

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT SERIES “OATHS - FROM A HEART OF INTEGRITY”

Text: Matthew 5:33–37

**Key Word:** Oaths

**Key Thought:** Is Our Word Reliable or Not?

We live in a much different world than our parents were raised in. There once was a time when a man was known to be true to his word. In fact, seldom were contracts even signed. **A handshake was as noble as a signature.** If someone broke their word it became a poor reflection upon their family as well as upon themselves. Are you a person whose word be trusted?

**\*\*** Paul Harvey told a story of four high school boys who were late for their morning class. They entered the classroom and solemnly told their teacher they were detained due to a flat tire. The sympathetic teacher smiled and told them it was too bad they were late because they had missed a test that morning. But she was willing to let them make it up.

She gave them each a piece of paper and a pencil and sent them to four corners of the room. Then she told them they would pass if they could answer just one question: Which tire was flat? **|**

Today we are going to explore a subject that touches each and every one of us. We are going to see what Jesus has to say about a heart of integrity. The word **“integrity”** means: **“uprightness of character, honesty.”**

Most of us do not expect people to keep their word anymore. Politics has gotten to the point where we **EXPECT** our leaders to have a lack of integrity. It reminds me of the farmer who saw a busload of politicians crash.

**\*\*\*** A busload of politicians was driving down a country road when, all of a sudden, the bus ran off the road & crashed into a tree in an old farmer’s field. The old farmer, after seeing what happened, went over to investigate. He then proceeded to dig a hole & bury the politicians.

A few days later, the local sheriff came out, saw the crashed bus & asked the old farmer where all the politicians had gone. The old farmer said he had buried them. The sheriff asked the old farmer, *“The coroner wasn’t here. Are you sure they were all dead?”* The old farmer replied, *“Well, some of them said they weren’t, but you know how them politicians lie.”* **\*\*\***

Looking for people of integrity in our generation perhaps could be compared to searching for a needle in a haystack. Indeed it may be easier to identify a grain of salt in a snowstorm. True men and women of integrity are rare indeed. Are you one of them? Is your life characterized by integrity? The Bible clearly indicates that our lives should be. In this part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that we should be as good as our word. Are you as good as your word? Do you readily back out of promises made?

Jesus says that if our righteousness is going to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, we must be people of integrity.

**Let Us Look at What Jesus Had to Say About Having a Heart of Integrity.**

### **I. THE COMMON PRACTICE (Matthew 5:33-36)**

### **II. THE NEW STANDARD OF PRACTICE (Matthew 5:33-34, 37)**

### **I. THE COMMON PRACTICE (Matthew 5:33-36)**

#### **A. Old Testament Practise**

\*\*\* In ancient China, the people desired security from the barbaric hordes to the north. So they built the Great Wall of China. It was too high to climb over, too thick to break down, and too long to go around. **Security achieved!**

The only problem was that during the first hundred years of the wall's existence, China was invaded three times. Was the wall a failure? Not really – for not once did the barbaric hordes climb over the wall, break it down or go around it.

How then did they get into China? The answer lies in human nature. They simply bribed a gatekeeper and then marched right in through a gate. **The fatal flaw in the Chinese defence was placing too much reliance on a wall and not putting enough effort into building character into the gatekeeper.** \*\*\*

Michael Green  
*“Illustrations for Biblical Preaching”*  
p. 204

In the Old Testament it was forbidden to make false vows. Here are a couple of the passages that clearly indicate this truth.

*“You shall not swear falsely **by My name**, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord.”*

*Leviticus 19:12*

## I. THE COMMON PRACTICE (Matthew 5:33-36) (Contd.)

### A. Old Testament Practise (Contd.)

*"If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."*

Numbers 30:2

*"You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised."*

Deuteronomy 23:23

God's premise in the Old Testament is if you made a vow before God, you were then obligated to keep that vow. An oath or a vow was considered a serious statement or declaration. You made a vow only if you wanted to be taken seriously. God said if you make one, you must keep it. If you invoke God's name in a vow and not keep it, you'd bring dishonour upon God.

