

To Tell the Truth

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When we were forming what has now become this church several years ago, we had the delightful opportunity to ask ourselves what are we going to call this church? What are you going to name it? That was a pretty special time for those of us that were involved in this and we kicked around a few different names. I suggested many good names that the people who were involved said, "Those are not good names." Not that I'm carrying a grudge about that or anything. No, I'm very happy with the name that we landed on, but we landed on the name Truth Community Church and the concept of truth being central to everything about Christianity. Christianity is not simply a moral code for living, Christianity makes a comprehensive truth claim over against every other philosophy that is present in the world that has ever been or ever will be. Biblical Christianity is what is true. It is the way things really are and to understand Christianity, you must understand that truth is at the core concept of everything that we say about the Lord Jesus Christ and about spirituality and about who God is and how a man can be reconciled to God from his sins.

Truth is at the center of that and there a number of passages even in the Gospel of John that would point you in that direction that speak about Christ, that speak about worship, that speak about the Gospel call and the exclusivity of Christ, that speak about sanctification, spiritual growth. In fact, let's look at those just very quickly, John 1. The truth of the matter is, that was an unintentional pun, the truth of the matter is that I've often thought about doing a series on these four verses to justify the name Truth Community Church, but here I'll just allude to them just to give you a sense of the centrality of truth in the nature of Christianity. You see it mentioned in John 1:14 in the Incarnation of Christ. Scripture says that, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." Our Lord Jesus Christ is full of grace, full of truth. There is no deceit in him. There is no deceit found in his mouth. And that is at the very core, the Incarnation of Christ is at the center of Christianity and truth is at the center of Christ.

In John 4:24, Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman, John 4:24, Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." You must worship God according to his revelation and according to his revelation alone. It does not matter what your experiences are. It does not matter how emotional they make you feel or how good they make you feel. If they are not based and

rooted in truth, they are false and it is false worship which God condemns rather than receives, no matter how it makes you feel.

In John 14:6, Christ in speaking about himself. making an exclusive truth claim about himself, you know, when you wonder who Jesus is, you take it on the highest authority and Christ himself is the highest authority. Who is Jesus? Jesus said to Thomas, he said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." No one goes to heaven except through repentance and faith in Christ. Only those that Christ saves will be in heaven. There is no alternative path. There is no detour. You either go through Christ or you go elsewhere. You do not end up in heaven if you try to go around Christ and go based on your own good works, based on the rituals of another religion, based on philosophies or, God forbid that anyone in this room would say, "I don't even believe there is a God." Well, of course there is a God. You know that in your heart whether you deny it with your lips or not. Christ says, "I am the truth and no one comes to the Father but through Me."

So you see truth in the Incarnation, truth in worship, truth in the Gospel. One final one for those that have been redeemed in John 17:17, Christ praying for his people prays to his Father and says, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." The 66 books of the Bible are truth. There and there alone do you find what truth is and where you find it revealed in final and authoritative fashion, and that word speaks to the truth who is Christ himself. Truth. Truth. Truth. Truth.

All around in Christianity are these infinite, immense, truth claims that repudiate every false religion and that set the stage for our text today as we come to Matthew 5 again. This was all by way of introduction. Matthew 5:33 is the text that we're going to look at this morning down through verse 37, but we needed to set this context to have a sense of the centrality of truth in what Jesus is about to say in these five verses that will be our text for today, Matthew 5:33-37. Let's look at that and take that in as our text for this morning. Jesus says in verse 33,

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."

Marginal translation perhaps being even a little better: is of the evil one, you could say. Jesus here is speaking to his disciples about the requirement of God that there would be truthfulness in their speech and truthfulness in their character, and what you must see as you look at this passage and as we study it together here today, what you must see is something very significant. You must see that the issue of truthfulness in your life is far more than just saying, "Don't tell a lie." It is connected, your speech and your representations are connected to a far greater framework in the totality of biblical

revelation that you must understand. As we've said from the passages in John, Christianity is a comprehensive truth claim and therefore those who are Christians are reflecting their theology with how they use their tongues and how they relate to others. You cannot separate the two.

