

# Tell the Truth

*The Ten Commandments*

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**Bible Verse:** Matthew 5:33-37  
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Well, as you know, on Sunday we started a consideration of the ninth commandment in Exodus 20:16 and I want to go back to a New Testament text we studied a few years ago to kind of round out our consideration of that and then we'll finish our study on the coming Sunday, but in Exodus 20:16 it says, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor," and what I wanted to do tonight was to go to a text that kind of helps us have a sense of what truth-telling in the Christian life looks like and what Christ says about speaking the truth.

With that in mind, I invite you to turn to the gospel of Matthew 5. Those of you that know me at all know that the Sermon on the Mount is very dear and close to my heart and tonight is no different. In Matthew 5:33, we read this text which, at first, seems a little bit obscure. Matthew 5:33 Jesus said,

33 "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' 34 But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil [or could be translated 'is of the evil one.']."

Now in the Sermon on the Mount we are seeing Jesus' exposition of the doctrine of repentance. Jesus is explaining what the repentant life looks like and as he starts the Sermon on the Mount in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 5, you can see that he is speaking about those who have a repentant spirit about them. Matthew 5:3 says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." To be poor in spirit is to be broken over your sin basically; it's a word and a phrase that talks about spiritual bankruptcy, someone who understands that they have no righteousness at all before a holy God and they mourn over that, they're broken over their sin, and Jesus pronounces blessing on them saying that it's people like that that the kingdom of heaven belongs to. The casual person who doesn't think about sin, who thinks and just assumes that he's right with God, is not repentant, is not someone

that is in the kingdom of heaven, and there is an odd sort of contrast that you might say, it's those who are most broken over their sin, who feel the worst about their sin and feel most desperately their unqualification, if I can make up a word, their lack of merit in order to be in the kingdom of heaven, it's people just like that that Jesus says he came to save. After all, he said it's not those who are well who need a physician, it's those who are sick. He said, "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And for those of you that feel deeply the weight of your sin and, you know, and I've had conversations over the years with people like this, a truly deeply repentant heart is actually kind of a rare thing, but those of you that might feel deeply the weight of your sin, take comfort and take heart in the fact that Jesus said it was precisely for ones like you that he came. He didn't come to save self-righteous people, they say they don't need any saving; self-righteous people exclude themselves from the kingdom of God by saying they don't need a Savior. But if you are broken over your sin, then you can know that the arms of Jesus are held open wide to you and it's a great encouragement to know that and a great encouragement to go to him. Scripture says that we do not have a high priest who is not able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, but rather we have a high priest who has been tempted in all things as we are yet without sin therefore he's able to deal graciously and mercifully with those who are broken over their sins. He feels our infirmities, he's been of like human flesh with us and so he knows what that is like.

You know, knowing that we have so many in the room tonight that just desire righteousness, you long for righteousness and yet, like me, you realize and you feel your shortcomings, you feel how far short you fall, well, you know, it's a great encouragement to know that the Lord came for people just like us. It's not when you're broken over sin that you need to be worried about your spiritual condition. The person, the man, the woman that needs to be concerned about their spiritual condition is the one who tries to justify their sin, who tries to excuse it, who blames it on someone else. "I did this because that person did such-and-such to me," and just making excuses rather than taking responsibility for your sin. You know, and one of the things about coming to Christ is that on the one hand it's utterly liberating to become a Christian, to realize that your sins have been completely forgiven, your sins have been washed away, covered in the blood of Christ, and a new life has been given to you, a new righteousness has been credited to your account, the perfect righteousness of Christ and you've been born of the Spirit, that's wonderfully liberating, but it's also very humbling, it's utterly humbling to have to acknowledge in the presence of God and before men that, "I have no righteousness of my own. I'm a vile, guilty sinner who deserves nothing less than the judgment of eternal flame in hell for my sin. I'm guilty before God like that and I have no merit of my own." You can hang onto your pride in one hand and blame someone else for the sins that you've committed, you can hang onto it like that but you have to let go of Christ in order to keep your pride. That's not a very good trade. You know, if you think through it, if we just humble ourselves before the Lord and turn to Luke 18 to get a picture of what I'm referring to here, I say this to encourage the brokenhearted and I say it to simultaneously give warning to those that would try to excuse their sin for one reason or another. Trying to excuse your sin is not the mark of a true Christian, beloved. Making excuses for yourself is not the mark of a true Christian. A true Christian takes responsibility for their

moral evil and casts themselves upon Christ rather than trying to defend themselves and proclaim their own righteousness.

