

**The Sermon on the Mount  
Radical Truthfulness (Part 1)  
Matthew 5:33-37**

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I invite you to turn with me again to the Sermon the Mount, Matthew 5, as we work our way through this magnificent sermon of our Lord's. You may be surprised, but I enjoy occasionally a mystery and I like Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie's detective. At the end of a dramatized version of one of Agatha Christie's short stories, Hercule Poirot has an interesting interchange with his side-kick, Hastings. In the mystery that they have just solved, a beautiful young woman had disguised herself as an old, ugly nurse. And after the mystery was solved and the criminal had been apprehended, Poirot was enjoying, you know, the victory, and Hastings was still deeply troubled about something. And Poirot asked him what it was exactly that was troubling him, and Hastings answered this way. He said, "There she was, a glamorous young woman, but with a bit of a wig and a few bits of makeup she could transform herself into that dowdy hag of a nurse. Poirot said, "Yes, it was indeed very well done, Hastings." Hastings went on to say, "But if a woman can do that one way, she can do it the other. Then where are you?" Poirot's classic response was, "At the beginning of wisdom, mon ami." The point that Poirot was making with a touch of humor was that the world as we know it is characterized by dishonesty. That is a fact of life on this planet. Lying has reached epidemic proportions in our society, from subtle deceit to outright lying. You see examples of it in every area of life. Look at it on the global scale. Governments sign treaties with other countries that they have absolutely no intention of keeping. It's all posturing. In our own country, politicians make promise after promise to get our votes, some of which they have no plans to keep, and most of which they will not keep out of political expediency. George Stephanopoulos, former adviser to President Bill Clinton said in a television interview, "The President has kept all the promises he intended to keep." Think about that one. I can promise you, by the way, that was simply not just true of President Clinton. That's a reality in our public life.

The last few years, there have been politicians and famous sports figures and others, who make bold lies even while they are under oath, committing perjury, apparently without the slightest twinge of conscience. The world of commerce is filled with dishonesty. There is deliberate false advertising in order to make a sale. There are deceptive marketing practices. That bag of potato chips isn't just filled with air in order to keep the chips that in there from breaking, but to communicate to you that you are getting more than you're actually receiving. Over the last couple of years, we have watched contract negotiations for two major sports leagues play out on

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the national stage. And those negotiations have been filled with misleading statements, and in some cases, outright lies.

The catastrophic sin of lying doesn't remain on the global stage or on the national stage, or on even the stage of commerce, but unfortunately it intrudes even into the home. Couples stand at their weddings and make solemn promises of life-long commitments and then several years later, they find an excuse to break them. And those who remain married struggle with honesty as well. Surveys tell us that close to 30% of married couples lie to their spouses about how much money they spend and why. Everyday life and normal conversations are filled with rampant dishonesty. Let's just admit to one another right here at the beginning that not a single one of us is exempt from this indictment. There isn't a single one of us who isn't tempted regularly to lie. We're talking to someone, having a good conversation, and suddenly, we find ourselves saying something that's not the whole truth. It's either a flat contradiction of the truth or it's a half-truth, or there's a subtle shading of the truth meant to mislead that person in some way. And somehow, we convince ourselves that although we're not really telling the truth, we're not lying, either. But in reality, listen carefully, from a Biblical perspective, in reality, every single word that comes out of our mouths is either the truth or it is a lie. I John 2:21 John writes, "No lie is of the truth." He's making a large statement. In a particular context it's applied, but he's saying that truth and lies are mutually exclusive. Everything we say is either the truth or it's a lie. This is a huge problem on this planet. Where did it start?

Well, the first lie that was ever made in the universe came from the lips of Satan, as he energized the serpent. In Genesis 3:4, the serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die." Satan is the ultimate source of all lying. When you and I lie, ultimately, that can be traced back to Satan himself. That's why in John 8, our Lord called Satan "the father of lies." The first human lie came in Genesis 4, right after the fall. It was the bold-faced lie that Cain made to God Himself. In Genesis 4:9, the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel, your brother," whom, of course, Cain had just killed, and Cain said to God, imagine the audacity of this – Cain says to God, "I do not know."

