

To Tell the Truth

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Matthew 5:33-37

As a young believer the impact of the Gospel of Matthew. This statement has caused much consternation and I remember a time when, influenced by a friend, I would not take an oath in court. This was a mistake and misunderstanding of the passage just as the Quakers err. If your conscience has ever given you trouble about taking an oath; if you ever wondered if you should have promised before God and witnesses to love, honor and cherish until death do you part, then this lesson will be a great comfort and encouragement to you. If John Calvin were my counselor he would have said that I, like some of the Anabaptists he knew of:

". . . betray not only a rage for controversy, but gross ignorance when they obstinately press upon (us) a single word, and pass over, with closed eyes, the whole scope of the passage."

Calvin's Commentaries - Harmony Of The Evangelists - Matthew, Mark, Luke - John Calvin

I. OVERVIEW AND REVIEW

A. The Themes Of The Gospel Of Matthew

THEME ONE: The King Is Revealed - An ancestry from a royal line; His birth dreaded by a rival king; wise men offer kingly honor and royal gifts. A heavenly herald proclaims His coming. Even His temptation is that He's offered the kingdoms of the world (which are already His). He sets His manifesto of His Kingdom, the righteous standards for His subjects with His miracles His royal credentials, His parables are the mysteries of His Kingdom. He is hailed as son of David and makes a royal entry into Jerusalem; claiming claims sovereignty. He tells, concerning Himself, the story of a king's son. As Sovereign, He prevents any hindrance of His capture and execution by reminding His followers that he has the power to summon thousands of angels. He predicts His future reign while on the cross and His last words are "All authority is given unto me," with the royal command, "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples."

THEME TWO: The King Rejected - His mother was in danger rejection by her husband. Jerusalem was troubled and Herod sought to kill Him. Soon after His birth, the angel choir was silent, and all that could be heard was the weeping and wailing of the mothers of slaughtered children. He was raised in obscurity where He received no honor. His forerunner was imprisoned and beheaded, and He had nowhere to lay His head. His parables declared His Kingdom would not be accepted and on the cross, He

cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" There is no penitent thief praying in Matthew, there is no word of human sympathy, and those who pass by mock, revile and jeer. Even the soldiers are paid to lie about His resurrection. In no other gospel is the attack so constant and bitter. Matthew reveals the King and then shows the rejection.

THEME THREE: The King Returning - All through Matthew, there is a focus on a day coming when majesty will belong to whom it belongs, the King will reign; a great emphasis on the Second Coming, ending as a gospel of great and glorious triumph.

The Spiritual Credibility Gap - John MacArthur

B. The Sermon On The Mount - The Address / Manifesto Of The King

Here, the King is saying, "These are the conditions for belonging to My Kingdom. These are the qualities of life that My Kingdom demands. This is the nature of My reign and rule in the world." It is the very antithesis of everything that Judaism was in the time in which Jesus gave it. He literally crashes head-on into the Jewish system.

It is not an easy-going talk; it is not socialistic, pious platitudes. It is a confrontive, bold, stark definition of the inadequacies of human religion. It is a blast of phoniness and hypocrisies of those who followed lies. It is the unmasking of a religion of human achievement and the establishment, in its place, of the religion of divine accomplishment. The greatest sermon the world has ever known and the first recorded in the New Testament and it is concerned with the most important **AND** the smallest details of life. NOT just grand theological principles, but where we live.

C. The Lay Of The Land

The Jews gathered on the hillside in Galilee where Jesus was preaching were basically led by a legalistic, ritualistic sect; the scribes were those who wrote down and copied the law. Together with the Pharisees, this coterie invented a sub-biblical, quasi-divine system of religion that had sub-standard ethics. As such, they convinced themselves they had attained to self-righteousness and spiritual perfection and gave everyone airs of great pride over their attainments.

In the Old Testament, God set a high standard; His divine law. In the moral disintegration and digression of Israel's history, they descended far away from it. They did not desire to go to God to receive grace for salvation; they wanted to attain it themselves, in their own pride, but they could not attain to the law of God as God defined it. So they invented a sub-standard ethic, a man-made system of their own designing. Then, they said, "If you keep that, you're alright." So in keeping that, they established their own self-righteousness, but it was not God's law.