Here in this passage as we're going to see, what Christ is doing here is he is making another perspective, giving us another perspective on this that everything that you say is said in the presence of an omnipresent omniscient God. In other words, the way that you speak to others, the way that you represent things with your tongue, is a complete reflection on your theology, what you believe about Christianity, what you believe about God, and what your sense of God's presence and observance of your life is to be. You see, those of you who know Christ will understand that God sees and hears what you say. Because he is a God of truth, that has a sanctifying influence on what you say and how you deal with the whole matter of the truthfulness of your tongue and the level of deceit that you're willing to tolerate within your personal relationships.

Now, in this text here in Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus is using the issue of oaths in order to make his point, and if I happen to say the word "oats" somewhere in the course of this, I trust that you'll be gracious to me. It's very easy to substitute those two words for one another. I'm not talking about oats here today, I'm talking about oaths and what is an oath? An oath is a solemn appeal to God to verify the truth of a statement or the binding nature of a promise. So when our national leaders assume office, they take an oath of the office to be faithful to uphold the Constitution. The idea of an oath is that you are calling God as a witness to verify the truthfulness of what you're about to say. And not only that in the course of what biblical oaths are, the person making the oath says that he will submit to the punishment of God if he speaks falsely or if he deals unfaithfully with the responsibilities that he is taking on. Oaths are used in solemn situations, in matters of great import. This is why our criminal justice system historically has used oaths and applied oaths to witnesses before they take the stand so that justice would be honored and the principle of justice would be upheld in the trial that follows or in the testimony that is given that follows.

Now, oaths are used in those situations where a statement is not susceptible to independent verification. For example, if you were the only person that was there at a crime scene, you're the only person who knows what happened. Well, how do we know that you're telling the truth? The idea of an oath is that it's going to foster credibility. The application of the oath helps you to see, "Oh, this is a solemn situation and I am invoking the name of God with what I am doing here. Therefore the fact that I recognize God as my witness, verifies and adds credibility to the fact that what I'm about to say is true."

Now, this is all kind of by way of introduction still. Oaths are so important that they should never be treated lightly in the biblical perspective. Jesus also speaks about vows. If you look at verse 33 with me, "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.'" Jesus goes on and says, "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven," and on he goes. We'll get into that in a moment. A vow is in the same family of an oath, a little bit different. In a

vow, a man is pledging or dedicating himself or something valuable to God in return for divine favor. So you'll see some of the Old Testament saints making vows to God if he would deliver them and then paying the vow after the deliverance would come, making a promise to God, a solemn promise to God. "God, I will do this if you bless me."

Now, all of that is kind of by way of introduction. There is overlap in these ideas of a vow and an oath but they both – watch this – they both invoke the witness of God to guarantee the performance of what's about to be said or done. They are saying, "God is witness to what I'm about to say and therefore I will speak the truth."

Now, Jesus here says in verse 34, "make no oath at all," and let's clear up some misunderstanding here before we get into the word more deeply. There are some who view what Jesus says here as an absolute prohibition against all oaths whatsoever. They will not take oaths in a courtroom setting. They will not pledge allegiance to their country. They say Jesus said, "make no oath at all," and on that basis they refuse to do that. Well, let's deal with this very briefly: that is a wrong and a mistaken view; that is a very biblically unsustainable view to take because Scripture speaks of oaths in serious situations.

For example, you don't need 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." Scripture in the Old Testament provides for oaths to be made. That alone should be despositive of the matter. When you look in other passages of Scripture, you find Paul calling God to be his witness saying, "I call God as my witness. I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." I think that's in Philippians 1.

Look over at Hebrews 6. Again, we're just kind of getting a perspective to try to understand what Jesus is and is not saying here. Hebrews 6 says that God himself made an oath. God himself made an oath to show the unchangeableness of his purpose toward those who believe in Christ. In verse 16 of chapter 6, it says, "men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute." How do I know you're telling me the truth? I take an oath, God is my witness. Okay, that settles it, is the idea of what the writer of Hebrews is saying here.

