

Matthew 5:33-37 (NKJV)

³³ "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'

³⁴ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne;

³⁵ nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

³⁶ Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

³⁷ But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Who here has never **deceived a person** for **their own advantage**?

Ok, let's expand that a little.

Who has never carefully crafted what you **did say** and what **you did not say** to deceive someone about something important?

I think we all will find ourselves **guilty** at some point.

So we have some expertise in the topic that Jesus is addressing.

The topic is **tricky deception** that **uses** the law to **defy** the law, just like the earlier topics of adultery and divorce. The **letter of the law** was being used as the excuse for doing behavior that overtly **offended** the **spirit** of the law.

Our hearts are the trickiest people we know.

The question really is, how do religious people lie?

I think this is what we will find.

Religious people

1. Find a way to cross their fingers
2. They find a way to blame it on the party they deceive for not finding out that they crossed their fingers
3. They find a way to ignore what God really cares about.

Normally when I read (red) this passage in the past I saw it as **unrelated** to the paragraphs before it. But this time it did not seem so **unrelated**. Let me show you what I mean.

How many fathers would accept this vow being given by a potential husband to their daughters?

"I will marry your daughter and remain married to her as long as she does not do a single thing that displeases me. As soon as she does that thing, all bets are off. Then I am free to leave them and their children as orphans and widows"

No, most men make a vow more serious than that. And that is expected by a father.

In Western Culture we normally make a vow that says we will remain true to this person, and no other, until death do us part.

Well the Pharisees had a way of getting around that vow. They found a loophole. They took a vow, and then they broke it with a technicality. We saw an example of that in their Divorce interpretation. Well now Jesus, in our current text, is expanding his explanation of the evil the Pharisees do in how they have **made rules** about oaths. They actually had created a **system of deception** and said that the **law backed it**. It is no wonder that Christ got angry with them often. They were supposed to be the spokespeople for the law. And they were teaching people **how to abuse it** for their own ends. They **used** the law to **defy** the law. It was religious chicanery.

We need to understand something. Truth matters. I hope we have really grasped the relationship between **telling the truth** and **fellowship**. The more honest the communication is between believers, the closer the fellowship will be. The more honest the communication between us and God, the deeper the fellowship we will experience with God.

Are you satisfied with your fellowship in your relationships with believers? Are you satisfied with your fellowship with God? If not, ask yourself what do you know about yourself that you actively hide in what you **choose to say** and what you **choose not to say**.

There isn't usually a huge disconnect. Believers who are not afraid to go where **the breadcrumbs of truth about themselves** take them, and who **allow the evidence about themselves** to convince them of **the truth about themselves**, those people are better equipped for more intimate fellowship. Those who simply will not go to the painful places, who refuse to investigate, who refuse to question their own motives and actions, they are not as equipped for deep fellowship. Their fellowship will be as shallow as their willingness to see their own faults. There may be other factors, but this is a big one.

Believers are, by definition, **lovers** of truth. First we love the truth of the gospel message. We love it to our cores. Because it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. But the **preparation** for that Gospel is to recognize that **we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God**. To the degree we recognize **THAT** truth, to the same degree we **appreciate** the salvation that was provided for us.

Do you see what I mean? Truth matters. Christ identified Himself, not just as telling the truth. He said I **AM** the truth.

If you are like me, you find that just living life teaches us to **cover** truth. We don't want to make our spouses or our parents or our kids or our friends angry. So we hide stuff. We cover stuff. We keep stuff out of view. And we grow distant.

Then, as the Holy Spirit works on us, we begin to see that the truth really is important. Even the truth we are not **forced** to tell. But the Spirit urges that confession until we make it. And we find that we are still loved. And that is freeing to our souls. Walking in the Spirit makes us uneasy with our coverings. They are good for **protection** maybe, but they are not good for **relationship**, they are not good for being **set free** from our bondages. Those secrets never turn the corner for us in our spiritual struggles.

OK.

Let's take a look.

Again let's look at what the law taught.

What the Pharisees taught.

And what Jesus taught.

OK, what does the law teach about oaths.

