

Midweek Message

“Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.”

(1 Peter 3:10 ESV)

Integrity, especially how it affects what we say, is one of the most important aspects of the Christian life. As we learned this past Sunday, Jesus was very concerned about the teaching of the Jewish leaders regarding oaths and how they taught that some oaths were binding and must be kept while other oaths were not binding and could, without consequences, be unfulfilled. Our Lord makes it very clear that we're all held accountable to every word we utter and as such we're to be those who let their yes be yes and no be no. He reminds us that as His followers, His people who've come to faith in Him and who've been given new life, that we're to be a people of integrity, such that our lives exhibit truthfulness at all times. The Apostle Peter tells us that if we desire a life of God's blessing then we need to be careful about the things we say. Now, what I'd like to do in this message is dig a little deeper into this issue of truth so that we, as God's beloved people, can know and grow in what it means to be people of integrity regarding our words.

First, we're to be truthful because God is the foundation of all truth. That shouldn't come as a surprise to any of us who believe in and follow Jesus. Scripture does say a lot about God being a God of truth. The Apostle John in his gospel account tells us: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14 ESV)*. Jesus Himself reiterates this when He says: *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 ESV)*. God is a God of truth such that He can never do anything or say anything unless it's absolutely truthful. Truth is the essence of who God is and as such He can never lie. As we heard Sunday regarding God's oath to Abraham and us as well, we learned that God can never lie. The writer to the Hebrews made this very clear when he said:

“So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.” (Hebrews 6:17, 18 ESV)

The reason why our hope in Jesus is so secure is because God is a God of truth who never lies, never deceives, never leads His people astray, but always speaks the absolute truth to us in His Word. You see, if God is always truthful then what follows is that what He's revealed to us in His Word is also absolutely truthful. In Jesus' high priestly prayer, He makes this clear when He prays: *“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17 ESV)*. The Apostle Paul tells us: *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (1 Timothy 3:16, 17 ESV)*. The Psalmist tells us: *“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever” (Psalm 119:160)*. Listen, everything about God, all that He is as well as all that He says and does, is and ever will be truthful. And since that's true we can be absolutely assured of all the promises He's made.

Second, we're to be truthful because Satan is the author of all lies. Jesus touched on this in the passage from Matthew that we looked at Sunday when He said: *“Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Matthew 5:37 ESV)*. The word translated “evil” could just as easily be translated “evil one” as it is in some of our English Bibles. Jesus is telling us that when we lie, when we choose to deceive, when we fail to keep our word, we're not acting as those who've been redeemed but instead, are giving ourselves over to the ways of the devil. Instead of promoting

and progressing the Kingdom of God, lying undermines everything for which the Kingdom stands. You see, the evil of lying came from Satan who is always lying. Jesus told the Pharisees:

“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44 ESV).

All the way back to the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden where they fell into sin was all based on a lie from Satan when he tempted them with these words: *“But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4, 5 ESV).* Of course, we know what believing that lie has done to humanity. You see, Satan is a deceiver who is always scheming and striving to mislead God's people by trying to twist the truth so that what he's advocating seems good. As the Apostle Paul tells us: *“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds” 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 ESV).* This is why we need to be careful regarding who we're listening to, what we're believing and accepting as true, and how we're living our lives each day so that we may not fall prey to the devil's deceitful schemes. This is why God has given us a spiritual armor as the Apostle Paul tells us:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:10-12 ESV).

Finally, for this message anyway, we're to be truthful because we're new creations in Christ. This shouldn't be too hard for us to grasp, should it? If God is always truthful and we're made in His image as well as having been redeemed and are being conformed to the image of Christ, then what follows is that we should also strive to live in truthfulness. The Apostle Paul tells us quite plainly:

“But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another” (Ephesians 4:20-21 ESV).

Now, that's rather to the point, isn't it? If we're God's people then we'll live as God's people, putting away falsehood and speaking the truth. Of course, we're to do so in love as Scripture commands but nevertheless we're to be truthful in every aspect of our lives. Do you realize that God's desire for truth is so strong that He's said: *“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8 ESV).* You see, that's why it's so important to walk in holiness as it's the evidence of our genuine faith in Jesus. I know we fail at times but there's a huge difference between falling into sin and walking in sin. As I said Sunday, this one Scripture has helped me most: *“Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!” (Psalm 141:3 ESV).* May that be the prayer of us all as we seek to love and obey our Lord.

Pastor Mark