Since that time, lying has become characteristic of all fallen human beings. Over and over again, the Scripture makes this point. Let me just give you a few examples. Psalm 52:3: "You love falsehood more than speaking what is right." In Psalm 58:3, speaking of evil rulers and all humanity, the psalmist writes: "The wicked are estranged from the womb. These who speak lies (*that's the wicked*) go astray from birth." To be wicked is to speak lies. To be a sinner is to be a liar, and it happens from the womb, from birth. You don't have to teach a child how to lie. Jeremiah chapter 9:5, as Jeremiah indicts Israel of his time, he says, "Everyone deceives his neighbor and does not speak the truth. They have taught their tongue to speak lies." In Romans 1:29, as Paul indicts all of humanity for our sins, one of the sins he lists is this. He says, "They are filled with all deceit." In Romans 3:13, as he begins to indict every single human being,

listen to what Paul says about every single one of us before Christ. He says, “Their throat is an open grave. With their tongues, they keep on deceiving.” It is absolutely rampant, characteristic of all fallen human beings. Even though it is so common that not a single one of us is exempt from it, it is still something that God absolutely hates.

Listen to what God’s perspective is about the sin of lying, something we take lightly. We watch television programs or movies or sitcoms, and we watch people lie and we laugh about those lies. But here’s God’s perspective: Psalm 5:6 “You destroy those who speak falsehood’ The Lord abhors the man of deceit.” Proverbs 6:16: “There are six things the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to him,” and number two on the list is a lying tongue. Proverbs 12:22 “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.” In other words, it’s something God utterly abhors. He hates it. He finds it repulsive. In fact, lying is a damning sin. Proverbs 12:19 says, “Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment.” Proverbs 19:5: “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape.” Proverbs 19:9: “He who tells lies will perish.”

Let me show you this, this thing comes back up at the very end of Scripture. Turn to Revelation 21, Revelation 21. John, the apostle is talking about the New Heaven and the New Earth, and in that context, he says something very disturbing. Revelation 21:7. He says,

He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (*Those are true believers. And then he says, verse 8:*) But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters,” (*wow, what a list, and then he adds this*) and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Look down in verse 27 of the same chapter. Speaking of that Heavenly city that is going to be prepared in the future, he says, verse 27: “Nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.” He says the person who as a pattern and habit of life practices lying, is not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life and will never come into that city. Chapter 22:15, again speaking of that Heavenly Jerusalem, that city that God will make, celestial city, he says, “outside of it are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters and everyone, (*without exception*) who loves and practices lying.” This is a very, very serious sin. God abhors it, He hates it. He finds it repulsive. It is contrary to His very nature, who is truth. And those who practice it will never be in His presence.

In fact, when a person comes to truly know God, for the first time, truth begins to really matter to them. Listen to David in Psalm 101:7: “He who practices deceit shall not dwell within My

house. He who speaks falsehood shall not maintain his position before Me.” Psalm 119: 163: “I hate and despise falsehood.” Proverbs 13:5: “A righteous man hates falsehood.” In Proverbs 30:8, Agur prays, “Keep deception and lies far from me.” Although lying and dishonesty is an inherent part of fallen human nature, the nature that each of us inherited from our parents, our Lord wants something else for us. And in the next paragraph that we come to in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us as His disciples to what Kent Hughes calls, “radical truthfulness, radical truthfulness.”

Let’s look at it together. Go back with me now to Matthew 5:33. Let’s see what our Lord has to say about this issue of truthfulness.

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord,’ but I say to you, make no oath at all, either by Heaven, for it’s the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it’s the city of the great king. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be Yes, yes, or No, no; anything beyond these is of evil.

Now, just to remind you of the context, this is the fourth illustration that Jesus gives of how the righteousness of His true disciples surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. In the first illustration, in verses 21 to 26, Jesus shows the relationship between anger and the Sixth Commandment against murder. In the second illustration, in verses 27 to 30, He shows the relationship between lust and the Seventh Commandment against adultery. In the third illustration that we finished up last week in verses 31 to 32, He shows the relationship between unbiblical divorce and the Seventh Commandment against adultery.

