

OATHS AND HONESTY **(Matt. 5:33-37)**

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Have you ever wondered why certain cults will not permit their members to salute the American flag or take an oath in court? The answer is found right here in Matthew 5:33-37. These folks have given a twisted meaning to these words, for they are taken out of context.
- B. Let us review for a minute the context of Matthew 5. In 5:20, our Lord has told his disciples that their righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees if they are to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Pharisees were strong on externalism and the keeping of the letter of the law, but they were weak on spiritual understanding of the Mosaic Law. These religious leaders had been guilty of creating many man-made rules and traditions that were never part of the Law, and these traditions were given a place along side or above the Law of Moses.
- C. The Pharisees had many traditions concerning the taking of oaths that were not consistent with the Old Testament teachings and Christ sets out to correct them.

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING ON OATHS -- 5:33

- A. *“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time,”* -- This refers to the Pharisaical traditions that grew up around the true meaning of the Law. The Jews did not deny the law they just added to it or somehow went around it.
- B. *“Thou shalt not forswear (deny an oath) thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:”* -- The Old Testament said a man must not swear falsely and if an oath was made in God’s name it must be

III. THE PHARISEE’S TRADITIONS ON OATHS -- 5: 34-36

- A. *“But I say unto you,”* -- Now Christ gives the right spiritual interpretation to the Mosaic Law concerning oaths. He is a Judge and the Lawgiver he surely ought to know how to interpret it properly.

NOTE: Apparently Jewish tradition had concluded that oaths containing the title of deity were binding, but an oath that did not contain His name was not binding. Therefore the Jews would evade the Lord’s name in their oaths and bear false witness under some other oath. This permitted them to find a rationalization for certain forms of lying.

- B. *“Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.”* -- These Jews instead of swearing in the name of God would make up a substitute word but closely related to God. If the Jew would swear by heaven, by the earth, by Jerusalem, or by his head their oath was not necessarily binding at all.

NOTE: Christ Jesus points out the folly of their reasonings and rationalizations. In effect the Lord says it is impossible to keep God out of any oath. If you swear by heaven you are swearing by God's throne. You have not removed God from the oath at all, and you are bound by it anyway. If you swear by the earth, you are taking an oath on the footstool of God, and again you have not excluded God. To swear by Jerusalem is to swear by the city that belongs to God. In effect the Lord Jesus says everything belongs to God and it is impossible to swear by anything and omit God from the oath. Therefore any oath is binding.

POINT: The result of Jewish tradition was a degrading of oaths. Oaths were taken for almost any reason but carried no real weight. Oaths had degenerated into a cheap type of extravagant language without real value. There was indiscriminate, glib oath taking without real intention to fulfill these oaths.

APPLICATION: How many times do we hear frivolous oaths today such as "I swear on a stack of Bibles" or "I will stake my life on it". Even more serious in our day are glib oaths with the title of God in them such as, "Honest to God: or "I swear to God it is true." Taking an oath of any kind is a solemn thing and God's name should never be used in a frivolous manner.

IV. CHRIST'S TEACHING ON OATHS 5:37

- A. "But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay:" -- The Lord gives a high teaching to his disciples in the area of honesty. The Lord does not just conclude that all oaths are binding, whether they have the title of deity or not, and Christians are to keep all oaths they make. No. His conclusion is this: ("Swear not at all.") This He says in verse 34. Then he says we are only to say "Yea, yea; nay, nay."

POINT: A disciple of Christ must be so truthful he does not need to rely on oaths to verify his word. When he says, "yes," there should be no questions or doubts. When he says, "no," everybody believes him. He is to be so honest that no one doubts his word.

APPLICATION: How important it is to keep the promises we make to others. To promise your children something is taking an oath and failing to keep that promise is lying. Everything is relative in our day. On the international level lies are accepted practices, even in our own government. Many a person speaks of national integrity but has not been faithful to his own marriage vows. Lying involves not telling all the truth or adding to the truth. A "little white lie" is a lie! We are commanded to lie no more as Christians (Col. 3:9) and to speak truth to all men (Eph. 4:25). Christians should be known as men and women whose "words are as good as gold."

- B. "For whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." -- Oaths among men come about because of man's sinfulness; he cannot be trusted. In other words, oaths in themselves are not intrinsically evil, but they become necessary because of sin. The taking of an oath is occasioned and caused by people who are liars. So Christ Jesus says oaths ought not to be used among God's children. They are necessary among sinful people, but they should not be essential among Disciples of Christ.

V. CAN A CHRISTIAN TAKE AN OATH?

- A. I think that the teaching of scripture permits Christians to take oaths with individuals and with the State, providing they are taken in a solemn manner with a realization that all oaths are before God.
- B. Oaths are quite common in the Old Testament. Even Christ did not refuse to take an oath when he was before the high priest. In Matthew 26:63 it says, "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." The Lord did not refuse and answered, "Thou hast said." We know that in Acts 18:18 THE Apostle Paul took an oath, for it says he shaved his head and took a vow.
- C. The Christian can take an oath but he should never initiate that oath with another person or with the State. His word should be trusted. If the State asks for an oath, we should gladly give it, realizing that this oath is primarily to God and not to the State.
- D. In essence the whole teaching of Matthew 5:33-37 is to call the Disciples of Christ to a simple life of righteousness and honesty where there is no guile or hypocrisy.

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. For you here this morning without Christ, did it ever occur to you that lying is as bad as murder in the sight of God? The Bible tells us that a holy and just God will judge all sin, even white lies or overemphasizing a truth or what ever. God hates lying, and will judge men for all eternity for practicing it unless these who practice it can find the forgiveness of sin.
- B. God has made a way for sinners to escape the certainty of the judgment to come and that way is through the death and resurrection of Christ. All who trust in Christ, as personal Lord and Saviour shall receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The greatest truth that ever hit the earth is that sinful men can find their way back to God through Jesus Christ. Have you found the way back? If not; you can if you will flee to Christ for forgiveness.