

Honesty & Integrity

Colossians 2:6-8

The U.S. Academy at West Point has a simple but rigorous honor code. It simply says, “A Cadet will not lie, cheat, nor steal, nor tolerate those who do.” Honesty and integrity have always been important to our nation’s military. But how important is it to the rest of America. Americans today seem all too ready to believe whatever they like, whether it is true or not. Many have lost their ability to distinguish between what is true and what is not, between what is right and what is wrong. Many believe in “whatever is popular at the time” and are undisturbed when “whatever” is false or harmful. In America we have become a “whatever” society.

In a pluralistic society, where people feel pressured to believe everything is okay, many believe that all religions are the same and end up believing in nothing. Many have ceased to search for truth or even to love truth for that matter. If every belief is true, then no belief can be counted on. If every belief is true, then nothing is sacred. Nothing matters. People who say all religions are okay are actually confused and deceived. If we cannot say that some doctrines are false, then what has happened to loving the truth and being faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ?

Our Scripture reading was from the book of Colossians today. Colossae was a small town in the Lycus River valley on main route from Ephesus to the Euphrates. Many Roman and Greeks had settled there as well as a good number of Jews. Since it was on the main road it had many visitors that would spend time there and it was susceptible to every new idea that came along. Paul had written this letter to Church in Colossae to deal with a strange doctrine arising among some of its members. He wrote to warn them of the false teaching and the deception of this worldly philosophy.

Paul writes in **Colossians 2:1-8** *“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the*

flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.”

A smooth-talking stranger can easily fool a naïve person with false promises and worldly traditions that sound good. This is why Paul has warned them not to be fooled by such nonsense. You will not find truth in listening to anything but Jesus Christ.

Particularly in our modern world; listening to distinguish what is true from what is false is one of the most important lessons of life. Some traditions are true, while others are false. A tradition is merely a belief or a practice that has been passed down from one generation to the next. When a belief is in error in one generation, it'll be in error in the next; but the second generation has never heard anything else and so assumes what it has heard is true. Once a deceptive tradition becomes accepted and is passed down from generation to generation, it is hard to get people to accept the truth. People get convinced of a lie, and think it is the truth and therefore, remain in error – often because they don't want to think those before them could have been deceived or would believe a falsehood. This is truly a sad situation.

Disbelief is the rejection of belief, a refusal to accept truth. To disbelieve in Jesus is to reject Him as the Son of God. This might come in the form of denying His miracles or refusing to believe in His resurrection. It might come in the form of refusing to believe the things that He teaches. In **Jn. 12:48** Jesus said, “*The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the*

last day.” Failure to believe Jesus is a serious matter. Many people will find themselves rejected on the last day because they failed to believe what Jesus teaches.

People misbelieve when they are convinced that something false is correct. Being deceived themselves, they then deceive others by causing others to believe a lie and thus to fall into error. The Lord condemns those who teach falsehoods and errors. Paul was shocked when some false teachers were misleading the churches of Galatia. In strong language Paul talks to these churches in **Gal. 1:6-9**, ***“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”***

Why did Paul say teaching a false gospel leads one to be accursed? Because changing what God teaches leads people to believe a lie. When people believe a lie, they follow after something other than God and separate themselves from God. Satan separates people from God by lying to them. In **Jn. 8:44** Jesus said this about the devil, ***“...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.”*** The devil lied to Eve and caused her to sin against God and to die spiritually and physically. Lies still lead people into sin and spiritual death. It does matter what you believe.

People today are deceived by all kinds of falsehoods and half-truths. A half-truth is when someone tells you a fact that leaves out other relevant information. For instance, while it is true that Sarah was Abraham’s half-sister, it is also true that she was his wife as well. So, when Abraham out of fear told Pharaoh that Sarah was his sister, it was only half right. Abraham’s lie caused a lot of trouble. Half truths are some of the most dangerous lies. There is enough truth to fool people into accepting them, but there is enough falsehood to lead to destruction. **A Christian must be very careful to examine everything he hears.**

Some false prophets in the days of Jeremiah began fabricating their prophecies. Jeremiah said in **Jer. 23:16**, ***“Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.”*** False prophets in every age have led countless souls away from the will of God. We don’t want to be led into error and lose our souls. And this is why we must examine everything carefully. **Acts 17:11** says, ***“Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word***

with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” We too should test every belief by God’s word to see what is true and what is false.

