

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

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Scripture: **Matthew 5:19**

Sermon Title: ***The Spirit of Integrity***

I hold a game that a friend of mine created. It is called "The Game of the Presidents." The object of the game is to elect a president, and the way you do that is to accumulate enough states with their electoral votes to be able to elect him. I was with my friend one day and I said I wanted to play the game; so he took it out and he explained to me how it operated. We began, and after a while he said, "Yes, that's right, that's the way you do it." And then in a little while he said, "No, you can't do that." I asked, "Why not?" And he said, "Because the rules won't let you do it." And then I realized that he had written the rules, he created the game, and therefore I couldn't argue with him. Now that is the way most of life works.

My wife and I bought a computer this year, and to say that I am computer literate is to be very kind. So I sat down and I said, "I'm going to understand how this thing works." So I began to key in things and after a while the computer just stopped; it just stalled out. I worked some other things, and I began to get all kinds of lines that were going all kinds of directions. I was under the impression that if you punched a key once and it doesn't work,

you punch it two or three more times. After a while this big sign came up, "STOP!," don't hit me again. But the one I love the most was when I keyed something in and this sign came on that said, "You have just committed and illegal act!!!" I put the blinds down and cut off the lights; I was waiting for the computer police to show up. When I bought the computer they said that I had a support system. So when things didn't go right I called the support system and somebody on the other end of the line would be happy to try to answer my questions. I have called so many times I'm sure that the last time I called somebody on the other end put her hand over the phone and said, "It's him! Another call from Richmond; pick up; you can't imagine what he is going to ask." So I asked my question. The sweet young thing was very kind and very helpful, and after a while she said, "Sir, did you know that you can take a course that will help you work this computer?" I said "It's my computer, I bought it and it ought to work like I want it to operate." Well, you know I didn't say that because if a person invents something or creates something it is going to operate as he wants it to.

Now the Bible says that God created us. And when He did that, He then gave us a set of instructions, and He said. "This is the way you operate, this is the way you work, and if you want to find a life full of happiness and meaning, then you will operate according to the instructions. If you want misery, then try to do it your way." Now when you stop to recognize it, you are very grateful God did that. Wouldn't it be terrible to live in a world and not know where you came from, what you are doing here, and where you are going? In such a case, all you can do is chose, yourself, every day, and experiment on what will work for your life. And so what happens is, if something doesn't work, you try something else; and all of your life is guessing, and all of your life is experimentation. When you stop to think about it, God's giving us

rules is the only way we can live together. Suppose you invited me over to your house and you had a new basketball goal out and you said, "Let's go out and shoot some hoops," and I said, "Fine." And then all of a sudden I realize you are carrying the ball around like you would in rugby. You are hitting it like a baseball, and you are tackling me as if we were playing football. And I say "Whoa!" You grab up the ball and you go running out past the court and you are up on your porch, and I say "You're out of bounds," and you say, "There are no bounds!" And when I walk away all disgusted, you run around the house, get a little step ladder, put it under the goal, climb up and put the ball down, and you say, "The score is now 7 to nothing." I say, "That is not the way it works," and you say, "Sure it is the way it works, everybody can do whatever they want to do." Do you understand that we have absolute chaos if the world worked that way? But the way it works is that when God created us, He said, "I am going to establish great principles of life by which you are to live." Listen to what Jesus said, "I have come, but even I have no authority to break the laws of God. I cannot even remove the dot over the *i* or the cross of the *t*. They are eternal and they will never pass away until all is accomplished." Jesus said there are some things that God has written into the very fabric of the universe that operate for everybody, and they are called God's Law. For example, the Bible says that you are not to take revenge. Revenge is when somebody does something wrong to you and you say to them, "I don't get mad; I get even," and you plan and plot how you get back against him. So all of your life is scheming and arranging and manipulating and just waiting for the time that you can get back. Someone has said that vengeance is like drinking poison and then waiting for the other person to die. What happens is that it begins to destroy you, it consumes you, it defeats you. So Jesus said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," saith the Lord." Don't spend your life with vengeance; that law never changes. Christ said that

2000 years ago, and if the world goes 10,000 years down the road, it is still the law of God.

The Bible says "*You shall not steal.*" A person who develops a life of stealing is a parasite, other people work and he just sucks their life earnings; he takes them for himself. No talent, no ingenuity, no education, you just let other people go to work and you break in and steal. So you become a parasite of life. You never develop who you are, you never develop your talents, you never make a contribution to life, all you do is just take from others. The Bible says the commandment, "*You shall not steal,*" will always be true. The amazing thing about it is that at times when missionaries have gone around the world and talked to people who have never heard of Jesus Christ, and have said, "Let me tell you some of the principles of God," some of the people will say, "We knew that." And the Bible says that what is happening is that God has written it in our hearts. The Bible doesn't create these laws, the Bible does nothing more than reveal the laws that God has already written into the universe. He has written them into your heart. Even if people have never read the Bible, some of them will say, "I know you ought not to steal." So God's laws are eternal, they are not up for option. Now it does not matter how you feel about them. Some of you, when you leave in a few moments, will go down Buford Road. On Buford Road there is a sign that says, "35 mph." So you, if you want to, can go down Buford at 75 mph, but the blue light will go on and a policeman will stop you, and he will say, "Sir, did you not know that this is a 35 mph zone?", and you can say, "But I feel like driving 75 mph;" and the kind policeman will say, "It doesn't make any difference how you feel; the law says 35." Do you understand that what Jesus says is that God's principles are not

up for your vote. They have been written, and whether you like them or not, whether you live by them or not, really does not make a difference; they are there.