Exodus 20:7 (NKJV)

7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Leviticus 19:12 (NKJV)

12 And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I *am* the LORD.

Numbers 30:2 (NKJV)

2 If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

Deuteronomy 5:11 (NKJV)

11 'You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 (NKJV)

21 "When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you.

22 But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you.

23 That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.

Do you notice what all of these verses have in common? They are all vows to the Lord.

The idea is that any oath to God invites God to referee the truthfulness of what is said, and to harshly judge anyone that violates their word when an oath to God is made. When we make an oath to the Lord we are inviting Him to **enforce the promise** we are making and to punish us if we do not carry it out. We see the definition of an oath in Heb 6:16

Hebrews 6:16 (NKJV)

16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute.

Oath calls upon **one greater than himself** to witness what happens and to intervene accordingly. Therefore an oath is always made by one **more powerful** than the one making the oath, because the entity we make the oath to must have the **power and authority to judge**.

Now why would anyone take an oath? There may be more reasons, but here are a few.

- 1- To **draw attention** to that which we plan to do.
- 2- To affirm by something higher than one's self **one's commitment** to do a thing.
- 3- To convince someone else you are **telling the truth** when you are known for not keeping your promises.
- 4- To make a formal statement, almost like a contract, of what you plan to do.
- 5- To find a way to **get the advantage of people believing you** without having to experience the **disadvantage of living by your word**.

God and godly people made vows for some of those good reasons. The pharisees were experts at the bad reasons.

If time allowed we would look at all the oaths made in the Old Testament by men of God. It was clearly a **common** practice, and when done sincerely and completed was **very good**.

Even God made oaths by Himself. And that is understandable because how could He make an oath by anyone else? This oath was clearly not made so it would **hold God to living up to His own oath**. He could not possibly lie. But it allowed those who heard Him to realize the **solemnness** of what God was saying.

So the law clearly taught that vows to God were certainly allowed, but if you made one, you had to keep it. There are examples of foolish vows. But even then, the people who made them were required to keep them.

It makes you wonder about those Jews who vowed that they would kill Paul or die. What did they do when they did not kill Paul?

Here are a few more things the law taught, not specifically about vows in the Lord's name, but about promises made.

Psalm 15:1 (NKJV)

¹ LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

Psalm 15:4 (NKJV)

⁴ In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD; He *who* swears to his own hurt and does not change;

So the righteous person is the one who swears to his own hurt and does not change. This swearing is more than just a promise. It is making some kind of solemn oath to do something. It was like Jephthah making a vow and having his daughter come out of his house instead of a chicken. He kept his vow.

God says the people who treat truth **like this** are the ones that live with Him. Let's look at what else the Old Testament taught.

Psalm 119:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ Remove from me the way of lying, And grant me Your law graciously.

Psalm 119:163 (NKJV)

¹⁶³ I hate and abhor lying, *But* I love Your law.

Psalm 120:2 (NKJV)

² Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips *And* from a deceitful tongue.

Here we see that David understood God enough to know that **God hates lying**. He hates a life that **continually deceives**, that allows **deception** as a way of **gaining what one wants** or **avoiding what one does not want**. Lying is the opposite of the law. If you love the law, you hate lying. And lying lips and deceitful tongues are synonyms.

Do we get what this is saying? Living in a way that compromises truth is anti God. Who is the father of lies? Who is the premier expert liar? Who lied his way into the human race **falling from grace**? Yep. The devil.

We need to ask at this point, where do we **run from truth**? About our selves? About our lives? About our attitudes? About our actions? The law does not cover that stuff. It is not safe territory.

It is against God.

Now what did the Pharisees teach?

³³ "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'

³⁴ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's

throne;

³⁵ nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

³⁶ Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

OK, what the Pharisees did was separate those oaths made in the **name of the Lord** from all **other Oaths**. So they said, oh yeah, if you make the oath in the **Lord's name**, that one you must keep. But if technically this oath was made by something **different**, well **maybe** you need to keep it and **maybe you don't**.

Notice the examples that Jesus uses. These were all things that Pharisees address. Really. They had rules on this stuff.

