



To Tell the Truth

Matthew 5:33-37

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Welcome to the GraceLife fellowship group. We are coming back to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. You can turn there if you would – Matthew chapter 5, beginning at verse 33. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is preaching what Matthew records as His first public major discourse, and He is explaining what spiritual and ethical life in His kingdom look like. As Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount, He says, “This is going to be the character that comes forth from the people who are truly My disciples.” As over the progress of revelation, as Jesus completed His mission and died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins and rose again, and as God through His Holy Spirit draws people into His kingdom through faith in Christ, He changes them.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away, behold, new things have come.

Well, the “new things” is a reference to the kind of character that flows out of the life of one that has truly repented. And so as we look at this passage, we are seeing that Jesus is assuming someone who has already repented from their sins, someone who has been born again and is now pursuing a life of righteousness. That is the mark of the Sermon on the Mount. He is not telling you how to be saved; He is telling you what your life should and must look like after you have come to saving faith in Him – we’ve discussed that many, many times.

As we come today to Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:33-37, we are going to see Jesus highlighting the role of truthful character in the life of the believer. Now, we as Christians know the one true God. We know the God of truth. Jesus, when He prayed to the Father in John 17 said: “Thy word is truth.” And earlier He had said about Himself that He was the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Him. And so the concept of truth goes to the very heart of Christianity

And if you are here today, beloved, and you are in Christ, you claim to be a Christian, you claim to be one who has been saved through faith in Christ and not through your own works – what you have to understand is that the ramifications of that claim are very far reaching indeed, because the whole matter of truth is at the heart of what you say is of the essence of your life, the essence of your hope for eternal life. What that means is that every word that you speak – whether in private or in public, whether on the job or off,

whether with your family or with complete strangers – every word that you speak is spoken in the presence of this loving God who is truth incarnate. Every word that you speak is impacted by your claim to know the living God of truth – it has to be that way. Truth is the environment in which you move and live and have your being. And so any contradiction to truth, any departure from the truth in what you say and speak, is an utter contradiction of what you claim as your theology.

Ephesians 4:25 – as Paul is working out the implications of what it means to be a Christian, one of the things that he says is:

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor.

I love talking at these kinds of real basic fundamental levels, laying out fundamental truths and just seeing how far they go as you think through the implications of what it means. The fundamental truth claims of Christianity have a direct impact on every daily conversation that you have, Monday through Friday, not just on when we teach on Sunday. So it goes to responses to questions like these: “Children, did you get your room cleaned before we left for church today?” “Hey, Jim, do you have that report finished yet that I asked you for last week?” Here’s one that has been a challenge for me in my relationship with Nancy over the years: “Did you just fall asleep while I was talking to you?” (Laughter) Truth be told, I haven’t always responded to that question honestly: “Yeah, I heard what you said; you were talking about what happened with Hannah that night.” “Don, that was ten minutes ago.” (Laughter) Well, we worked most of that out anyway.

But here’s my point, beloved. Every heart question, every point of accountability that someone brings to your life, becomes the proving ground for your character. Every assertion that comes from your tongue becomes the test of your theology – it couldn’t be any other way. You say, “I believe in the one true God. I know the truth about salvation; Jesus Christ who is truth Himself has saved me.” Then that means that what comes out of your heart and over your lips and through your tongue should be nothing but truthful.

Our passage this morning invokes all of those issues. Look at Matthew 5:33 with me, where Jesus says:

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, “You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.” But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is “the city of the great King.” Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But your statement be, “Yes, yes” or “No, no.” Anything beyond these is of evil.

It could also be translated, and you will see it in the margin notes of your Bible, “anything beyond these is of the evil one” – that’s a legitimate translation of the underlined language there.

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So in this passage, what Jesus is doing is He is using the subject of first century oaths that they existed at the time of His ministry – He is going to use that first century oath context to call His disciples, to call you and me, to a high but simple standard of truthfulness for your daily life – that’s the theme of this passage that we are going to look at. And to explain it for you, I need to start first of all by giving you a little background on the biblical use of oaths. And I know that before this sermon is over, I’m going to say the word “oats” where I mean to say “oaths,” and you’ll just have to translate that accordingly.