I am reminded of the little girl who brought a rabbit to school, to show and tell, and things were going fine until somebody asked, "Is it a boy or a girl?" And the little girl, not to be undone, said, "I don't know, let's vote on it." It doesn't make a difference whether you vote or not. It doesn't make any difference whether you try to live by the laws, or not live by the laws; they are there. And what happens is you really don't break the laws, what you do is break yourself against the laws; because just as there is a policeman behind the sign there is the authority of God behind His laws; and He says if you break them there is a consequence to doing so. So all you are going to end up doing is destroying yourself.

God did that with physical laws. I can determine that what I'm going to do is jump off of this building and fly down. Every sixth grader would say, "Don't you know about gravity?" It doesn't make any difference whether you feel like flying down or not. Physical laws are there.

God's spiritual laws are eternal, they are always there. Now listen to what Jesus said. *"Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom heaven, but whosoever practices and teaches these commands will be great in the kingdom of heaven"* Which means if I set aside a life in which I am not going to keep them, then I am ultimately going to destroy myself. And He said *"And if you teach others to break them, you are the least in the kingdom."* You know, the thing about us is that we have a herd

instinct. If the whole group is going, this is the way we want to go. Very few of us like to be out here by ourselves, going against the tide. So whenever we make a decision, we always turn to someone else and say, "Come on, follow me." Now, if you are going in the right direction that is wonderful, but if you are going in the wrong direction, you are not only jeopardizing yourself, you are jeopardizing those who follow you. And the tragedy, I often say to folk, is not only in the fact that you have influenced them in the wrong way, but in the fact that you may find the truth and you may come back, but they may keep going in the way in which you have pointed them. You remember the picture of the dad walking through the snow and behind him is the little boy who is jumping to get in his dad's footsteps. I am told--I don't know--that every person has a least two people for whom he is the major influence in their lives. And what that simply means is that whatever you decide about God and about church and about Jesus and the things of God, you are going to be influencing others in their decision about God. Jesus said, *"If you want to break the least of the commandments, or you want to influence others in that way, you are going to be at the bottom of the rung"*.

I deal with this in my life; I certainly deal with this as a minister. Years ago I determined that this book was God's Word. I would never, I could not, stand in front of you and say, "This is wrong, this is a mistake, go on and do what you want." I understand the scripture to say His word is eternal I must never do anything to teach anybody to turn away from it.

But He said, "Let me tell you how you can be great in the kingdom. The great in the kingdom are those who determine that they want to follow the commands of the Lord." Now let me ask you, what if I said to you, "Is 80% following all right?" Well, use it this way: you're a dad and you have

children at home, is it all right for you to be a kind, loving, considerate dad 80% of the time and 20% of the time you just beat your kids? You are married: is it all right to be faithful to your wife 95% of the time? You are an astronaut pilot, you are bringing Apollo back: is it all right to land 75% of the time? Suppose you go through life and just simply say, "Well, dear God, if it's difficult, if it's not practical, if I don't think it makes sense, then I'm not going to do it." He said, "If you determine that you want to live for Me than the only way you can do it is to say, 'Lord, here is my life, take it, I want to follow you wherever you take me.'"

I made that decision years ago, I came home from college one time and realized that the life that I was living had hurt my Mother. I remember sitting down with Mom at our little breakfast table and I turned to her and said, "I make a commitment to you, I will never hurt you again". He died for me. I will try never to hurt Him again.

And He said, *"And you will be great when you teach others"*. So all of you who teach in our Bible studies and missions and seminars, I want to put a star beside you today. You're a parent who is teaching your kids, put a star beside you. Teach others, determine in your life that you are going to pass His commandments on to those who are around you. God said of Abraham, "I chose you because I knew you would teach your children that which is right and just". The reason God chose you is that you would be one who would pass it on to others.

A letter was received in the mail by an extended family, it was from a lawyer. "Uncle Simon has died, he wanted to pass all of his wealth on to you. Come to my office next Tuesday." Boy, what a letter! Sugar plums dance in their heads. They come to the lawyers office, they read Uncle Simon's will. "I bequeath to my descendants

my wealth, I give them my trust in God's principles and my love for Jesus Christ". And the story says "And they walked away disappointed".

You need to come to the realization in your life that His Word and His Son are more important than anything, and the greatest wealth you can pass on is the truth about Him. Some of you in this room need to come to understand again that you need to live by the eternal principles of God. Some of you beat your head against the wall and you realize that you don't break it, it breaks you. And you need to come today and say, "God has been working in my life and I want to give my life to Jesus Christ and I want to live how He has made me to live."