Now in verse 17 he goes on and says, "In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise 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." The idea being that God swore that he would keep his people and it's not that God was swearing to someone higher than himself, there is no one higher than God, his word alone would be enough but in order to bring security and confidence to your heart God pledges, "I swear that I will not let you go. I will not allow you to be lost." And we are to draw strength and encouragement from that. The point here for this morning is that Scripture is saying that God used an oath to guarantee the security of believers to us.

Not only that, in Matthew 26, turn back there. Jesus testified under oath at his own trial. Matthew 26. There is a reason why I am belaboring this point. In Matthew 26:63, the high priest put Jesus under an oath and said to him, "I adjure You by the living God," I charge you under oath, answer this question, "are You the Christ, the Son of God?" And Jesus answered him, Jesus accepted the oath and said, "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." Jesus testifies under the oath that the high priest placed him under.

Now, why do we belabor this? This is so important. I know I say that a lot. It's just one of those verbal tics that I have. But this is so very important for you to understand what it is that Christ is saying to us in Matthew 5. If you think that Jesus is simply saying, "Don't make oaths in your life," then you are completely missing the point, completely missing that and turning it into something that he didn't say. By biblical example and precept, we see oath after oath actually being given in appropriate circumstances and so it cannot be – this is the point – it cannot be that Jesus is simply making an absolute prohibition against oaths so that someone would be a pain-in-the-neck to a judge in a courtroom. That can't be what he's talking about here because if oaths were always wrongs, you wouldn't have so many examples of them being used. So we don't view Matthew 5 as a prohibition against oaths in appropriate circumstances.

Well, what is he talking about then? Ha, he's talking about something way more important than oaths. He's talking about something far more searching in your life than isolating it to situations where you would refuse to pledge allegiance to your flag or you would refuse to take an oath of truthfulness before you testify in a courtroom. Think about it: if that's what he was talking about, it would be virtually irrelevant to all of life because how often are you in those circumstances? Is Jesus here in the Sermon on the Mount which is a definitive statement about what true repentance looks like in his disciples, would he stray into talking about an extraneous matter that hardly ever affected any of us? No. In case you were wondering, the answer to that question, the answer to that question is no. What he is doing is far more searching, far more important, far more pervasive. What he's saying in this text goes to every moment of your life. It goes to the way that you think and the way that you speak. Far more than those isolated things. He's doing this: he's teaching you about the nature of the righteousness and truthfulness that God requires from his disciples and that is far more searching. Something far more important than oaths are at stake in our text today.

Let me set this up with a negative illustration before we get into the text and you'll get a sense of what's going on here. When I was a kid, probably still the same today, you'll be familiar with this, this is very simple and plain. When I was a kid, you could tell a lie, supposedly, as long as you had your fingers crossed, right? You'd say, "Did you take that ball?" No. And supposedly the formality of crossing your fingers excused the blatant lie that you were telling. You all know that. That's how kids operate, as if the crossing of your fingers physically excused the guilt of the lie that you were telling. Well, that's a simple illustration but remember it as a framework for understanding that is about to follow now as we go back to Matthew 5.

If you're not there, turn back to it. I think we'll pretty much stay in the text now for what is about to come. We're going to break this message into two parts as we often do. We're going to see how the Pharisees treated oaths and Jesus will address that, and then we will see Jesus' call to truthfulness in response to that. Jesus here is establishing a standard of truthfulness and he is using oaths merely as a way to illustrate the importance of what he is saying.

Look at verse 33 with me as Jesus is going to set forth the standard that God holds you to when he tells you to tell the truth. Verse 33, Jesus says, "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.'" Let me remind you of something here: we are in the middle of a section of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:21-48, where Jesus is using six different illustrations to make the greater point that he said in verse 20 of Matthew 5. Look at that verse with me. I feel like we're kind of circling wagons a little bit but I think we'll end up in the right place for the gravy train eventually. In Matthew 5:20, Jesus said, "I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." He says God requires a surpassing righteousness of those who would enter into heaven and the standard of God's righteousness must be reflected in the lives of those who claim that they have repented and are following Christ. What Jesus does, having made that general statement in verse 20, is he starts to illustrate it with different sections of life and shows how the righteousness that God requires goes far beyond what the Pharisees in the first century were requiring.