Look what Jesus says later in Matthew.

Matthew 23:16-22 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.'

¹⁷ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?

¹⁸ And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.'

¹⁹ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

²⁰ Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it.

²¹ He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it.

²² And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.

This gives us a lot more insight into what the Pharisees are teaching. The Pharisees are splitting hairs on **when you can lie** and when you **have to tell the truth**. Imagine that. They are actually making rules that say, if you swear by the temple, if you were to say, "**I swear by the temple that I will give you a cow for those two donkeys**", I don't have to pay you the price I agreed to. But if I swear to pay you by the **gold** of the temple, now I do.

There is no way that these rules are going to lead people into better **promise keeping**, any more than their rules on divorce **strengthened marriage**.

The Pharisees saw themselves as making a hard stand for God because they emphasized that any vow made in the name of God had to be kept. I am

exceedingly curious how **they** made vows in their business dealings, knowing what they knew. I'll bet a lot of them made vows on the temple instead of the gold in the temple.

When you leave a **crack** for deception, what you will get is a **flood of deception**. With your children, all you need to do to get a **boat load** of deception is to not **check** for deception. If you want deception from young children, believe what they tell you without doing the work of verifying if they are telling you the truth. Just leave the crack and they will fill it. That is what flesh does. Do you remember as a child the first time you realized you got away with a lie? Didn't the light go on? Didn't it open up a world of opportunity that you did not realize previously existed?

Somehow the Pharisees figured a way of calculating **closeness** to an actual vow to God. The **closer** it was, the more **binding** it was. But the back end of that equation is also true. The further the vow was from the name of God, the more deception was allowed. And over time you can bet that if you accepted a vow that was technically not binding, that is **your fault**. It is like as if you had not read the **fine print** of the **contract** for some agreement you were entering into, even though a verbal agreement had been reached and agreed upon. There is actually evidence of this kind of teaching in the Mishna. There are bodies of writing on it. This was really a thing. It might look silly to us, but it was not silly to them.

So we saw what the Old Testament taught and what the Pharisees taught.

Now lets looks closely at what Jesus taught.

I will be reading from Matt 5:33-37 and 23:16-22 again

Matthew 23:16-22 (NKJV)

16 Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.'

17 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?

18 And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.'

19 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

20 Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it.

21 He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in

it.

22 And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.

In Matthew 23 we get the idea that **all swearing** by **any** of God's creation is **swearing by God**. The emphasis here is that the Pharisees were encouraging sin by the wrong logic they were applying to God's law. Their teaching was not standing **for** God. It was standing **against** God. Jesus castigates them for misleading the people they were supposed to be serving. They were doing a horrible job and Jesus did not hesitate to point that out.

In Matt 5, our text, Jesus is teaching us not just what we **should not do** but what we **should** do.

Matthew 5:33-37 (NKJV)

33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'

34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne;

35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

OK, how are we to understand Jesus's statement, "**but I say do not swear at all?**" The Quakers take that to mean that they should not take any oaths, even an oath in a courtroom. They should not vow to tell the truth. Why? Because Jesus said not to.

Again, as we said early on in this study, it is VERY easy to misapply the sermon on the mount. We do very well to understand how the sermon should be applied by **those who spent the most time with Christ**. We must see it through **their lens** of application. This will protect us from extremes that Jesus did **not** intend to drive us to, but help us emphasize exactly the points that Jesus truly was emphasizing.

Now, was Jesus telling us to never make any kind of vow?

Probably not.

Why?

Well **first**, the Old Testament tells us how to make vows. We read (red) some of those passages. It tells us we can make them to God. But it tells us to never

make them frivolously. If we make a vow we must keep it. Remember that Jesus stood strong on the strength of the Old Testament. And really, most of us made marriage vows **before God**. Was it wrong to make them? Probably not. But it is very wrong not to keep them.

Second there all kinds of godly men in the Old Testament who made vows to God. It is easy to come up with a long list. That is not seen as a bad thing, except when they did not keep their vows.

Third, Jesus testified under oath.

