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| Series | Sermon on the Mount |
| Study | Study 7 |
| Topic | Integrity |
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| Speaker | Dr Peter Ng |

Welcome to another session of Gamma. Today we're going to be dealing with the topic of integrity, which is a very important topic because it lies at the center of how we interact with each other.

Matthew chapter 5 verses 33 to 37. Let's read

33 Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

So today's topic is about integrity, truth and honesty. The trouble is it is a default mode of us as sinners as we lie because we try to get, use the lies to get ourselves out of trouble, boost our reputations which might be bad to start off with. And here you have a situation where the people whom Jesus is talking to have a problem with a lack of credibility. And so therefore they resort to swearing.

Now let's look at this picture. Here you actually have the seriousness of the lie against what you swore by. If you swear by your life and if it was a lie then you basically owe your life. You could, if your life isn't as valuable you swear by all other things. For example you could swear by your own life or your family's life or God's temple or God's name. So whatever you used to swear, the more valuable it is, the more serious the lie if you are actually lying, because you're using this to basically bolster your own credibility.

Matthew 23 also talks about this. Let me read to you Matthew 23.

18 Woe to you, blind guides, who say, If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' 17 You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? 18 And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.' 19 You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? 20 So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. 21 And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. 22 And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.

So what this other passage in Matthew is saying that the seriousness of the lie depends on what you swear by. And according to the Jews if you swore by the temple it's not as bad if you actually lied compared to the swore by the gold or the temple or you swear by the if you swore by the altar it is not as bad if you lied compared to you swore by the sacrifice on the altar and you swore by the

temple of God, it is not as bad as swearing my God's name itself. So basically they had an artificial system by which you could distinguish the seriousness of lies by what you actually swore by. But the problem is that Jesus looks at this whole thing and saying it's a stupid argument because God is everywhere. Either you swear by the altar or swear by the temple, whatever it is it's related to God. God sees you when you're actually lying.

Remember the story was told by Tim Keller of a gentleman whom he have been counseling that his life is falling apart because of adultery and whenever his wife was traveling to a foreign place for business he will bring his mistress and they would have sex in the middle of the day in his own apartment. The trouble is there are so many wedding photos there and every time he would have bring his girlfriend there he would actually turn the wedding photos to face the other way and there are so many of them he had to go round and round the whole house, turning them everywhere, so that he would not see his wife or as it were his wife do not see him when he was having an affair with this girlfriend of his. He was breaking his vow. There was lack of integrity. He would not done it if his wife was in the house but because the wedding photos reminded him of her presence he had to turn it away.

Now Jesus is saying, you can't turn the photo of God away. Everywhere you are, whatever you swear by God is there. God knows whether you're telling the truth or not. We do that too don't we. When we have lied or sin or gone to some dodgy business transaction we refuse to pray or join the prayer meeting or read the Bible because it's like your wife's photo. It looks at you and it condemns you. After a while you don't read the Bible anymore. I had somebody I knew who was financial investor who refused to go to church but he would ask me to take his tithing to the church. He would always remember his tithing but he would not come to church. Why do you think he did that? He probably did that because he must have had some dodgy business deals with which he had gained this money. He was not proud of it but he continued the pay his tithing because of the fear that God would punish him and the stocks would go down.

We actually have in this situation like a love-hate relationship with God. You are unfaithful but you are fearful. You don't really believe the Bible or follow it or buy into what the Church teaches you, maybe God exists maybe God doesn't but you better cover your backs and bribe God. You reconstruct a concept of God who cannot see your heart but was dumb enough to accept your bribes. And this is caricature of God actually is.

He tells them that the righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees. The people who have the strictest code of the law. See, they believe they live the good life, God will owe them, he had to bless them and bring them to heaven. You will be a person of integrity if you understand that God is everywhere, but if you are Pharisee the fact that God is everywhere is absolutely crushing because they operate out of fear and afraid of being condemned, so anything that reminds them that God is looking at them is actually terrifying to them. So they have to construct all these weird ideas about swearing.