D. The Purpose Of The Sermon On The Mount

The key to what He says in the Sermon on the Mount is this:

Matthew 5: 20 - Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will in no case enter the kingdom of heaven.

The standard of the scribes and Pharisees is too low. The scribes and Pharisees were so pious, they were looking for a vacancy in the Trinity. In their own minds, they had elevated themselves to that level. They thought that when the Messiah came, He'd grab them all and scoop them into places of leadership, but He says, "You don't even belong there. My standard is far beyond yours. His standard is this:

Matthew 5: 48 - Be perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.

Who qualifies? Nobody. Nobody on his own terms, by the effort of human achievement, on a system of self-righteousness, can get into My Kingdom. You can't attain that perfection. Whence does that perfection come? It is imputed to you by faith in Jesus Christ. The perfection that you have to have to be in His Kingdom and can't attain is a gift of His grace. Those in Christ's day and we haven't made it, we need to look to a Redeemer. He offered Himself. **HE** would be the solution to the very problem.

The purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is to convince people of their sinfulness and to show them the utter hopelessness of a religion of human achievement to attain an absolute standard of righteousness.

The Spiritual Credibility Gap - John MacArthur

Perhaps the best summation of the whole Jewish system of His day:

Matthew 15: 9 - You have substituted the commandments of men for the doctrines of God

That defines what they had done, and so He comes to destroy their smug, secure, self-righteous confidence, strip them bare, leave them empty, so that they wind up in a Beatitude mentality: beggars crying for mercy, mourning over their sin, meek before a holy God, hungering and thirsting for a righteousness they must have but can't attain. Then they're ready to receive the gift of forgiving grace and the righteousness imputed to them. That's His purpose the Sermon On The Mount.

E. Six Corruption Corrections

Jesus deconstructs the corrupt traditions 6 times beginning here:

Matthew 5:21 - You have heard that it was said by them of old, but I say unto you . . .

In other words, "Your system has told you this, but I'm telling you this." Six times Jesus lifts the standard back to where it belonged. He is NOT adding to OR taking away from the Old Testament. He is reestablishing the biblical standard against a sub-standard system.

They had thought that because they didn't kill, but He said, "You hate, and that's murder." They didn't have sexual congress but He said, "You commit it in your heart just the same." They had paperwork for divorces, but He said, "When you divorce for other than fornication, you make everyone an adulterer."

Religious legalism is still with us. Take one view on divorce where a church states that divorce is a serious sin. But suddenly in the newspaper you see that a certain prominent member of that church has been granted a divorce. How does it happen? It is a matter of interpretation, and their claim is that they are able to prove that no real marriage had taken place. By subtle arguments they seem to be able to prove anything.

The Sermon On The Mount - D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

He stripped the cloak of self-righteousness put it back where it belonged. He said, "God is concerned with your hearts, not your external system. You are sinners; your hearts are angry and hateful. Your hearts are lustful, and your adulteries are multitudinous through your illegitimate, unbiblical divorces."

The **fourth correction of corruption**: Now He comes to a fourth illustration of their sinfulness in verse 33. Here He says, "You think you're telling the truth, but I'm telling you you're nothing but a group of liars."

Now, whenever the Bible talks about the tongue, or about what we say, we ought to stop and study it, and we ought to master it.

James 1: 26 - If any man can control his tongue, the same is a perfect man

Matthew 12: 34 - For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks

Matthew 15: 18 - Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man

Wouldn't it be nice, in our world, to know the truth about just anything? Wouldn't it be refreshing? The entire system of the world in which we live is built on lying; it's from Satan.

John 8: 44 - You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

All men are born liars. Just look at your little kids; the first thing they want to do when confronted is to lie about it. We have to teach them to tell the truth.

There is such a credibility gap in our world, and we add to it by the fantasy of television and music and movies, which induce us into a fantasy mentality where our basic, unreal approach to everything adds to our overall skepticism. The truth is scarce, and everyone is suspect: business people, salesmen, clerks, lawyers, doctors, advertisers, teachers, reporters, writers, politicians, ***preachers, and even elder/pastors***, with a few exceptions. We shade the truth, we cheat, we exaggerate, we tax-dodge, we fail to keep our promises, we flatter for gain, we betray confidence, we make excuses, we tell half-truths, and white lies.