You see this plainly in Luke 18:9-14. Jesus told "this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt." He said this, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'" Now look at the spirit of true repentance in verse 13, "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." And so I simply ask you whether you've humbled yourself before Christ like this, acknowledging your sin freely, openly, without qualification, without self-justification. Is that your spirit toward sin? "Lord, I confess I'm guilty. Be merciful to me. I have no hope if You're not merciful to me." Is that your spirit toward sin? Well, the Bible says that you walk away justified in the sight of God, those are the ones that Jesus justifies, that he accepts, that he welcomes, and that God declares righteous.

Listen, look at another passage. We've taught on this passage in the past. I haven't emphasized it as much as perhaps I should, but you look at Romans 4 with me for a moment. Romans 4 in verse 5 it says, "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies," who does he justify? He "justifies the ungodly," he justifies the ones who are unworthy. He doesn't justify the good, the good have no need of repentance and there is no one good, it's just the perception that one thinks that he's good when he's not. Christ did not come to save those who think they are good. If you think you're good enough, if a man thinks he's good enough to go to heaven, he's not going to heaven and Christ has nothing to do with him because Christ came to seek and to save the lost.

So for those that have bruised hearts tonight, feeling the weight of sin, the mercy of Christ is open and pouring out in abundant measure upon you. It's not those that feel their sin and are repentant over it that need to worry, it's those that think they're all right, or those who make excuses and refuse accountability, that evade accountability, that want nothing to do with the word of God being applied to their lives by an elder or by a fellow Christian. Those are the people that need to worry. Those are the people that should be concerned about the state of their soul. And you know, we just have to be direct and candid about these things. I wouldn't be much of a pastor if I tried to hide these things and smooth them over in order to make everybody feel good about themselves. The Bible's not a book that makes us feel good about ourselves. The Bible tells us that there is no one good, not even one, but there are none who seek for God, and on it goes and, you know, and all have fallen short of the glory of God.

So, you know, I do to the best of my ability, I say these things tenderly and softly to you as well as I can, but this is what Scripture teaches us and so we need to take these things seriously. It does no one any good whatsoever, beloved, it doesn't do anyone any good to

try to gloss over these things or pretend that the Bible is less searching and piercing than it is. That doesn't do anybody any good. You know, maybe it makes us feel good for a time but what good does it do when we die and we stand before a judge and he says, "Depart from Me, I never knew you"? You know, what good is that? What have we accomplished if we simply pat each other on the back and rub each other's shoulders and whisper sweet spiritual nothings into each other's ears and then we end up in hell at the end? What good have we accomplished if we do that? No, that's not biblical Christianity. And so, you know, I just commit that all to you and trust that the Lord will apply it in his wisdom to each heart as the need may be but, you know, the framing thought here is that there is hope for the one that is broken in their sin, there is hope in Christ, but there's no promise to those, there is no promise of blessing to those who seek to evade responsibility for their sin.

Now coming back to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is explaining what it means to repent. In Matthew 4:17 there's a summary statement of what his gospel message was, "Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" It reminds us of Mark 1:14 and 15 where it says repent and believe in the gospel. These summary statements that are describing a call to spiritual repentance, of a brokenhearted turning away from sin and simultaneously turning to Christ by faith for eternal salvation and the question, then, becomes is what is the overflow or what happens in the life of the one who repents, who's truly repentant? Well, Jesus goes on and explains throughout the Sermon on the Mount what repentance looks like, you know, and he just goes to different areas, different components of life and basically explains that this is how one of his disciples responds to the law of God and how he responds in prayer and faith and such matters. The undergirding purpose, or I should say the undergirding defining desire is found in Matthew 5:6 where it says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." You can mark a repentant person by this unquenchable desire that they have to live righteously, to be pleasing to God. Paul talks about this in Titus in Titus 2, you know, that the Lord saved us in order that we might live righteously, godly in the present age. And so Jesus makes this same point when he's speaking there in verse 6.