Here in the fourth illustration, the one we come to today, as we unfold it and unpack it, I think you’ll see this. He shows us here the relationship between truthfulness in our speech and both the Third Commandment against taking God’s name in vain, and the Ninth Commandment against bearing false witness. The point that Jesus is making in the text we just read together is that He demands radical truthfulness from His disciples. Now, as He has done with the other illustrations we’ve already looked at, Jesus begins here by looking at the scribes’ flawed interpretation of the Old Testament command, and in this case, of course, specifically the command for truthfulness.

Before we look at the text in detail, I need to first define a couple of key terms that are used. You’ll notice the word in verse 33, “vow” and in verse 34, “oath.” Those are key words that this week and next, you need to understand. Those are good English translations of the Greek word, so let’s just make sure we know what the English words, “vow” and “oath,” mean.

The word “vow” is defined by the shorter Oxford dictionary as “a solemn promise made to God.” Obviously, we can make some human vows. We talk about the wedding vows, etc. But by and large, in biblical terminology, a vow is a solemn promise made to God. That’s a vow. “Oath” is defined this way in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, and again, this is the same concept in the Greek word: “A solemn declaration as to the truth of something, often invoking God, a deity, etc. So you see the difference? A vow is a solemn promise made to God. An oath is where you swear something is true, usually against a deity, or sometimes against your own life. An oath is really a form of self-cursing. It’s asking God to testify that what you’re saying is the truth, with the understanding that if it’s not true, you’re asking God, inviting God, to bring catastrophe into your life. In the old days of jurisprudence, a juror would get up to give testimony in the court room. He would lay his hand on the Bible, and he would say, “I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth, (*what?*) so help me God.” That was both an invitation for God to assist him in telling the truth and it was an invitation for God to bring desperate circumstances into his life if he violated the truth. That’s an oath.

So with the understanding of those two words, we need to consider, then, how the scribes had misunderstood what the Old Testament teaches specifically about this issue of truthfulness. So first of all, they misinterpreted what the Old Testament has to say about truthfulness by focusing primarily on perjury, on perjury. Look at verse 33: “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, you shall not make false vows.” Now, I need to emphasize again, Jesus is not disagreeing with the Old Testament here. That’s the reason for that unusual expression, “you have heard that the ancients were told.” He’s not disagreeing with the Old Testament. As with the other examples we’ve looked at, he is disagreeing with the scribes’ and rabbis’ interpretation of the Old Testament. We’ve already seen that in the previous examples. This is very clear if you look down in verse 43 in the final illustration He uses. He says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor’ (*that’s the Old Testament*) and hate your enemy,’ (*that’s not the Old Testament*). So clearly, He is taking issue here, not with the Old Testament itself, but with what the scribes and Pharisees have made the Old Testament say. And this is clear, by the way, because the quotation in verse 33 can’t be found in the Old Testament. It is not a direct quote from the Old Testament. Instead, just as they did with divorce, they have taken two different ideas found in different places in the Old Testament, and they have placed them together as their own summary of the teaching of Scripture.

Now, let’s look at what they taught. Look at the first expression, “You shall not make false vows.” That’s one Greek word. It’s used only two other places in Scripture. It’s used in the Septuagint. That’s the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Bible that was used in the First Century. It’s used there in Zechariah 5:3, where it’s translated “to swear” in the idea of a court room, and it means “to swear falsely, to perjure oneself.” In I Timothy 1:10, the word occurs and there it is translated, “perjurers.” The leading Greek lexicon defines this word as “To swear that something is true when one knows it is false, to swear falsely, to perjure oneself.”

