbs 11:1

Just imagine shopkeepers with scales that are deliberately adjusted to give less than the customer has paid for. The shopkeeper may think he or she is smart and clever but God hates this hidden wickedness.

Each of us can be tempted to give 'short measure' even if we are not a shopkeeper. Perhaps we lie to our employer telling him that we are ill and cannot go into work when this is not true. Perhaps we steal little things from him – such as a pencil or some paper. We may even try to justify this by telling ourselves that we need it for the good of others. It may be possible to hide our deeds from other men but we cannot hide them from God.

Bribery is one of the worst forms of dishonesty that we meet in our everyday lives. We may be asked for money in order to receive a favour or we may offer dishonestly to pay someone money to

get something we want. This is corruption and in some countries it is very common. God hates it and again He tells us that those who are involved in bribery will not be in His Kingdom

“O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?
He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart;
who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbour, nor takes up a reproach against his friend;
in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honours those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change;
who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.” Psalm 15

The Psalmist asks a question and then answers it. He asks ‘Who will be in the Kingdom of God’ and then he tells us of the character of those men and women whom God will choose. They are like this.

- They do right things in their lives, following the commandments of God.
- Not only do they speak the truth but they think it in their hearts also. Their lips do not say one thing whilst their hearts hold a lie.
- They do not say bad things about other people and are faithful to their friends.
- They do not slander their neighbours.
- They honour those who fear and worship God.
- They turn away from those who despise the name of God.
- They do not go back on their word, even if it means that it costs them a great deal to keep a promise.
- They do not defraud other people.
- They do not take bribes to hurt innocent people

These are the kinds of people who will be in God’s Kingdom!

There is a very powerful lesson in the Bible – that God deals with us as we deal with each other in our lives. David wrote of this in a very straightforward way in Psalm 18.

“On him who has mercy you will have mercy; to the upright you will be upright;
He who is holy will see that you are holy; but to the man whose way is not straight you will be a hard judge.” Psalm 18:25-26 (BBE)

We want God to be merciful with us at the Judgement Seat and to accept us as holy people, worthy of a place in His Kingdom, therefore we need to be merciful, straight and honest with others now.

“Let me be weighed in a just balance, and let God know my integrity!”
Job 31:6

God always deals justly and fairly with people, how can we expect Him to accept us into His Kingdom if we have been unjust and dishonest to others in our lives?

An Example to Others

There is another very important reason why a disciple of Jesus must be totally honest. Non-believers look very carefully at our lives to see if we ‘practise what we preach’. If we live honestly and preach God’s Word, then people will see that we really believe what we preach. If we preach about honesty but live dishonest lives, then people will not believe our message. This was a problem in the days of the Apostle Paul and he wrote about it to the Romans.

“If you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,
an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth-

you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?

You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

You who boast in the law dishonour God by breaking the law.

For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."
Romans 2:19-24

This is a terrible consequence of dishonesty in the life of a believer – that people outside the ecclesia will blaspheme the name of God when they see it.

Once again it is the Apostle Paul who sums up what we have been thinking about in this lesson. These are things we need to practise and to fill our lives with if we are to journey towards the Kingdom of God.

“Finally, brothers,
whatever is true,
whatever is honourable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely,
whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me- practise these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Philippians 4:8-9

Questions

1. What does it mean for a disciple to be ‘holy’?
2. Give three examples of how the Children of Israel were to be honest in their lives.
3. When we lie to each other, who else knows about it?
4. Give three examples of how we should be honest in our everyday lives.
5. Give three characteristics of the type of person who will be in the Kingdom of God.
6. Explain the teaching of Psalm 24:3-5