Nothing is sweeter to the mind than the light of truth.

Cicero

Truth is the highest thing a man may keep.

Chaucer

There is nothing as powerful as truth - often nothing so strange.

Daniel Webster

We will be covering three very important parts as we dig into Matthew 5: 33 - 37

The Principles Of Mosaic Law - what the Old Testament taught about oaths

The Perversion Of Jewish Tradition - what the Jewish system had developed

The Perspective Of Divine Teaching - what Jesus affirms

II. THE PRINCIPLES OF MOSAIC LAW

Matthew 5: 33 - 37 - "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.'

You'll notice that it says in verse 33, "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'" That statement is not included in the Old Testament. It was kind of a ***composite statement of their Jewish tradition and demonstrated the corruption that existed both inside of man AND within the hypocrisies of the Scribes and Pharisees!***

The main intent of these statements was to place a bridle upon man's proneness, as the result of sin and the fall, to lying.

The Sermon On The Mount - D. Martyn Lloyd Jones

Swearing, oaths, and perjury basically all come from the same thing. An oath is simply this: it is making a statement and calling God to witness to the truth of that statement, and invoking a curse from God if, in fact, you're not telling the truth.

We do it; we say, "I swear to God that's the truth." You go into court, and you put your hand on a Bible, and say, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God." When you get married, you say, "Before God and these witnesses, I take you," and you are invoking God as a witness to the veracity of a lifelong vow that you are making.

A. Oaths & Swearing Are Woven Throughout The Scriptures

This had been a part of Jewish society from the earliest part of the Old Testament and continued through the New Testament.

B. God Himself Gives Oaths & Swears

The supreme oath in the Old Testament was, "As the Lord lives," to confirm words. "As I live," says the Lord "I swear by My own name."

Genesis 22:15 - 19 - Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "**By Myself I have sworn**, declares the Lord, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." 19 So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba.

Always two things in the Old Testament: **swearing only in God's name**, and **only for very special occasions**.

It is especially critical since it touches on the third commandment:

Exodus 20: 7 - 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.

Look for a moment at

Hebrews 6: 13 - 18 - For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you." And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

God is talking here about the new covenant that Jeremiah said would come when God would plant His law in the inward parts, the hearts of His people. God was giving this tremendous promise of a new covenant, and wanted to verify the validity of His word. God never tells a lie, but God accommodated Himself to the human mode, the human way, in an oath.

When a man wants to swear, or make an oath, or confirm his word, He will call God, who is the greater, to attest to the truthfulness of it. So men will swear by a greater. When two people have a conflict, and one promises to fulfill something that will resolve the conflict, and in order to end the conflict and secure the confidence of the other person, he affirms the truth by calling God to witness.

So God, who never lies makes an oath. When God makes an oath, He doesn't make an oath by anyone greater than Himself, but what you find throughout the Old Testament is this statement, "'As I live,' says the Lord, 'I will,'" and then comes the statement. In other words, God makes an oath on Himself.

The point is this: ***God does acquiesce to the oath system.*** God realizes men are sinners, and He realizes that they need an affirmation of their truthfulness. They need something fearful to bind them to speak the truth in serious settings. Did you know there are times when God says, "Verily I say to you," and there are times when the Lord said, "Verily, verily I say to you," and someone said to me one time, "When God says, 'Verily, verily,' are those the times He really means it?" When God says, "Verily, verily," He really means it. When He says, "Verily," He means it, and when He doesn't say, "Verily," at all, He means it. Those are merely for emphasis.

That is the reason God makes an oath; not because you have to have an oath from Him to trust Him, but simply to emphatically state the urgency and the singular significance of that which He has said, setting it apart from other things. So we see, then, that an oath is simply calling God to testify to the truth of something.

By the way, in the theocracy of Israel, where God ruled and the people feared God, this was a good way to bind men's word. We live in a society today where people don't keep their word. I read an article not long ago that asked the question, "Do you know how many peace treaties in the history of the world have been broken?" I thought for a minute, and I didn't know. The answer was all of them. Men break their promises, and they need something fearful to hold them to it, so God allowed them to draw His name into it. We still do that today, in certain, very serious settings.