1. The Biblical Use of Oaths

Here I want to first of all give you a definition of what an oath is, so that we can kind of be on common ground together and see what Jesus is talking about in this passage.

A. The Definition of an Oath

What is an oath? *An oath is a solemn appeal to God to verify the truth of a statement or a binding character of a promise.* And so that is why for centuries, courtrooms have had witnesses swear that they were about to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The momentous character of upholding the justice of law calls for a solemn appeal to verify the truth of what a witness is about to testify.

An oath is designed for solemn situations or situations where the truthfulness of an important declaration is not readily susceptible to independent confirmation. It is for solemn situations; it is a way of proving the truthfulness of what is about to be said. And in an oath, the one who makes the oath – get this, because this is just fundamental to everything we are going to say – the one who makes the oath calls upon God as his witness to the truthfulness of what he is about to say, and he subjects himself to the punishment of God if he speaks falsely. And so he says, “In the presence of Almighty God, the omniscient God who knows all things – in His presence, I declare that what I am about to say is true. And may God judge me if I speak falsely in the process.”

Would to God that preachers throughout the world would carry that same weight of solemnity into the pulpit with them week by week because, as teachers, they will face a stricter judgment – but that’s a side point. The whole point of an oath, in other words, was designed to foster credibility and integrity. It was designed to make truth a solemn matter, to make truth something that was certain to come out in serious situations. Because oaths are so important to the cause of truth in those solemn situations, they should never be treated lightly or as a trivial matter.

Now, here in this passage in verse 33, Jesus also talks about the concept of vows. A vow is somewhat similar to an oath; it is a pledge in which a man dedicates himself or something that he has that is valuable to God, often in expectation of divine favor in return – you see a lot of them in the Old Testament. So there is overlap in the ideas of a vow and an oath, but they both invoke the witness of God as a guaranty of performance –

that's the basic idea of an oath. You say, "Well, how does that apply to me?" We will get to that, trust me – we will get to that in a way that will be clear, I trust.

B. The Demonstration of Oaths

Now, going from the definition of oath to the biblical demonstration of oaths – how are oaths used in the Bible? I want to cover this just briefly because when Jesus says, "I say to you" – in verse 34 – He says, "make no oath at all," some people in the course of the broadly defined course of Christian history have used Jesus' words here as an absolute statement against oaths, saying that His followers should never take an oath of any kind whatsoever. And therefore, these people who see it that way won't take oaths in a court room; they won't pledge allegiance to their countries or anything like that. They say, "That's what Jesus is talking about here, I can't take an oath in a court room." Well, when you look at the totality of the Bible and the totality of the life of Jesus, you will quickly see that that view is not sustainable. That is not what Jesus is talking about; I'm going to deal with that in just a second.

But I want to deal with something really critical here. If you minimize this passage to just a declaration about not taking solemn oaths, you have completely missed the point of what Jesus is teaching. You have made it so that it doesn't apply to virtually any part of your life whatsoever – that is not what Jesus is intending to do here. Jesus introduces this whole passage by saying that "your righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees or you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." He is talking about something that is very real, very practical, very day-to-day, in the overall context of what He is saying here. He is not just talking about what you do when you come to a courtroom – that's not the case at all. And it shows how the importance of the biblical principle of interpretation – that you compare scripture with scripture, and you don't just run with what you think is the meaning of one single verse and make that a rule for your life.

First of all, let's understand, as we are talking about the biblical demonstration or use of oaths, that the Old Testament required oaths in certain situations. I'll give you a couple of verses here that you can jot down for your notes. In Numbers 30:2 it says:

If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all the proceeds out of his mouth.

In Deuteronomy 10:20 it says:

You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name.

And so the Old Testament contemplates in these and other passages the use of oaths, the use of vows, in the life of the nation of Israel. And so there's obviously nothing inherently wrong or sinful about taking an oath or God never would have ordained it in

the first place. And we are just touching on a couple of things to make the point; we are not really developing it very well at all as far as the Old Testament is concerned.

What about when you come to the New Testament? When you come to the New Testament, you see the apostle Paul invoking the name of God as proof of the truthfulness of his sayings. He is making an appeal to God in 2 Corinthians 1:23 – he is as it were taking an oath when he says, “I call God as witness to my soul.” He is appealing to the omniscience of God and subjecting himself to the judgment of God if he doesn’t speak truth. He says:

I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth.