So understand he illustrates it with the fact that it's not just that God prohibits murder, he prohibits anger. Next illustration, it's not just that God prohibits adultery, he prohibits lust in the heart. It's not just that God requires marriage to be done properly, he deals with marriage and divorce in the third section that we spent many weeks looking at. Now here we come to the matter of truthfulness, it's just another continuing illustration of how far searching and how surpassing the righteousness that God requires really is, especially contrasted to the behavior of those that were setting the culture in Jesus' day. So we see the broader context in what we're talking about here. A lot of context to this.

Now, with that said, look at what Jesus says, 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.'" What Jesus is doing here, what he's done in the prior three sections of this passage that we looked at, the broader passage, he is setting forth the false practices of the Pharisees in order to refute them and to show what true righteousness really looks like. What were the Pharisees doing? What did the Jews do in his day? Well, the Jews had a complex code that governed oaths. They had different categories of oaths, some were more serious than others, some were binding and some were not, and what the Pharisees had done is they had said that if you made an oath in the name of God, you had to keep it. If you made a vow in the name of God, you had to keep it, but if you didn't invoke the name of God when you made it, then it was a vow of lesser significance, you didn't have to be so accurate in what you said, you could fudge the truth, and they justified this by saying, "Scripture says you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." So,

"Well, I didn't use the name of God in my oath and so I can do kind of whatever I want here because I didn't use God's name when I raised my right hand."

Now, you don't have to be too smart to realize that is a cannon shot against the whole concept of truth. Rather than simply speaking truth, you have to parse out the kind of vows and oaths that were being made and you couldn't simply rely on what was being said. In that system, the Pharisees could give an appearance of commitment to truth but leave wiggle room as to whether they were being truthful or not. Watch this: it was a sophisticated way of crossing their fingers.

And you can see this illustrated if you look over at Matthew 23, kind of an illustration that will help us settle into what Jesus is addressing here with these hypocrites. Matthew 23:16. This will help you see what the Pharisees did and what Jesus was addressing in Matthew 5. He was addressing the scribes and Pharisees as we see from verse 13, now in verse 16 he says, "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.'" Do you see the distinction? You can swear by the temple but if you invoke the gold, then you've got to keep it. "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by 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."

Okay, laid a lot out here. Let's just step back and you can see what was going on. They distinguished the binding nature of oaths depending on whether you invoked certain things or not. Well, whatever happened to the concept of truth in that? Why do you think that you can play these verbal games and be free to lie in the presence of the God of truth? Today we would say, what makes you think that you can lie and use sophisticated ways to exercise deception with people when God is a God of truth, Christianity is a comprehensive exclusive truth claim, the Gospel is a truth claim, Christ is truth himself, where is this liberty to lie and deceive in that? Jesus is blowing all the smoke away and convicting these Pharisees and saying, "Your technicalities are just a pretext for deception." And you can see him address that and unfold it and show how useless those pretexts are in verses 34 to 36 in Matthew 5.

Look at that with me. 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. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black." Here's what Jesus is doing: he is taking us right into the most holy presence of God with what he says here. He says, "These distinctions that you are relying on to make different categories of oaths are meaningless. They are useless. They have no value whatsoever because God is over all, because God is omniscient, because God is omnipresent." And the whole point that Jesus is making here is actually quite simple and quite profound. In response to this sophisticated program of deception

and degrees of commitment to the truth, Jesus plunges a dagger into all of it and says, "You are missing the whole point." The whole point of this is that God is everywhere present; that God hears every word that you say regardless of how you try to qualify it with your lips. God is present at every moment and at every word that comes off of your tongue therefore it doesn't do any good to say, "I don't really mean it here," because God is the ultimate Judge, God is the present Judge of what you're saying and God sees it all and hears it all and that is more than enough to sanctify what you say so that it will be true when it comes out of your mouth.