C. God Encourages Oaths / Covenants / Swearing

Did you know there were times in the Old Testament when God asked for an oath to be taken? I don't have time to show you all of them, though I wish I did, but I'll give you a sample.

Numbers 30: 2 - If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth

All oaths were to be in God's name and only at special times, for very serious occasions.

Deuteronomy 6: 13 - You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name

Isaiah 65: 16 - He that swears shall swear by the God of truth

Deuteronomy 10: 20 - You shall fear the LORD your God, Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you cleave, and swear by His name

The only object ever to be sworn by was God. Jeremiah reaches to the Gentiles and says,

Jeremiah 12: 16 - You are to swear by God's name only.

They had a fear of God and when they called God to witness something, it bound their hearts.

Joshua 9: 20 - This we will do, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore

Leviticus 5: 4 - 6 - Or if a person swears thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, in whatever matter a man may speak thoughtlessly with an oath, and it is hidden from him, and then he comes to know it, he will be guilty in one of these. 5 So it shall be when he becomes guilty in one of these, that he shall confess that in which he has sinned. 6 He shall also bring his guilt offering to the Lord for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin.

If you broke an oath to God, you must go and offer a trespass offering, a sacrifice. This was serious business.

Who has a right to ascend into the holy hill, who has a right to worship God, who has a right to enter His presence? David says, "He that swears to his own hurt and changes not."

Psalms 15: 1 - 5 - O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? 2 He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. 3 He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; 4 In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord; **he swears to his own hurt and does not change**; 5 He does not put out his money at interest, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.

D. Examples Of Biblical Oaths

Genesis 24: 2 - 3 - **Abraham** said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Please place your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live"

Genesis 26: 28 - 32 - Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with his adviser Ahuzzath and Phicol the commander of his army. 27 **Isaac** said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?" 28 They said, "We see plainly that the Lord has been with you; so we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, 29 that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.'" 30 Then he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. 31 In the morning they arose early and exchanged oaths; then Isaac sent them away and they departed from him in peace.

Genesis 31: 43 - 55 - Then Laban replied to **Jacob**, "The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? 44 So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me." 45 Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46 Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." So they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. 47 Now Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. 48 Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me this day." Therefore it was named Galeed, 49 and Mizpah, for he said, "May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. 50 If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me." 51 Laban said to Jacob, "Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set

between you and me. 52 This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. 53 The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. 54 Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain. 55 Early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

I Samuel 20:12 - 17 - Then Jonathan said to David, "The Lord, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded out my father about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if there is good feeling toward David, shall I not then send to you and make it known to you? 13 If it please my father to do you harm, may the Lord do so to Jonathan and more also, if I do not make it known to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And may the Lord be with you as He has been with my father. 14 If I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the Lord, that I may not die? 15 You shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." 16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the Lord require it at the hands of David's enemies." 17 Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life.

The greatest men of God, there they are: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jonathan, David, and those are only samples. They covenanted with someone to the truthfulness of their statement by calling God to witness it, and saying, in effect, "God, if I'm telling a lie, You bring Your vengeance on me." When you said, "Before God and these witnesses," at your marriage, that's what you meant - "Lord, I'll stay with this person until I die, or else, You deal with me." That's the way they did it then.

E. Sinners Lie & Distrust

God knows that the basic lying nature of men causes them to distrust each other, and in serious situations, there will be necessary oaths taken.

Matthew 26: 69 - 75 - Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." 70 But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." 71 When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and *said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72 And again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." 73 A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away." 74 Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know the man!" And immediately a rooster crowed. 75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

This isn't profanity, dirty talk, filthy, obscene language. He is saying, "God is my witness! May God curse me, I swear to God I don't know!" That's what he's doing.

Now you know why, when the cock crowed, he wept bitterly. It was bad enough to lie, but worse to confirm your lie by invoking God as a witness to its truthfulness, and then to swear to God and call down a curse from Heaven if you're lying. I'd imagine that all the tears he shed never washed his soul of the memory of those lies.

