

Sermon On the Mount Series
"Keep Your Word"
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Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptures are from the NKJV Bible.

We have examined the teachings of Jesus concerning murder, adultery, and divorce. Now we will consider His teaching on the "Swearing of Oaths."

Matthew 5:33-37 "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.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."

The Teaching of the Law

Leviticus 19:12 "And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord."

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."

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth."

- In each case the emphasis is on truthfulness and faithfulness.
- A person must be truthful when he swears an oath.
- A person must be faithful in keeping the oath.

Truthfulness "IN THE HEART"

Psalm 15:1b-2 "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart..."

Psalm 24:3-4 "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully."

The Lack of Truth "IN THE HEART"

Hosea 4:1-2 "Hear the word of the Lord, You children of Israel, For the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy Or knowledge of God in the

land. By swearing and lying, Killing and stealing and committing adultery, They break all restraint, With bloodshed upon bloodshed.”

The teaching of the Law is clear: vows to the Lord should be kept, and truthfulness in all things was expected.

The Traditional Interpretation and Application

From Jesus’ comments in verses 34-36, it appears the emphasis had shifted from being truthful in all things to honoring only those vows sworn “to the Lord.” In their application of the Law they justified the use of meaningless vows.

The Scribes and Pharisees Made Arbitrary Distinctions Between Their Vows.

Matthew 23:16-19 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?”

- “I swear by heaven.”
- “I swear by the throne of God.”
- “I swear...by the earth...by Jerusalem...by the altar...by the temple...by my head...”

Jesus Exposed Their Hypocrisy in Making Arbitrary Distinctions.

Matthew 23:20-22 “Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.”

- We cannot swear by these things without involving God.
- Heaven is the throne of God.
- Earth is His footstool.
- Only God can change our hair color (without the use of dyes).

THEREFORE ANY OATH IS AN OATH “TO THE LORD.”

Jesus Taught the Original Intent of the Law was “Truthfulness in the Heart.”

- Let your “yes” mean “yes.”
- Let your “no” mean “no.”
- Any more than this is evil, and would be contrary to speaking “truth in his heart.”

Zechariah 8:16-19 “These are the things you shall do: Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,’ Says the Lord.”

Psalms 51:6 "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom."

Making Oaths in Judicial Matters

Can Christians swear oaths under certain conditions?

Jesus qualified the statement "swear not at all" to refer to flippant and hypocritical oaths commonly voiced by the people.

- Oaths used to make impressions
- Oaths used to spice daily conversations but were never intended to be kept

Jesus Was Willing to Answer Under Oath Before the Sanhedrin Court.

Matthew 26:63-64 "But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, 'I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!' Jesus said to him, 'It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.'"

Other Scriptures to consider:

God has sworn an oath to us. Hebrews 6:16-18

Paul made solemn oaths in his epistles. 2 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 1:20

An angel of God swore an oath. Revelation 10:5-7

Conclusion:

1. The Scribes and Pharisees were spicing up their statements with vows and oaths in order to be believed.
2. Citizens of the Kingdom of God are to be so truthful that people know that their simple "yes" means "yes" and their "no" means "no."
3. Disciples of Christ are to be truthful and trustworthy so that it is not necessary for them to swear oaths or have to say "I promise" to be trusted.

Challenge:

Can others count on you to "Keep Your Word?"

When you say you will do something, is it as good as done?