

## "God's Standards for Oaths"

### Matthew 5:33-37

**Introduction:** Tonight in our study of the Sermon on the Mount we have arrived at a passage that desperately needs to be proclaimed loudly in our society. Not only does it need to be proclaimed loudly but it also needs to be heard and practiced.

You see we live in a day and age when it is very hard to know who is telling the truth and who is not telling the truth. Many people today will tell you what you want to hear but only for the purpose of personal gain at any cost. You hear politicians today stand up and make a statement about their opponent and then their opponent stands up and denies everything that was said. Now that tells us that one of them is lying.

Often people will make a promise to get what they desire but never carry out that which they promised. I invite people to church all the time and I often get the promise they will come but they never do show up. They made the promise and when Sunday came they never once thought of fulfilling their promise.

Lying has become a habit in our society and it is not only tolerated but it is accepted as a way of life for you see many people see it as necessary if you are going to make it through this world. The Bible has a great deal to say concerning those who lie and the Bible also tells of very severe consequences for those who lie.

### Proverbs 6:16-19

*<sup>16</sup> These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him:*

*<sup>17</sup> A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,*

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<sup>18</sup> *An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief,*

<sup>19</sup> *A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.*

### **Proverbs 12:22**

<sup>22</sup> *Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.*

### **Hosea 4:1-3**

*Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.*

<sup>2</sup> *By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.*

<sup>3</sup> *Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.*

### **John 8:44**

<sup>44</sup> *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

### **Revelation 21:8**

<sup>8</sup> *But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have*

*their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*

### **Revelation 22:14-15**

*<sup>14</sup> Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*

*<sup>15</sup> For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.*

All of these verses help us to see that God hates the sin of lying and it will be judged by God. Now we also need to understand that lying is not just looking someone in the eye and telling them false information but it is also breaking promises and commitments that we have made with others.

In the passage before us tonight Jesus will address the subject being truthful.

### **I. The Teaching of the Rabbis (5:33)**

#### **Notice Matthew 5:33**

In this verse Jesus refers to the teaching of the rabbis of His day but the statement that He quotes here which was taught by the rabbis is not a statement that is found in the Old Testament. It was a statement that was taught in their Jewish traditions and at the same time it was based on Old Testament practice.

There are 2 words in this verse that I want to draw your attention to:

1. **Forswear** - This word means to "perjure" which means to give a false testimony or to lie.

2. **Oaths** - An oath is simply making a promise and calling on God to be a witness and to bring a curse if the "oath" is not carried out. This word actually means "to bind something" therefore an oath is binding meaning that we are to be bound to the promise to be sure and to be true to our word. To call on God to be a Witness is for the purpose of strengthening the commitment by knowing there are consequences when the oath is broken.

Now on the surface the teaching of the rabbis looked really good but if we examine their teaching we will see there were 2 major problems.

1. **There was an omission in their teaching.**

They rightly taught that anyone who made an oath was to be true to that oath but they never taught when it was correct to enter into an oath. In other words the religious leaders were going around swearing by this or that on a regular basis.

In the Old Testament an oath was to be entered into only on special occasions. There was nothing wrong with entering into an oath but it was not to be done recklessly as the religious leaders were doing. When the oath was entered into it was to be taken seriously.

### **Numbers 30:2**

*<sup>2</sup> If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.*

### **Ecclesiastes 5:5**

*<sup>4</sup> When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.*

<sup>5</sup> *Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.*

<sup>6</sup> *Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?*

So, there was nothing wrong with entering into an oath but it was not to be done recklessly. A marriage would be an example of the proper place for an oath or a vow where it is right to call on God as a witness. The religious leaders were very reckless with their oaths and were teaching others to do the same.

## **2. There was a loop hole in their teaching.**

Now, let us remember that the rabbis were often deceptive with their teaching and they were guilty of not taking what they taught far enough. Let us notice 5:33 again.

