

HONESTY IN SPEECH

Matthew 5:33-37

Intro: When the Lord made the statement which we find in Matt. 5:20 He was setting the theme for all that we have in this first chapter of the the Sermon on the Mount. (Read Matt. 5:20.) The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, sad to say, was no guarantee that they were in the kingdom of heaven. Or, to state it another way, the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was no proof at all that they were saved.

This is a very sad thing that our Lord said about those who were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of the people of Israel in that day. To be sure, righteousness is required for salvation, but it is not the righteousness of men, but the righteousness of God! And such righteousness is not a righteousness produced by our works, but a righteousness which is ours through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been learning about the true righteousness in our study of Romans. Let me remind you of what Rom. 1:16-17 says:

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

And we can add to this what the Apostle wrote in 2 Cor. 5:21. Speaking of what God had done for us in Christ, he said,

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

So, after saying what the Lord said in verse 20 of this chapter, He went on to correct by His teaching the false teaching of the scribes and Pharisees by giving His disciples the truth.

Today we come to the third or the fourth abuse, depending upon how you arrange them. If you combine what the Lord said about adultery and divorce, as I have, then this is the third point. If you divide verses 27-30 from verses 31-32, then this is the fourth.

What was the problem that the Lord was addressing here? Well, our first response to that question probably would be that it is against taking oaths. But a closer examination will show us that it is against the third commandment in the Law, against taking the Lord's Name in vain. And then when we ask why would the Lord's Name be taken as an oath, we can see that it

is to assure others that a person is really telling the truth. So we can say that this is the problem:

I. THE SIN OF LYING.

We all know how prevalent this is in human life. We all are guilty, and we always as Christians have to be on our guard against being deceitful. It is a major sin, according to God.

If you have memorized the verses that we have in our Bible Memory work this winter, you know that one of our verses was Psa. 58:3:

The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.

And then remember Jer. 17:9:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

In Mark 7:21-23 we have those illuminating words from our Lord Jesus Christ:

- 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,
- 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:
- 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

And even as Christians we are warned against lying.

9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him (Col. 3:9-10).

In Eph. 4:25 we read these words:

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

And then listen to these verses:

Prov. 12:22:

Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.

Isa 59:2-4:

2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

3 For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath

muttered perverseness.

4 None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.

Hosea 4:1-3:

1 Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.

2 By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.

3 Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.

John 8:44:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him.

When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

1 Tim. 4:1-2:

1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.

Rev. 21:7-8:

7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Rev. 22:14-15:

14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

So lying is unquestionably a major sin in the sight of God, and it is one of the greatest problems that we face every day. It is everywhere. No one is innocent of this great sin. We see it in business, in politicians, in broken marriages. No child ever needs to be taught to lie; it is a part of our nature.

But what is one measure that men use to try to show that they are not lying?

II. THE USE OF OATHS (Matt. 5:33-36).

The Lord began here as he did in the preceding sections of His message, by referring to what had been said before. See verse 33.

“Forswear” means *to commit perjury, or to lie, or to swear falsely.*

One commentator made the following statement:

The Jews held that only oaths need be kept, and not all of them; only certain forms of swearing were binding. Christ [said] that such distinctions are iniquitous; all oaths are binding. But no oaths ought to be used, because a man’s word ought to be enough. Oaths and other strong statements have come into use because men are so often liars; but it is a grievous error to suppose that a lie is not sinful, unless it is sworn to. The Jews went even beyond this, and held that perjury was not sinful, unless the oath was taken in a particular form (Plummer, Alfred, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 82, 83).

As an example of this, let me read to you the words of the Lord Jesus in which He was denouncing the scribes and Pharisees for this very thing.

His words are found in Matt. 23:16-22:

16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?

18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.

19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.

21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and

by him that dwelleth therein.

22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

Actually the statement made by our Lord is not found in exactly this form in the OT, but the gist of it is there in verses like Ex. 20:7:

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

And Deut. 6:13:

Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.