Well, with that little bit of framework, then, what we see is that part of the way that repentance plays out in your life is the way in which you use your tongue and the way that you speak truth, and the way that you handle truth and accuracy in your day-to-day conversations. So we see that coming up here in the text that I read earlier, Matthew 5:33-37. This is a text that deals with the theme of truthfulness and the concept of truth goes to the very heart of Christianity. Jesus Christ himself is the personification of truth. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," Jesus said. And so Christ himself is truth itself and so if our Lord is truth himself, truth itself, truth incarnate, you might say, then obviously those who are his disciples are going to be committed to the highest level of truthfulness in their personal communication so that the idea of truth impacts every word that we speak as Christians. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4 said this, he said, "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor." Truth. Truth. Truth. Truth. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor. And so we just have this concept elevated to

us greatly in our minds as we make the most rudimentary consideration of what the Bible says.

So what we have in this passage here, Jesus uses the subject matter of first century oaths or vows, he uses that subject to call us to a simple standard of truth in your daily life. The standard of truth is very high and elevated and the way that we honor that is through simplicity and transparency and candor in what we say to one another. So I need to give you some background information before we go into the text itself, and so our first point for this evening is simply, we'll say it this way: the biblical use of oaths. The biblical use of oaths. An oath, I'm going to give you a definition of an oath here, an oath is a solemn appeal to God to verify the truth of a statement or a promise that is being made. And I illustrate it reverently, someone says, you know, perhaps in a courtroom setting, "I swear to God that what I'm about to say is true." That's the idea of an oath, it's an appeal to God to verify the truthfulness of what is being said, sometimes used on occasions where there is no independent witness that could verify the statement. If it's knowledge that's known only to one person, you know, the Bible made provision for someone to use an oath in order to verify that what he was saying was true. The idea of truth and the honoring of the principle of truth was that important.

So an oath was designed by God to be used in solemn situations like courtroom testimony, or times where an important matter was not susceptible to independent confirmation. Let me say that again, it's designed for solemn situations like a courtroom setting, or times where an important matter is not susceptible to independent confirmation. Okay? We're going to fill this out, we're building up to something here so just stay with me as we go through some of this background matter.

As I said, the one who makes the oath calls upon God to be his witness, and the corollary of that is that the person who makes the oath says, "I submit to the punishment of God if I speak falsely in what I'm about to say." So he appeals to God, "This is true. God help me, this is true," and implicit in that is, "I submit to the punishment of God if I speak falsely." And so it's a very serious matter to invoke the holiness of God to affirm a statement that you are making.

Now the idea of the oath, then, is that the oath gives a sense of credibility to what is being said. Because oaths are so important to the cause of truth, here's what's so important, they should never be treated lightly. We should never lightly say, "I swear to God that such-and-such is true." That should never come out of the mouth of a Christian except in the most solemn of situations. Oaths are matter of great seriousness, they are matters of great sobriety, and the name of God is holy and sanctified and is to be honored, not to be lightly invoked.

Let's go back to the 10 Commandments and just remind you of that because it's been a while since we looked at the first table of the law in Exodus 20:7, you can just look there with me for a moment. Exodus 20:7, it says, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain," in other words, you shall not use the name of God, you shall not use the name of Jesus Christ in a casual manner, the name of God, the name of Christ should

never be used by believer especially or by unbeliever either as a common cuss word or as a common exclamation of surprise. You know, and I quote this simply to make the point in a reverent way so that it is clear what I'm saying, beloved, no one in this room should ever be saying, "Oh my God!" in response to, you know a casual daily situation. That is taking the name of God in vain. It is not treating his name as holy. That should never be done. We of all people who are in Christ and who love his word, should recognize that the name of God is holy, holy, holy, and treat it with the utmost reverence. It would be better for you not to say the name of God ever than to use it in a casual manner like that.

Well, that undergirds that reverence for the name of God is in the woodwork of what is being said here in Matthew 5:33-37. Jesus said, look at it again there, Matthew 5, Jesus said, "You've heard that it's said you shall not make false vows but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord." Jesus said, "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is 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."

Now some people believe that this text forbids all oaths absolutely, and so they will not take an oath in a courtroom, they will not pledge allegiance to their country but, beloved, that kind of view is not sustainable from Scripture and I just want to kind of walk through this rather quickly to dismiss that idea, that wooden, superficial interpretation of the passage because it doesn't stand up biblically, and if that doesn't stand up biblically and if it's not prohibiting all oaths here, then that opens us up to the question, "Well, then, what is Jesus requiring from us?" That's the key question that we're going to get to, but before we get to it we have to understand what he's not saying. He's not forbidding all oaths under any and every circumstance. We know that from multiple testimony from Scripture.