That if you are saved by grace, you're no longer operating out of the fear of condemnation but the fear of grieving God, and you want to delight in God's law because God's law is a way of avoiding you grieving him. This verse is key to keeping our integrity as by David Psalm 16:18

*I **have set** the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.*

Now David recognizes the presence of God. It doesn't mean when he sets God before him, it doesn't

mean he creates it, alright, but he recognizes it. So therefore, David does not do anything that he'll be ashamed of. At the same time the one who loves him is at his side. That is the secret of integrity. The secret of integrity is that you will be same person everywhere you go. The same person in public, as the same person in private because you're always before God. Matthew 5:37, Jesus describes integrity

Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

Yes see, the word integrity actually comes from a mathematical concept of integer. All right. -3, -2, 1, 0, 1, 2, 3. They are all whole numbers. A person without integrity is fractured. A person without integrity is whole. Whole numbers have no fraction. So here is the definition of integrity. Integrity means wholeness or oneness, someone with integrity has perfect alignment between their words, their actions, and their beliefs. A person of integrity is not divided. They do not say one thing and do another. They are consistent to their core.

They don't say one thing and behind your back say another thing, as one gossiping. Years ago in Baptist church, one of the biggest problems with their pastors were to be voted in by the majority of vote. And this had a lot of difficulties because you have got so many different groups within the church, all of of different opinions and if you said yes to every single group you would wind up being inconsistent. Because your yes to one group will mean and no to another group. Politicians have the same problem. They have to please everyone.

C.S. Lewis has a great quote on this and he describes the struggle that we actually have in a society. On one hand we admire, we want to have integrity, on the other hand we actually make it impossible. He writes,

We clamour for the very qualities that we are rendering impossible. We laugh at honour but we are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings to be fruitful.

There are whole bunch of problems that we actually have with our lack of integrity in our society today. There are four problems:

One, it destroys human community.

Two, it destroys human identity.

Three, it destroys human dignity.

and the fourth things is that it puts you on a collision course with reality.

Firstly, the lack of integrity destroys community. How does it do it? Well, somewhere along the line someone from one side or the other, one race or the other, has told his side that the other side or the other race is bad. They are taking advantage of you. They're bullying you. They're threatening your position. They are bad. They're evil. And when these things are believed barriers, disunity and hatred builds up along racial lines, along party lines, along ideological lines. This is common, it destroys community.

What about partnerships? Why is it so often that many partnerships invariably break up? Why? Because one partner or the other seeks advantage over the other partner. He either breaks the contract or slips in the claws that that severely disadvantages the other partner who doesn't find out until later on and he feels this is unfair and this lack of integrity breaks them up. It breaks up community.

What about the church? The most common thing that happens in a church or in a church break up is when one person feeds an unsubstantiated rumor about a pastor or elder or leader and half the congregation believe it and the other half who have been personally ministered to by the pastor will not believe it and then they become polarized along personal allegiances. And that's why so many splits have occurred simply because of the lack of integrity.

The next problem that the lack of integrity does, is that it destroys human identity. It is the idea of who we are. We are something that we do or believe or something that we are that always stays the same. And if we have lack of integrity this is inevitably destroyed. Edith Stein was a German Jewish philosopher who actually converted to Catholicism and became a Carmelite nun. She was canonized as a martyr because she was actually killed for her beliefs by the Nazi Party during World War II when she was actually canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church. And she writes some really important words about self-identity. She writes

The human soul must have self-knowledge and be capable of taking a stand with respect to its own self. It must find itself in a dual sense: It must learn to know itself, and it must come to be what it is destined to be.

So therefore there is a true self and identity. You must actually understand who you are and what we are actually destined to be and that's the basis of our identity stability.

Here is a picture of Sir Thomas More, very famous English lawyer, diplomate, statesman and internationally renowned humanist scholar. He entered royal service in 1517 and was appointed Lord Chancellor of the Realm in 1529. He served under the famous Henry the VIII who wanted to divorce his wife Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. Thomas More oppose this and he actually resigned, tried to get away. But then Henry took the Church of England out of Roman Catholic influence and Thomas More was imprisoned because he didn't want to recognize what Henry had done. He was under the threat of death and execution and all he had to do was endorse what Henry had done, abandon his beliefs in his Catholic Church but he refused. He held on to the integrity of his beliefs.

