

**The Sermon on the Mount
Radical Truthfulness (Part 2)
Matthew 5:33-37**

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Well, I invite you to turn to Matthew 5 as we continue to work our way through the illustrations Christ is giving in this sermon of how our righteousness as His disciples surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. It surpasses it in that it's righteousness that begins in the heart. It's obedience from the heart and in the heart that then flows out to the life. And specifically, we began last week and we'll finish today looking at the illustration Jesus gives about how His true disciples deal with the issue of honesty in our speech, truthfulness in what we say.

Dr. Robert S. Feldman is the dean of the College of Social Behavioral Sciences at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and he has, as part of his career as a secular psychologist, spent time studying the issue of lying. We wouldn't agree with some of his ultimate conclusions and certainly not his ethical and spiritual perspective of the issue, but some of the research is interesting. Dr. Feldman writes this: "Most of the time, people lie because it's socially expedient. We lie habitually because it helps conversation flow more smoothly while telling the truth can make it stall and stutter." Feldman's research suggests that in an average ten minute discussion – they actually did a study of it. In an average ten minute discussion with strangers or new acquaintances, sixty percent of Americans will lie at least three times – in ten minutes with strangers or new acquaintances. His research indicates that men and women are equally prone to lying, but for different reasons. Men, he says, typically lie to make themselves look better. Men, he says, are more likely to say I ran five miles this morning when they really ran 3.8 miles. Women are more likely to lie if they think it will make another person feel good. By the way, that's not entirely true because I happened to come across another statistic this week, a poll on a popular women's website that found that sixty-eight percent of women lied about their weight on their driver's license. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands. I'm not going there, but it is a huge issue.

Many in our culture say that frankly we just shouldn't worry about lying. It's just not that big of an issue. In fact, some would even go so far as to say it is essential to the evolutionary process – that just as there are animals that cloak themselves, that some find a way to deceive others to survive, that's exactly why there is the presence of lying and deception among people. You may think I'm making that up, but let me share with you from his popular book, *Why We Lie: The Evolutionary Roots of Deception and the Unconscious Mind*, what David Smith writes. Listen to

this: “Deceit is the Cinderella of human nature; essential to our humanity but disowned by its perpetrators at every turn. It is normal, natural and pervasive. It is not, as popular opinion would have it, reducible to mental illness or moral failure. Human society is a network of lies and deceptions that would collapse under the weight of too much honesty. We are all natural born liars. Lies just slip out of us as easily as breathing or sweating.” Well, he’s right about the pervasive part anyway. It is everywhere.

This past week, I sat down with my girls to watch an old movie. I mean, how bad can that be, right? We sat down and watched Cary Grant’s movie ‘His Girl Friday’ and it’s a very entertaining movie, but I was struck as I sat there and watching it with how many lies, dozens of lies, absolutely permeate this movie. Why? Because it is intended to be a reflection of the human condition. That is absolutely true.

Although lying is an inherent part of the fallen human nature that each of us has, Jesus calls us in Matthew 5, He calls us as His disciples to what Kent Hughes calls “radical truthfulness”. Let’s read it again. We’re studying this paragraph, Matthew 5, beginning in verse 33.

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’s the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is 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.

In this fourth illustration that our Lord gives here of how the righteousness of His true disciples surpasses that external righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, He deals with the issue of truthfulness. Just to remind you, He began, and we looked at this last week, with the scribes’ flawed interpretation of the Old Testament command for truthfulness. He shows us how their teaching was wrong. They were wrong in several ways. First of all, and again, this is what we covered last week, they focused primarily on the issue of perjury. Verse 33 begins: “you’ve heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows...’ The Greek verb that’s used in that expression is used of perjury, of lying under oath. And so they said when the Old Testament talks about truthfulness, this is the primary thing it’s talking about.

Secondarily, they, they interpreted what the Old Testament had to say about truthfulness by focusing on the vows made to God. They said it’s not so much about what you talk about with other people, what you say to other people. It’s specifically, the Old Testament is, concerned with the vows you make to God. And you see this in the second half of verse 33: “but you shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.”