F. Other Examples Of Rash & Foolish Oaths

We find in the Old Testament many occasions where people took rash oaths. They had no business taking them, they took them at the wrong time for stupid things, and then they were bound by them. You'll remember, for example,

Joshua 9: 3 - 27 - When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, 4 they also acted craftily and set out as envoys, and took worn-out sacks on their donkeys, and wineskins worn-out and torn and mended, 5 and worn-out and patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and had become crumbled. 6 They went to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us." 7 The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you are living within our land; how then shall we make a covenant with you?" 8 But they said to Joshua, "We are your servants." Then Joshua said to them, "Who are you and where do you come from?" 9 They said to him, "Your servants have come from a very far country because of the fame of the Lord your God; for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt, 10 and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and to Og king of Bashan who was at Ashtaroth. 11 So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them and say to them, "We are your servants; now then, make a covenant with us."' 12 This our bread was warm when we took it for our provisions out of our houses on the day that we left to come to you; but now behold, it is dry and has become crumbled. 13 These wineskins which we filled were new, and behold, they are torn; and these our clothes and our sandals are worn out because of the very long journey." 14 So the men of Israel took some of their provisions, and did not ask for the counsel of the Lord. 15 Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them. 16 It came about at the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were neighbors and that they were living within their land. 17 Then the sons of Israel set out and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon and Chephirah and Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim. 18 The sons of Israel did not strike them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord the God of Israel. And the whole congregation grumbled against the leaders. 19 But all the leaders said to the whole congregation, "We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them. 20 This we will do to them, even let them live, so that wrath will not be upon us for the oath which we swore to them." 21 The leaders said to them, "Let them live." So they became hewers of wood and drawers of water for the whole congregation, just as the leaders had spoken to them. 22 Then Joshua called for them and spoke to them, saying, "Why have you deceived us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' when you are living within our land? 23 Now therefore, you are cursed, and you shall never cease being slaves, both hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." 24 So they answered Joshua and said, "Because it was certainly told your servants that the Lord your God had commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; therefore we feared greatly for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. 25 Now behold, we are in your hands; do as it seems good and right in your

sight to do to us.”²⁶ Thus he did to them, and delivered them from the hands of the sons of Israel, and they did not kill them. ²⁷ But Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord, to this day, in the place which He would choose.

Judges 11: 29 - 40 - Now the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon. ³⁰ Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, “If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, ³¹ then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.” ³² So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the Lord gave them into his hand. ³³ He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel. ³⁴ When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had no son or daughter. ³⁵ When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot take it back.” ³⁶ So she said to him, “My father, you have given your word to the Lord; do to me as you have said, since the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon.” ³⁷ She said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions.” ³⁸ Then he said, “Go.” So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. ³⁹ At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, ⁴⁰ that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

I Samuel 14: 24 - 46 - Now the men of Israel were hard-pressed on that day, for Saul had put the people under oath, saying, “Cursed be the man who eats food before evening, and until I have avenged myself on my enemies.” So none of the people tasted food. ²⁵ All the people of the land entered the forest, and there was honey on the ground. ²⁶ When the people entered the forest, behold, there was a flow of honey; but no man put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. ²⁷ But Jonathan had not heard when his father put the people under oath; therefore, he put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened. ²⁸ Then one of the people said, “Your father strictly put the people under oath, saying, ‘Cursed be the man who eats food today.’” And the people were weary. ²⁹ Then Jonathan said, “My father has troubled the land. See now, how my eyes have brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. ³⁰ How much more, if only the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great.” ³¹ They struck among the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very weary. ³² The people rushed greedily upon the spoil, and took sheep and oxen and calves, and slew them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood. ³³ Then they told Saul, saying, “Behold, the people are sinning against the Lord by eating with the blood.” And he said, “You have acted treacherously; roll a great stone to me today.” ³⁴ Saul said, “Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, ‘Each one of you bring me his ox or his sheep, and slaughter it here and eat; and do not sin against the Lord by eating with the blood.’” So all the people that night brought each one his ox with him and slaughtered it