In Philippians 1:8 he says:

God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

What Paul’s desires were and where his affections lay were things that were known only to him and God; they were not subject to independent confirmation. And so, to make sure of the truthfulness of what he was saying, to make sure that people understood how serious and solemn he was as he expressed his pastoral concern for them, he said, “I call God as my witness.” “I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.” That’s not all about the use of oaths. That’s not all that proves that that superficial wooden look at Jesus’ words is wrong and that therefore Jesus must be talking about something more searching than what we do when we show up in a courtroom, which most of you never will do. God Himself swore by oaths in Psalm 110:4:

The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

And in a more familiar passage perhaps, in Hebrews 6:17 it says:

God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath.

God Himself shows Himself, reveals Himself, as taking an oath to verify the truthfulness of His intentions.

Now just as a side point, God doesn’t give these oaths because there is a higher authority for Him to appeal to. It is not that He is taking an oath because He might not tell the truth otherwise – that’s an *anathema* kind of thought. God does this as a measure of condescension to the weakness of men to help them believe in His word. You say, if God swore an oath – it would be true no matter what – but if He swears an oath, how much more can I trust His word when He declares the intentions of His purpose – so that’s the idea there. So you have the Old Testament declaring the usage of oaths, you have the apostle Paul calling upon God as his witness, you have God Himself taking an oath.

There is one more thing. Even in the earthly life of Jesus – turn to Matthew 26 so you can see this for just a moment. Two or three years after Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, where He said, “Make no oath at all” – here in Matthew 26:63, at His trial before Caiaphas, the high priest – look at verse 62:

The high priest stood up and said to Him, “Do you not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against you?” But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, “I adjure you by the living God – you could also say, I charge you under oath – that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God.”

The high priest put an oath on Jesus, bound Him by an oath. And what did Jesus do? Did He say, “I’m sorry, I’ve already said that I cannot take an oath? So therefore, I will continue to remain silent?” No. No, after He was placed under an oath, in verse 64:

Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter, you will see ‘the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power’ and ‘coming on the clouds of heaven’.”

And so, all of that – in view that review of the Old Testament and God and Paul and Jesus in His earthly life – I view it as an important point to make so that you won’t be hung up and say, “Jesus is just talking about me taking an oath some place.” Jesus is not forbidding all oaths, and here is the point: that means that we have to see what it is that He is really getting at when He speaks this passage in verses 33-37.

So throughout the Bible, we see oaths commanded, we see God’s spokesmen taking oaths, we see God Himself speaking under oath. So in their proper context, oaths were appropriate and useful to the people of God. So when we take the fullness of the teaching of the Bible, we cannot take Jesus’ words here as an absolute prohibition against all oaths in every circumstance with no exceptions, without turning Jesus into someone who contradicted Himself – that obviously not His intention.

Alright, now, if that wasn’t His intention, what was His intention? Well, the truth of the matter is that the whole matter of taking an oath was simply secondary to what Jesus was communicating here. It was a means of illustrating the fundamental problem that the Pharisees had in their own character and that Jesus was exposing so His disciples could see what the real standard was. *Jesus is going beyond the matter of oaths here to deal with the nature of true righteousness and truthfulness that should be the mark of the character of His true disciples.* And so, far from talking about courtroom oaths or something similar to that, Jesus is confronting every word that you speak in this passage – it’s incredible.

With that bit of setup, we can turn our attention more specifically to the text in front of us. But before I turn you there, I want to introduce this next section with a short illustration to help you process what I am about to say more easily. As we see what the Pharisees were doing with oaths, this little illustration will help you have in mind the problem that Jesus was confronting.

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I don't know if children still do this or not – I imagine that they do – but when I was a kid, one of the ways that you could supposedly tell a lie and get away with it was to say something with your fingers crossed. “Did you take my ball?” “No, I didn't.” Now, that might have been a blatant lie, but supposedly, in the culture in which I grew up anyway, your lie was okay if you had your fingers crossed – it excused you from responsibility. Get this: a little trick excused childhood deception. The formality of crossing your fingers hid a blatant lie. Keep that in mind as a framework for understanding our second point here which is:

2. The Pharisees' Abuse of Oaths

Jesus steps into this first century context, and He confronts the way the Pharisees are using oaths in their culture. He is condemning them and then showing why truthfulness must be the mark of His true disciples.