So he says in verse 34, "make no oath at all, either by heaven." "I swear by heaven," notice they didn't use the name of God. Jesus says, "But what is heaven? Heaven is the throne of God. God is there. If you're swearing by heaven, you're swearing by the God who inhabits heaven." That shallow distinction does not work. Verse 35, it doesn't do you any good to swear by the earth because "it is the footstool of His feet." God is so powerfully over all of the earth that it's just like a footstool to him and he sees it and he reigns over it. You can't avoid the holiness of God in that way. You could swear by Jerusalem but Jerusalem "is the city of the great King." It's where Christ will come and reign from. It's where Christ is. "So on what basis do you think that you can evade truthfulness with these verbal games? Don't you understand that God is in heaven and in earth and at Jerusalem?"

He's making an appeal to the very perfections of God with what he is saying all based on this: God is omniscient, he knows all things; God is omnipresent, he is everywhere. And that means this, beloved, all of that to say this: God witnesses deception whether or not you say it in his name. The deception is a violation of his character regardless of whatever verbal trappings you try to put on it to dress it up, whether you try to cross your fingers or not. God doesn't care if your fingers are crossed. God doesn't care what kind of oath you've made. It doesn't change the absolute nature of the holiness of God requiring absolute truth and every evasion of truth, every distortion of what is accurate will bring forth his judgment.

For those of us who certainly in our pre-Christian days could tell lies as easily as we could drink water, that's pretty unnerving. Scripture says that you will give an account for every careless word that you'll utter. This is greatly serious and you see why this is far more than what you do in a courtroom or whether you pledge allegiance to the flag or not, those things are incidental. What this passage is telling you is that God is making a searching review. God is searchingly aware of everything that comes out of your mouth and the way that you interact with others and when there is deception, God does not accept that, God does not wink at that, God does not say, "Eh, that's okay. Truth doesn't really matter." Of course truth matters. God is a God of absolute truth and Christ is one in whom his mouth there was found no deceit, 1 Peter 2. So these lies which we so easily excuse are deviations and violations of the character of God and he sees it all and sophisticated ways to deceive don't make it any better.

Years ago in a far away place from Cincinnati, I'm happy to say, I knew a man who was preparing for a government interview for a position that he wanted to have and the

government agent, whatever the agency was, came to his house, set up an appointment to come to his house for the meeting and the guy knew that he would be asked about firearms on his property. He knew that in advance somehow and so what did he do? When the appointment was set, before the agent came, this is so wicked, he took his handgun, crossed the property line and put it on his neighbor's property somehow. He came back, sat down in the interview with this agent and the anticipated question came, "Do you have any guns on your property?" "No, sir, I don't." He worked a deception while technically telling the truth. He must have learned at the feet of Bill Clinton, it depends on what the meaning of "is" is. He looked that agent in the eye, said, "No, I don't," and when the agent was satisfied and left, he went back and got his gun and carried on in his own merry way and got what he wanted.

Can you imagine working a deception by technically telling the truth? How steeped in ungodliness is that? How much a violation, how much an affront to the holiness and omnipresence of God who sees exactly what you're doing and is not fooled in the least by such things. You know, things like that simply witness, don't they, and perhaps the Spirit would convict your own heart, things like that show us that there is more to the concept of truth than mere technicalities. The man was a liar in that interview but he was telling the truth as he did it. How twisted is that? And what Christ is saying here in this passage is, "Don't play games with the truth like that." The truth is too sacred. The truth is too high, it's too holy, it's too important. It's too much an outflowing of the very nature of God who is truth, who never deals with us in those kinds of sophisticated games of deception. By what right would a man think that he could do that when God is completely opposite of that? So what Jesus is saying here is, "Forget the oaths. Don't play games. Just tell the truth." God sees it all anyway.

So in our second point here we see Jesus' call to truthfulness. In light of all of this, how should you conduct yourself? How should you conduct yourself in light of these things? Jesus says in verse 37, "But," he gives the contrast. He says, "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil," or from the evil one. Beloved, this isn't difficult at one level, it's not a difficult principle to understand. What does Christ require from you as one of his disciples? He requires simply straightforward truthfulness. The true Christian does not – this will surprise some of you – the true Christian does not call on God in ordinary conversation. He is a holy God of truth. You fear and honor him and therefore you use straightforward honesty. Yes means yes. "Do you have a gun on your property?" No, but I keep one. I just hid it so you wouldn't know. "Did you take the ball?" Yes, I did.

