

CHARACTER – STUDY #4 – Honesty

HONESTY

Very few of us would consider ourselves to be dishonest. We don't consider ourselves liars, cheats, or thieves. And yet any attempt at honesty compels us to acknowledge that we have all spoken untruths or engaged in deceit at some time in our past. How well did our lies and deceit serve us? Again, any honest assessment will reveal, "not very well in the end."

Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "Honesty is the first chapter in the book of Wisdom." Everyone wants to be counted as trustworthy. And trust is bred by honesty. Honesty means acting in a trustworthy way so that you will respect yourself and be respected by others.

So how does one build honesty into their character? Simply put, being honest is about actions, words, and deeds that are always consistent with the truth.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are some of the reasons that people lie, cheat, or steal?
- What are some of the drawbacks when others discover that we've not been honest with them?

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Background: During the very early history of the Church, many wealthy Christians sold property to help those who were in need, the result being that early-day Christians held many possessions in common.

Read Acts 4:32 through 5:11 AND Luke 16:10

Chapter 2 ³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Chapter 5 ¹ Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. ² With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." ⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶ Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. ⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price." ⁹ Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." ¹⁰ At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Luke 16:10 ¹⁰ Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

Holy Bible - New International Version

1. While the consequences of lying are seldom as costly as they were for Ananias and Sapphira, it still begs the question: Is there ever a time when there are no consequences for being dishonest?
2. It's doubtful that Ananias and Sapphira sat down and devised an elaborate scheme to mislead, and in doing so cause harm to the Church. What was their motive in lying to the Church (what were they trying to accomplish)?
3. When we tell a lie, from whence does it spring (Chapter 5, Verse 3)? Does this imply a deliberate choice on our part when we lie, cheat, or steal (Chapter 5, Verse 2)?

4. When we choose to be dishonest, at least three stakeholders are always hurt. Who are they?

5. While we can fool some of the people some of the time when we're dishonest, do we ever fool God with our dishonesty? What does dishonesty do to our relationship with God?

6. Is it ever okay to tell little white lies?

7. Why is it harder to be honest when significant matters arise if we've not been honest about the small things of life?

8. What are some of the benefits that accrue to us when we're honest in our dealings with others?

9. What kind of "fear" are Verses 5 and 11 of Chapter 5 speaking about? Why were the people seized with fear (read what Psalm 111: 10 say about this)?

APPLICATION

- Identify one area in your life where you are prone to exaggerate or perhaps mislead others, and examine the possible motives for your behavior before God in prayer. Also examine who gets hurt besides God when you are dishonest in this area of life.

- Pray that God would help you to be honest in the small matters of life so that you're prepared when the big test comes your way.

- Spend a few minutes considering how your relationship with God is broken when you are dishonest in any way, and seek His forgiveness for any dishonesty that has broken your relationship with Him (you may also find the Holy Spirit prompting you to seek the forgiveness of others where acts of dishonesty that have damaged your relationship with them). I John 1:9 assures us that God is ALWAYS "faithful to forgive us... and to cleanse us from our sin."