

Building A Home For God

Integrity

Mike Ford (1955-2021)

Given 05-Aug-06; Sermon #787S

As a young boy growing up, my first love was baseball. I loved to play that game. Every chance I had I played and I just soaked it up. I followed the sport wherever I could, radio, TV, newspaper. I fell asleep at night listening to WHO out of Des Moines, Iowa broadcast the Minnesota Twins. A little strange maybe for a boy from Tennessee. I really liked Harmon Killebrew. And I am really dating myself by mentioning that name because it is doubtful very few of you know who that was.

My brother and I would get up in the mornings in the summertime and sit at the breakfast table and just devour the box scores and replay the games in our heads, memorize statistics. My brother thought that Henry Aaron was the best hitter of the game he had ever seen. Old Hammering Hank. I went with Ted Williams. I never got to see Ted play. By the time I was interested in the game, he was managing the old Washington Senators. Back in 1941, Ted batted 406 for the year, not been done since, probably never will be done again. He won six batting titles and that is with losing four and a half years during his prime to go off and fly fighter jets in World War Two. And in Korea. A little piece of trivia, he was John Glenn's wing man in Korea. Interesting.

Anyway, if he had not lost those four and a half years to the military during his prime, I do not have any doubt he would own the home run record. But anyway, like I said, he won six batting titles and he retired with a lifetime batting average of 344.

I say all this to say that when he got to be 40 years of age, he was closing out his career and he batted less than 300 for the first time in his life. Now he had a pinched nerve all year, but he never used that as a complaint or as an excuse. And at that time in his life, he was the highest paid ball player in the game. He made \$125,000. That is in 1959, a lot of money. He wanted to play one more year, so the Boston Red Sox front office sent him a contract and

they were going to pay him the same amount for his final year. Let me quote Ted Williams as he reminisced about this incident. Ted says,

When I got it [meaning the contract], I sent it back with a note. I told them I wouldn't sign it until they gave me the full pay cut allowed. [I think it was 25%. He says it was actually closer to 30.] My feeling was that I was always treated fairly by the Red Sox when it came to contracts. Never had any problem with them about money. Now they were offering me a contract I did not deserve and I only wanted what I deserved.

He cut his own contract by \$35,000, almost 30%! Can you think of any pro athlete in the world today with that kind of integrity?

Well, it is integrity that I do want to speak about this afternoon. *Rogets Thesaurus* defines integrity as honesty, uprightness, moral soundness, principle, character, decency, and righteousness. What Ted Williams did was honest and upright. It was decent, principled. Another definition for integrity is "a refusal to engage in lying, blaming, or other behavior to evade accountability." I really like that one.

Now, based on these definitions, integrity is in short supply, not only in the sports world, but in all walks of life. How often do we hear of someone or meet up with someone dishonest, immoral, unprincipled, and unrighteous? Well, far too often, I am afraid.

Let us go to the book of Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10 to 14. The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus, but it was circulated, we feel pretty confident, to all the churches, and he is exhorting the brethren to become the unified spiritual body of Christ. Wherever they might be, they are all members of the body. In chapter 6, starting in verse 10, Paul is talking about standing firm against the scheming of Satan. He says,

Ephesians 6:10-13 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against

spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

Let me stop there for the sake of time. Paul does go on with the other various pieces of our spiritual armor. But notice the number of times in these few verses where we are told to stand, to hold our ground, to fight against the pressures of Satan and of this world. In verse 11, he says, "stand against Satan." In verse 13, it says, "withstand in the evil day." And then a little later, "having done all, to stand." In verse 14, he reiterates, "Stand therefore, . . . put on the breastplate of righteousness."

Now I know there are two things here. First, of course, that we stand firm, that we do not move, that we are grounded, having a firm foundation, not moving—living a life of integrity, you could say. Then the second thing, our armor, in this case, the breastplate. In Paul's day, soldiers wore a breastplate which was worn around the chest to protect the heart and the other vital organs. Now, in the case of Paul's analogy, the breastplate guards our heart. Even today, a policeman or a soldier might wear an armored vest or a bulletproof vest. It is the same principle. If we are to stand firm, our heart must be protected because it is the seat of our emotions.

It is interesting to me that the Phillips translation of the New Testament renders righteousness as integrity: protect our heart, protect our love, protect our emotions with a breastplate of integrity—right across our chest. Now, what happens when someone takes off their armored vest, their bulletproof vest, their breastplate? Their heart is unprotected. They are open for an attack. Their heart is apt to be swayed, to be turned away without that protection.