there. 35 And Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first altar that he built to the Lord. 36 Then Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and take spoil among them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you." So the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here." 37 Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You give them into the hand of Israel?" But He did not answer him on that day. 38 Saul said, "Draw near here, all you chiefs of the people, and investigate and see how this sin has happened today. 39 For as the Lord lives, who delivers Israel, though it is in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But not one of all the people answered him. 40 Then he said to all Israel, "You shall be on one side and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you." 41 Therefore, Saul said to the Lord, the God of Israel, "Give a perfect lot." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. 42 Saul said, "Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son." And Jonathan was taken. 43 Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." So Jonathan told him and said, "I indeed tasted a little honey with the end of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am, I must die!" 44 Saul said, "May God do this to me and more also, for you shall surely die, Jonathan." 45 But the people said to Saul, "Must Jonathan die, who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Far from it! As the Lord lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people rescued Jonathan and he did not die. 46 Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.

Matthew 14: 1 - 12 - At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus, 2 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." 3 For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. 4 For John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." 5 Although Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded John as a prophet. 6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod, 7 so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 Having been prompted by her mother, she *said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." 9 Although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. 10 He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. 12 His disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus.

Rash, ridiculous, and stupid oaths with formidable consequences.

III. The Perversion Of Jewish Tradition

Matthew 5: 33 - 37 - "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' 34 But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

Notice two things: a *missing ingredient*, and a *misplaced emphasis*.

A. The Missing Ingredient

The ***missing ingredient*** is this. It says, "You shall not perjure yourself, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord." *The missing ingredient in their system was that it never told them when oaths were proper, so you might say that the missing ingredient lead to frivolous swearing.* They were swearing oaths for every little thing throughout every day. They were swearing by this, and swearing by that, and swearing to this, and swearing to that, all the time swearing oaths indiscriminately, add-libbed, glibly, taking them as a common matter of conversation.

B. The Misplaced Emphasis

The second thing is not only a missing ingredient, but a ***misplaced emphasis***. Notice the phrase, "Unto the Lord." That was their little catch. ***As long as you swore unto the Lord, you had to do it. But if you swore to anything else, you didn't have to.***

Remember when you were a little kid? "I know I told you that, but I had my fingers crossed!" That's exactly what they were doing. That's what they were playing. "If you don't swear to the Lord, you don't have to keep it." So they would swear by Heaven, Earth, Jerusalem, their head, the temple, and just go out and do the very opposite. They didn't have any impunity at all, no sense of guilt, because they didn't swear by the name of the Lord, and all it did was make a network of lies going everywhere.

For example

Leviticus 19: 12 - You shall not swear by My name falsely

The emphasis is that you shouldn't swear falsely. But their emphasis is, "You shouldn't swear by His *name* falsely." See the difference?

Numbers 30: 2 - When a man makes a vow to Jehovah, or swears an oath, he **shall not** break his word

They read it this way, "When a man makes a vow **to Jehovah**, he shall not break his word." Otherwise, you could break it.

You see, if you're going to be righteous on your own, and make yourself righteous, you have to invent a system you can keep. So they wanted to lie because they were liars, and sinners can't help lying, so they just fit their lies into a nice, comfortable category. If you didn't say 'in the Lord's name,' you could lie and it was OK. That's how they twisted the Scriptures.

You might call that evasive swearing. It was frivolous because they did it all the time, and evasive because they circumvented the truth. Watch how Jesus deals with this; I love this. Verse 34. "But I say to you, do not swear at all," which really means, "Stop swearing like that!" You can't swear by Heaven and avoid God; that's God's throne. Or by earth, you can't avoid Him there either - that's His footstool. Or by Jerusalem, you can't avoid Him there, that's the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black."

Now that was before Clairol, we'll have to agree to that. But what He is saying is this: God is in control of your head. Whenever you touch Heaven, you touch God. Whenever you touch earth, you touch God. Touch Jerusalem, touch your head, and you touch God; He is all and in all. You

can' avoid God; there aren't any little compartments where you can lie over here and speak the truth over here. ***There is no sacred and secular; there is no way to evade it. You can't tell the truth in church and lie in your business; you can't separate those categories.*** God is all and in all, and whenever you vow a vow and swear to tell the truth, you invoke God.

