

“Honest to God!”

Matthew 21:28-32

Intro. – There is a magazine called “Moody Monthly”... My brother tells of a class he was in at Cincinnati Bible Seminary where the professor asked: “How many of you get “Moody Monthly?” No one but the lone girl of the class sheepishly raised her hand, misunderstanding the question.

Several years ago in “Moody Monthly” a George Sweeting wrote an article on the lack of honesty/integrity. In this article he referred to Dr. Madison Sarratt, who taught trigonometry and calculus at Vanderbilt University. Before giving tests this professor would admonish his class as follows: “Today, I’m giving two examines: one in trigonometry and the other in honesty. I hope you will pass them both. If you must fail one, fail trigonometry. There are many good people in the world who cannot pass a trigonometry test, but there are no good people in the world who cannot pass the examination of honesty.”

We’re all too aware of the need for honesty and integrity. In preparing this message, I learned of two companies: 1) Universal International Term-papers Limited, Inc.; 2) Term Papers Unlimited. Both of these businesses write “term papers” for students. They charge certain rates per page... They even do doctoral dissertations. For an added price, they will guarantee a certain grade!

A Washington D.C. merchant has a sign in his shop window: “You can fool some of the people some of the time and generally that’s enough to allow for profit.” And such is the *bottom-line* isn’t it? We can justify whatever just as long as money is being made.

Our text is a parable of a dad and two boys (Gr is $\tau\epsilon\kappa\nu\upsilon\nu$ = child). One son promises to do the father’s will and then does not do it. The other tells his father to “shove off”, but, then he has a change of heart and does it. Which of these boys does Jesus want you and me to imitate? Neither! But of the two our Lord prefers the doer to that of the talker. Christ’s question makes this clear – “Which one did the Father’s will?” He wants us honest before God. He wants this in a real sense – He wants us *Honest to God!*

Purpose: to better understand the doing of God’s will is more important than anything

By answering the following questions, we’ll accomplish this purpose: Is doing the will of our Father all important? Is there anything else that matters before this? Is everything else secondary and trivial to the doing of our Father’s will? Honestly, is doing the will of God more important than anything else in our lives?

I HONESTY is Good

A. Honesty is of God

1. Text = 2nd son tells his father “I’ll go”, but then he does not do it.
2. If you don’t call him a liar, very least you must call him *irresponsible*.
 - a. this is not a person to be trusted... with whom a handshake would close a deal... his word is NOT his bond...
 - b. Illus. – live in area where we’re exception to this rule... many peoples’ word is their bond!
3. Oliver Cromwell (England’s dictator during the Commonwealth era).
 - a. Cromwell was forced to sit for portrait. To him it was a nuisance. He submitted to it IF painter wouldn’t try to flatter him. “I desire you would use all your skill to paint my picture truly like me and flatter me not at all... Paint me pimples, warts and everything as you see me.”
 - b. today we still speak of telling the truth of someone as “warts and all.”
4. This is of God. He inhabits honesty. He is the very definition of TRUTH... Falsehood is so opposite of the very nature of God... that such cannot stand in the presence of God!
5. Fairness, justness, honesty, truthfulness, faithfulness, integrity, reliability = all defined by God!

B. Honesty Flourishes in His Presence

1. Our society is such that honesty flourishes ONLY when the strongest probability that dishonesty will be revealed/exposed.

- a. Illus. – Flagstaff, AZ a woman hit another car. She dutifully stopped and wrote a note to the owner of the damaged car. The note said: “The people watching me who saw me hit your car think I’m leaving my phone number so you can call me. They are wrong...”
- b. thinking she could not be found out, she didn’t “feel obligated” to leave her information...
2. Is it any wonder that Shakespeare’s Hamlet groaned: “To be honest as this world goes is to be one man out of ten thousand.”
3. But in the presence of the God – honesty flourishes = applications abound = one area in particular is in the area of oaths/promises.
 - a. marriage oath... business dealings... simple promises... these and others are all dependent upon the integrity of all parties.
 - b. without integrity, all relationships will breakdown!
 - c. Illus. – early 80’s many were forced to examine their meaning of “oath.” Remember the strike by air traffic controllers union? The controllers signed an oath/promise when they were first hired that they would never strike. Yet, thousands did. What did their promise mean? Was their striking an act of honesty? Was this being Godlike?
4. Honesty is Godlike and it flourishes in His presence. It thrives on TRUTH and nothing less!