The third way they misinterpreted the Old Testament statements about truthfulness is that they limited those statements and what it says about truthfulness to only those human oaths and promises that are made in God's name. They said, 'Okay. If you want to talk about truthfulness at a human level and out of the courtroom, then the ones that really matter are the ones that you make when you invoke God's name.' So essentially what the rabbis taught was this: if you avoid perjury and if you keep the vows that you make to God and those human vows that you make with other people that are made in God's name – if you keep those, then you've met essentially the Old Testament requirement for truthfulness. You're okay. God thinks you're fine.

Jesus steps into that misunderstanding, that misinterpretation, and He tells His disciples that what the scribes and Pharisees taught them about truthfulness was a gross misinterpretation of both the Old Testament law and the heart of God. So today, we come to the second part of this passage, verse 34 to 37. It's Jesus' correct interpretation of the Old Testament command for truthfulness, Jesus' correct interpretation. Now these verses as well as the ones down in verses 39 to 41, 42 are some of the most misunderstood verses in all the New Testament; in fact, we could even say in all the Bible.

And so before we look at what Jesus means here in our text, I think it's very important for us to first step back and make sure we know what Jesus doesn't mean. So let's look at what Jesus doesn't mean. First of all, Jesus doesn't mean by what He's teaching here that we must never take a legal oath. We must never go into a courtroom and swear under oath to tell the truth. That's not what Jesus is teaching. The Anabaptists of the Reformation period, the Moravians and the Quakers have all taught that what Jesus says here is that we must never take an oath of any kind, including in a courtroom. George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, was sentenced to prison for refusing to swear over a Bible that he would tell the truth. And here's what he said: "You have given me a book here to kiss and to swear on; and this book (which you have given me to kiss) says, 'Kiss the Son'; and the Son says in this book, 'Swear not at all.'" He comes right back to this text and he says I shouldn't be taking an oath in this courtroom because Jesus said don't do it. Is that what Jesus meant? Absolutely not. Jesus cannot be saying that for a couple of reasons. Reason #1 is that the Old Testament law demanded oaths in similar judicial circumstances and situations. First of all, the Old Testament commanded that you should swear in God's name. Deuteronomy 6:13 "You shall fear only the Lord your God; you shall worship Him and swear by His name." If an oath is required, don't swear in the name of some false god. Swear in the name of the true God.

But then when it came to judicial proceedings, courtroom-type proceedings, oaths were required as well by the Old Testament law. I won't take the time to take you there, but if you want to, you can look later at Numbers 5:19-22. There was a system put in place in a legal setting to determine whether an accusation of adultery was true or not. And in that setting, the person who was accused of adultery was required to go under oath in that legal setting. So understand then

that the Law of Moses didn't forbid all oaths. It only forbade false or irreverent oaths. It actually required some oaths in a judicial-type setting.

But I think an even stronger argument is Jesus' own example. Go to Matthew 26. I want to show you what happens in Matthew 26. Jesus is in His Jewish trial before His crucifixion. He is being testified against with false testimony. Verse 62 of Matthew 26: "The high priest (Caiaphas) stood up and said to Jesus, 'Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?' (This is a courtroom.) But Jesus kept silent. (Jesus, to this point, has said nothing in His own defense. He's not responded to the charges. He's been entirely silent.) And so the high priest said to Him (Caiaphas says to Jesus), 'I adjure You by the living God...'" Notice the marginal reference in your New American Standard Bible for that expression: "I charge You under oath by the living God." That is exactly what's happening here. In first century Jewish jurisprudence, this was the expression to put somebody under oath. He's saying, 'I'm now putting you under oath, Jesus.' And he goes on to say: "I adjure You (or put You under oath) by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Messiah, the Son of God." Are You claiming to be Israel's long awaited Messiah, the Son of God? Now Jesus for the first time speaks up. The moment He is put under oath, He responds. "Jesus said to him, 'You have said it...'" Mark makes it even clearer. Mark says: "Jesus said, 'Yes, I am.'" You have said it. Yes, I am. So Jesus here in His own trial willingly speaks up under oath. He allows Himself to be put under oath. He doesn't say, 'Listen, I should never take an oath. You shouldn't be asking me to do that. That's wrong. God doesn't allow that.' He allows Himself to be put under oath and speaks up at that moment. So the Biblical data then does not support the interpretation that Jesus is not allowing us to take an oath in a courtroom. Based on the Old Testament law and based on our Lord's own example, it is completely legitimate for Christians to submit to a legal oath such as that in a courtroom. So He doesn't mean that.

