

TEACHINGS OF Jesus (14)
Sermon on the Mount (13)
Concerning Oaths
Matthew 5:33-37

In our lesson today we continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount, likely similar to many of the sermons Jesus preached often, especially early in His ministry. We have devoted considerable time to this sermon and I plan to devote much of the remainder of 2020 to this sermon, then in 2021, we will continue our theme on the teachings of Jesus dealing with other teachings.

Thus far we continue in the midst of a section where Jesus is dealing with superior and godly righteousness (Matthew 5:20 – superior to self-righteousness, and pleasing to God). It is a righteousness of the heart. When one asks, how can my righteousness exceed that of the religious leaders, Jesus in essence said, “Let me show you” and proceeded to give 6 examples. We are in the midst of these examples. Thus far we have addressed: 1) Murder & anger; 2) Adultery & lust; and 3) Divorce and remarriage. Today, we will notice the next one – the taking of oaths – Matthew 5:33-37

I. “You have heard that it was said to those of old”

a. “You shall not swear falsely but perform your oaths to the Lord.”

i. ***This WAS THE Law of Moses and clearly taught -***

Leviticus 19:12, *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, *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 23:21, *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.*

- ii. ***It was also emphasized in other places*** – Ecclesiastes 5:2, *“Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God...”* 4-6, when you make a vow to God
Jeremiah 5:1-2 – one of the sins of Jerusalem was that they swore falsely
Hosea 4:1-2, *Hear the word of the Lord, You children of Israel, For the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: “There is no truth or mercy Or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, Killing and stealing and committing adultery, They break all restraint, With bloodshed upon bloodshed.*

- iii. ***Notice the emphasis in each of these verses*** – and consistently throughout the Old Testament (and New Testament as well) – it was about truthfulness and faithfulness. It was about keeping one’s word when you made a promise. It was about making promises sincerely and integrity, and with the full intent of keeping your promise, even if it hurts – Psalm 15:4, *Who may abide in the tabernacle of God? (vs. 1), ...He who swears to his own hurt and does not change...*

God has ALWAYS demanded truthfulness and condemned/frowned upon dishonesty.

b. How had they corrupted this command?

- i. ***By saying that only oaths have to be truthful.*** IF you didn’t “swear” it was acceptable to lie or fail to carry out your oath.
- ii. ***By qualifying what constitutes an oath*** – both in our text and other places (Matthew 23:16-22), Jesus noted how they would use certain wording which determined whether an oath had to be kept or not. IF someone was not aware of the “code” they could be deceived.

- iii. **By only making binding “oaths to the Lord”** – there were those who said that if you made an oath in the name of the Lord (regardless of what name) you were obligated to keep it. But if you did not invoke His name, you could break the oath.
- iv. **By divorcing the wife of youth** – Malachi 2:14-15. I consider this because it follows vs. 31-32 and serves as an example of setting aside an oath before God because you decide you don’t want to follow it anymore.

II. But I say to you?

- a. **Do not swear at all** – This is obviously something that needs to be put into a proper context.
 - i. First consider the word used in the Greek does NOT have the multiple meanings we use in English language (1- an oath; 2 – profane language). The word is only speaking of taking oaths – a word meaning to solemnly promise something, or to affirm the truth of something, especially by invoking God as witness.
 - ii. We shall see that there were occasions when “swearing” (taking an oath) was acceptable under the Old Law and we even find it in the New Testament.
 - iii. NOTE: This is NOT what the LOM taught – Jesus is making a point and in essence is saying, “You shouldn’t have to take an oath when you promise to do something.” Let’s develop this more.
- b. **Do not swear by anything** – Jesus qualifies what He means with several examples.
 - i. Our text – Jesus gives several entities to consider:
 Don’t swear by heaven – it is where God’s throne is
 By the earth – it is His footstool
 By Jerusalem – it is the city of the Great King (either David and/or the Messiah), who was a man after God’s own heart
 By your own head – you were created by God and there are things you cannot control – even the color of your hair (there are traits about you, that you cannot control – BUT GOD CAN). The point of these examples – when one seeks a “loophole” by saying, “I did not swear an oath to the Lord”, IF you swear by ANYTHING – in essence God is witness and the maker of whatever that is. God owns it all – Psalm 24:1, *“The earth is the LORD’s and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.”* (Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:24).
 cf. Psalm 50:10, *For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills.*
 - ii. See Matthew 23:16-22, where Jesus is the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees for their corruption. He addresses their manipulation of the truth calling them “blind guides” They created “loopholes” such as:
 - Swearing by the temple would be nothing, BUT swearing by the gold of the temple you had to perform it. Jesus challenges them in vs. 17 – Which is greater – the gold (money) or the fact that it belongs to the temple of God thus making it holy? They had this backward.
 - Swearing by the altar was nothing, but swearing by the gift on the altar obligated you to keep it. Again Jesus asks the same thing in vs. 19 – Which is greater – the gift which is simply an animal that has been killed, or the altar where it is sacrificed that makes it holy. AGAIN, they had it backwards with their materialistic minds.
 vs. 21-22 - Jesus, then notes he who swears by the temple swears by God who dwells therein and all that is in it; and he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God where God is sitting on it.
 The point – DON’T PLAY WORD GAMES when it comes to the truth!
 NOTE: Jesus is condemning them because of wording that is DELIBERATELY intended to deceive one who is unaware.
- c. **Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes!’, and your ‘No’, be ‘No!’**

