

Tell the Truth

Matthew 5:33-37

Intro

[expand — **A Few Good Men** — “I want the truth!”
— “You can’t handle the truth!”...]

And this is why we lie — we think that someone cannot handle the truth...

- ***If we tell the truth then they will get their feelings hurt...***
- ***If we tell the truth we will get in trouble...***
- ***If we tell the truth then we won’t get our way...***

The reasons for lying go on and on — but what they all have in common is that they are all ways of trying to **control outcomes**...

- They are ways of **not trusting God** — lies give us the illusion of control — they are ways of manipulating situations in an attempt to achieve our goals apart from trusting God...

And this truth reminds me of a quote from one of my favorite Charles Dickens novels, **Great Expectations**...

In context, the main character of the story, Pip, has just confessed that he told elaborate lies to his family...

And part of the reason that Pip told these lies is that he is embarrassed of being poor and he wants to become uncommon; he wants to become a gentleman...

His best friend and mentor, the uneducated blacksmith, Joe, shares the following words with Pip in response to the confession of lying...

"There's one thing you may be sure of, Pip," said Joe, after some rumination, "namely, that lies is lies. [Howsoever] they come, they didn't ought to come, and they come from the father of lies, and work round to the same. Don't you tell no more of 'em, Pip. That ain't the way to get out of being common, old chap."

As Joe rightly rebukes Pip, Joe makes reference to what the Lord Jesus taught about the origin of lies in John 8...

- So, here at the beginning of our study on ***Telling the Truth***, I think we would be wise to spend some time considering **John 8:31-47...[please turn there]**

John 8:31-47 (NKJV)

31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.

32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

This is a vital point that we must not miss — ***truth frees us...***
[expand]

Unfortunately, the opposite is also true — ***lies bind us...***[expand]

Continuing on in vs...

33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?"

These individuals are not in ***current reality...***

The descendants of Abraham have been in bondage many times — including bondage to the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and as they spoke they were being occupied by the Romans...

IMPORTANT POINT — If a person is unwilling to accept the truth of their current condition, they are unlikely to receive additional truth that is offered them...[expand]

Moving on to vs...

34 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin."

Jesus' hearers were **slaves of sin** — they were **slaves to a lie** — the lie that they must take what they want even if it means disobeying God — this is the heart of sin...[expand]

Dallas Willard defined sin as "A failure to rely on God for the good that only God can provide."

The Lord Jesus continues in vs 35-36...

35 And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.

36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

You see, those who are ***slaves to lies are slaves to sin*** and they will not abide in the house forever — the day will come when they will be removed in judgment...

But those who believe the truth — those who place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ — they are adopted as sons...

They are brought into the family of God — and they will abide in His house forever...

Let's continue on in vs 37-41...

37 "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.

38 I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father."

39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham.

40 But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.

41 You do the deeds of your father."

These men demonstrated their refusal of the truth through their rejection of Jesus — if they were interested in the truth they would have listened to Jesus...

And this test — are you willing to listen to Jesus?...

- ***If you are willing to listen to Jesus then you are a person who is interested in the truth...***
- ***If you are unwilling to listen to Jesus then you are not a person who is interested in the truth...***
- [expand — reading different atheistic philosophers — they are not interested in the truth because they refuse to listen to Jesus...]

Let me say it again — no one who rejects Jesus is truly interested in the truth — that person is simply interested in believing what they want to believe...

Let's pick up in the second part of vs 41-44...

Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God."

42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.

43 Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.

44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

The Lord Jesus makes it clear that the devil is the father of murder and the father of lies — and these two things are tied together...

- The devil **murdered** Adam and Eve through **the lie** that he told them...[expand]

45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.

This is a very interesting phrase — **because** the Lord Jesus told these men **the truth** — they **didn't believe Him**...

- In other words, if the Lord Jesus had lied to them — if He had told them what they wanted to hear — then they would have believed Him...

[expand - people wanting to hear what they want to hear — want to be told that everything is ok just as it is...]

This makes me think of what the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy in...

2 Timothy 4:2-4 (NKJV)

2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Continuing on in John 8 to vs...

46 Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?

Essentially, Jesus is saying, “where is my sin — where is my wrong? — point it out”...

- “And if I am telling you the truth, why do you refuse to listen to me — why don’t you believe me?”...

This is a vitally important point — the Lord Jesus is never wrong — He always tells the truth...

- ***So, if we fail to listen to Him — if we fail to obey Him — then we are committing to a lie — we are walking in falsehood...***

With this in mind we must decide — are we willing to walk in truth?...

- Do we want the truth above all else?...

Because if we do want the truth then we will know the truth and it will set us free...

47 He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

To be of God — to be those who are rightly related to God — one must be willing to embrace the truth — whatever the truth is...

When a person does this — when they embrace the truth the they are sinners and that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only one who can save them — then the will become children of God — children of the truth...

- However, if a person rejects the truth — if a person refuses to walk in reality — then that person remains on the outside of a relationship with God...

So with this in mind, let's turn to our passage in Matthew 5...

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.

Now, as we move into this section of the Sermon on the Mount, it is vital that we remember that the Lord Jesus is addressing the issue of ***externalism***...

Externalism is the outward conformity or the appearance of outward conformity without an accompanying inward conformity...

It is the cleaning of the outside of the cup while the inside of the cup remains filthy...

- It is pretending, it is acting — it is hypocrisy...

And externalism is not what the Lord wants — man judges the outward appearance but the Lord judges the heart...