The second thing Jesus does not mean is that we must never make a vow to God. He's not saying that you should never make a vow to God. Now don't misunderstand. Deuteronomy 23:21 says that you don't have to make a vow to God. It's not a sin not to make a vow to God. But when you come to the New Testament, you might say, 'Well, maybe Jesus is saying that from that point on, no vows should be made to God.' Well, the problem with that comes in Acts 21. And again, I'm not going to have you turn there, but you can jot down the reference and look at it and study it on your own - Acts 21:17-26. There, you remember, Paul comes back to Jerusalem from his missionary journeys and James and the leaders of the Jerusalem church are very concerned because word has gotten out among the Jewish believers in Jerusalem that Paul has taught the Gentiles to disregard God's law, which was partially true and partially false. He in no way denigrated the law of God, but he followed through on what had been taught from the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. And so they say, 'Listen. To alleviate the concerns of those Jewish brothers, here's what we want you to do. There are some men among us, Christian men, who are under a Nazirite vow. We want you to enter that vow with them and that will show that you ultimately do

have respect for the Scripture, for the law.’ And so Paul in Acts 21 apparently entered into a Nazirite vow along with other Jewish Christians. Now although it was as a Jewish man that Paul took a Jewish vow, what I want you to see is he still did that after Jesus issued this command. So clearly Jesus did not outlaw all vows made to God because if He did, then Paul sinned in Acts 21 in taking that vow.

A third thing that Jesus doesn’t mean is that we must never make a solemn oath to confirm our word using God’s name. We must never take a solemn oath to confirm our word using God’s name. Godly people throughout the Bible do this. Abraham in Genesis 14 takes an oath that he will not take any of the spoils of war from the king of Sodom. He’s sworn by God’s name. In Genesis 21, Abimelech makes Abram swear by God that he will not deal falsely with him or with any of his descendants, but will treat them well. In Genesis 24, Abraham makes his servant Eliezer swear by God that he will not take a bride for his son from among the Canaanites, but will go and seek one from his native land. Jacob makes Joseph swear in Genesis 47, and it’s repeated again in Genesis 50, that when the Jewish people leave Egypt, they will not leave Jacob’s body there, but they’ll take it and bury it in the Promised Land.

When you come to the New Testament, you see that same kind of language used from time to time. Paul uses it. For example in Romans 1:9, Paul says, “God is my witness as to how unceasingly I made mention of you in my prayers.” He calls God to witness. In II Corinthians 1:23, “I call God to witness upon my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth.” In other words, I didn’t come to Corinth again for your sake, out of concern for you. And I swear by God, I call God to witness upon my soul that that’s true. It’s interesting though to me that God Himself swears. He takes an oath. He does so in Genesis 22 to Abraham. He swears by Himself. In Psalm 89, He swears by Himself to David. In Psalm 110, He swears by Himself to Christ.

This may surprise you, but did you know that God has taken an oath about His promises to you? This is one of my favorite passages. Go over to Hebrews 6. Hebrews 6:13. Of course, when God wants to take an oath, what does He take an oath by? Nothing’s greater than He is so He takes an oath by Himself. Verse 13, Hebrews 6: “when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself...” Verse 16: “For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath is given as confirmation to make an end of every dispute (now watch verse 17). In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise...” Who’s that? Who are the ultimate heirs of the salvation promise made to Abraham? We are. This is us. We are participants of that promise, Galatians 3 says, “that God was preaching the gospel to Abraham when He said, ‘In you all nations of the earth will be blessed.’” We are the participants of that. We are the heirs of that promise. God, desiring to show to us “the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.” What I want you to see is that

