

Authentic Christians

Lesson 14 – Matthew 5:33-37

1. The Structure of the SOTM

- **REMEMBER:** The SOTM is one sermon in 3 parts – **PART 1** (5:3-16) introduces the “kingdom of heaven” (*inclusio* is “heaven” in vv. 3 & 16); **PART 2** (5:17-7:12) makes application of “kingdom truth” (*inclusio* is “Law and the Prophets” in 5:17 & 7:12); and **PART 3** (7:13-8:27) calls people to make a decision (*inclusio* is the idea of destruction in 7:13 & 8:27)
- **REMEMBER:** Jesus is correcting Pharisaical misinterpretations of the Law and their deliberate error in PART 2 of the SOTM, thus the “You have heard” beginnings to each section.

“Being ungodly is not just about committing a certain list of sins. It is also about finding fulfillment outside of God, which leads me to commit an endless list of sins of the heart.”
(Paul David Tripp, A Quest for More, pg. 136)

Would any of us have been smart enough to look behind the Law for the heart issues? Would we also have felt that God was very specific with what He did not allow, so much so that to add to or subtract from His commands would have been anathema? Would we also have misinterpreted God’s intent with the commands?

- **REMEMBER:** The contrast is between the acts of a citizen of the kingdom and the motivations of that citizen’s heart; in essence Jesus is saying “You think you’re innocent of ____, but you’re guilty!”
- **REMEMBER:** Vv. 21-48 are commentaries on Commands 6-10 (vv. 21-26 on #6 murder; vv. 27-30 on #7 adultery; vv. 31-32 on #8 theft; vv. 33-37 on #9 false witness; and 38-42 on #10 coveting and defrauding) – a similar order is repeated in Mk. 10:19 & Lk. 18:20.
- **REMEMBER:** Jesus is dealing with inter-personal relationships, not events that are “acts of God” (events that have no human malice, knowledge or motivation).

2. Integrity

- The point Jesus is making focuses on the practice of supporting/undergirding one’s statement by an oath that makes a connection with something that’s commonly known and accepted as true, faithful, loyal, trustworthy, etc.
- Jesus also points out the Pharisee’s obvious hesitancy to make a vow/oath in God’s name without any intention of keeping it; the religious leaders felt justified, though, in swearing an oath based on the integrity of something other than God and then breaking their oath because it was not sworn in God’s name. (See Lev. 19:12, Num. 30:2, Deut. 23:21-23)

“The Pharisees were notorious for their oaths, which were made on the least provocation. Yet they made allowances for mental reservations within their oaths. If they wanted to be relieved of oaths they had made by heaven . . . by the earth . . . by Jerusa-

lem, or by one's own head, they could argue that since God Himself had not been involved their oaths were not binding.” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary)

“Manifesting of this same dishonesty, the Jews not only swore according to Old Testament law by the name of the Lord (and occasionally violated such oaths), but also had developed the practice of swearing false, evasive, deceptive oaths by everything other than the name of the Lord (which alone was considered binding). They swore by anything other than the Lord for the very purpose of pretending to a truthfulness that they had no intention of maintaining.” (MacArthur, James: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, pg. 263)

What are some of the creative ways people (children especially) try to annul their verbal promises? (fingers crossed, didn't use the proper phraseology when making the promise, etc.)

- The religious leaders were keenly aware of two biblical events that helped shape their twisted logic:
 - The Deceit of the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:3-27) – an oath of protection was made by Joshua to the Gibeonites; in spite of their deceit, Joshua kept his oath because it was made “in the name of Jehovah” (Josh. 10:1-15).
 - The Legacy of Saul (2 Sam. 21:1-14) – David faced a 3-year famine due to Saul's actions against the Gibeonites; the oath was still in effect 400 years later!

