

BUILDING TRUST IN A SKEPTICAL WORLD

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Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the Lord your God gives you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Ex. 20:1-17 NASB).

INTRODUCTION

Trust is basic to the well-being of all human relationships and institutions. Trust is about the proper use of power. When power is properly exercised, leaders are deemed to be worthy of trust. A breach of trust occurs when power is abused.

I. A CULTURE OF TRUST MUST BE BUILT ON THE FOUNDATION OF COVENANT WITH GOD AND THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

A. A proper relationship with God is expressed in a proper relationship with others. The building blocks of covenant community are as follows:

1. Honoring parents and elders (Ex. 20:12; 1 Tim. 5:1)

2. Reverence for human life (Ex. 20:13; Matt. 5:21-25)
 3. Fidelity to the marriage covenant (Ex. 20:14; Matt. 5:27-32)
 4. Respect for the property of others (Ex. 20:15, 17; Eph. 4:28)
 5. Promotion of justice (Ex. 20:16; Matt. 23:23)
- B. The ninth commandment—the prohibition against offering “false witness”—suggests that justice is promoted by the truthfulness of our words and actions.
1. Jesus said that the words of the mouth—“evil thoughts . . . false witness, slanders”—reveal the condition of the heart (Matt. 15:18-20 NASB).
 2. We should exercise great caution when we make commitments, promises, and contracts (Matt. 5:33-37; James 5:12).
 3. The promotion of justice within the community requires accountability to the community. Paul insisted that the saints should judge the saints (1 Cor. 6:1-8).
- C. The promotion of justice is the mortar that holds together the covenant community.
1. The Greek philosopher Plato understood justice as the harmonious relationship between warring parties—the proper balancing of tensions that exist within the community.
 2. The Hebrew prophets proclaimed that justice should be exercised by those in power so that the weak and oppressed may be protected (Isa. 1:17; Jer. 22:3).
 3. James insisted that justice is demonstrated in the equality of all persons and is a proper expression of God’s love (James 2:1-13).

II. THE SHALOM OF THE COMMUNITY IS DESTROYED BY ABUSES OF POWER THAT WEAKEN THE PILLARS OF TRUST

- A. Ezekiel prophesied against the shepherds who exploited the sheep (Ezek. 34). The exploitation of the sheep is often expressed in terms of classic temptations—money, sex, and power.
1. *The love of money* (Matt. 6:24; 1 Tim. 6:10). The wise man said, “He who oppresses the poor to make more for himself or who gives to the rich, will only come to poverty” (Prov. 22:16 NASB).
 2. *The desire for immoral sexual relationships* (2 Sam. 11:1–12:9). Those in positions of power and authority should never be enslaved to their sexual desires (1 Thess. 4:3-8).
 3. *The pursuit of power*. When James and John sought for authority in the kingdom

of God, they stirred the indignation of the disciples. Jesus reminded the disciples that they were not to be masters, but servants (Mark 10:35-45).

- B. Simon Magus was seduced by power and offered money to the apostles so he might receive the power of the Spirit (Acts 8:9-24).
 - 1. Simon's love of power and money had produced in him "the gall of bitterness" and "the bondage of iniquity" (v. 23 NASB). Peter's rebuke was harsh: "May your silver perish with you" (v. 20 NASB).
 - 2. In the tradition of the church, Simon is associated with the scandal of power and greed within the church. The crime of *simony* is defined as "buying or selling the holy offices of the church."
 - 3. We must be very careful that the anointing and grace of God do not become commodities for trade lest our anointing becomes "a ring of gold in a swine's snout" (Prov. 11:22).
- C. There are other spiritual abuses that can destroy the covenant community.
 - 1. Selfish ambition (Phil. 1:15-17; James 3:16).
 - 2. Professional jealousy that leads to schism within the church (1 Cor. 3:1-9).
 - 3. Arrogant preachers and teachers who teach questionable doctrines for the sake of controversy (1 Tim. 6:3-5; Titus 3:9).

III. A CULTURE OF TRUST, THE PROPER EXPRESSION OF POWER AND AUTHORITY, IS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST (Phil. 2:5-11)

- A. Jesus "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped" (v. 6 NASB).
 - 1. The Greek word for "grasped" suggests that which is *seized*. Those who seize power are most likely to abuse power.
 - 2. In politics, the party that "seizes" power is obligated to protect the interest of its constituents.
 - 3. The example of Jesus compels us: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (vv. 3-4 NASB).
- B. Jesus "emptied Himself" (v. 7 NASB).
 - 1. Jesus did not seek to hold power, but released power. He sacrificed His divine status (glory and power) for the sake of human redemption.

2. The rich young ruler could not bring himself to be emptied of the symbols of his status (Luke 18:18-25).
 3. But Zaccheus was eager to be emptied for the sake of the kingdom of God (19:1-10). One can only imagine the goodwill among the people that was generated by his actions.
- C. Jesus “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death” (Phil. 2:8 NASB).
1. The “humiliation” of the divine Son is expressed in footwashing (John 13:5-20). Footwashing interprets the cross as Jesus having laid down His life for His disciples. Likewise, He commanded His disciples to lay down their lives for one another.
 2. The proper expression of Christian power is symbolized by the cross, not by the sword. In other words, people may fear the sword, but they don’t trust the sword. We do not trust those who threaten us. However, we trust—even revere—those who sacrifice for us.
 3. The proper expression of Christian power is redemptive. Those who wish to lead the church must be willing to sacrifice themselves to save the church.