God took an oath. God Himself took an oath to do what He said He would do. Think about that for a moment. God has made promises to you in Christ and He has sworn against His own name to fulfill those promises. That's incredible. So God Himself does this. So therefore, this is not what Christ is saying we shouldn't do. Lloyd-Jones puts it like this: "The conclusion we can come to based upon Scripture is that while oath-taking must be restricted, there are certain solemn, vital occasions when it is right – when it is not only legitimate, but actually adds solemnity and authority which nothing else can give." Just like we saw with divorce, oaths are a concession because of human sin. Why do people make oaths? Men make oaths because there is the general perspective and expectation that their words cannot be trusted. A.M. Hunter says, "Oaths arise because men are so often liars." So oaths have a place. In light of that reality, Jesus is not saying that His followers may never take a legal oath, may never make a vow to God or may never make a solemn oath to confirm their word. So that's what Jesus does not mean.

Let's look at what Jesus does mean because, in this passage, Jesus gives us two commands and each of those commands is followed by a reason. Notice the first command at the beginning of verse 34: "But I say to you, make no oath at all..." And then that's followed by a reason beginning in the middle of verse 34 down through verse 36. The second command comes in verse 37: "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'" and then the reason is given in the second half of verse 37. So then what you have in this passage are two basic commands or correctives of what the scribes taught.

Let's look at them together. The first one we could summarize like this: all oaths and vows are serious and must not be made frivolously or frequently. All oaths and vows are solemn and serious and must not be made frivolously or frequently. Look at verse 34. Here's the first command: "But I say to you, make no oath at all..." Now let me remind you what making an oath is. We defined it last time, but it is to make a solemn declaration of the truth of something or of your commitment to do something invoking usually God or His name. That's an oath. This is true or I will do this by God.

Again now, when Jesus says make no oath at all, we have to reconcile that statement with the rest of what God says in His Word. And as we have already seen, there are legitimate circumstances in which to make an oath or a vow. So Jesus is not forbidding all oaths and vows. You say, 'Well, it looks that way. Why would Jesus say it this way?' Remember, He is addressing the flawed interpretation of the scribes and Pharisees and they had created a system, an entire system, in which oaths were a normal part of everyday life and, frankly, they were often frivolous. Jesus is telling His disciples don't buy into that system at all. Don't have anything to do with that system. Oaths and vows are a solemn and serious thing. Don't don't make them often and don't make them frivolously. We must not use oaths combined then with clever wording and little mind games in order to deceive and to be dishonest. That's what Jesus is saying. You can see, by the way, that this is what our Lord means by the examples that He then

goes on to, to use in verses 34 to 36. Remember, the first part of verse 34 is the command and what follows is the reason. The reason for not making the kinds of oaths and vows that the rabbis encourage be made is that all oaths and vows are ultimately sworn before God and against His own person. The rabbis taught that using heaven or earth or Jerusalem in your oath – if you use those little catch phrases in your oath, then those promises, those oaths didn't need to be kept because you didn't actually mention God in them. And therefore, you were free.

But Jesus says all these things that you might use in your oaths are ultimately connected to God. And therefore, the oaths made using these formulas that the rabbis were teaching them are just as binding as those that specifically mention God Himself. Notice what He says. Look at the second half of verse 34: "I say to you, make no oath at all, (*and by that I mean don't make an oath*) by heaven, for it is the throne of God..." It's interesting. The Jewish Mishnah specifically refers to oaths made by heaven or by earth and it specifically says that if you include that wording, then such oaths are not binding. You don't have to keep them. But Jesus told His disciples that, regardless of what the rabbis taught, to swear by heaven is as binding as if you swore by God Himself because heaven is God's throne. Jesus is of course quoting Isaiah 66:1 which says: "Heaven is My throne..." So you can't dodge honesty by throwing in some formula swearing by heaven, because heaven is God's throne

He goes on to say in verse 35: "don't swear by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet..." The earth is also - although it seems removed from God, it is connected to God because it's like His footstool. Therefore, an oath made by the earth is just as binding as one that appeals to the person of God. Again, this goes back to Isaiah 66:1, which says: "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool." Verse 35 goes on: "or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King." The rabbis may not have considered an oath by Jerusalem to be binding but, according to Jesus, it is binding because Jerusalem is sacred because it is the city of the great King. He's here quoting Psalm 48:2 where Jerusalem is called exactly that. After all, wasn't it in II Chronicles 6:6 where God says: "I have chosen Jerusalem that My name might be there..." It was God's earthly address if you will. It was His earthly throne room.