Now, in this overall passage, verses 21-48 – I need to just consistently remind you – Jesus is illustrating how the practical righteousness of His disciples must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. In this passage we are at illustration number 4 of 6. He has already dealt with anger; He has dealt with lust; He has dealt with the whole issue of marriage and divorce. And as you see the accumulation, the totality of what He is saying here, you start to realize just how very searching this section of the Sermon on the Mount is. Jesus is saying your anger is sinful and incurs the judgment of God. Your lustful looks incur guilt and incur the judgment of God. The way that you deal with your marriage in the privacy of your own home goes to the very essence of what God requires in the righteousness of His children.

I've got to tell you, as I'm preparing this and just seeing these things pile up again and again and again, I say, “This is really searching; this is really pervasive.” The searchlight, the white hard searchlight of the holiness of God shining forth in every area of our soul here, leaves us with no place to hide. It bares our sin – it cuts our souls open and exposes them. Almost any area of sin that you would think you could hide in secret, God brings to the full light of day and says, “Your righteousness must exceed that.” It's painful, but I tell you what, I'm glad for it. Any true disciple of Christ – I say this dogmatically without fear of contradiction; I welcome the fight of anyone who wants to contradict this point – the true disciple of Jesus Christ wants that in his life. Because the true disciple of Christ is marked by – Matthew 5:6 – a “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” He wants his life to be righteous; he wants it to be conformed to the character of Christ, the one who saved him from his sins. His highest aspiration is to be like Christ and to reflect His holiness in every area of his life.

And so, we don't rebel against this; we don't chafe against God probing into the deepest part of our soul here. Even when it's painful, even when it's convicting, we say, “Yes, Lord, have Your way with me. Crush me if that's what it takes to bring forth righteousness out of my life.” That's the true disciple's response. Your response to the Sermon on the Mount is the measure of where you are at spiritually, no doubt about it.

Now with that said, the Pharisees were not like that at all. These were unregenerate men, even though they claimed to be the teachers of the Law of Moses. These were men who were separated from God, dead in their trespasses and sins. And yet they were holding the keys to the book of God, as it were. Praise God that Jesus stepped into that and took away the keys and opened it up to recover the true meaning of truth. And so Jesus as He comes here in verse 33 – just like He has been with the whole issue of anger and murder, and lust and adultery, marriage and divorce – He is exposing the false practices of the Pharisees so that He can set forth the true force of the moral law of God.

Why did He focus on this matter of oaths? Why was that an issue here? Well, as you do a little bit of reading on this, you realize that by the time the first century had come around, the Jews had built up this complex code that governed oaths in detail. They had different categories of oaths that they used. Some of their oaths were binding; some of them were not. Specifically, the Pharisees said that if you made an oath in the name of the Lord, you were bound to keep it. But if you happened to make an oath in which you did not specifically invoke His name, it was an oath of lesser significance, and therefore, you did not have to be so accurate in what you said. In that way, they thought they were avoiding a violation of the third commandment in Exodus 20:7, which says:

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.

The Pharisees said, “We can speak in vain; we can speak lies all we want – just don’t attach the name of the Lord to it and all will be well. Don’t speak in the name of the Lord if you are going to speak falsely, just use some other formula and all will be well.” If the affirmation that they made was a lie or the promise wasn’t kept, it really wasn’t that serious to them as long as they had not invoked the name of the Lord. You could swear by heaven, swear by earth, swear by Jerusalem – and get this; this is just so fundamental to understanding what Jesus is saying here – you could give the appearance of commitment, the appearance of truthfulness, but all the while as you are deceiving the person that you are talking to, you are giving yourself this mental wiggle room as to whether you are actually being truthful in your speech. The form that they used in their oaths was just the precursor to a little kid crossing his fingers when he wanted to lie.