Here is a beautiful quotation from a play by Robert Bolt. Looking at the last words of Sir Thomas More when he was speaking to his daughter, explaining to his daughter why he was willing to face death rather than just to deny his own beliefs. It would be so simple. All he have to do is just follow Henry VIII, buy into all this and then he would be free, very simple, but this is what he says,

"When a man takes an oath, Meg, he's holding his own self in his own hands. Like water (he cups his hands) and if he opens his fingers then, he needn't hope to find himself again. Some men aren't capable of this, but I'd be loathe to think your father one of them."

So therefore Sir Thomas More is saying that his beliefs form his identity and he were to give up his beliefs in the loss of integrity he would actually lose himself. He will never find himself and all he has done in his entire life. So that lack of integrity destroys identity. Sadly, there are very few people like Sir Thomas More who would be standing for his belief in integrity. In fact the world is filled today with many more people like George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright, famous writer and Nobel Prize winner in literature, who actually writes,

Life isn't about finding yourself but recreating yourself

So therefore in a series of whether truths or untruths, life is about spinning. Spinning and creating a narrative of what you are and you present to the world, not being authentic.

Is that what life is about? Well let's look at what psychologists have to say about that. Let me illustrate this with some ideas from Erik Erikson who was an ego psychologist, who developed one of the most popular influential theories of development. Erikson suggested there were eight very important stages of psychological development in which people deal with conflict and emerge with their psychological strengths that will serve them well for the rest of their lives. If they fail to deal effectively with each of this conflict, they may not develop the essential skills needed for strong identity.

When people talk about identity they are referring to all the beliefs and ideals and values that will help shape and guide a person's behavior. So the first crucial stages is in the adolescence when one develops ideals and beliefs that will form the basis of their personality and identity. For example, a teenager might think based on what his peers think in himself and his achievements and his own ideas and experiences that he's a very kind and generous guy. He develops this image and his behavior is molded about by this and the rest of his life he acts in a way that is consistent with his identity. Then towards the end of life, there is the final stage of life called the integrity versus despair stage.

Those who feel proud of their accomplishments will feel a sense of integrity. This is based on the extent of which the behavior is consistent and in line with their perceived identity. Successfully completing this phase means looking back with few regrets and the general feeling of satisfaction. If one would have to live a life with our integrity there will be a destruction of ones identity, because your behavior is at odds with your identity. You could say one thing but you act in another way. For example if a doctor believes in the sanctity of all life and yet on the other hand secretly and quietly he prescribes abortion pills, which is contrary to all that his beliefs. The action is contrary to all his beliefs and this will lead to internal conflict and is this destruction of his own identity. People like this will feel unsuccessful during this phase and will feel that their life has been wasted and have experienced many regrets and they'll be left with feelings of bitterness and despair. And this is what the loss of integrity brings.

The third effect of the loss of integrity is that it destroys human dignity. Everybody knows CS Lewis but not very many people are acquainted with his wife and she has three very important things to say about this loss of integrity. She says the three things happen when you've got the loss of integrity that affects human dignity.

- There are lies of gossip that make haters out of us
- There are lies of advertising that makes money out of us
- There are lies of politicians that actually make power out of us

What Joy Davidman is saying is that the lack of integrity, the spreading of lies through gossip actually influences us and makes us hate in that sense that actually uses us as objects. There are lies of advertising and basically the more we listen to this advertising to buy into the lies that they tell us then we will pay money to buy the goods that have been advertised and basically the person who tells the lies benefits in making money out of us. And this is most evidently seen today in our political sphere. There is no better example of this than in Utusan Malaysia in 2011 headline based on a meeting between the NACF pastors that they were actually plotting to make Christianity the official

religion in Malaysia. It is such a claim on the surface, is such a ludicrous claim because the Christians make less than 10% of the entire population, how can this actually happen. But it achieved its desired political effect by galvanizing grassroot Malay support. You actually have Ibrahim Ali falling to this trap. He writes,

Perkasa is ready to crusade against ungrateful Christians.

