

Today we talk about 'Oaths' and really that Christians don't make flippant 'Oaths'

What is an oath? And oath is different than a promise...but how?

- A promise is a person's commitment to do or refrain from doing something
  - **Reliability:** "I promise to be there on time," or "Pick you up from the airport."
  - **Confidentiality:** "I promise not to tell anyone what you just shared with me."
  - **Presence:** "I promise to put my phone away during dinner every night."
  - **Unconditional Support:** "I promise to support you no matter what path you choose."

Oath is a solemn affirmation that calls upon God to establish the seriousness of a commitment

And it is not that we cannot take oaths...it is that we must take our oaths very seriously

- **Taking an oath in court**
  - I swear before God that I will tell truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth
- **Taking an oath of office**
  - I solemnly swear before God that I will faithfully fulfill the duties of this office
- **Marriage vows**
  - Before God, I promise love you, remain faithful to you, honor our marriage covenant

What Christ is saying in this text is that if you make an oath you had better mean it

It is better not to make an oath and just be an honest person than to make an oath and not mean it

<sup>33</sup> "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

Imagine two people applying for the same job – Fist: I swear to God...I'm not lying...trust me

- Second person simply answers questions honestly, admits what he doesn't know, and gives truthful answers even when the truth might cost him the job – Who do you trust?  
Trustworthiness is not established by how strongly we promise to tell the truth but by whether we consistently tell the truth

Big Idea: Honor God through Consistent Honesty

Have you ever known someone whose word you simply could not trust?

- They make promises they never keep, give assurances they never fulfill, and tell you what you want to hear rather than what is true – Friend named "Lies"
- Eventually, you learn that their words mean very little because their actions have taught you not to believe them.
- On the other hand, think about someone you know who has earned your trust
- When that person says they will do something, you believe them.
- They do not have to swear to God, make dramatic promises, or offer some guarantee

Their character has established their credibility

Jesus, in this text, is commanding us to be people who say what they do and do...say

Just as an aside...this text has brought contention to the Christian community

- There are two ways to approach this text
  - **Literally:** Never take a single oath – Quakers | Mennonites | Amish | Brethren
  - **Warning:** Never take an oath hypocritically – Most NT churches including us

A Christian's word should be trustworthy all the time, not just when making a solemn oath  
Prov. 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight

- Abomination - God considers detestable because it contradicts His holiness/ righteousness
- Delight - deep joy, and satisfaction found in someone or that is treasured, loved, and valued

## 1. Don't co-opt God's authority (33-35)

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What does it mean 'Don't Co-opt God's Authority'?

To use God's name to support our own promises in a way that presumes upon Him

Instead of simply telling the truth, you invoke God as a guarantee that you must be believed

- This effectively uses God's name to strengthen their own credibility
  - "I swear to God I'm telling the truth!" "I promise God is my witness that I'll do it."

Problem is treating His name as tool to make our words more believable...being trustworthy

Jesus begins by reminding His listeners what they have heard about oaths

- Then He exposes the problem behind a careless approach to trust

### a. Understand the Seriousness of your Words

"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'"

- Jesus refers to Old Testament teaching concerning oaths and vows
  - **Leviticus 19:12** warns against swearing falsely by God's name
  - **Numbers 30:2** teaches person who makes a vow to the Lord must not break his word
  - **Deuteronomy 23:21-23** teaches the seriousness of fulfilling vows made to God

God's people were not to use God's name to support a lie

Oath was a declaration intended to affirm truth of a statement or seriousness of promise

⇒ There is a danger in treating truth casually – The problem was not the OT command

Problem how people could use religious language while neglecting heart of God's command

Person might be careful not to break a formal vow while being careless w ordinary promises

Jesus saying, 'Don't just be honest when you make an oath...be honest in everything you say'

Two men sitting across a table – Agree with a handshake – Man says, 'You have my word'

Week later...backs out...I never signed anything | The problem isn't a signature

The problem is a lack of integrity – This is the kind of thing Jesus is confronting

- **Our integrity should be consistent** - We tell the truth even when it costs us something
  - **Our promises should be dependable** - We follow through even if circumstances change
  - **Our words should reflect God's character** - We remember that the God we represent
- b. Recognize the Authority Behind Your Words "But I say to you, Do not take oath at all..."
- You could take this the legalistic way...impossible – Marriage = Vow | Military = Oath
  - Or you could, and should, take it as a warning Jesus is giving

We must never use a solemn declaration to compensate for a lack of everyday honesty

A person should not need to say, "I swear to God," before we believe person telling truth

- c. Remember Who Is Witness to Your Words - ...either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King
- Some people were swearing by different things...heaven...throne...earth...Jerusalem
- This is like saying 'I swear on my mother's life' – Your mother's life belongs to God
- **Heaven belongs to God** – Jesus says Heaven is God's Throne
  - **Earth belongs to God** – Jesus says earth is God's footstool
  - **Jerusalem belongs to God** – Jesus says is, 'The city of the great King'

Principle simple: God sovereign over everything, so no declaration escapes His authority

- Guard Your Words — Speak truthfully and avoid exaggeration, and careless promises.
- Honor Your Commitments — Keep your word even when becomes inconvenient/costly
- Remember God's Authority — Live with the awareness that God hears your words