- And **lying** is simply a form of externalism...

Externalism is lying because it is simply outward — external words or actions — that lead someone to believe something that is not true inwardly...

- When I lie, I am misrepresenting reality — I am hiding what is actually true...

And I usually do it because I am afraid of what will happen if I tell the truth...

- So I seek to control outcomes by telling lies — I seek to do evil that good may come — but I cannot accomplish true good by committing evil...

With this in mind, let's see what the Lord Jesus has to say in vs...

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.'

Here are a couple of verses from the Law that communicate this truth...

Leviticus 19:12 (NKJV)

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)

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.

This is pretty straightforward — if you swear by the name of the LORD then you should do it...

- And if you make a vow to the LORD or swear an oath in the name of the LORD then you are to fulfill it...

One commentator

“To swear by God’s Name meant that He was your witness that you were telling the truth”...

Now, to make sense of the next few verses in Matthew 5 we must understand that people in Jesus’ day were taking oaths using something other than the LORD’s name...

And this was simply a way of lying...

They would swear by something that was *close to the Lord* but *not the Lord Himself* as a way of being able to avoid actually fulfilling the oath that they swore or the vow that they took...

- [ex. crossing your fingers when making a promise...]

With this in mind, let's see what the Lord Jesus said in vs...

34 But I say to you, do not swear at all:

Now, I take this to mean that we are not to swear an oath in our daily conversations and interactions...

- I do not take this to mean that we are never to swear or take an oath at any time or under any circumstances...

For instance, I believe that it is proper to swear an oath at your wedding ceremony...[expand]

- I believe that it is proper to swear an oath if you become a citizen of a nation...[expand]

I believe that it is proper to swear an oath if you are entering the military or law enforcement or the medical field, etc...[expand]

- These different roles require the swearing of oaths that highlight the seriousness of what is being entered into...[expand]

The Lord Jesus Himself was put under oath in...

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.”

*Now, for greater understanding on what the Lord Jesus is referring to when He says, “do not swear at all,” I think it is helpful to consider what Dallas Willard writes in **The Divine Conspiracy**...*

“The problem with ‘swearing’ or the making of oaths—which was really a huge part of life in Jesus’ world—is not just that it involves taking the name of God in vain, or using it lightly and without love and respect for him...The evil of it that he addresses is that it is an inherently wrong approach to other human beings.

The essence of swearing or making oaths is to try to use something that, though impressive, is irrelevant to the issues at hand to get others to believe you and let you have your way. This is wrong. It is unlike God...We are making use of people, trying to bypass their understanding and judgment to trigger their will and possess them for our purposes. Whatever consent they give to us will be uninformed because we have short-circuited their understanding of what is going on.”

In other words, swearing an oath was being used as a way of lying — it was a way of manipulating others — of tricking them into doing what you want them to do...

- Swearing an oath was **not** being used as a way of holding oneself accountable to do the thing promised...

Instead, the swearing of oaths was being used as a tool to trick another person into agreeing to your terms...

- It was a failure to love you neighbor as yourself — it was a failure to do what was best for them...

As we continue on in vs 34, we see some of the ways that this was done...

- *Instead of swearing by God Himself, other things were substituted...*

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

- [expand — didn't have to fulfill the oath because God's name wasn't used...]

And the point that the Lord Jesus is making in this section is that any swearing of an oath brings God into it — because everything belongs to God...

- God is a witness to every oath...

So don't think you can swear by heaven and not fulfill it because heaven is God's throne — if you swear by heaven you bring God into it...

Moving into vs 35 we read...

35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool;

Swearing by earth brings God into the situation because earth is the place where God rests His feet...

nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

Swearing by Jerusalem brings God into the situation because Jerusalem is the city where God worked through David and it is the city where Christ will reign when He returns...

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

The Lord Jesus said this in the days before Just For Men and beauty shops...

- But the big idea is you should swear by your head because even that does not belong to you nor is it ultimately in your control...

This sort of oath brings God into the situation because *your head* and *your life* belong to God...

- So, the big idea is that you shouldn't swear oaths to try to manipulate others because it is a form of lying whether or not you use God's name — and God is still involved in the situation...

In fact, God is involved in any and every situation — He is a witness to everything that happens on planet earth...

- ***As Damian Kyle puts it, "The earth is God's living room"...***
[expand]

***Or as CS Lewis wrote, “There are no private affairs.”...
[expand]***

This brings us to the first part of vs...

37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'

In other words, as believers we are called to be people ***who simply tell the truth*** without any adornment...

- Whether we are talking about something big or something small — we should be people who always tell the truth...

What we say ***outwardly*** should correspond with what is going on ***inwardly***...

- People should not need to read us — they should not need to decode what we say...

We should be people who say ***yes when we mean yes*** and we should be people who say ***no when we mean no***...

Now we come to the last part of vs 37...

For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

In other words, if we need to add to our ***yes*** or add to our ***no*** then we are moving into the enemy's territory...

- If we cannot get our mission accomplished by simply telling the truth then we must leave it with the Lord and let Him work it out...

Once we start trying to convince people to believe us by **adding to our yes** and **adding to our no** we begin to manipulate them and take away their ability to choose...

And this is not how we tell the truth...

Conclusion

I will close with the words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy in...

1 Timothy 2:1-4 (NKJV)

1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men,

2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

If it is God's desire that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth — then the best possible thing we can do everyday is to simply ***tell the truth...***

Let's pray...