And he says,

If they want a crusade, so be it. Before our followers fall in this battle, (Perkasa) leaders will first lay down their lives and die sprawling in blood."

Here you actually have the Malay population being used by Utusan as a tool for their propaganda to achieve the political aims and here actually is a denigration of the dignity of this group of people of people, you are treating them like pawns, recruiting them for your own evil purposes in order to achieve your political goals. The lack of integrity so often politics actually destroys human dignity.

What about that famous story about the honest George Washington? Who as a young boy actually mischievously cut down a cherry tree. When he was confronted with this instead of lying and spinning and denying what he did was he confessed that he had chopped down a cherry tree and he was punished for it. Well turned out that this first American president didn't actually do that. It was all a political lie to gain support. In fact there was an article by CNN written by Ed Urvic who was a former congressional chief of staff that looked at all the presidents and actually concluded that every president has not only lied at some stage but needs to lie in order to be effective. This is the kind of society that we actually live in and there is no starker difference in lies in presidents then between Jimmy Carter, a democratic president and the current president Donald Trump.

Donald Trump has told 16,000 lies in office as of January 2020. Well historians describe Jimmy Carter as he was too noble, too pure he didn't know how to play people against one another, he should have read his Machiavelli. Here we have an honest Christian president who actually never made it very substantially, he was only a one-term president versus a pathological liar.

One of the greatest sources of disinformation or fake news today is basically social media. And it's been noted with great sadness that Facebook is sticking to its policies on politicians lies and voter targeting, which means they are not going to interfere with any ad which any politician puts up even though it contains lies. Why? Simply because there's billions of dollars of campaign ads that need to be made. For the sake of money Facebook loses integrity.

This is ironic because the founder of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg with his wife Dr Priscilla Chan actually started the Chan Zuckerberg initiative for philanthropic purposes, for the good of society and mankind. They want to cure diseases, they want to help the poor but it's ironic isn't it. They are actually willing to sacrifice the integrity which in turn destroy human dignity of the very society which they are trying to help.

Well, the lack integrity destroys human dignity simply because it's exploiting people. Because when you lie to people you're not allowing them to see your reality. When you don't allow them to see your reality, you'll put them at a disadvantage and when they are at disadvantage you use them, you turn them into the instruments of your own purposes. So therefore you treat them like children, you treat them like objects and this destroys basic human dignity.

Finally, the loss of integrity will put you on a collision course with reality. Somehow reality will come. You can get away with it today, tomorrow but not forever. Ultimately, it will come. What about pastor Bill Hybels, senior pastor of one of the largest most successful groundbreaking churches in America called the Saddleback Church. In the end he had to step down because he's led a double life. In front of the pulpit in holiness and at the back in sexual immorality.

What about our former prime minister Najib Razak? When he was brought to trial, he denied all knowledge about financial embezzlement. I didn't know I was too busy running the country but then reality hit like a train. By the next month the MACC brought out actual tape recordings of all his illegal business dealings. The Chinese Communist Party is no different. They tried to cover up what the young Dr Li Wi Yen was trying to tell the world about the pandemic. Eventually the truth came and hit the entire world like a train. It hit the communist party like a train. You couldn't hide the truth anymore.

In January this year President Trump was impeached because he was using his office for his personal gain, lying and this is what representative Adam Schiff said,

"What matters is whether he is a danger to the country, because he will do it again. And none of us can have confidence, based on his record, that he will not do it again, because he is telling us every day that he will,"

You see Adam Schiff's prophetic words were not taken to heart by the Republican Party and they let Trump off and yet a month or two later on the reality train hit in terms of the coronavirus. No amount of lying by the president could stop this train. He tried to cover it up but in the end there are more than 50 thousand deaths and more than a million cases. You see lying will only get you somewhere. The loss of integrity when you get you so far but in the end reality will take over.