Now, the effects of those kinds of semantics, those kinds of technicalities, are obvious. Their system of oaths had simply become a pretext for telling lies and deception – they just had to be careful to use the right technicality. *The truth wasn’t even an issue to them; it was just a formula.* And Jesus comes and blisters them on this issue. It comes up again in Matthew 23, where Jesus pronounces woe upon woe upon woe upon the scribes and Pharisees. One of the places where He goes after them is on this whole matter of how they treated oaths and vows. And you can see in this passage – Matthew 23:16 – you can see the little sophisticated trick that they used where this oath was binding, but *this* oath was not. And Jesus condemns it all and exposes it for the fraud that it is. He says:

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Woe to you, blind guides, who say, "Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated." You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And, "Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated." You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering?

Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. Whoever swears by the temple, swears by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

He says these distinctions that you make in your oath-taking are a total sham. "You fools, you blind guides, you liars and hypocrites."

You see, beloved, Jesus stepped into this situation with this whole biblical theology of oaths, and oaths were designed to encourage truthfulness. The Pharisees had turned them into a license to lie and to deceive. It was a complete perversion of God's design for truthfulness. It was a denial of the character of the God of truth that they played in their position of religious leadership – they played into their advantage on unsuspecting people. It was totally wicked, and yet they had devised their own set of codes, their own code of conduct, supposedly in the name of the Bible, and in the name of conforming to the truth of the Bible, they lied up and down, all the while caring about their religious pretensions – how despicable is that!

When we come to verse 33, Jesus is invoking and bringing to mind all of this custom here in Matthew 5:33, He says:

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord."

Jesus is invoking this whole matter of how they treated oaths and is reminding the people and saying, "This is what your teachers had taught you. This is from of old has been said, that you do it this way." But now, as we go into verse 34, the Champion of truth has arrived on the scene, the cavalry has come, and the cavalry is going to clear out the enemies of truth. And look at what Jesus does in verse 34 as He starts to speak here. He is setting forth God's standard for truthfulness in your own character. This is incredible, He says:

But I say to you – speaking on His own authority once again, emphatically saying, "I am the one who is speaking here" – but I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

What Jesus is doing here is He is showing why all of these artificial distinctions that the Pharisees made in their oaths – all of those distinctions were absolutely meaningless. And He premises His argument on the fact that God is omniscient and He is omnipresent. Every oath is spoken in the presence of God; every word that you say is spoken in the presence of God. You can't excuse God as a witness to your words simply by not quoting His name when you start to speak. He sees it all 24-7, 365 days a year. Everything we say is under His searching omniscience. The One who made the tongue hears it when it speaks. The One who made the ear hears when the tongue speaks. So give up this false distinction that says, "If I just use a clever little formula – if I cross my fingers, if I say I am swearing by Jerusalem, not by heaven, not by God – then I am okay."

What Jesus is saying here in verses 34-36 is this: He says if you swear by heaven, understand that you are swearing by the throne of God. If you swear by the earth, you are swearing by the footstool of His feet. If you swear by Jerusalem, you are swearing by the city of the great King. You can talk about how you are going to make oaths, that you are going to do one thing or another – then He says you couldn't even choose your natural hair color when you were born – all of it under the powerful searching eye of God. And so He says, don't make these kinds of oaths, don't set up and perpetuate this false system of testimony. Don't take this into your daily conversation. Because all you are doing is stating that you don't recognize the presence of God in every area at every moment.

See, beloved, when you speak, every word that you speak – here in this room, in the car driving home, on the pillow of your bed – every word that you speak is spoken in the presence of God. He is everywhere present. He knows all things. And so when you speak, He hears; He is a witness, an unforgetting witness to every word that you speak. And therefore, you cannot exclude Him from witnessing your deceit simply because you don't speak His name or because you use some kind of calculated means of deception that fools the person in front of you, but leaves your soul guilty before God.

The truth of the matter, beloved, is this: calculated deception is the worst kind – it is absolutely the worst kind. If you think about it and you say, "I've got to work something out so I can trick this person in front of me or I can cover my tracks here or there," your conscience is commenting on the fact that there is a standard of truth and you feel condemned by it, but what you do is that you take means to cover it up and so you plan out how you are going to cover up your deception. You recognize the need for truth. You want to maintain the appearance of truth while holding on to your lies and deceptions. Jesus says that doesn't work at all.