Verse 36: "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black." Some of the early church fathers thought that that verse outlawed the use of hair dye. Some of you are in serious trouble if that's true, but that's not what Jesus has in mind here. In ancient times, to swear by one's head was in reality to swear by your life. It was like saying: 'May I lose my head, may I lose my life if what I'm telling you is not true.' The expression would be similar I guess in some ways to our expression 'I'd bet my life on it.' Jesus says we're not to swear against our own lives because we are not responsible for our own life or death. God is. In fact, we are so not in control that we can't really change the color of a single hair.

Don't miss the big point Jesus is making here. He is saying that every promise we make, every oath we swear to, is made 'coram deo', before the face of God. And any object by which we swear, whether it's by heaven or by earth or by our own lives or something else, is ultimately connected back to God Himself. That means that every single oath we take obligates us to the same degree as if we said, 'I swear by the name of God Himself.' D.A. Carson writes this: "Jesus relates every oath to God. To swear by anything is to swear by God for God in some way stands behind everything. Therefore, no oath is trivial. No oath is justifiable evasion. All oaths are solemn pledges to speak the truth." That's what Jesus is saying.

Now obviously, we don't struggle with exactly the same temptations, that same sort of rabbinical system of oaths that the disciples struggled with in the first century that they had been taught. So what are the timeless lessons that grow out of their specific practice in the first century? I think there are several for us. Let me just give them to you briefly. First of all, don't make everyday, frivolous oaths. Don't make everyday, frivolous oaths. How do we persuade others that we're telling the truth when there's a question about our honesty? What are our own culture's oaths? It begins, doesn't it, almost as soon as a child can speak? Every child eventually learns that little expression 'cross my heart and hope to die.' Seems cute, right? That is an oath. That is saying I know I can't generally be believed to tell you the truth, but what I'm about to tell you is true and I swear to it.

When we reach adolescence or adulthood, it takes other forms, forms like this, and you hear people peppering their daily conversation with expressions like this: 'I swear' or 'I swear to you' or 'I swear I'm telling the truth' or 'I promise you I'm telling you the truth this time' or 'May God strike me dead' or whatever it might be - some oath to say you ordinarily can't believe what I say to you, but what I'm about to say you can believe. Here's how Helmut Thielicke, a German theologian, puts it: "Whenever I utter the formula 'I swear' or 'I swear by God', I am really saying, 'Now I'm going to mark off an area of absolute truth and put walls around it to cut it off from the muddy floods of untruthfulness and irresponsibility that ordinarily overruns my speech.' In fact, I am saying even more than this. I am saying that people are expecting me to lie from the start. And just because they are counting on my lying, I have to bring up these big guns of oaths and words of honor." Don't make everyday, frivolous oaths. Certainly Jesus is saying that to us.

Secondly, He's saying when you make a vow to God, keep it. You don't have to make a vow to God. You could go your whole life without making a vow to God except the vow that you make in salvation to love and follow Jesus Christ. Apart from that, you don't have to make any other vow to God. But if you make a vow to God, you better pay it. Psalm 50, verse 14: "pay your vows to the Most High..." Ecclesiastes 5:4 - "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!" Now there are exceptions. There were exceptions even in the Old Testament. If the vow you make you find out is sinful or if you

make a vow that you later find out is contrary to Scripture, you don't have to keep them. If you find out it's a truly foolish vow - it was interesting - in the Old Testament, vows could be vetoed by the authority in your life. They could say that was a foolish vow and you didn't have to keep it.