Pay very close attention to the words "***but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths***". This phrase contains the loop hole that they believed allowed them to break many of the oaths they were entering. Let me explain. These religious leaders were going about swearing by the temple, the altar, the offering, their own heads and whatever else they could swear by. They would swear by everything. But they were careful not to swear by the Lord only on certain occasions. Their teaching was this, as long as a man or a woman did not swear by God they were not bound to keep their promise. They were swearing by many things and then they would never keep their promise but if they swore by God's name then they believed they were bound to their oath or vow.

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It would be the same as me entering into an oath with you and then when I did not hold up my end of the oath and you called me out I would simply say, "It did not count because I had my fingers crossed."

They would neglect to fulfill their promises and then when called out they would say, "I did not swear in the Lord's name so therefore I am not bound."

This was the loop hole they had designed. They were again making their own rules and regulations because they could not keep God's. All of this was done to convince themselves they were self righteous.

They were guilty of twisting several verses in the Old Testament.

### **Leviticus 19:12**

*<sup>12</sup> And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.*

### **Numbers 30:2**

*<sup>2</sup> If a man vow a vow **unto the LORD**, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.*

The emphasis in both of these verses is not to swear falsely or if you make a promise be sure to keep it. The religious leaders would look at these verses and conclude that a promise only had to be kept if it made in the Lord's name.

## **II. The Teaching of Jesus (5:34-37)**

### **Notice 5:34-36**

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Jesus said, "Swear not at all." In other words He was telling them to stop what they were doing. Then He went on to tell them there was no place they could go and there was nothing they could swear on that did not include God. Let me show you what He was saying.

*<sup>34</sup> But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:[He is there and is aware of the oath]*

*<sup>35</sup> Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool:[He is omnipresent on earth and aware of your oath] neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.[this is His city]*

*<sup>36</sup> Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.[God is even in control of the hairs on our head].*

The bottom line was God knew every oath they made and they were accountable for every promise they made. There is no way to divide life in the sense that in one area you are accountable to God but in another area it is ok to lie. That is what Jesus was saying here.

Notice the words of William Barclay on this thought:

*"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*

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*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."*

The religious leaders had divided life into compartments. In one compartment they were accountable to God but in another compartment they believed it was ok to lie if it brought them personal gain. It would be the same as a believer who believes that while he is around God's people he must be truthful but at his secular work he believes it is ok to break an oath or a promise because that is just what everyone else does. He believes it is necessary evil in order to get ahead. That is the very lifestyle that Jesus is condemning here.

Jesus later addressed this very topic again because it was out of hand in His day as it is in our day also.

#### **Notice Matthew 23:16-22**

*<sup>16</sup> Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!*

*<sup>17</sup> Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?*

*<sup>18</sup> And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.*

*<sup>19</sup> Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?*

*<sup>20</sup> Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.*

*<sup>21</sup> And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.*

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*<sup>22</sup> And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.*

### **Notice 5:37**

Here in this verse Jesus makes it clear how it should be. If we say yes to something then be true to that and if we say no to something let us be true to that also.

***"for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil"*** - This means any variance from this reveals the wickedness of the heart.

### **Notice James 5:12**

*<sup>12</sup> But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.*

### **Conclusion:**

Jesus is not saying that we should never swear at all. Some people teach that it is a sin to swear an oath but that is not what He is saying here. Jesus was addressing the very practice of the religious leaders here in the way they had become so careless with their oaths. There are times it is right to swear and to invoke God as a witness (Examples: Testifying in a court of law, entering into a marriage covenant). What Jesus is saying here has a twofold application because He was speaking to both the saved and the unsaved.

1. **To the unsaved** - He was showing them how far short they were of earning a place in the Kingdom. They were all guilty of lying. He was stripping them of their self righteousness so they would see their true condition and turn to Him for salvation.

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2. **To the believer** - He is making it clear to us that as children of the Kingdom we are to be people of our word. We are to think before we make a promise and when we make the promise we are to be sure we are true to that promise.