It is not about the formula of the oath; it is about every word that you speak is spoken in the presence of God, the presence of an omnipresent, omnipotent God. And therefore, every deliberate evasion of the truth, every careless word that you utter, will one day be brought to an account.

I can remember the story of a man who knew that a representative of a government authorized agency was going to come and they were going to interview him about a

number of different things. One of the topics that he expected to come up was whether he had some forbidden personal property on his land. So the time of the meeting was set up and before the agent arrived, he picked that stuff up and put it over on his neighbor's land. He came back and met with the agent. So when the anticipated question came up, the agent asked, "Do you have this forbidden personal property on your land?" He looked him straight in the eye and said, "No sir, I don't." Agent finished up the interview, drove out of sight – man went back, picked up his stuff, and brought it back.

Beloved, technically telling the truth in order to work a deception is a heinous sin before God. And the opportunities for each one of us to do that is present every day of our lives. And what you have to do is you have to look at your soul and say, "I'm going to declare war against that kind of deception in my character. I am not going to tolerate that because I understand that God sees it."

Beloved, let such liars and deceivers who have no fear of God in their eyes beware: God is not mocked. And He will vindicate His truth and He will vindicate it well even if He gives you a temporary reprieve from the immediate consequences of your sin. God is not mocked! And if you can trick everybody, if you can trick me, I don't care – you are not tricking God. He sees through all the sophistry, He sees through all the deception, all the little tricks – and all the little tricks do is just multiply exponentially your responsibility before Him, because your conscience tells you, "I know this is wrong, but I'm going to cover it up anyway." And the true disciple of Christ, the one who truly desires righteousness says, "This is wrong and therefore I'm not going to do it; I don't even want to do it." Your cover-ups just build a bigger mountain of guilt before God because He sees it all.

It grieves my heart when I hear of a Christian businessman who has the nickname "Slippery Bob." It makes me worry when I see businesses – maybe some of yours, although I don't have any in mind – where they go out of the way to put the little fish sign on their signs. Jesus says, "Don't do that. You just be truthful. You just let your yes be yes and your no be no." Don't try to add on things that make it look like you are more truthful than you are. The truth of the matter is that when people feel the compelling need to say over and over again, "I swear this is true... as God is my witness, this is true..." – what is really going on there is they are acknowledging that at other times in their lives their word cannot be trusted because *this* needs a special affirmation to show the truthfulness of what is being said. Jesus blows all of that away. Third point is:

3. Jesus' Call to Truthfulness

Jesus' call to truthfulness, in contrast to the sophisticated deception of the Pharisees – here is what Jesus lays forth for His disciples – it is the genius of simplicity in verse 37. Look at it with me. Jesus says, "By way of contrast to what I have described and how I have refuted the Pharisees, but for you, let *your* statement – singular, speaking to each one of you: you Ron, you Suzy, you Barb, you Janet – you let your statement be yes, yes or no, no. Anything beyond these is of the evil one."

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See, beloved, what Jesus is saying here is the true Christian, the godly citizen of the kingdom of heaven, doesn't need an oath at all. You don't flippantly call on God in your ordinary conversations; you don't speak falsely – it is not necessary. Jesus says, “The standard of righteousness in My kingdom is people who would speak sincerely the truth, who would speak soundly the truth – that when they speak, they are speaking the truth because it comes from the overflow of their transformed heart.”

And so you don't need to multiply your promises. You don't need to swear to God. And you need to beware of people who make that their habit: “You know, I swear, that was the best roast beef I've ever had.” The true Christian doesn't practice deception with lies, fabrications, exaggerations, or broken promises: “That fish I caught was at least 23 pounds.” No, no. The standard for the Christian is simple, straightforward honesty in his speech. Yes means yes. Spoken facts are true to reality: “That was a fine supper, ma'am.” You don't need to swear about something like that. “That fish I caught weighed in at 3 pounds 12 ounces.” (Laughter)

The examples I have used here, beloved, are simple and obvious. But if you sit here in the presence of God, sit here in the presence of the omniscient, omnipotent, all-seeing, all-knowing God, how much more the weighty matters of life, marital faithfulness, integrity in your work place or business, your relationships within the body of Christ, your comments to your neighbors! And what Jesus has done here once again is He has pointed us to the direction of the Old Testament law. He has laid out the spirit of the Old Testament law to us. The point of the Old Testament, the point of God's revelation, is truth; it is truthfulness. The God of truth gave His word of truth to people whom He intended to speak the truth. And that is the standard, whether you are in church leadership or whether you are a brand new Christian.