- i. The point Jesus is making is simple – BE TRUTHFUL! Let your word be your bond. Be a person of integrity. Even if it hurts, keep your word.
IF you say you will do something, with confidence the one that you made the promise to ought to know you will do it, AND if you say you will NOT do something, he knows you will keep your word (e.g. He knows you will not repeat what you promised you would not repeat, etc.).
James 5:12 repeats this, *But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.*
- ii. God hates lying and always has – the very first sin which resulted in the fall of man, involved a lie – which is why Satan is called the father of lies – **John 8:44.**
Proverbs 6:16-19 – A lying tongue is one of the 7 things God hates. Also add to this – a heart that devises wicked plans and a false witness who speaks lies.
Proverbs 12:22, *"Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal truthfully are His delight."*
NT – **Ephesians 4:25**, *Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another*
Revelation 21:8, *But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."*
- iii. We need to be people of truth and integrity and our word needs to mean something. We hear of previous generations, not long ago, when a deal could be made with a handshake and it was honored. It didn't matter if it was on a signed contract, "His word was his bond". SADLY today, even with contracts, some look for loopholes to get out of their responsibilities. This is a problem with bankruptcy and many other examples.
- iv. Are there times when we are not able to keep a vow? **Possibly**, but it should NOT be reflective of your character, and because of circumstances that make it impossible or possibly harmful to carry it out. But even then, there needs to be repentance – an explanation of WHY you could not do something. IT IS NOT A LOOPHOLE or the norm.

III. Does this mean we can never "swear" an oath? Etc.

- a. Does this text mean we cannot take an oath in court? Or to join a police department, etc? This text has been used by some to say we cannot swear even in these circumstances. It has caused our courts to allow the word "affirm" instead (or they may say, "Do you swear OR affirm..."). But I want to consider that regardless of what word you use, you ARE putting yourself under an oath to tell the truth or faithfully carry out your duties, etc.
- b. The text is about taking oaths, not the mere wording – which was the ABUSE. Contextually, if you can't "swear" then you can't "affirm" either. So what do you do?
- c. As we have already noted, Jesus is talking about telling the truth, being honest and a person of integrity at all times. Its not about NEVER taking an oath, but being serious about it when you need to. It is about understanding that when you "swear" something, God is witness and you are accountable.
- d. There are examples of oath taking in scripture –
 - i. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5, when you make a vow to God (an oath – TT), do not delay to pay it.
 - ii. Note previously mentioned verses from the LOM – Numbers 30:2, when you make oath or swear, KEEP IT!; Deuteronomy 23:21 – you make an oath to God, do not delay to keep it.
 - iii. God swore by an oath – Hebrews 6:13-18 – referencing the LORD's promise to Abraham concerning Isaac his son, we read that he not only made a promise, but confirmed it with an oath. (Genesis 22:16, *Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of*

heaven, and said: "**By Myself I have sworn**, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—..." (emp. mine – TT)

- iv. Jesus was placed under an oath and answered it – Matthew 26:63-64 – He answered "the charge" that He was the Son of God.
- v. Paul also, on many occasions, said, "God is my witness.." (Romans 1:9, 9:1, 2 Corinthians 1:23, 11:31, etc.). IN essence Paul is saying, "I swear in the presence of God..." or Jesus, similar to what one does in a court room when he promises to tell the "truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth..."
- vi. The point being, being put under oath or "swearing" to tell the truth is NOT what Jesus was condemning. But as I heard one source say, IF you are uncomfortable using the phrase "I swear", then say, "I affirm". But in practice it is semantics. And be careful in judging those who would do otherwise.
- e. Ultimately Jesus is saying, "You live your life so that you never have to utter special words to someone before they believe you." Be a person of your word – PERIOD!

So in conclusion I ask, How is your righteousness? Is God pleased with the way you act, speak and think for Him? Is your word your bond? Think about it.