Well, what about the actual swearing or taking oaths. Well the Bible is full of covenants. The covenant isn't oath. Jesus takes oaths. Paul takes oath. God takes an oath. Like in Genesis 15 he takes an oath. When he says do not swear an oath, let your yes be yes and your no, what he is saying is that there's no levels of truths. You don't have to back up when you say by swearing. If you are my disciple Jesus is saying, every single thing you say must be the truth, every time you say something and you act something you must be consistent as if you're swearing in a court of law.

Matthew chapter 12,

for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

So everything you say should be said as if God is in front of you and you are under oath. What would you say if tomorrow whatever you said was recorded and put on Facebook? Would that change the way you speak? Would it make a difference? Sadly, we live in a world where we're so use to the usual white lies, political lies, sorry I'd love to come to your party but I'm going to be out of town, I'm not in but you are actually in, or exaggerations, you always, you never. Whenever you say, you always, you never, it is almost never true. They are not trying to get the truths out, but you're

actually trying to beat up the other person to get them to do what you want them to do. Or word inflation. Everything that happens is fantastic. It is wonderful, you're amazing, it's so wonderful all the time after awhile people will not believe you anymore. Or the benevolent lie, when somebody is playing a concert piece or cooks a nice mee suah for you and say, how is it and then you have to say, ah well, you know, it is actually okay, it is pretty nice, actually it sucked you know, and we have to lie to get out of that. Or your boss comes and tells you, I am sorry we had to let you go. You know, he is actually sacking you but he is cast in such a way that they let you go but I don't want to go, you know, but he says we have to let you go as if you are the one who has got to go and not him.

Do we say yes when we actually should have said no. This is we can't return to please other people. Have you promised to do something and then you know you cannot deliver or do you mislead someone by agreeing to do something in advance, something really unrealistic or do you say something in order to gain an advantage or to save your own reputation.

Lets look again at Matthew chapter 5 verse 33

*Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not swear falsely, but shall **perform** to the Lord what you have sworn.'*

The word perform in Greek is apodidoomi, which actually means you shall pay back, which gives you the concept that the truth actually costs. When we actually come to people and we want their approval and we lie to get the approval simply because our self image is rooted in people's approval. If I tell people the truth they will get so mad. So we spin and we lie because we don't want to pay the price.

How do we get to a place where we are secure enough, we are happy enough to always tell the truth and to pay the price? Lets look at John 18 verse 19

Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. 20 "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. 21 Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said." 22 When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded. 23 "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" 24 Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Here you actually have a situation where the pharisees hit Jesus. Why? Because he is telling the truth. Jesus is actually paying the price for telling the truth in general and also paying for our dishonesty. Why couldn't this pharisee stand Jesus and why does he smack him for telling the truth? Because they couldn't bear to hear what Jesus said. Because whatever Jesus said undermine their self-esteem and their self-righteousness. He was stripped naked so that we could be clothed with his righteousness. When Jesus Christ looks into our hearts, he saw the worst in us and he loved us anyway and now we have the security, the power to handle the truth, whatever happens, whether people like us because we tell the truth or not it really doesn't matter. I love the hymn. This hymn is called, his be the victors name and the second last verse I am going to read to you, it says,

*What tho' the accuser roar
Of ills that I have done;
I know them well, and thousands more;*

Jehovah findeth none.

The accuser is going to roar in their life. the accuser is satan. He is going to roar about all the sins that I have done but actually I know my sins well and I have probably know a thousand more but the beautiful part is Jehovah findeth none. When God looks at us he sees none because of what Jesus has said.

So today, we can be a people of integrity? Why? Because we can handle the truth. Because we are now clothed in Christ. His righteousness means that I can handle the truth. I can pay the price, whether someone likes or doesn't like me. Whether I lose control or not lose control, I am secured in Christ because Jesus paid the price for our dishonesty.

So lets move on forward after this Gamma lesson to be a people of integrity, to be that city of lights in the hill, to be that salt in a world where there is fake news, in a world that has no integrity in the world, that is wallowing in lies and fake news every single day. We should be the people of integrity. We should be the wholesome human beings that the world can look at and follow.

Thank you.