And if you are outside of Christ, you have so many multiplied sins that have weighed up against your soul that you need to understand that you can never make it right. Your only hope as one outside of Christ is to appeal to Him, appealing to His grace, appealing to His mercy, to save you from your sins based on His death and resurrection where the penalty for those sins was laid upon Him. You contemplate these things, you contemplate the truth, you think about the reality of your salvation, and then you come back to the very character of the earthly life of our Lord Jesus. The Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 2:22:

He committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth.

That's another reason why you live this way – it is another reason why you pursue truth. You say, “Jesus, You were like this.” Beloved, I've got to ask you to think about this and to come to grips with it. How could you claim the salvation of Christ, how could you rest in His finished work, how can you hold Him up and say, “He is my Lord and my Savior; O how I love Him” – realizing that He was one who practiced no deception of His own, realizing that He calls you to truth – and then to step out into another area of life, another circle of influence and lies and deception and cover-ups and all kinds of sophisticated little tricks, living out your life crossing your fingers in the presence of the eternal God

“To Tell the Truth”

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who shed His blood for your soul? That's impossible. That is utterly demonic, Jesus says – look at the end of verse 37 – He says:

Anything beyond these is of evil.

The devil himself is the father of lies. So beloved, when you are being deceptive, what is the source of that? You are going to attribute that to the holy God, the thrice holy God, the God of truth who inspired an inerrant word for the sake of your soul? You are going to say it came from Him? The Bible says the devil is the father of lies. When you speak beyond the bounds of truth, beloved, you are stepping into an area where you have no business being.

So the ultimate issue is not whether you cross your fingers; it is not whether you present your own spin; it is not whether you swear up and down and stamp your feet saying “I’m telling the truth this time.” No, the question is truth. Cut through it all – cut through all of the garbage and just – “What is the *truth*?” – and speak that. Do you speak the truth without evasion, without qualification? To live a Christian life means that your words are absolutely trustworthy and transparently honest. Let every man, woman and child examine himself, repent of any sin, and renew a commitment that would truly give glory to God.

Let’s pray:

Our Father, how deep will Your holiness search us, O God? How full is Your omniscience of our souls! How much do You see, Father, that we have covered up for fear of the shame of it being seen by men? O God, would You return each one of us to an understanding of Your presence and understanding of Your omniscience that is such that it makes us fear You and causes us to want to live righteous lives in response to the salvation that You have given to us in Christ? Father, clear away from each one of us, everyone under the sound of these words today, clear every one of us from the self-deception that thinks that You don’t see it. Clear every one of us from the spiritual dullness that lives life without contemplating and factoring in the fact that we are living everything that we do in Your holy presence.

Father, we confess to You that our lips have spoken falsehood, our hearts have treasured deception, we have deceived people into thinking things that were true that were not often to their hurt. And God, our responsibility for that is great. Would You forgive us and cleanse us from our sinful deception. Father, would You rebuke us and convict us deeply if we just don’t get the point. Hammer on our conscience, Father – bring a boil to it until all of the impurities are brought to light. We cleanse them away through confession and trusting in Your forgiveness, trusting in the blood of Christ shed for our sins and then, Father, walking and living a purity of life that exceeds that false righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees and more closely mirrors the righteousness of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, who committed no sin nor was any deceit found in His mouth.

Father, what a God of truth would want with any one of us is beyond my comprehension. But we thank You for the grace when You reached down and saved us in Christ. It had to be Your initiative; it had to be for Your glory, Father; the benefit that accrues to us is secondary. And so we lay our lives before You and ask that You would use us and that You would change us from day to day in increasing degrees of glory till one day we can see You face to face and in that moment be changed into utter perfection when we see Christ as He truly is. When that day comes, O God, it will be our joy to fall down on our face before You and sing hallelujah to the King.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.