This is what they were teaching. This was their summary of the Old Testament teaching about truthfulness. “Just don’t perjure yourself.” Now, where did they get that? Well, it’s likely that they got it by combining two of the Ten Commandments together into one idea. In Exodus 20:7, the Third Commandment, you remember the Third Command, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” The Ninth Commandment says, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” In other words, you’re not to lie about your neighbor on the stand. What the rabbis did was take those two different commands and join them together and say they’re essentially addressing the same thing. They had decided the primary focus of those two commandments was not taking God’s name in vain when you were under oath by bearing false witness, by perjuring yourself. In other words, they had made truthfulness really about avoiding perjury. And if you did that, you were okay, God was happy. Now, think about the practical ramifications of this in everyday life. Their misinterpretation led the Jewish people in everyday life, in the promises they made, in the vows they made, even in the oaths they made daily, weren’t really serious and didn’t really have to be kept. And so by their misinterpretation, by making the focus on perjury, which is the first half of verse 33, they had distorted God’s true intention for truthfulness.

There’s a second misinterpretation Jesus goes on to identify in the second half of verse 33; they focused on vows made to God. Look at the second half of verse 33: “Again, you’ve heard the ancients were told you shall not make false vows, but you shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.” This was their summary of truthfulness. Basically, don’t perjure yourself, and keep the vows you make to God. The Greek word, by the way, “fulfill” has the idea of paying what is due. It sees the vow that you make to God as a debt that must be paid. And they were essentially right. Here’s what I want you to get. They were essentially right in the content of what they taught. I mean, after all, Psalm 50:14, says “Pay your vows to the Most High.” Ecclesiastes 5:4 says: “When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow.” So they were right in the content of what they taught, but they were wrong in the emphasis of what they taught. Because according to the scribes’ emphasis, the only time truthfulness really mattered was in what you said to God or before God. You invoked God’s name. Vows made to Him. Now, their interpretation came from distorting some Old Testament texts, and I want to show you those texts. Go back with me to Leviticus 19. I want you to see the difference that just a little bit of emphasis can make – Leviticus 19:11. Moses told the Children of Israel the words he heard from our Lord on Mount Sinai:

You shall not steal nor deal falsely, (*now watch this*) nor shall you lie to one another.  
(Verse 12) You shall not swear falsely by My Name so as to profane the name of your God, I am the Lord.

Now clearly, the intention of that passage is that we are not to lie to one another. We are not to swear falsely. But the scribes emphasize something different. Let me read it to you again; here

was their emphasis, verse 12: “You shall not swear falsely *by My Name* so as to profane the name of your God.” So it wasn’t about swearing falsely. The emphasis was about when you invoke God’s name. Let me show you another example. Go over to Numbers 30, Numbers 30:2. This whole chapter is about vows and Moses begins in verse 2 by saying, “If a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.” Now, clearly, the emphasis of that statement is in the context of making a vow to or before the Lord, yes, that’s true. But clearly, the emphasis here is that he’s not to violate his word. Whatever proceeds out of his mouth, in this context pertaining to God, but the implication is in any context, even pertaining to man, do what you say. Here’s the scribes’ emphasis. They said, “Well, look at what it says. ‘If a man makes a vow *to the Lord* then he needs to do all that he said.’” Turn over to Deuteronomy 23, you’ll see one last passage here to show you this emphasis and how it distorted everything. Deuteronomy 23:21 – again, the context is vows to the Lord:

When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you. However, if you decide not to vow, it would not be sin in you.” (*You don’t have to make a vow--but, verse 23*) You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised.

Now again, the large emphasis in these texts is, whatever goes out of your lips is to be truth. In the context, it’s being spoken to God, and therefore, you’re to do it. But, the emphasis is on truthfulness, but again, the scribes distorted what this passage was emphasizing. Let me read it as they would have read it: “When you make a vow *to the Lord your God* you shall not delay to pay it. What I want you to see is that what those texts actually taught was that God’s people must not take oaths lightly, they must not use God’s name in a light or frivolous way, they must not break their vows, but above all, they are to be utterly truthful in what comes out of their mouths.

Now that you understand the distorted emphasis of the scribes and Pharisees, go back to Matthew 5 and look at it again. And now you’ll pick up what they’re saying. In the first half of verse 33, they’re saying “don’t perjure yourself.” In the second half of verse 33, they say, “and you shall fulfill, you shall pay your vows *to the Lord*.” Now, the problem with their emphasis was this; they had actually become convinced that a lie between people was not that important to God. Now, if God’s name were invoked, then suddenly, His dignity and His honor were at stake. William Hendricksen puts it like this: “In their understanding, if the affirmation which a man made was a lie, or if the promise was never even meant to be kept, that was not so bad, as long as he had not sworn to the Lord.” This was the mind-set. You know, when we think again of the scribes and Pharisees, we tend to think of, of the kinds of legalists we have in our day, where they are fastidious in every way, but not so. When it came to divorce, as we have seen the last

several weeks, when it comes to truthfulness, they played fast and loose with the truth and excused it.

