

Exposition of Matthew Speaking Truthfully (5:33-37)

Introduction- we have a truthfulness crisis in our culture

Craig Keener sums up this section, “Oaths are a poor substitute for integrity.”

I. The Old Testament Teaching and the Tradition (33)

- A. Again, you heard that it was said to the ancients

- B. You shall not falsely swear
But you shall pay your **oaths** to the Lord
 - 1. Oaths/vows were a part of OT religion
Oaths, invocations of God or some sacred object to undergird a statement or promise.
Vows, solemn promises to God of an action to be performed (France, 213)
Most oaths/vows were voluntary (Lev. 5:4; Num.30:3-15)
Some were required (; Ex. 22:11; Num. 5:19-22)

 - 2. False swearing was clearly prohibited
Ex. 20:7; Lev. 19:12; Psa. 24:3-4 (cf. 15:4)

 - 3. Keeping your vows was clearly required

Deut. 23:21-23; Psa 50:14; Ecc. 5:4
“Once Yahweh’s name was invoked, the vow to which it was attached became a debt that had to be paid to the Lord” (Carson)

 - 4. Jewish tradition had created hedges
E.g., Matt. 23:16-22

II. The Antithesis (34-36)

- A. But I say to you, not to swear at all
“We are not violating good and necessary principles of interpretation if we regard the word of Jesus, ‘swear not at all,’ though absolute in its terms, as having reference simply to the kind of profanity with which He was expressly dealing, the disguised swearing of which Jesus proceeds forthwith to give examples” (John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 171).

- B. Neither by heaven, because that is God’s throne

- C. Neither by earth, because that is the footstool of His feet

- D. Neither toward Jerusalem, that is the city of the Great King

- E. Neither shall you swear by your head

Because you are not able to make one hair white or black

III. The Principle (37)

- A. Your word must be Yes, Yes, No, No
 - 1. Yes, yes is probably, “yes be yes”
 - 2. Honest people do not need an oath as if their word was based on some external authority.
 - 3. Jas. 5:12
 - 4. The OT was emphasizing the importance of truthfulness. Jewish tradition took oaths and vows and used them as ways to circumvent truthfulness.
- B. Beyond these is of evil
 - 1. To add vows and oaths to one’s words comes from an evil heart
 - 2. “Swearing (i.e., oath-taking) is really a pathetic confession of our own dishonesty” (Stott, 102).

Conclusion

- 1. Are all oaths and vows forbidden?
- 2. What is being forbidden and commanded?

What is commanded is to be a truthful person.

“Human cultures developed oaths because people could not trust their neighbors without calling an avenging deity to witness; but those who recognize that God witnesses every word must speak and act from integrity of heart that transcends such formalities” (Keener, 195).