We hurt ourselves greatly when we lie to ourselves. God in **Jer. 17:9-10** says, ***“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? “I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”*** Our hearts may tell us something we want to hear, rather than what is right. If we listen to our hearts and our desires rather than to the word of God, we can easily end up doing what wrong spiritually, morally or practically. Solomon said in **Prov. 14:12**, ***“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”***

When people wish for something to be right, they can begin to justify it in their minds, whether it is right or not. The folks set their minds to follow this error and can hardly be persuaded to repent. They must find out the hard way. The prodigal son was like that. He had to have his inheritance and live the way he wanted. He took his money to a far country and wasted it in a sinful lifestyle. He had to ruin himself before he could admit how foolish and sinful, he had been. The prodigal son lied to himself until he couldn’t believe his lies anymore. And then he came to his senses, repented and went home.

Many people are ready to believe a lie, if they think it will benefit them. In a politically correct world people turn a blind eye to the truth and focus on what’s convenient and popular. They would rather give in to a popular lie than embarrass themselves by taking an unpopular position. Some think it shows wisdom or love to take a position of neutrality on every controversial issue. Others think we can never determine what is true, so every view is as good as every other. But these types of convictions are miles away from the heart of Jesus’ teaching. It may appear kind to accommodate others, but sin shows no love for the will of God. God did not create every religion; and not every religion teaches His will. God wants His people not only to love Him but to love His truth.

It was in **Mt. 7:21-23** where Jesus said, ***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*** *Being religious does not guarantee that one is righteous.* Some say they are saved by faith alone, but this passage makes it clear that one must in addition to believing also do God’s will. These people who lived lawless lives deceived themselves into thinking that they were still all right with God. Jesus, however, told them to depart. He never knew them, that is he had no relationship with them.

You see, it matters to God what we believe and how we live. Since before I became a preacher, I have heard people embrace the doctrine of salvation by “*faith only*.” They suggest all one must do to be saved is to believe, and once saved they cannot be lost. But this doctrine did not come from Jesus. This doctrine is known as “*once saved always saved*.” But even they will confess you can’t be saved without loving God, or without repenting, or without obey the Lord Jesus. But even this shows, yes that faith is essential, but you have to do more than simply believe. It takes more than simply believing to please God.

Some say one religion is as good as another and that all religions are the same; but in **Jn. 14:6** Jesus told the world, “*Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*” Jesus acknowledged that the only way to the Father, the only way to heaven, is through Him, Jesus Christ. **Acts 4:12** tells us this about Jesus, “*And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*” It might be popular to say that all religions are the same, but Jesus did not believe this or teach this.

Why should we confess Jesus as Lord? Because He loved us so much that He died for our sins that we might go to heaven – and no one else has ever done that for us. Why would I ever want to hold to the teachings that change with the wind? **William Inge** said, “*He who marries the spirit of an age soon finds himself to be a widow.*” We need eternal truths that don’t change with every wind that comes. Truths that were true in the beginning and that remain true for all eternity. These truths are found only in Jesus Christ. Only He can forgive me of my sins. Only He wants to take me to heaven. Only He died for me to make it possible. And only Jesus will come again in the clouds to take me to heaven on the last day. I don’t know about you, but I want, and need, Jesus Christ.

David wrote this in **Psalms 103:15-16**, “*As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.*” The devil loves for you to be undisturbed about your soul. He would love to keep you in confusion about life, the church, and about His eternal truths. He would love for you to wait till another day to decide to follow and serve Jesus. Have you ever noticed that when you want to do what is right, the devil will tell you, wait till tomorrow – his hope is to get your mind off spiritual things. And if you keep putting off doing God’s will, you will take your mind off spiritual things, you won’t think about the cross, about the church, about salvation, or about heaven or hell. He wants you to live for the present and to ignore your soul and the future. He wants you to remain confused and even apathetic to the will of God.

Today is the only day that you have to make your soul right with God. Yesterday has passed, and tomorrow is not assured. If you love the Lord and want to be right with Him – then put your faith in Him. Repent of sin and be baptized in water in the name of Jesus

for the forgiveness of sin. It is in baptism where God, in Jesus Christ, forgives your sins and adds you to His church. This is what Jesus had Peter teach on that first Pentecost after his resurrection – and this was done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. You can ignore the teaching of God, but remember, it is at your own peril – your soul will be lost. Won't you decide for Jesus today?