Keep in mind the basic definition of integrity: honesty, uprightness, moral soundness, principle, character, decency, and righteousness. Keep that in mind. Anyone in the church for any length of time has heard or read many a sermon or an article on all of these attributes. And I do not think there is anyone here that would disagree that these are attributes that we must possess. So let us look at integrity, not only as a trait that an individual

Christian must have, let us look at it as something we need to bind us together as a unit.

There is a second meaning for integrity. You have heard someone speak of a building that has integrity. That means that that building has structural soundness, that it is reliable, that it is complete, that it is whole, that it possesses strength and unity. Turn back a few pages if you would to Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (Phillips Translation) [Paul says] So you are no longer outsiders or aliens, but fellow citizens with every other Christian [the New King James says saints], you belong now to the household of God. Firmly beneath you is the foundation God's messengers and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus Himself. In Him each separate piece of building, properly fitting into its neighbor, grows together into a temple consecrated to the Lord. You are all part of this building in which God Himself lives by His Spirit.

We are standing on the lives of those who have gone before, those who have died in the faith, the saints who await their resurrection. They form the foundation, along with Christ, on which we stand. And if we live our lives with integrity, then we too form a piece of the Temple.

Now, Paul's main thrust here is talking to the Gentile converts, letting them know that they have equal privileges with the Jewish converts, that each forms a separate piece of the building and fitted together the whole forms a habitation for God.

But that building metaphor is totally appropriate for us as well because we come from all walks of life: different education, different job experience, different life experience. And yet we all come together to form a part of the Temple, a place where God dwells, and integrity has to be part of not only our individual character, but everyone else's, to form the pieces that make the whole. If a building is constructed from solid pieces, no rotted wood, no bowed wood, no rusted metal, everything with integrity, no inferior materials of any type, and it is built on a solid foundation, then you have a structure with integrity.

Peter also uses the building metaphor in I Peter 2, just a few books over.

I Peter 2:1-5 [Peter says] Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking [which basically describes a person with integrity], as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

A building stone, a building block used to build a spiritual house or temple must be sound, it must have integrity.

Back to Ephesians 3, if you would. I want to break into the middle of the thought here.

Ephesians 3:17-19 [Paul says] that Christ may dwell in your hearts [remember, the heart protected by the breastplate of integrity] through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love [there is the heart again], may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height [it sounds like we are building something, does it not]—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with the fullness of God.

He says rooted and grounded, standing firm on a solid foundation. What happens when some portion of the structure is constructed from inferior material? Let us say, a support beam. What if that support beam fails? Not only can the roof cave in, the building come down, but lives could be lost as well. Let me continue with the Ted Williams connection.

Boston, Massachusetts. There is a tunnel connecting Boston proper with Logan International Airport. It is called the Ted Williams Tunnel and it goes under Boston Harbor. It is part of a huge construction project called "The Big Dig." It has been going on for a decade. Some of you may have read

about this recently. A few weeks ago on July 11th, 12 tons of concrete ceiling panels collapsed on a passing car, and it killed the woman instantly. A steel tie back, holding a 40 foot stretch of concrete, failed.

The couple had just been married; on their way to the airport to pick up family. Killed the woman instantly, never knew what hit her. She never gave a thought, I am sure, to traveling through this tunnel or traveling any of these roads involved with this huge construction project.

But there was fraud, there was deceit, there was a lack of integrity throughout this project, this Big Dig. There was a lack of integrity in the construction of the Ted Williams Tunnel. No structural soundness, no reliability. It was not complete, it was not whole, it was not unified. Now add to that the lack of integrity in the building materials, which it appears that the concrete was of an inferior nature. It appears they brought in old concrete rather than fresh. How about those responsible for the shoddy materials and the workmanship? One contractor might do a good job and might have integrity and use good materials while another may not. And so therefore the building as a whole had no integrity, or in this case, the tunnel.

Well, the same applies to us us. Each of us is responsible for taking the traits that God has given us, the abilities that God has given us, and building it into the integrity or the character that we have to have. If we each operate with honesty and uprightness, moral soundness, principle, character, decency, righteousness, then we fit together as a temple that has integrity—a fit habitation for God.

I read Ephesians 2 earlier from the Phillips translation. If you can turn back there again or basically just listen because I want to read it again from the Moffat.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (Moffatt Translation) [keeping in mind the examples I have given] Thus, you are strangers and foreigners no longer, you share the membership of the saints, you belong to God's own household, you are a building that rests on the apostles and prophets as its foundation, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone;

in him the whole structure is welded together and rises into a sacred temple in the Lord, and in him you are yourselves built into this to form a habitation for God in the Spirit.