First of all, in the Old Testament God required the people to take oaths in certain situations. You just need to write down this text, we won't take the time to turn there. In Numbers 30:2 it says, "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." And so Moses, who gave us the 10 Commandments, God gave the 10 Commandments to us through Moses, in the writings of Moses itself it recognizes a place for oaths in the life of the nation of Israel, and so that immediately causes us to step back from a wooden view that says this is prohibiting all oaths under all circumstances.

But then you go further, you go into the New Testament and you see this laid out in so many ways. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul invoked God's name to support what he was saying in his letters so that in 2 Corinthians 1:23 he says, "I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth." He calls God as his witness. Would Paul have done that if Jesus meant that God was never to be called as a witness to the things that are being said? No, he wouldn't have. And so the fact that Paul called God as his witness in his writings shows us that that's the wrong interpretation to place on Matthew 5.

He did it in Philippians 1 where he said, "God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." Paul is writing to the church at Philippi and he wants to tell them what's in his heart toward them. Now there is no way to independently confirm what Paul was or wasn't feeling toward the church at Philippi, no one knows what was in Paul's heart except Paul and God, and so in order to verify to the Philippians that his love for them was genuine, he says, "I call God as my witness that you would know that I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." Once again, if Jesus intended to prohibit all oaths, Paul would never have spoken with such language.

But you can go even further, you can go even further. God himself has sworn by oaths. In Psalm 110:4 it says, "The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.'" And then in Hebrews 6:17 it says, "God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath...in which it is impossible for God to lie." God made an oath of his faithfulness to his people in order to accommodate to our weakness of flesh, our weakness of faith, God swears by himself that he will be faithful to his people. Well, if oaths were always wrong, obviously God himself would never have said such a thing.

Then there's one more line of understanding. Jesus Christ himself testified under oath before the high priest in Matthew 26. You can turn there just to give your fingers some exercise. Matthew 26:63 and 64. In verse 62, "The high priest stood up and said to [Christ], 'Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?' But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, 'I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.': He placed Christ under an oath and what did Christ do? He spoke and answered the question. "Jesus said to him," verse 64, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

With all of that biblical evidence laid out in front of us, we can see that in their proper context, in the proper context oaths were appropriate for the people of God to take. All of that to say that we can't take Jesus' words in Matthew 5 in an absolute sense. So all of that to clear away that misunderstanding of what Jesus was doing here, we needed to clear it away so that we could ask this question, "What, then, was Jesus teaching? What was His point? What is He saying to us as His people that was so important for us to understand?" That's the question that we need to answer and, beloved, the answer is far more reaching than an outward prohibition on taking oaths in certain situations. You know, the place and time for oaths is actually very limited and restricted. You know, how many of us have ever been in a courtroom or testified at a trial? You know, the place of that's very small and what would that have to do with the outward manifestation of an inward repentance from sin? It would make Jesus' point so narrow that it would have no application at all. That would be ridiculous.

So since, you know, we respect our Lord and we know that he does not say things for no purpose, and that he doesn't say things that, you know, are marginal in their importance

to us, what is it, then, that he's saying? Well, something that hits all of us with a complete force of power, Jesus in this text in Matthew 5 is instructing his disciples on the matter of integrity and utter truthfulness in our communication. Let me set this up with an easily understood illustration that all of us can relate to and that all of us have probably used at one time or another. When I was a kid, I'm assuming it's still the same today but I don't know that, but when I was a kid you could tell a lie and get away with it, you could tell a lie and not be guilty of lying, so to speak, if you simply made the statement with your fingers crossed. You have your fingers crossed, you could say anything you wanted to and it wouldn't really count as a lie. So you could say, "I didn't take your ball," and you're standing there and you've got your fingers crossed behind your back, then supposedly that excused you from moral culpability for having told a baldfaced lie. You had done something to evade the application of truth. And so it may have been a lie but it was okay, supposedly, if you had simply crossed your fingers before you said it. Here's the point: a little trick supposedly made the deception legitimate. Just a little trick, a little physical trick made the deception legitimate, at least in the childhood economy of Southern Indiana where I grew up. The formality of crossing your fingers covered up for a blatant lie, a blatant untruth.