## 2. Don't Corrupt your reputation (36)

<sup>36</sup> And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black

Guard your reputation by speaking truthfully and recognizing the limits of your own control

What Jesus is doing is using oaths to talk about the limits of human control

**Jesus warns His listeners against making oaths based on something they do not control**

- We do not possess ultimate control over even the smallest details of our lives
- Jesus is challenging believers to abandon the illusion of self-sufficiency
- Imagine a family that spends months planning the perfect outdoor wedding (elaborate)  
Storm – Decorations are blown over – Bride's hair spazes out – Balloon arch blows away  
They controlled invitations, decorations, and the schedule...could not control the weather  
We can influence many things, but we cannot control everything

Jesus makes this point by drawing attention to something as small as color of a single hair

a. **Recognize the Limits of Your Control** - And do not take an oath by your head

- At the time of Jesus...swear on their own heads | 'I swear on my life'
  - Jesus saying, 'You should be careful to make these promises because you can't control'
  - Jesus exposes arrogance of using something as a guarantee when you have not control
- We've all broken promise - Because circumstances came up that were out of our control

We can make plans, but we cannot control every outcome

We can make promises, cannot guarantee every circumstance might affect our ability to fulfill them

Father promises child, "I guarantee I will be at your game Saturday. Nothing keep me away."

Saturday, seriously ill – Never intended deceive kid – Promised more than could control

Wiser response would be, "I plan to be there, and I will do everything I can to make it."

Do not promise what you cannot reasonably guarantee

You damage your reputation when you promise more than you have the power to deliver

b. **Respect the Reality of what you Cannot Change** - for you cannot make one hair white or black

Jesus gives a simple example to establish a profound truth: human control is limited

- Person could not simply command hair to become a different color by the force of will
  - When my wife was a full-time cosmetologist...45 min – But she couldn't do it by will
  - Jesus uses this ordinary reality to remind us that we are not sovereign over our lives
- We are creatures, not the Creator. God possesses ultimate authority; we do not

**Matters for our reputation b/c dishonesty begins when we refuse accept our limitations**

- Rather than admitting, "I don't know," we pretend to know
- Rather than saying, "I cannot guarantee that," we promise certainty
- Rather than acknowledging a failure, we make excuses

**Accept Your Limitations** — Recognize that you are not in control of everything

- Stop pretending you have power over what only God can determine

**Abandon False Confidence** — Don't make promises based circumstances you cannot guarantee;

- Practice honest humility instead of misplaced certainty

**Anchor Your Trust in God** — Rest in God's sovereignty rather than trying to control future

- remember your responsibility is faithfulness, not absolute control

Live faithfully with what God has entrusted to you, and humbly acknowledge what you cannot control

## 3. Don't Communicate Deceptively (37)

<sup>37</sup> Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

This is the key that unlocks the entire passage...let your 'yes' ne 'yes' & 'no' be 'no'

Honor God and build trust with others by communicating with honesty, clarity, and integrity

Deception does not always involve telling an outright lie.

Sometimes it involves choosing words cause someone to believe something is not true

We've all done this – Invite to somethings you don't want to go to – 'Really Busy'

- The question is not simply, "Did I technically tell the truth?"
- The better question, "Did I communicate the truth in a way that others can trust?"
- a. **Speak with Clarity** - Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'
- Jesus calls His followers to straightforward communication
- Our words should be free from unnecessary complications intended manipulate others
- When I worked in a carpet store – Save up to 70% - Markdown one ugly berber – full price
- A Christian should not be satisfied with asking, "Can I defend what I said?"
- We should also ask, "Was I clear about what I meant?"
- Speak so that people understand the truth rather than merely hear the words
- b. **Stand by Your Commitment** - 'Yes' or 'No'
- Jesus presents two simple answers: yes and no
  - A yes should communicate agreement, willingness, or commitment
  - A no should communicate refusal or disagreement
  - Neither should be used carelessly to manipulate another person

The principle is that our words should be dependable

- When we agree to do something, others should have reason to believe we intend do it
- When we decline, not disguise our answer in a way that deliberately creates false hope

**This does not mean Christian can never change a decision because circumstances change**

- **Do not say yes to please people** - Tell people truth even when the answer disappoints
- **Do not make promises carelessly** - Consider ability & willingness before committing
- **Do what you say you will do** - Treat your commitments as expressions your character
- Let your commitments be dependable, even when keeping them becomes inconvenient
- c. **Stay Away from Deception** - anything more than this comes from evil

Jesus concludes with serious warning...He connects deceptive/manipulative speech with evil

- When people routinely must swear, exaggerate, manipulate, or construct elaborate explanations to convince others that they are telling the truth, something is wrong
- Our words should not be instruments of manipulation
- They should reflect the integrity of our hearts – The boy who cried wolf

Once trust is damaged, even honest words may be met with suspicion

- **Reject deliberate half-truths** - Do not use technically correct statements conceal truth
- **Refuse manipulative speech** - Do not use carefully chosen wording to control people
- **Protect your credibility** - Remember trust takes time build but can be destroyed quickly

Protect the integrity of your words by refusing every form of deliberate deception

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