II OBEDIENCE is Better

- better than what? Better than “lip service”

A. Obedience is Discriminating

1. To put this in simplest terms = obedience is what separates the men from the boys
 - a. religious leaders then were “talking the talk” but not “walking the walk” = not obedient
 - b. which son represents these leaders is clear = all talk and no act = “religious fronts”...
2. Application is clear = those who truly love the Lord and are growing in Him living obedient lives which reflect right understanding – good works are the result of grace!
 - Romans 6:16 *“Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?”*

B. Obedience is Forthright

1. The Lord doesn’t ask for “blind obedience” (i.e. mindless/thoughtless devotion) – note: mindless discipleship is the ultimate oxymoron!
2. Illus. – Galileo (Italian physicist, mathematician, astronomer) printed his findings that the earth traveled around the sun and not vice-versa (heliocentrism)... June 22, 1633 Galileo retracted his “heretical teaching”, but, when he arose to read this retraction he whispered to a friend, “It does move, nevertheless.”
 - Galileo chose to lie and live rather than speak the truth and die.
3. This is not the obedience the Lord asks of you and me:
 - a. unashamedly we must adhere to TRUTH, without apology we must stand for RIGHT.
 - b. lacking all hesitancy we must cast our lot in with Christ and His Body the Church.
4. Note: the religious leaders are likened to 2nd son = promised to obey but don’t... -- tax gatherers, prostitutes etc. are likened to first son = initially said “no way” but later repented and obeyed!

The point is clear – obedience is far better!

III REPENTANCE/FORGIVENESS is Best

- the whole of this text is summarized in one word/concept = REPENTANCE:

A. Repentance is Change

1. Military term = “about face” = about face to God!
2. Bible translators struggle with this word:
 - a. Guatemala = “it pains my heart”

- b. W. Africa = “it hurts so much I want to quit”
 - c. S. Africa = “it becomes untwisted”
 - d. Mexico = “my heart is turning itself back”
3. All Indicate the sorrow/pain for the direction one is going and the change of behavior that ensues..
 4. Repentant sinner says: “I am going the wrong way... it is perverted and incomplete. I will not say one thing and do another. I will be honest to others, myself and most of all to God!”

B. Repentance Leads to Grace

- saved **BY** grace, **THROUGH** faith, **AT** baptism, **FOR** good works!

Conclusion: Man joined “The Emperor of China’s Orchestra” even though couldn’t play a note. When the orchestra played, he’d hold a flute up and fake his way... Received a modest salary and was more than content to live this way. Until, one day, the Emperor requested each musician to play a solo just for him. This flutist went nuts. Tried taking intense professional lessons, but, he had no ear for music... The day of his solo arrived, but rather than appear to play, he poisoned himself. As an acquaintance put it, “He couldn’t face the music.”

What’s the point? Are we able and willing to “face the music”? Those outside of Christ are you tired of saying you are a Christian when in fact you are not? Brothers and sisters are we ready to be more honest before God and before each other more than ever before?

The command of our Lord in this text is to work His vineyard. It is a call to service filled with amazing possibilities. We actually can be used to help heal the world’s open sore. We have been given the task of being “ambassadors for Christ.” Each of us have differing abilities, yet we have the same task. No one need stand on the sidelines. There is a need and a place for each of us. All Christians are described as “ministers.”

Someone defined *gentleman* as follows: “A gentleman is one who puts into life more than he takes out of it.” It is every man’s, woman’s, young person’s privilege and duty to be one of God’s gentlemen. To do this we must hear God’s call to work in His vineyard. We must be “Honest to God!”