Now keep that little illustration in mind as your framework for understanding what we are about to see from the words of Jesus, and that leads us into our second point this evening. The first point was the biblical use of oaths, now we come to our second point this evening: the Pharisees' abuse of oaths. The Pharisees' abuse of oaths, and what Jesus is doing in this passage as he does, you know, six times in Matthew 5:21-48, is he quotes or he refers to a teaching or a practice of the Pharisees who were the first century religious leaders in the Jewish nation, he quotes a corrupt teaching, a corrupt doctrine, or a corrupt practice of the Pharisees in order to refute them and to lay bare what the true standard of God really was. That's what he is doing here in verse 33.

Look at it again with me where he says, "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told," in other words, he is quoting what the tradition handed down from prior generations is and what the prevailing standard of integrity was at the time. And he quotes it, he says, "You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord." Now notice, you shall not make false vows, that sounds pretty good, you shall fulfill your vows, that sounds pretty good, and to the Lord, that sounds good too, what could possibly be wrong there with a statement like that? Well, when you go on, you see what the problem is and you see how the Pharisees had distorted a practice that was designed to enforce the truth, they distorted the practice with their own variations in order to legitimize deception. And I'll explain this as we go along but you see Jesus talks about making vows to the Lord and then he goes on and says, "But I say to you," by way of contrast he says, "make no oath at all by heaven, by the earth, or by Jerusalem." Verse 36, don't "make an oath by your head for you cannot make one hair white or black." How does heaven and earth and Jerusalem and the hairs on your head, how does that have anything to do with making a vow to the Lord, and what does it have to do with personal integrity?



Well, the historians who look into these kinds of things tell us this, the Jews in the first century had different kinds of oaths that they would swear. Some of these oaths were binding and some of them were not, and so you had to keep an oath if you made it in the name of the Lord, if you specifically invoked the name of Yahweh, you specifically invoked the name of God while you were making your oath, you had to keep that one but if your oath did not specifically invoke the name of God, it was an oath that was less significant; you did not have to be so accurate in what you said as long as you didn't invoke the name of God. So they looked back at Exodus 27, don't take the name of God in vain, and they say, "Okay, I see how this works. I won't use His name and that will give me greater liberty, greater license in what I say to someone else and in the representations that I make." They thought that by carefully excising the name of God from what they were about to say, that they could evade the force of the third commandment and evade guilt and still practice deception as long as they didn't bring the name of God into it. So, "I swear by heaven. I swear by the green grass on the earth. I swear by the city of Jerusalem." You could swear like that and give an appearance of earnestness in your truthfulness because you were making an oath even if it was a lesser category of an oath, but all the while in the way that this played out in the culture of the time, they were giving themselves wiggle room. It was their way, beloved, of crossing their fingers when they talked. "I'll just keep the name of God out of it and then I can practice a deception and not be morally culpable for what I say." That's what Jesus is addressing here.

Now let's just think about that practice for a moment before we go into what it means for us. Isn't it obvious what the effect of those kinds of technicalities is? Isn't it obvious that this just a game of semantics that they were playing? Isn't it obvious, beloved, that their whole system of oath-taking was simply a pretext for practicing deception? In the name of trying to heighten the truthfulness of what they were saying, they were actually giving themselves liberty, so they thought, in order to be less than honest in what they said, and what Jesus does is he takes a battering ram to their system of communication and he shows why all of those distinctions are meaningless and do not justify deception simply because you had not invoked the name of God, and he shows them how impossible their system was to justify.

So he says there in verse 34, he says, "I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King." What's he saying? You can think about it this way. If you remember the omnipresence of God, that God is everywhere present, he is personally present in all places at all times in the fullness of his being, then you realize how ridiculous and silly it was for religious leaders to try to practice this system of oaths that would allow for deception. "You want to swear by heaven? Fine, that's the throne room of God." Jesus says, "You want to swear by the earth? It's the footstool of His feet. You want to swear by Jerusalem? That's the city of the great King, that's where God has made His presence known." And all of a sudden you realize he has eviscerated an entire system of deception by showing the holiness and presence of God cannot be evaded. God sees all. God hears all. God knows all. And God is a God of truth.