“One who swears in the name of God, even if he swears to his own hurt, must keep the oath in order to represent God's character. God is a holy God, and to break an oath made in His name is to transgress, to blaspheme, to caricature the God in whose name the oath is made. Because the Jews were the people of God, they were to have a morality that was not only individual but national. The nation itself was required to keep oaths made in God's name.” (The Complete Works of Francis Schaefer - Vol. 2)

- By the time of Jesus, one whole tractate in the Mishnah was given over to oaths:

“One rabbi says that if you swear by Jerusalem you are not bound by your vow; but if you swear toward Jerusalem, then you are bound by your vow.” (Carson, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, pg. 50)

- Jesus seems to prohibit the members of His kingdom from swearing or taking oaths (vv. 34-37).
 - Some see this passage as a clear prohibition of taking an oath in court or taking an oath of allegiance to one's country (Quakers & Mennonites) ... however ...

Should Christians use the phrase “so help me God” or “in God's name”? Should a Christian swear allegiance to the flag and/or recite the pledge of allegiance?

- The OT allows for oaths in God's name (Deut. 10:20)
- Many of God's servants employed oaths (Gen. 24:1-9, Ezra 10:5, Neh. 5:12)
- God swears an oath by His own name (Heb. 6:13-17)

- The point Jesus is making, however, is that every member of His kingdom needs to guard the essential integrity of one's speech, promises and intentions.

"The duties required are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever."
(Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 144)

- Implied in Jesus' command is an accurate representation of the majesty and integrity of Jehovah – the examples used are objects of God's creation that have been tainted by sin.

"Understanding that the Lord would have our oaths to be a species of divine worship, we must be the more careful that they do not, instead of worship, contain insult, or contempt, and vilification. It is no slight insult to swear by him and do it falsely: hence in the Law this is termed profanation (Lev. 19:12). For if God is robbed of his truth, what is it that remains? Without truth he could not be God. But assuredly he is robbed of his truth, when he is made the approver and attester of what is false." (Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. 2, Ch. 8, #24)

- Jesus deals again with the Jewish tendency to be deceitful in Matt. 23:16-22.

3. Practical Implications

- Since an oath is meant to bolster the truthfulness of a person's speech and since Jesus prohibits such oaths by compelling His followers to always be truthful, we should require an accurate and truthful conversation from ourselves and from others without resorting to an oath.

Give some examples of how parents in particular can violate this command.

How important is teaching our children to accurately communicate information without embellishment or misrepresentation? How can we help them do this?

Is there ever a time in which a Christian can violate Eph. 4:25?

- Read James 5:12 – Verbal commitments must be fulfilled no matter the inconvenience.

"Christians claim to have the truth, and to follow him who is the Truth (John 14:6). In our conversations, therefore, truth must be our watchword." (Carson, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, pg. 51)

"The custom of swearing oaths was a major part of life in biblical times. It had become an issue in the church, particularly the predominantly Jewish congregations to which

James wrote. Since swearing oaths was an integral part of Jewish culture, Jewish believers brought that practice into the church. But such oath taking is unnecessary among Christians, whose speech is to be honest (Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9), and whose lives are to demonstrate integrity and credibility. For believers, a simple yes or no should suffice because they are faithful to keep their word.” (MacArthur, James: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, pg. 264)

When should a Christian expect his/her word or verbal commitment to be verified, and when should his/her word or verbal commitment be sufficient?

What types of consequences result from a Christian’s lack of integrity in their speech?

Read Psalm 15:1-5

- Oaths are serious business and should not be taken lightly – implied in Jesus’ command is that every oath finds its way back to God.

Do you think a divorce initiated by a believing spouse is a violation of this passage and others like Ps. 15:4?

What application ... if any ... does this passage have on our agreements with computer software makers (downloads) and the music industry (ripping and sharing) and publishing companies (reproducing copyrighted material)?

- Speech that is consistently untruthful or inaccurate or disingenuous is the trademark of an unbeliever. (See Matt. 12:34-37 & Luke 6:43-45)

How does a believer approach another professing believer over either their lack of verbal integrity or their propensity to embellish the truth?