I think another lesson for us from this first command is when you do take a legally binding oath, always tell the truth. And I'm not talking about just in the courtroom. That goes without saying. I'm talking about whenever you sign your name saying the facts that I have just put on this form are absolutely true, you better be telling the truth, because as far as God is concerned, you're making that before Him, 'coram deo'. You sign your name to your tax form or to your insurance form or to whatever else it might be, it better be the truth. That's what Jesus is saying - and certainly when you're placed under oath in some kind of legal proceeding. And in everyday life, if you choose to affirm your word by an oath - on those very few occasions when you must say 'God is my witness, I call God to witness I'm telling you the truth' - it'd better be the truth because God doesn't take fools lightly. He will not be trifled with.

So the first corrective is that Jesus demands that all oaths and vows be solemn and serious and not be made frivolously or frequently. The second command or corrective comes in verse 37 and let's summarize it like this: all our words are to be radically truthful so that everyday oaths are unnecessary. All of our words are to be radically truthful so that everyday oaths are unnecessary. Look at the second command that begins verse 37: "But let your statement be 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'..." 'Your statement' is literally your 'logos' or your word. It refers to anything you say in any context. Jesus is saying let anything you say in any context be, 'Yes, yes' and 'No, no'. In other words, when you say yes, let it be truly and really and completely yes. And when you say no, let it be really and completely and truly no. You see, the true disciple of Jesus is to be a person of such radical truthfulness and the people in his life are to have found him to be so dependable, so trustworthy, that they always believe his words. When he wishes to say that something is true, all he needs to say is yes. When he wishes to deny something, all he needs to say is no. And whether he says yes or whether he says no, he is believed by the people around him. Is that how the people in your life think of you? Do they think of you in, in your family - do the people in your family know you to be a person who always speaks the truth? Do the people in your workplace know you to be a person that can be counted on to say the truth and knowing that there's no equivocation, there's no shading of the truth, there's no lying? Or do the people in your life know you to have a reputation for lying, for exaggerating, for deceiving, for shading the truth? Jesus says if you're My disciple, don't let that be true. We are to be known for radical truthfulness.

Now let me give you several warnings about speaking the truth and I always have to give these because unfortunately there are some Christians who abuse the command to speak the truth. Let me, let me give you a couple warnings. Warning #1: speaking the truth is no excuse for brutal,

brash communication. Here's the person who says, 'I just tell the truth. I just call it like I see it.' And then they proceed to hack their way through relationships with their words like a machete, hacking everyone in their path. That's not what this means. What does Ephesians 4:29 say? It says: "Don't let a single word come out of your mouth that is not for edification (that isn't building others up). Also, truth telling does not require breaking legitimate confidences and revealing legitimate secrets. There are illegitimate confidences and secrets and you shouldn't enter into those. I tell my kids, 'You have no right of privacy in my home. You don't have any secrets that I shouldn't know as your parent.' But there are situations and circumstances in life where there are legitimate secrets, there are legitimate confidences. You tell someone, someone shares something with you and says I want you to pray with me about this and ask you to keep it between the two of you, you need to do that. And if you're afraid you can't do that because they're going to share with you something that needs to be addressed, and I do that sometime. I'll say, 'You know what? I won't share this with anyone who isn't a part of the solution, but obviously I can't make a promise that if someone can't help or shouldn't help that I'm not going to bring them into it.' But speaking the truth does not require breaking a confidence or revealing legitimate secrets.

Thirdly, speaking the truth does not demand that we dump all of our ill feelings and doubts and hatreds on the one whom we dislike. It's like, 'Well, you know the Bible says be honest so here it goes. You know, I really don't like you and let me tell you why I don't like you.' That's not what Jesus is saying. That's pseudo honesty. If that's in our hearts, then we should confess those sins in our hearts, deal with it before the Lord and ask Him to change us, but we shouldn't spill that garbage on everybody we come in contact with. So just be aware that truth telling doesn't mean those things. But other than that, we are to be known for radical truthfulness.