The trouble with the Pharisees and scribes was that their attitude was legalistic. They were more concerned about the letter of the law than the spirit. As long as they could persuade themselves that they were keeping the letter of the law they were perfectly happy.

The Sermon On The Mount - D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

This thing had become so complex that Jesus had to deal with it later, and He gave them another good shot

Matthew 23: 16 - 23 - "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.' 17 You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? 18 And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' 19 You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? 20 Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. 21 And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. 22 And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. 23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

Whew! That's straight stuff.

Isn't it amazing what a system they had invented? They were playing footsie with all these objects, and they wanted to con someone by saying, "I swear by the altar in the holy temple." Jesus says, "You're liars to the core, and your system only betrays the reality of your rotten hearts."

Here is a great eternal truth: light cannot be divided into compartments in some of which God is involved, and in others of which He is not involved. There cannot be one kind of language in the church and another kind of language in the home. There cannot be one kind of standard of conduct in the church and another standard of conduct in the business world. The fact is that God does not need to be invited into certain departments of life and kept out of others; He is everywhere, all through life, and every activity of life. He hears not only the words which are spoken in His name, He hears all words, and there cannot be any such thing as a form of words which evades bringing God into any transaction. We will regard all promises as sacred if we remember that all promises are made in the presence of God.

William Barclay

The truth knows no degrees, no grades, only black and white. Half-truths are whole lies. The Bible says that you are not to lie. There are six things the Lord hates, even seven. The first is a proud look and the second is a lying tongue.

Proverbs 12: 22 - Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord

You see, only the wicked engage in lying,

Psalm 58: 3 - The wicked go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies

Jeremiah 9: 5 - 6 - Everyone deceives his neighbor and does not speak the truth, they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity. 6 "Your dwelling is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know Me," declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 23: 25 - 32 - "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, 'I had a dream, I had a dream!' 26 How long? Is there anything in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, even these prophets of the deception of their own heart, 27 who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal? 28 The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?" declares the Lord. 29 "Is not My word like fire?" declares the Lord, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock? 30 Therefore behold, I am against the prophets," declares the Lord, "who steal My words from each other. 31 Behold, I am against the prophets," declares the Lord, "who use their tongues and declare, 'The Lord declares.' 32 Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams," declares the Lord, "and related them and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit," declares the Lord.

I Timothy 4: 1 - 3 - But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, 3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. - (*apostates lie*)

What is the end of all liars? All liars shall find their part in the lake of fire, which burns forever

Revelation 21: 5 - 8 - And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He *said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." 6 Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. 7 He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. 8 But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and *all liars*, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Jesus is saying, "You can't be in My Kingdom if you're indicted on all these counts of lying." They were liars; they couldn't have been in their Kingdom on their own, they would have to have those lies washed in the blood of Christ to get into His Kingdom. The sons of the Kingdom hate lies;

Psalm 119: 29 - Remove me from the way of lying

Psalm 119: 163 - I hate and abhor lying

Psalm 120: 2 - Deliver my soul, O Lord, from a lying tongue and deceiving lips

So our Lord destroys their system, tears their elaborate cloak of cover, and reveals the truth.

IV. THE PERSPECTIVE OF DIVINE TEACHING

From the principles of Mosaic law, and the perversion of Jewish tradition, we come to the perspective of divine teaching. What is Jesus teaching here? Beloved, I believe He is simply reasserting the Old Testament standard. What was it? Two things govern oaths:

- a. don't use them frivolously, but only for special occasions; and
- b. only swear by the name of God. He deals with the second one first, in verse 34.

Matthew 5: 33 - 37 - "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.'³⁴ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,³⁵ or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING.³⁶ Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.³⁷ But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

N.B. These exact words are NOT to be found anywhere in the Old Testament, which again is a proof that He was not dealing with the Mosaic law but with the Pharisaical perversion of it.

"Swear not at all by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or by your head." In other words, He is not forbidding swearing totally, like the Quakers have taught. If God took an oath, and if God reiterated that oath in Hebrews 6 in the new covenant, and if Jesus, in His trial, was confronted, and they said to Him, "I adjure you by the living God," and at that point, His silence was broken and He answered. Why? Because He had been called into oath; Jesus responded to an oath.

