

Radiant Church, January 31, 2016
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**A Disciple's Heart...Delights in Integrity
Matthew 5:33-37**

This passage is number four of six illustrations Jesus used to describe a "righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees."

Matthew 5:33-37 *Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply "Yes" or "No"; anything more that this comes from evil.*

Here is a prayer given by the Chaplain of the Kansas State Senate some years ago:

*Omniscient Father:
Help us to know who is telling the truth. One side tells us one thing, and the other just the opposite.
And if neither side is telling the truth, we would like to know that, too.
And if each side is telling half the truth give us the wisdom to put the right halves together.
In Jesus' name, Amen.*

That's maybe a desperate prayer, but it's also cynicism. We all have it.
Maybe why we don't entirely trust Wikipedia, or the network news.

"Perjury," something invented in western legal culture is the crime in court of not telling the truth, even under oath.

The OT held a tight line on telling the truth; and making vows was a way of saying "I'm telling you the truth about what I'm going to do"

Jesus summarizes it in verse 33 - *Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'*

Two things:

1. Vows were encouraged. Deuteronomy 10:20 says, *you shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear.*
2. What was discouraged was making a vow, swearing to do something, and then not doing it. **Leviticus 19:12** *You shall not swear by my name falsely and so profane the name of your God; I am the Lord.*

Deuteronomy 23:21 *If you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will surely require it of you.*

In summary, vows were encouraged...but once made were not to be broken for any reason.

The taking of oaths and vows was part of life for Jesus' contemporaries. The two kinds of promises were distinct. An oath was concerned with ones future actions. A vow was related to objects and their use.

However, the teachers of the law in the first century taught that it was ok if you used word "tricks" while making oaths or vows. One major trick was to swear by something other than God, and thus would not be held to it.

They used these little tricks to exonerate themselves later if they changed their mind or had perhaps fudged the truth a little.

They had a formula, a sort of fingers crossed behind their back way of avoiding being dishonest. They completely avoided the spirit of God's command of truthful transparency in all circumstances.

Matthew 23:16-22 *Woe to you, blind guides, who say, If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold in the temple, he is bound to his oath. You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath. You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.*

Compare a similar statement in **James 5:12** *But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no so that you may not fall under condemnation.*

Here in Matthew 5, Jesus is saying; don't speak in such a way that you need to "swear." Do what you say and say what you mean.

Jesus rules out making vows for any reason...because whether vowed on God's name or by something else, God stands behind everything. All of creation is God's, and we cannot refer to any part of creation without it referring ultimately to God, Himself.

Don't make promises you won't keep or keep certain facts hidden. Your motives, words and actions are all done in full view of God.

Simply speak the truth without exception; exceptions come from evil intent. Don't exaggerate, leave info out or lead someone to the wrong conclusion.

God desires truthfulness that comes from a heart that honors Him. God wants His children to be known for keeping their word.

Here we see Jesus confronting hearts that do not delight in integrity but wiggle out of promises while defending their righteousness.

Mathew 15:3-9 *And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother' and 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the work of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*

Think about all this for a second: why oaths in the first place?
Because we humans at heart are liars.

Jesus calls us away from cheap oaths and promises, and toward radical truthfulness.

What does this mean for us as the church?

1. It's never fun or easy, but to tell someone else the truth about our sin or their sin is truth-telling. We naturally run from that kind of confrontation. But we're called to be different than the world we live in.
2. If we see one of us deceiving another one of us, or deceiving someone outside of our church, we have to bring up the truth of that also.
3. We have to encourage each other to be true to our promises, our wedding vows, and even the little promises to call or get together that we each make to each other all the time.
4. Even if we say we'll pray for someone, we need to stop and take the time to pray to God on that person's behalf.

5. We need to admit our dishonesty if we deep down know that what we say we're doing in God's Name is really motivated by what praise or glory we ourselves might gain. We can be guilty of doing the right thing for the wrong reasons, and that makes it all wrong. Integrity is not skin-deep; integrity is the measure of our actions put up against our motives.
6. We are called to see our truth-telling as the outward sign of our inward condition. **Matthew 12:34b-37** *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*

If your stomach sinks when you realize that you have deceived someone, or if you realize you are a sloppy promise-keeper; that is the Holy Spirit. Praise him because he is at work in your heart. Thank him, that he is not content to let sin reside any longer in you.

Praise Jesus because he is always faithful and true, even when we are not. Thank God because he always does what is good and right and perfect. Thank him for when he says we are now "clean" in him, we are, because he says so. That is the gospel, and the gospel is the radical truthfulness of who He is and what He's done, giving us a new identity in His truth, and calling us to live new lives in light of His truth.

If your conscience isn't easily bothered by deceit, or feels like it's a small victory gained when you pull something over on someone, stop and reconsider why you find joy in this. Ask the Holy Spirit why you are so numb to this?

Ask the Spirit to show you how God's command for truthfulness and transparency is better.

Thank Jesus because he will never mislead you or change his mind. Praise God, he never changes and he keeps his promises.

Praise God because he has been honest and given us full disclosure on Himself, on us and our sin, and on His grace to us accomplished by Jesus on the cross and past the grave.

Matthew 5:37 *Let what you say be simply "Yes" or "No"; anything more that this comes from evil.*