Now, there was a third way that the scribes misinterpreted the Old Testament command about truthfulness, not only making it primarily about perjury or vows made to God, but thirdly, they limited the requirements to truthfulness to only those human oaths and promises that were made in God's name. So, they said it did pertain to things between humans, but only if you invoked God's name. And that's what you have in the examples in verses 34 to 36. Notice, you have oaths by Heaven, (verse 35) oaths by the earth, (verse 36) oaths by your head. Understand that the examples Jesus cites here, and we're going to look at them in more detail next week, are not chosen randomly or just sort of picked out of the air. The scribes and the Pharisees actually made these kinds of fine distinctions in their teaching. In fact, there's an entire tractate of the Jewish Mishnah that's devoted to teaching about which oaths are binding, are somewhat binding, and which oaths are not binding at all, can be disregarded entirely. For example, one rabbi taught that, and I'm not making this up, "if you swear *by* Jerusalem, you're not bound to keep your vow." But if you swore *toward* Jerusalem, you are bound to keep your vow. They explicitly taught that oaths made in God's name or in direct reference to something that belongs to God had to be kept. On the other hand, if in your statement, you didn't mention God or any of His holy things, then that oath you were swearing to, you were not bound to keep. The Talmud expressly teaches that if you were to make an oath using the expression, "by Heaven," or "by the earth," whatever promises you made would not be binding in any way. Maimonides, a 12<sup>th</sup> century Jewish rabbi, was commenting on the Talmud, which predated him by many, many centuries, and he wrote this about what it teaches about vows, "If any one swears by Heaven, by the earth, by the sun, etc., even though it be the intention of the swearer, under these words to swear by Him who created these things, (*in other words, if I say, I swear by Heaven or I swear by earth, or I swear by the sun and what I really mean is I'm swearing by God, he says*) if you don't use God's name, this is not an oath"

So do you see the situation in the situation in the first century? John Broadus, I think, described it well when he said it this way, "The Jews were remarkable for their frequent use of oaths in ordinary conversation, swearing by the temple, by the altar, by the lamb, by the dishes, by the Law, by Moses, by the prophets, by the life of the rabbis, as well as the oaths here mentioned, and countless others, and reckoning such oaths to be nothing." Now, you get another picture of this in our Lord's words in the sermon on Tuesday of the Passion Week. Go to Matthew 23. Jesus is standing on the Temple Mount, the scribes and Pharisees are gathered around. There are perhaps hundreds of thousands of people gathered for the Passover who were standing around, and in that context, Jesus launches into the scribes and Pharisees. He tells them they are children of hell, he tells them they are snakes, they are hypocrites, but in the middle of this, He takes issue with their truthfulness. Look at verse 16:



Woe to you blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple (*huh,*) that’s nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple (*well*) he is obligated. You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And whoever swears by the altar (*oh,*) that’s nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on the altar, (*well*) he’s obligated.” “You blind men,” (*Jesus says*) “which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears by both the altar and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

Jesus says, I’m going to have nothing to do with your equivocating schemes, and He just launches into their lack of truthfulness.