So beloved, here's the thing that Jesus was saying to his first century audience, and nothing has changed in the intervening 2,000 years since he said it because God is who he is, because God is omnipresent and God is omniscient and he knows the words that you speak before there is a word formed on your tongue, he knows it all, Psalm 139 says, the consequence of that is that God sees your deceit and God knows your deception thoroughly whether or not you speak in his name, and as a result of that, every evasion of truth subjects a person to the judgment of God. A single deception is an assault on the truthfulness of God because deception is practiced in his immediate presence.

You know, one thing that makes this so searching among all the other things that we've said already, think about this and this is what makes deception so deceptive and what makes it so very very ugly. It is possible, in fact it happens every day, that people can speak the truth in order to practice deception, and I'll make that very clear and obvious to you, so much so that even Satan can quote Scripture in order to practice a deception. It's what he did with Jesus. Look back a page or two in your Bible to Matthew 4. You can quote Scripture in a way that is misleading so that in one of the temptations in verse 5 of Matthew 4, "the devil took [Jesus] into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'" The devil quoted Scripture in order to tempt Jesus to do something that would have violated the trustworthiness of God, that would have tested God.

So he quoted Scripture in a way that was designed to cause the Lord to sin. Perhaps a more earthly example also will add some illumination to this. True story what I'm about to tell you. What I'm about to say appalls me because this was a man in ministry that I knew who did what I'm about to describe to you. This was years ago, years and years ago. This man, whom I knew personally, knew in advance that a government agent was coming to conduct an investigation of him for whatever purpose it was, I don't remember the purpose of it. But he knew, he knew that the government agent was going to ask him about firearms. He wasn't supposed to have firearms and he had one. So before the appointed time that the government agent was going to be at his house and interview him, he took his gun or guns, crossed the property line and put them on his neighbor's property, left them there and came back to his house knowing full well how the interview was going to go. So the agent asked him a question to the effect of, "Do you have any firearms on your property?" And this man looked the agent in the eye and said, "No, I don't." What had he done? He told the truth while practicing a deception. He knew the intent of the question but evaded it by crossing his fingers, he evaded it by doing something that was technically true but utterly contradicted the spirit of the question that was being asked of him. He told the truth in order to work a deception.

Beloved, it's easy for us to fall into those things if we're not careful and if we're not examining ourselves but let me just say this, that someone who can be so calculating in a deception like that is manifesting something very profoundly wrong in their soul, they are showing they have no fear of God in their eyes. If you can practice deception without fearing what the consequences are from God, you have no fear of God in your eyes

because the man who fears God, or to stay in the realm in which we introduced today's message, the one who is repentant wants nothing to do with deception. They want to be as far away from deception as they possibly can be because they understand that Jesus Christ is truth incarnate and they love him and they respect him and they fear him, and they want to drive deception out of their lives, not accommodate it.

So, again, I'll just leave it to the Holy Spirit to apply this to each individual heart as may be needed in the case. You know, are you telling the truth somehow and practicing deception? I'll just leave it there. You get the point that Jesus is making.

So we're to reject all of that, we're to hate all of that from our repentant hearts, but what is it to be like, then? Jesus doesn't simply condemn the deception, third point for this evening, he makes a call to truthfulness. He makes a call to truthfulness and that's what he's doing in verse 37. Jesus affirms the simplicity of genuine integrity. Verse 37, he says, "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of the evil one." Beloved, people say things like, "I swear to God," or I've had to catch myself using this pretty innocent adverb, "Honestly. Let me tell you how I honestly feel." Well, what were you telling me before? Was it not true before and now you're going to be honest? These little adverbs kind of give us away. And men use language like that, men use oaths like that when either their word is not reliable or they think that the way that they're received will not be reliable.