Yes means yes. No means no. It means that your words are consistent with what the facts really are and when you cultivate that kind of character – here's the point and here's what Jesus is saying – when your character is like that, you don't need to use oaths to verify the truthfulness of what you're saying. So you don't need to say things like, "I swear, that is the best roast beef I have ever eaten! I swear to God that's true!" Now why would you do that? Why would you trivialize the name of God like that? But people do it all the time. Maybe a little closer to home, "That fish I caught was 25 pounds!" Exaggeration and unnecessary swearing.

You know, this is where our daily conversation comes in and what Christ is saying is, "Don't talk that way. Don't trivialize the name of God by attaching it to such incidental things. Don't trivialize the holiness and truthfulness of God by tying it to what you've eaten just now. God's name is to be revered and feared and respected. Don't drag it into things like that." It's enough to say, "That was a fine supper, ma'am. That fish I caught weighed in at 3 pounds 12 ounces." And beloved, if it's true in those small trivial matters of life, how much more the weighty matters of marital fidelity, marital relationships, family interactions, workplace integrity and relationships within the body of Christ? How much more straightforward honesty necessary? How much more when we speak to one another within the body of Christ should it be reflective of what is actually true and that what is said when you are in a group is consistent with what you say in private as opposed to saying one thing and putting on one face to one group of people, and then whispering other things different, contradictory in private? That is a vast sin against God. That is a vast violation of his holiness. There is no measuring the depth of the wickedness in that. To perpetrate deception within the walls of the body of Christ should be unthinkable to every one of us that name the name of Christ and love his people.

Let your yes be yes and your no be no. There should not be this public side of you that is what you want most people to believe but then you corner off people and tell them something different that is in direct violation. That inconsistency of character has to go and if it's a mark of your character, beloved, you need deeply to repent. There should not be that two-facedness found anywhere in a Christian. There should not be those patterns of deception being worked out in the body of Christ.

Now, just so you know, there is no one in this room that I have in mind as I say these things. I'm not addressing this to an existing issue in the church when I say that. We are simply making the point and bringing it to where Christ would have it to go in response to his word, for us to understand that there should be a consistency and there should be an integrity that what you are in private with one or two is what you are like with a group as well; that what you say is consistent from setting to setting and does not differ based on who you're talking to. If that stings somebody, it apparently needs to sting.

This is the standard. This is the character that Christ has called us to when he saved us and when you think about it, it could be no other way. Didn't Christ save you in part to conform you to his image? Didn't Christ save you so that you would be like him? Well, if he is a God of truth, and he is, if he is the way, the truth and the life, and he is, then wouldn't you expect that what he wants from you is an unmixed character of transparent honesty before those with whom you have relationship? Of course. Of course. Of course. And it puts a new light on what I'm about to describe, doesn't it? Those times where you cover your tracks because you've done something you think is wrong and so you cover your tracks so others won't find it later. Well, why do you cover your tracks if not that you have something to hide? And isn't there deception rooted in that as well? We fall so easily, don't we? We're so accustomed to the environment of deception that we live in in our culture that it's hard for us to recognize what the standard really is and yet the

standard is so pure, it is so simple, it is so straightforward: let your yes be yes and let your no be no.

Now, does that convict us? Does that convict you? Let's drive the conviction home just another step and make it so that we're actually fearful of this kind of deception in our lives, this kind of ambiguity, this kind of dual character, one face in public, one face in private. Do you realize what Scripture says the source of lies is? Jesus speaking about the devil in John 8:44 says the devil is the father of lies; that the source of deception ultimately finds its way back to Satan himself. It was Satan who deceived our first parents in the garden and cause the ruinous fall of the entire race and Christ says Satan is the father of lies. So these deceptions which we so easily tolerate are actually rooted in an evil being, rooted in Satan himself, and that's what Jesus says. Look at verse 37, "anything beyond these is of evil," it's of the evil one.