It was under oath that Jesus declared Himself to be the Christ, the Son of God (Matt. 26: 63 - 64). In this world of dishonesty and deception the oath is at time necessary to add solemnity and the guarantee of reliability to an important affirmation or promise. What we have here is the condemnation of the flippant, profane, uncalled for, and often hypocritical oath, used in order to make an impression and to spice daily conversation. Over against that evil Jesus commends simple truthfulness in thought, word and deed.

If the Apostle Paul, in

Romans 9: 1 - I speak the truth in Christ; I lie not. The Holy Spirit bears me witness

If Paul takes oaths in the epistles (and that's only one of many), if Jesus takes an oath at His trial, if God takes an oath in Hebrews 6, and if Jesus says in Matthew 5:17, "I came not to destroy the law," and in verse 19, "No one is to break the least of these commandments," then believe me, there is still a place for those kind of oaths.

So He is not removing it all, He is saying, "Swear not at all in the manner to which you have become accustomed, evasively trying to cover your lies, because it is God who touches every place in His universe." Secondly, He says, "You'd better keep it for solemn occasions. You'd better not do it as a way of life; that just shows you come from the evil one." Verse 37, "But let your communication," and He uses the simplest Greek word for conversation that there is, logos. Let your routine conversation, your daily communication, be just, "Yes, yes," and, "No, no." If it's any more than that, you simply show the evil source of your heart.

What He's saying is, "Keep it for those times when it is needful, when invoking God's name is a right thing because of the seriousness of the matter. But on other occasions, in your normal logos," and by the way, that word is translated in the New Testament probably 50 times as 'common speech,' just the word 'speech.' "Let your normal speech be that 'yes' means 'yes,' and 'no' means 'no.' That way, you don't have to swear by anything, because your word is your bond." So Jesus is merely reiterating what I said at the beginning, the two Old Testament standards.

That's what God wants. There are times in our lives when we can take a vow. I remember in my own heart, after the accident that almost took my life, when I committed my life to the Lord for ministry. I said, "Lord, I promise You my life, to preach Your Word until I die. I covenant with You." I take that as a very solemn oath, and I feel, were I to step out from under that oath, God would have the right to chasten me, to avenge me, because I made Him a promise. That is a promise I'll never break. When I married my wife, I made a promise before God, and called Him to witness that promise that I would spend my life with my wife. I'll keep that promise; she knows that I'll keep that promise. That makes marriage a lot easier, when you both know you'll keep that promise until you die.

Those are some solemn occasions in my life when I made those promises. That's not for everyday conversation. If my conversation is so suspect every day that I have to make vows to God that I'm telling the truth, then there is something wrong in my life, right? You should be able to trust what I say. What is this message saying to you this morning?

If you're a non-Christian, what it's saying to you is that you may think you're OK, but you're not. God is a holy God; to be in His Kingdom, He demands righteousness. You can't be righteous. You may think you tell the truth, but you shade it; you cheat, you dodge here and there, you tell half-truths, you make excuses, you betray a confidence. We all have that lying in us from our sin nature, and Jesus is saying to them and to you today, "If you see it there and know it hasn't been dealt with, you need to come to Jesus Christ, who alone can give you the righteousness you must have but can't gain on your own." if you come and put your faith in Jesus Christ, then Christ will

give you His righteousness and you'll be as perfect as God is perfect, as His righteousness is imputed to you. By simply receiving Christ, His righteousness becomes yours.

What does it say to Christians? If you're a Christian and a child of the King, you should live like one. He is the Father of truth, so when we open our mouths, the truth ought to come out. On those solemn occasions when we vow a vow to God, we ought to keep that vow. On those other occasions, in the daily matters of life, our 'yes' should be 'yes,' and our 'no' should be 'no.' Anything more than that reveals an evil, untrustworthy heart.

Beloved, let's start a new movement in the world, a truth movement. Wouldn't it be great? Let's keep the vows we've made that demanded an oath before God; let's keep them for our lifetimes. In our daily conversation, let's speak the truth, the real truth, and live it. Let's be an oasis in the midst of the evil of this world of lying.

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