And Lev. 19:12

And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

Now the point both in the passage in Matt. 23 as well as in our text in Matt. 5, is that oaths were to be made as in the presence of the Lord, and not by Heaven, nor by the earth, nor by Jerusalem. Note how our Lord related all of these to God. And as far as swearing by our own heads, we cannot make one hair white or black. They probably dyed their hair in those days as some people do today, but the Lord was not talking about that. He meant permanently changing hair from white to black, or from black to white. We can't do that. But God certainly can.

So the people needed to remember that heaven is God's throne, the earth is His footstool, and Jerusalem is "the city of the great King," perhaps speaking here of the place where God dwells. So it is God who is being emphasized in each case. If we always remember that God sees us, and God hears us, and God knows what is in our hearts, then we will be careful about what we say and about what we promise to do.

I think that it is good to point out here that oaths are not always wrong. And we have examples in Scripture to prove this. When Abraham sent his servant to get a bride for Isaac, he made his servant swear that he would do what Abraham wanted him to do. See Gen. 24. Joseph made the children of Israel swear that they would take his bones with them when they returned to their own land. See Gen. 50. Joshua swore to the Gibeonites that he would let them live. See Joshua 9. And Saul was judged by God later because he did not honor that oath. Jonathan made David swear that he would not cut off his kindness from Jonathan's house forever.

So good men have used the oath.

But what is even more significant is the fact that God has made oaths. He not only made the promise of salvation to Abraham, but He confirmed His promise with an oath. See Heb. 6:13-20. And we have the example of the Lord Jesus responding to the high priest when the Lord was standing trial before him. Listen to these words found in Matt. 26:63-64:

63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.

64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

The Lord did not rebuke the high priest for using God's Name in this way, but He responded to the high priest, confessing that He was the Son of God. Origen, who is remembered as "the celebrated Alexandrian Church teacher," and who lived in the second and third centuries, said that our Lord's "verily" was an oath.

So if you are called to witness in court that you will tell the truth, there is really no reason why you cannot do it. Living in a world like we live in, and with people as prone to lie as they are, this is one way of confirming that we intend to be, and will be, truthful.

And yet, for those of us who know the Lord, there is an even better way. Let me borrow words from the Apostle for my last heading.

III. "A MORE EXCELLENT WAY" (Matt. 5:37).

We find this in verse 37. The Lord was indicating that every child of God should be known for his "honesty in speech." We should tell the truth whether we are under an oath or not. And our truthfulness should go down to the simplest of words. Our "yes" should always mean "yes," and we should never say "no" when the right answer is "yes" – or *vice versa*. And so we should never say "yes" when the right answer is "no." Our "yes" should always mean "yes," and our "no" should always mean "no." We need to be known as honest people. This means that we are not going to cheat anyone. We are not going to take anything that does not belong to us. And we always seek to do what is right because:

- 1) We have been born again, and so are new creatures.
- 2) We know that the Lord is always watching us, and we want to do what is pleasing to Him.

At the end of verse 37 the Lord added these words: "For whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." The Greek says, "from the evil," and this

has led many commentators to say that it should be translated, “from the Evil One.” This certainly fits in with what I read to you a little while ago from John 8:44. Let me read it to you again. The words are those of our Lord as he spoke to unbelieving Jews:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

The Devil lied to Eve, and in the following course of events, Adam sinned and the whole human race was brought under sin and under the judgment of God.

And so what did our Lord mean? Commentators seem to shy away from explaining this expression, “For whatsoever is more than these cometh of the Evil One.” I am not sure that I know, but I will tell you what I think our Lord meant. In the first part of verse 34, the Lord said, “But I say unto you, Swear not at all.” Putting these two verses together (34 and 37) it would seem that the Lord meant that we should be so intent on being honest before men, that they would know that a simple “yes” or “no” was even more dependable than if we had backed it up with an oath. The Devil does not want us to concentrate on being what God wants us to be; he would prefer that we join with the world in saying whatever we need to say in order to get by. Besides, when we take frivolous oaths, we run the danger of becoming hypocritical, and so would use the Name of our God in vain.

Perhaps James reference to this passage can help us. Listen to James 5:12: James 5:12

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

Concl: Let us seek by the grace of God to be honest, never deceptive, not only in what we are, but also in what we say, and in all that we do – and even in our thoughts. And to God be all of the glory.