So you've got a positive and a negative motivation to deal with your patterns of deception in your life. On the positive side you recognize the high character of the truthfulness of God and you rest – think about it – you rest your eternal hope on the fact that God is true. You are banking your eternal destiny on the fact that when God promised to save you in Christ, when Christ said, "Come to me and I will save you from your sin," you are trusting him to be true to his promise, that he was telling you the truth when he said it. Everything most vital to your eternal soul is rooted in the concept of truth and that God and Christ will never violate it. Everything depends on that. Everything depends on this 66 books of the Bible being absolutely true. If there is a lie in it, the whole thing is corrupted. Everything that we hold dear depends on truth. Well then, if that's true, then you say, "Then it's obvious that my life must comport to truthfulness as well." There is no other way for it to go.

That's the positive side. On the negative side you say, "Oh, Christ has not only saved me from sin, he's saved me from the kingdom of darkness, saved me from the dominion of Satan and Satan is the father of lies. I want to run from that which is rooted in him. I want to run from that which reflects his character. I want so much to honor the Christ who saved me that the idea of keeping one foot in the devil's camp with my lies is unthinkable to me. And Lord, I repent before you in ashes and dust for the deception that I've tolerated in my character."

Christ is the truth and no deceit was found in his mouth. Christianity makes a truth claim: God is a God of truth; God sees it all; God hears it all; God will hold us to account for every careless word. Satan is the father of lies. How much more do we need to have a sanctifying influence on the truthfulness and the integrity with which we carry ourselves in our homes, in our church, in the workplace, in the world around us? Oh, beloved, come to this God of truth and bow before him. Come to this God of truth and if you're convicted, let's take a moment soon in confession to recognize, "God, my lies are not simply a horizontal thing, my lies are an assault against your character."

And if you're not a Christian, let me say something else that's true. If you're not a Christian, you need to understand something. There is so much sin in your soul, you've

told so many lies, you've violated God in so many ways there is absolutely no way that you can ever make it right on your own. There is no way that you can fix it. A text like this which exposes the deception in our hearts simply shows us how utterly ruined we are and how much we need a gracious Savior to save us and to forgive us and if you're not a Christian today and deception has been brought to your consciousness and you say, "I am a guilty sinner before God," good. I'm glad it had that effect on you. You need to know that because that's who you really are and then to go a step further and say and even to one like you Christ died. Christ rose again to save sinners just like you, to save them and to forgive them out of their deception and to bring them into the kingdom. How gracious is that? Judgment awaits your deceit, my non-Christian friend. Christ offers you himself right now to save you out of it.

And for the rest of us, let's put away the little tricks of deceit. Put away the big tricks of deceit. Put away any deception in our families, any deception in our local body, anywhere in your private life, because Christ has called you today with clarity to tell the truth, to live the truth, and the question is will you?

Let's bow together in prayer. I want to take just a moment to give you an opportunity for some honest confession before the Lord if something has convicted you, that the Spirit of God might seal true repentance in your heart and that you would form commitments and convictions in your heart to do what's necessary to make it right, to confess your sins before God remembering that in the midst of the conviction, Christ has truthfully promised a true promise for you to truly rely on, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." You don't have to walk out of this room with that burden of guilt upon you. Christ will forgive you. Go to him and receive the forgiveness that he's promised in his word. He keeps his promises.

Father, we thank you and we praise you that you are a God of truth, that Christ is truth incarnate, that your word is written truth. We thank you for the truth of the Gospel, that Christ died to save sinners just like us; that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day and now having offered a perfect blood atonement for sinners everywhere, he says, "Come to me and I will not cast you out." Thank you for the simplicity and the purity of the Gospel. And Father, we thank you that you've always dealt truthfully with us and that you always will. There is no deceit in the mouth of Christ. There is no deceit anywhere in the character of God. You are holy and pure and you take no pleasure in evil or deception. O God, we are so glad that you're like that and we offer you not just our verbal praise in response to that excellency of your perfections but, Father, we offer to you the commitment of our hearts to leave deception behind and to walk in truth just as Christ himself also walked in truth. Help us to that end. Cleanse us and purge us from any lingering deception in our hearts that our lives might be a pure reflection of who you are as we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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