Now go back to Matthew 5 and I want you to see at the end of verse 37, Jesus gives us the reason we must speak the truth without equivocation. He says I want you to let your yes be yes and your no, no because "anything beyond these is of evil." The expression 'of evil' is literally 'out of evil'. It could mean 'out of evil' in a general sense. In other words, to speak untruthfully is evil and that's true and that may be what Jesus is saying here. But I think He means more because the expression can also mean 'out of the evil one', 'out of the evil one' – meaning that anything beyond radical truthfulness is ultimately from Satan himself. Satan is the ultimate source of all lies. Listen to Jesus in John 8:44. He says to those who weren't believers, "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and (*watch this*) he does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar (*and listen carefully*) and is the (*what?*) father of lies." Understand this. Every time you lie or slander or deceive, it is not a reflection of the image of God in you. It is not even, in some senses, a reflection of you. It is a reflection ultimately of Satan himself. You are at that moment not behaving, if you're a

Christian, like your new Father; instead, you are still imitating the behavior of your old father the devil.

Therefore, as God's children, we must be characterized by complete truthfulness. That is the message of both testaments. Leviticus 19:11 – "You shall not... lie to one another." The New Testament, Ephesians 4:25 – "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." Colossians 3:9 – "Do not lie to one another, since you have laid aside the old self with its evil practices..." So how do we get there? Well, first of all, the first important step is to stop justifying lying. We live in a culture that justifies it. I read you a quote earlier that justified it on natural selection. That's where evolution always goes. It undermines God and His rightful, ethical rules in our lives and that's exactly where they go: "Well, it's just part of survival of the fittest." Stop excusing and justifying lying. 'Well, it's not hurting anyone. Everybody does it. Just a little white lie. Listen. You can't survive in the real world without lying. Lying, it's not really that serious of a sin.' Listen. We discovered last week that God singles out lying alone as a sin that will cause Him to send a person to hell forever. We must not justify our dishonesty.

But I think there's another important step that we have to take if we're going to deal with lying in our lives and that is we must first unmask the reason we are tempted to lie. You understand that lying is never an end in itself? It is merely the tool we use to get something we want. And so the question is why am I lying? Until you ask and answer that question and deal with the motive of the heart, you're never going to really deal with the sin of lying in your life. Let me give you a few of the Biblical reasons people lie. Here are a few. Number one: to protect ourselves. Abraham lies about Sarah being his wife because he's afraid for his life. Sarah lies to God about laughing because she's afraid of what God might do. Peter lies about knowing Jesus because he's afraid of being harmed in some way. We lie to protect ourselves.

Secondly, we lie to make ourselves look good. In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira – they bring the money to the church and Peter says, 'Is, you know, did you sell the land for this price?' And they say, 'Yeah, for that price!' Why? Because they wanted to look good. We often lie to present ourselves in a better light than we deserve. Closely related to that is we lie to be considered spiritual. What did Saul do in I Samuel 15? He lied about why he sacrificed before Samuel got there because he wanted to look like he actually cared what God wanted him to do. In I Timothy 4, false teachers lie because they want to be thought spiritual.

A fourth reason we lie is to hide personal hatred. Proverbs 10:18 says, "He who conceals hatred has lying lips..." People will often lie to someone to hide their hatred for that person and then they'll turn right around and lie to others about that person in order to hurt that person, to do them harm.

We lie to gain financial advantage. In Proverbs 21, verse 6, it talks about the acquisition of wealth by lying tongues. People lie to get what they want, to enrich themselves. That's why contracts require all that fine print. It's a protection of both parties because people lie. Here's a big one. A lot of people lie to hide their guilt about other sins. Cain did this in Genesis 4, remember? God comes to Cain and says, 'Where's your brother?' And Cain says, 'Hmm, I don't know.' He was lying to cover his guilt for the sin of murder. In Genesis 37, Joseph's brothers lie about what happened to Joseph to cover the guilt of the fact that they had sold him. People often lie in order to hide their guilt of some other sin. Lying becomes a handle that attaches to almost any sin to cover it. And I see this in counseling. People lie to cover a habit of pornography. They lie to their spouses. They lie to cover stealing in some cases. They lie to cover their laziness. They didn't get done what they should have gotten done and so they lie about it: 'Well, the dog ate it.' People lie to cover adultery. They lie to cover a substance abuse problem with drugs or alcohol. They lie to cover and to hide from the guilt of other sins. So here's the issue. Every time you're tempted to lie, ask yourself why am I tempted to lie? If you're going to stop lying, you first have to deal with the motive of your heart that most often gives birth to your lies. And you must confess not only the sin of lying, but you must confess the sin of the heart that leads you to lie.