This was such a common problem, by the way, this whole perspective, that when Jewish people came to faith in Christ in the first century, they continued to struggle with this. And so in the very first New Testament epistle written, James, he has to address this. In James, 5:12, He says, “But above all my brethren, do not swear, either by Heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be your yes and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.” Now, none of us here, (I don’t think) are walking around swearing by earth, or by Heaven. We’re not doing this. So what we need to do is step back and look at what really is going on here, because what’s really going on is still going on today. Why exactly did the Jews fill their everyday conversations with those kinds of oaths? What was really going on? They were trying to cover their lies and dishonesty. God gave the Old Testament laws about truthfulness in one’s communication to limit our overwhelming tendency and temptation to lie. What the Old Testament was really teaching at its heart on this issue was that we must, as God’s people, be people of our word, be people who keep our promises. The real problem was that the scribes and Pharisees had lying, dishonest hearts, and they were trying to justify their dishonesty and their lack of truthfulness, and at the same time, avoid on the one hand, legal guilt before the courts. They could appeal to this sophisticated set of regulations about vows, and on the other hand, I think they really thought they could avoid God’s judgment as well. It’s kind of the adult version of, “Well, I crossed my fingers before I said it, so I’m not really accountable for it.” What Jesus was telling his disciples that day on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and what He is telling us is that He, as our Lord, will not tolerate such lying and dishonesty. Those who belong to Him, must, unlike the scribes and Pharisees, be pursuing radical truthfulness. So let’s ask the obvious question. We’re not walking around swearing by the temple or by the altar, so what are we doing that’s like what they were doing, that our Lord was taking issue with? What are common forms that this temptation to untruthfulness takes today? Let me give you several to think about.

Number one: lying. This is simply denying what we know to be true, directly contradicting what we know to be true. Now, what are some of the ways, let me give you some examples that as Christians, we can be tempted to lie, to contradict what we know to be true. Here's an example – asking someone in your home or workplace to say you're not there because you don't want to take the call. It's one thing to say you're unavailable, that may be true. But to say, "I'm not there," when you're standing right there by the person, that is a lie. Telling your teacher that you read a book that you merely skimmed. Making up some excuse to cover yourself, or you might get in trouble. Making foolish promises that you have no intention of keeping. Calling in to work sick when you're not. Those are contradicting what you know to be true, and those are just a few examples. But those are the kinds of ways that our culture has taught us and our own fallenness has taught us, "it's okay." We're playing these games, and we think God's playing along with us. Listen, Jesus demands *radical* truthfulness.

Another way this expresses itself, there are other ways, of course, that lying expresses itself in life, but another way that untruthfulness expresses itself, in addition to lying, is slander, slander. This is lying about or exaggerating the faults of others. It may be repeating an unsubstantiated negative comment about someone. That's otherwise known as gossip. Texting or posting something that is either a deception or an outright lie about someone else intended to hurt them because of some perceived hurt they have done to you. Slander – it's a form of lying, it's a form of untruthfulness.

A third expression is deception. This is really at the heart of lying, isn't it? A definition of deception would be trying to convince someone to accept as true what we know to be false – that's deception. We know it to be false. We don't want to outright deny the truth, but we want to so shape the truth as to communicate something that we know isn't true. We want that person to come to a conclusion that is contrary to the truth – that's deception. This is really at the heart of lying. John Ruskin writes: "The essence of lying is in deception, not in words. A lie may be told in silence by equivocation, by the accent on a syllable. And all these kinds of lies are worse and baser by many degrees than a lie plainly worded, so that no form of blinded conscience is so far sunk, than that which comforts itself for having deceived, because the deception was by gesture or silence instead of by words." So how do we deceive? Well, one way we deceive is by hypocrisy. We're going to get to that in Matthew 6. That's when we try to make other people think we're more spiritual than we know ourselves to be. Flattering, giving someone an insincere compliment in order to get something from them, either for them to like us, or because we have some other ulterior motive. Pretending to befriend someone for our own advantage. Posting something that is an exaggeration of some accomplishment. Exaggerating your past accomplishments. You've all heard the expression, "The older I get, the better I was?" Inflating your education or other credentials on a job application. Leading someone to believe that you agree with them, by silence, when in fact, you disagree. Forging your parents' signature on a

note to the school. Plagiarizing someone else's material. Intentionally misleading a parent or teacher who has asked you a direct question. It's deception, it's a lie, it's untruth.

