

Life Group Lesson

Oaths – Matthew 5:33-37

August 1, 2010

***"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."* – Matthew 5:33-37 NIV**

Jesus said to the Pharisees and scribes in Matthew 5:33-37, *"You think you're telling the truth, but I'm telling you you're nothing but a group of liars."* Jesus had already summed up all of Chapter 5 in verse 20, *"Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will in no case enter the kingdom of heaven."* The moral standard of the scribes and Pharisees is too low. Jesus was raising the bar and here is attacking their lies.

Ok, who hasn't lied? Everyone has. What is the point of telling everyone what they already knew they were doing? The entire purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is to convince people of their sinfulness and to show them the utter hopelessness in religion and self righteousness. The Pharisees had done this. They were only concerned about the external manifestations. If they didn't physically or technically break a Law, they considered themselves righteous. They created tons of laws and loopholes to get out of things like anger, lust and lying. Jesus summed it up in **Matthew 15:9**, ***"You have substituted the commandments of men for the doctrines of God."***

Oaths in the ancient world were extremely important. They were almost used as common as currency. The Jews would swear to all kinds of things, serious and trivial. Oaths were statements to a person's integrity. Oaths were used in paying of debts and marriage. Most of the Jews would make elaborate oaths to testify to the truth of their words and their commitment by claiming the importance of the Temple, or their house and goods. They would swear by everything and anything - except God and His standards. They measured their word and integrity by others, not to the standards of God.

Here is how bad their warped reasoning was – they knew they shouldn't take the name of the Lord in vain. It was a Law – one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:7). They thought by swearing by other things, if they broke their word, it was not sin and ok. After all, they didn't technically use God's name in the oath. The problem was that their oaths became more and more elaborate. Their integrity became worse and worse, and those oaths quickly became broken and worthless. They would say anything to get ahead. They would promise whatever to get their way. Their words had become worthless. They were so crooked that they couldn't see their lack of integrity. They only saw their attempt to elude sin by not using God's name. If you don't use God's name, then it isn't sin. As long as God's name was not in it, the oath could be broken, and people were free of responsibility to their word and commitment.

They were fence-straddlers. They wanted to know how far they could stretch the truth before it was actually a lie. They would go as far as possible (in their reasoning) and stop just shy of the act of sin. Or so they thought. Jesus said again that righteousness was internal. Jesus calls us to be true to our word as a testimony to our Faith in Him. We are not to be worldly with our words or integrity or drag His good name and defile it with feeble, easily retracted words. We must be people of integrity of the heart, words and actions.

4 Main Points

1. You have heard it said: Jesus is summarizing the OT Law concerning oaths, and is bringing the people back to God's standards. He challenges their trivial disregard to the law (Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12). The Law forbids irreverent oaths, especially the misuse of God's name! If you used God's name, you had better follow through. Jesus is simply stating that we should tell the truth at all times. The Pharisees were acting like kids who crossed their fingers behind their back when they said something. As long as the fingers were crossed they were exempt from keeping their word and from sin.

2. You shall not swear falsely: Oaths were originally designed to hold people to their word; however, the oaths over time became clever devices to cover truth and integrity with hidden agendas and deceit. Jesus, here, seems to do away with oaths. He puts the focus on the truth, not on manipulation or trying to find loopholes to get out of responsibility. A life of integrity is essential for the person who claims Christ as Lord of their life!

When a Christian, who has the Spirit of God living inside them, makes a statement (true or false), you represent the Lord. It doesn't matter if you say "in God's name" or not. You are His representative. God is not a liar. We must represent him with consistent truthfulness. Everything in the universe belongs to God - even the number of hairs on your head are under His sovereignty. He's in charge of their color.