There's one more important question we have to ask and that is why is radical truthfulness so important to our Lord? Why does He care so much? Well, there are a number of reasons we could list. Let me give you just a couple. Here's why it matters. First of all, because God's character always is truthful. God's character manifests it. Numbers 23:19 – "God is not a man, that He should lie..." Hebrews 6:18 – "it is impossible for God to lie..." II Corinthians 1:20 – "God's promises to us in Christ are yes and yes." I love that. God's character - He is truthful. If we're going to be His children, then we have to be truthful.

There's a second reason it's important to Christ and that's because the gospel depends on it. The gospel depends on it. Based upon our truthfulness, we either build a foundation for sharing the gospel with others or we destroy that foundation. Listen. How open do you think the people around you are going to be to your sharing the gospel if they know that you're a perpetual, consistent liar? Kent Hughes writes: "The avoidance of one small fib may be a stronger confession of faith than a whole Christian philosophy championed in lengthy, forceful discussion. When people know that you do not lie, your testimony will have more effect than all the theology you could ram at them." Because it's so uncommon, it stands out in a world of lies. Number three, here's another reason it's important: because Jesus demands it, because Jesus' own person demands it. Think about it for a moment. We claim to follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We claim to follow One who has Himself professed to be in John 14:6 – "I am the way and (*what?*) the truth..." Our Lord calls Himself the truth. Do you think it would matter for those who claim to be His followers to be known as men and women of the truth?

And finally, radical truthfulness is important because our words reveal the true condition of our hearts. Our words reveal the true condition of our hearts. Turn over to Matthew 12. With this we finish our time together. Matthew 12:33. Jesus says,

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. (*The tree here is the heart, the fruit, the words. Notice how Jesus develops this.*) You brood of vipers, (*He's talking to the Pharisees, unbelievers*) how can you, being evil (*at the heart level*), speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

What flows out of your mouth reveals your heart. You know, sometimes we'll say, 'Oh, I didn't mean that.' Well, there's a sense in which that could be true from time to time. Maybe words slip out or we say it in a way we didn't intend, but listen. Words don't lie about us. Our words may lie, but our words don't lie about the true condition of our hearts. What comes out of our mouth is an accurate description of who we are. Verse 35:

The good man brings out of the good treasure of his heart (*in his words*) what is good; and the evil man brings out of the evil treasure of his heart (*into his words*) what is evil. But I tell you that every useless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.

Jesus fast forwards us here to the day of judgment. And He says let me tell you what's going to happen at the day of judgment. Look at verse 37: "by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Listen. If I could follow you around with a recorder and I could record everything you say – I'm not talking about what you say to me, I'm not talking about what you say at church. If I could record everything you say and I could analyze that tape or that recording, I could know your heart because "out of the heart (*Jesus says*) the mouth speaks." It is a perfect reflection of who you are. And Jesus says on the day of judgment if you are not in Christ, if you have not truly come to faith, you will stand at the judgment and it doesn't matter what you say. Jesus has kept a recording of all of your words. And your words will either justify you – they will show you to be a genuine follower of Christ because they will reflect your heart – or your words will condemn you because they will show you to be a deceiver and someone who is deceiving himself. Your words reveal the true condition of your heart. That's why they're so important. Let's pray together.

Our Father, for those of us in Christ, I pray that You would help us to follow our Lord's teaching here, commit ourselves to pursuing by Your grace and by the work of Your Spirit because we don't have the strength to do this on our own. And Father, by Your Spirit and by Your Word, help us to pursue radical truthfulness. Help us not to be content with lying and deception. Help

us to see that as part of who we used to be and imitating our old father and not You, Father, because You never lie. You always speak the truth.

And Father, I pray for the person here this morning who has a pattern of lying and even lying to himself or herself. Father, help them to see what it will be like on the day of judgment when their own words will condemn them. And may this be the day when they run to Jesus Christ and seek the forgiveness that's found in His death for sinners and in His resurrection. May they cling to Him as their only hope, turning from their sins and putting their faith in Him alone. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.