Matthew 26:63-64 (NKJV)

63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

One would have thought that Jesus might have told the high priest to pack sand at this point. But He did not. He told the truth under oath. It appears that even He accepted the strength of the oath.

And Fourth, the disciples took oaths.

Paul makes an oath by Christ and the Holy Spirit

Romans 9:1 (NKJV)

1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,

Here he also calls God as a witness.

2 Corinthians 1:23 (NKJV)

23 Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.

I think we can see that Jesus was not saying that there is **never any place** for taking an oath. This was not an absolute condemnation of oaths.

But we need to take it in context. Jesus was talking about the **misuse** of oaths.

The oaths were being made **frivolously** about any little thing. And under riding all of this was a general **lack of honesty** that had to be bolstered by the **giving** of an oath. It is as if to say **in general conversation** these people knew they could not trust each other to live by their word. So they would make oaths. And only the **shrewd** among them would not get ripped off. Because the shrewd would know the Pharisaiical rules and would not allow someone to make a vow that was not prosecutable.

It looks to me that **this** was Jesus point.

³⁴ **But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne;**

³⁷ **But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.**

Look at the context. Jesus is not addressing those times when people, in all sincerity, make an oath to God and keep it. He is talking about how people abuse oaths in order to lie. That is why He can say that “**anything more than this is of the devil.**” Would Christ really say that making a marriage oath before God, that we fully intent to keep is of the devil? Based on the examples we reviewed, I think we couldn't conclude that.

The **topic** is oaths, but the **issue** is deception. We must understand this text in that context.

The examples that Jesus's lists are those questionable oaths. These were oaths made to **avoid** telling the truth rather than to **emphasize** telling the truth. Jesus is telling them, don't even get into that **deception game**. Knock it off. Stop. Just tell the truth. That is all. Just tell the truth. Quit trying to deceive. Quit playing games with the law. Quit pretending deception is ok. Get honest. If you say something, **do it**. If you say you **won't** do something, **don't do it**. Why? Anything else is demonic. Anything else is from Satan, the Father of lies.

Stop adding anything to your promises to each other. Begin being the people who **can be believed** simply because it is **you** that said it and you always **keep your word**. Develop the character where everyone knows that what you promise you will do.

Oaths can add **layers** to telling the truth. They can complicate communication. And that is what Jesus is addressing here.

This application cannot be missed. **If you say you will do something and do not do it, that is a serious failure.** If you teach people that they cannot count on you to do what you said, that is a **failure**. It is a misrepresentation of Christ. It is a point where we should say, please forgive me. I sinned by not living up to my word. Oh maybe we forgot. Or maybe life situations intervened. But if we gave our word, our word is binding. That is the way of Christ. Our failures are **forgivable**, but we must identify them as **failures**. They are serious. Our word is what people must depend upon in the fellowship of the church.

I find that I often qualify my promises because I am flawed. I will tell people that I will do it if I remember. I do not want to lie to my brothers and sisters. Promising according to my intention does not get me off the hook. Every

promise is a yes. And we are to make it a yes. We are to carry out what we promise.

Truth was what Jesus was getting at. We all owe it to each other to have **truthful** communication. And when we stray from that, due to **laziness**, or **forgetfulness**, or **selfishness when something better comes up**, we begin straying into the devil's territory. We begin becoming **unbelievable**. And we do well to stop blaming the people who **do not believe us** when we have given them **ample reason to not believe us**. We need to do exactly what Jesus said. Make **yes yes** and **no no** without any excuses. Tell the truth to each other and do not lie.

So how do **we** formally posture something that is not true for our advantage in our day to day lives?

How do **we** seek advantage by deception?

I think **pretentious action** and **lying words** is how we do it.

I tell you that I love you when what I really want is to use you in some way.

I tell you my motive is one thing when it is really something quite different.

I tell you what you want to hear because it will in some way remove my pain or increase my pleasure.

Maybe we do not make vows like the Pharisees backhandedly taught. But all deception is the spawn of the devil and fits this category.

The question we are left with this morning is, **How do I deceive in my normal day to day life? What changes can I make to make it stop?**

let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.