3. Let your word be yes. The Pharisees masked their lying hearts with oaths. The oaths were only OK if they were worded correctly. The rest were not binding. Oaths became a way to escape honesty. All you had to do was swear an oath by something other than God or not even take an oath at all. Dishonesty was then acceptable. This tradition is still in place in the legal system, as in many US courts, you have to swear, by raising your right hand, and placing your hand on a Bible (most courts no longer use the Bible now), to tell the truth before you give testimony. And, if you ever seen a trial, you can easily see that this oath is not taken seriously!

Oaths were solemn declarations that invoked God as a witness to our promises and dealings (Genesis 24:1-9; Ezra 10:5; Hebrews 6:13-17). Jesus is not banning all oaths. He is simply saying we should make very sure that whatever we do is honest, especially since God is our witness. Oaths were not the problem. God Himself swears oaths (Genesis. 9:9-11; Luke 1:68; 73; Hebrews 6:17). Jesus submits to an oath (Matthew 26:63). Paul and the early Christians took oaths (Romans 1:9; Galatians 1:20; 2 Corinthians 1:23). An angel of God swore an oath (Revelation 10:5-7). We take positive oaths – marriage vows, oaths to live our lives for the Lord. Not taking an oath is not the main point Jesus is stressing here. Misusing His name was sin. Lying was sin. Dishonesty and deception were the problems. Whatever "tool" used to lie was not the main problem or evil. It was the lying and deception. Oaths were the vehicle for lies and deception. .

4. Truth is commanded by God: (Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:11; Psalm 5:9; 12:1-4; 15:1-3; 52:2-5; Jeremiah 9:3-6; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 22:15) We have no excuse to skirt around truth, play games, or manipulate justice with creative legal games! We cannot push our agenda over and against God's truth and Word! When we engage in deceit and lies, we are following in the footsteps of Satan, not Christ (John 8:44). God requires us to take our word and deeds seriously, as this is a reflection of our relationship to Him. We must never vow or take an oath to do anything that is contrary to what is in Scripture, in Christ's character, or cause someone else to violate God's Word! Everything we do as a child of God must be in integrity, truthfulness, and honesty, as we are not only representing Him, He is living in us!

Questions:

1. Are you a man or woman of your word? So, when you say "yes," or "no," people take it as fact? If you answered "yes," what causes them to see integrity in you? If you answered "no," what are the reasons?
2. When you say you will do something, is it fact, as good as done? If not, why? What causes you or someone else to say one thing, yet do another?
3. Jesus calls us to be true to our word as a testimony to our faith in Him. What has been your response to this call at school, work, home, with friends, with family, and so on?
4. Why did Jesus have to bring the people back to God's standards, challenging their trivial disregard to God's standards and oaths?
5. There is nothing complex about truth. If you seek to make it complex, you have no regard to truth or to the God of truth! So, why do we seek to make it complex, seeking loopholes to escape responsibility and righteousness?
6. Why would consistent integrity be essential for the person who claims Christ as Lord of his/her life?
7. Why are finding loopholes so appealing to people in the law profession, (or any profession) to release their clients from responsibility? What is their justification? When would it be right to do so?
8. What do you think of this statement: "As a Christian you have the Spirit of God living in you. Thus, when you make a statement, either false or true, He is implicitly represented in it."
9. How would you define integrity? How do you practice integrity? What would or could block you from being one of, or acting with, integrity?
10. Everything in the universe belongs to God. Since He is God, Creator, and Sustainer, He has that right and authority. So, why would material things motivate you, or others, to deceive and manipulate situations to your favor over and against God's standards?

More scriptures on lying:

- Colossians 3:9 - Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices,
- Colossians 3:10 - and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.
- Leviticus 19:12 "Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord."
- Proverbs 25:18 - Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is the man who gives false testimony against his neighbor.
- Proverbs 14:5 - A truthful witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies.
- Proverbs 19:5 - A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free.
- Proverbs 19:9 - A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will perish.
- Proverbs 24:28 - Do not testify against your neighbor without cause, or use your lips to deceive.
- Proverbs 12:19 - Truthful lips endure for ever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.
- Revelation 21:8 - But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.