So what an oath does in the mouth of an ungodly person, it simply reinforces the fact that what he says cannot be trusted. If what you said could be trusted, you don't need an oath. And you know, again, just using some simple little things that we might otherwise laugh off, you know, picture somebody having just had a nice meal at someone else's house, "I swear that was the best roast beef I have ever eaten." Well, why are you swearing about something like that? Maybe a little closer to home for you outdoorsman, "Honest, honest, that fish was 25 pounds!" Christians don't talk that way, or at least they're not supposed to. What Jesus tells us when he says let your yes be yes, and your no be no, he's saying just speak in a straightforward manner, speak what is true. Yes means yes and no means no. And what he is doing is he's restoring the whole spirit of the moral law that says don't bear false witness against your neighbor, he's restoring the whole spirit of the moral law with those simple words. The one who loves the word of God loves truth. The one who loves the law of God loves truth and just wants that spirit to animate everything about his being and everything that he says. The moral law requires men to speak the truth without regard to oaths, without regard to cultural conventions that are designed to heighten integrity. What Jesus is saying is that your integrity should be such that if you say yes, it means yes. There is nothing about yes that misleads someone into thinking that reality is something other than what it is. "Do you have a gun on your property?" No, but that's deceptive in the whole context of what that engagement was, and what Jesus is saying is for you and me as Christians, you do not need to embellish what you say in order to persuade men. Your words should be simple, direct, and consistent with the facts the way that things really are. "That was a fine supper, ma'am. I really enjoyed that. That fish weighed in at 3 pounds 12 ounces."

The examples have been simple here this evening but just think through it, beloved. The simplicity of the illustrations give us insight into the things that are even more weighty. What about your communication with your spouse and the transparency and candor with which you speak to one another? Can your spouse believe what you say? Can a fellow Christian believe what you're saying when you're interacting about matters of significance? Is what you're saying true or are you misleading a fellow believer in the body of Christ perhaps about a personal matter? What about your integrity at work with an employer or with employees, or with relationships in the body of Christ? You know, it's painful, isn't it, it's painful to be in the body of Christ and to see someone that it turns out that they were being deceptive, they were not who you thought they were. That's painful. That hurts a lot of people when that takes place. Why is that? It's because our circle of relationships within the body of Christ have presupposed integrity and that we're being candid and honest and transparent with one another, and when you find out after the fact that it wasn't like that, you feel like you've been used and deceived and taken advantage of, totally contrary to the spirit of true repentance that Jesus calls all of his disciples to.

Notice what Jesus says at the end there in verse 37. He says, "let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no,'" then he adds this concluding line, "anything beyond these is of evil or is of the evil one." It comes from Satan. Beloved, look, sometimes I'm just astonished at how simple biblical truth is. It's just so simple, so clarifying, it just blows away all of the smoke and you can just see things for the way that things really are. God is a God of truth. God, Scripture says as we talked about on Sunday, it is impossible for him to lie. His veracity is ironclad and unchanging, immutable. Every promise that he makes is true. Every threatening that he makes is real. Every word is tested. There is no deception in God whatsoever and do you know what that means? That the deception that we see about us cannot come from God, it cannot be sourced in God, it does not originate from Christ. There's only one alternative, our deceptive ways come from Satan himself. Anything that goes beyond the simple integrity of what we have spoken here tonight, Jesus says anything that goes beyond that is from the devil. It's evil itself.

And so I just ask you, do you speak truth without evasion, without qualification? Is your word enough for someone to know that it is so just as you have spoken it? Or do people need to question you more closely? Does someone need to be a lawyer to get to the bottom of what you're actually saying? Well, for the Christian in the kind of integrity that Jesus calls us to, it's a fruit of true repentance.

Look over at that verse that I alluded to at the beginning, Ephesians 4:25, and we'll close with this. Ephesians 4:25. In fact, let's start with verse 22. The Apostle Paul, Jesus speaking through his apostle says this, "in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." If you have been born again, God has placed a spirit of truth within you and you are to live in accordance with the new man, not the old man. In verse 25, "Therefore, laying aside

falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."

Let's pray.

*God, we thank You that You are a God of truth because that gives us an anchor. We can go to Your word and know what the truth is and know that You will never work a deception on us no matter what men may do to deceive us. Father, help us as men, as women, as boys and girls, to be people of truth. May Your Spirit help us to recognize pockets of deception of which we need to repent. Give us strength to speak the truth boldly where it might cost us to do so. Give us the humility to speak truth, Father, when it means exposing perhaps our own sinfulness, things that we have done that are wrong. Father, help us not to hide behind evasion or deception or blame-shifting but let us be men and women of truth that would be pleasing in Your sight, reflecting if there's someone in the room tonight that's just thoroughly convicted by Your word of being an out-and-out liar, Father, I pray that Your Spirit would reinforce the conviction but not simply convict them, Father, but convict them to the point of leading them to Christ repenting of their deception, turning to Christ for forgiveness, submitting themselves to the Lord of truth and going forth in newness of life through faith in our blessed Lord. Help us all to these great and glorious ends. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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