A fourth form this takes is cheating. It's lying in order to get something from someone else or for yourself. For example, here are a few examples – misreporting your income tax on your tax return. Taking tax deductions that are not legitimate. Misrepresenting the quality of something you're selling to a potential buyer, Misreporting the purchase price of a car to save on taxes. Keeping the extra change that a cashier mistakenly gives you. Inflating your office expense accounts records. Charging personal expenses to your expense account. Misrepresenting the quality of your product or its actual cost, in order to make more sales. Failing to actually work the hours you were paid to work. By the way, this is a huge problem. A management survey reported 80% of employees do this and the average amount of time every week that an employee says he worked or she worked that they didn't is almost four hours a week. Working on unapproved personal projects on company time or equipment. My wife was telling me she read an article this week that one of the biggest users of corporations' internet bandwidth is the forwarding of humorous videos, many of them of cats, which I don't really get, but whatever. Cheating on a test or assignment . Those are some of the ways we cheat.

A fifth way that we are characterized by untruthfulness is by false accusations. I had a friend in California who was in law enforcement. He told me that law enforcement spends more time today than ever before clearing the innocent of false charges, charges that are made out of spite and revenge and hatefulness. The Ninth Commandment says, "Don't bear false witness."

A sixth way this expresses itself is in false profession – claiming to be a Christian while living a life characterized by sin. We don't normally think of that as lying, but God couldn't be clearer. Look at 1 John with me. 1 John 1: 6: "If we are saying, (*John writes*) that we have fellowship with God, (*in other words, we know God, we have a relationship with God*) and yet we are walking in the darkness (*as a pattern of life, we are walking in sin that characterizes our lives*) we lie and do not practice the truth." Look down in Chapter 2:4. The one who is saying I've come to know Him, I know God, and does not keep His commandments, God says, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. He has added yet another sin to his list by making a false profession of something that he does not possess. If you claim to be a Christian, and yet you're living a life that is characterized by sin, that you refuse to acknowledge, you refuse to repent of, you refuse to turn from, God says you're a liar. And as we already saw from Revelation, there will be no liars in Heaven.

You know, when I studied this passage this week, and as you've heard it this morning, this passage again does to us what all of these illustrations have done. Our Lord's teaching here about truthfulness absolutely demolishes all self-righteousness. Because there isn't one of us in this room that could stand before Him at the judgment, if this is the standard. Not one of us. It

drives us back to the gospel, where we find forgiveness for our lying and our dishonesty. Our only hope of not being sentenced to hell, just for our lying alone, is found in the only person who never lied, who never slandered, who never deceived, who never cheated, who never made false accusations, and who never made a false profession of faith and trust in God, that he didn't possess. And our hope is found in turning from our sins and placing our faith in Jesus Christ alone as Lord and Savior. There we find forgiveness. And the only reason we find forgiveness for our lying is that on the cross, when Jesus died, He died suffering God's just wrath against every single sin, including every single lie, every single deception, every single slander, for every person who will ever believe. Listen, your only hope is to run, not walk, from your life of dishonesty and lying, to Jesus Christ. Because if you die before that happens, or Christ returns before that happens, someday you will stand before God, and this will be the standard, not the sliding human scale of acceptability. For those of us who are in Christ, our Lord's teaching here is a call to radical truthfulness. Jesus says I won't accept all of those games the scribes and Pharisees play. For My own, you need to be truthful, because you follow One who is the truth. Let's pray together.

Our Father, as we have found ourselves constantly in studying this sermon, we are humbled by what we have studied today. Lord, not a single one of us could ever stand before you and have any hope because of the sin of lying, except for Jesus Christ. We thank you, oh God, that you have given us life, that you have given us a hatred for lying and a love for the truth. Father, help us to live that out practically in daily life by Your grace. Give us the strength by Your spirit, to be people who, as a habit of life, are pursuing radical truthfulness. Don't let us be content to be swept along with the culture right into hell.

And Father, I pray for the person, undoubtedly more than one here this morning, whom Your Spirit has spoken to through this message about the control that lying has in their lives. Father, I pray that You would strip away the excuses, strip away the crutches, Lord don't let them lean and depend, go back to some childhood profession of faith, some prayer they prayed. Lord, strip that away. Help them to see themselves today as You see them. And Lord, seeing themselves as You see them, may they run to Jesus Christ and find in Him forgiveness and life and a future. We pray it in His name and for His glory, amen.