### B. The Practice of Jesus' day

The religious leaders being who they were, found ways to "get around" keeping their vows. Jesus spoke of making vows or oaths toward heaven, earth, Jerusalem and their head (indicating their life much like the Gentiles did) in verses 34-36. Whenever a person made a vow they did not intend to keep, they would swear by one or more of the above to impress or convince the person they were making the vow to, that they would keep it.

When an oath was made and it was broken, there was an elaborate system in which the religious leaders would judge how close the oath came to God as to whether it was a valid oath that needed to be kept. There were whole sections of the Jewish teaching that dealt with which vows were valid and which ones were not.

Swearing by heaven or earth was not binding, nor was swearing **BY** Jerusalem, **BUT** swearing **TOWARD** Jerusalem where the Ark of the Covenant was located! The idea behind this was that, if God's name was used, God became a partner in the transaction, whereas if God's name was not used, God had nothing to do with the transaction. **READ MATTHEW 23:16-22 for more information.**

If someone swore by the temple, it was not binding. But if some swore by the temple's gold, it was. If some swore by the altar, it was not binding. But if someone swore by the offering upon the altar, it was binding. A broken vow or covenant comes from the evil one, the devil.

## I. THE COMMON PRACTICE (Matthew 5:33-36) (Contd.)

### C. How Does this Apply Today?

This all boils down to a lack of integrity on the part of those who participated in this practice. This mind set was being passed on from generation to generation. **Abraham Lincoln said that for a man to train up a child in the way he or she should go, he must walk that way himself.**

Do we still do the same thing today? **Do we make promises that we do not really intend to keep?** Do we say yes to things just to get people off our backs, with no real intention of carrying out what we said? How many times have we promised to do things for God's kingdom, the church or in the name of Jesus, only to fall short because it was a bit inconvenient? **How many times have we said we would pray for someone only not to have done it?**

## II. THE NEW STANDARD OF PRACTICE (Matthew 5:33-34, 37)

### A. In Jesus' Teaching

Jesus told the people not to make an oath at all. The people of Jesus' day and even today feel that they can separate God from certain areas of life. According to William Barclay in his commentary on Matthew:

“Here is a great eternal truth. Life cannot be divided into compartments in some of which God is involved and in others of which He is not involved; **there cannot be one kind of language in the Church and another kind of language in the shipyard or the factory or the office;** there cannot be one kind of standard of conduct in the Church and another kind of standard in the business world.

### B. We Are to Show Integrity by Our Words

*“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; **but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.**”*

*James 5:12*

*“Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.”*

*I Timothy 4:12*

## II. THE NEW STANDARD OF PRACTICE (Matthew 5:33-34, 37) (Contd.)

### C. We Are to Show Integrity in Our Actions

Paul told Timothy in the passage we read in 1 Timothy 4:12 that we are to show ourselves as example in our conduct.

**\*\*** A rather pompous-looking Sunday School teacher was endeavouring to impress upon a class of boys the importance of living the Christian life. *"Why do people call me a Christian?"* the man asked.

After a moment's pause, one youngster said, *"Maybe it's because they don't know you."* **\*\***

**Our actions are what back up our words, our words are worthless without sincere actions.** We show what is important to us by what we do and what our priorities are. If our kids are important to us, our actions will back that up. If our integrity is important, our actions will back up our words.

**\*\*\*** In Chicago, 1929, a 26 year old government agent named Eliot Ness formed an elite team of 9 incorruptible men to bring down Al Capone's 120 million dollar mob empire. At the time, Ness was making \$2800 a year working for the government. One day a young man walked into his office and handed Ness an envelope with 2 one thousand dollar bills and promised this weekly if he would lay off Capone.

Ness sent the money and the messenger back. Desiring to make a point, Ness called a press conference. Newspapers and newsreels from various agencies were in attendance. Ness told the story of Capone's attempted bribe and Ness' response to it. The next day, headlines read *"Ness and his men are 'UNTOUCHABLE.'"* **\*\*\***

### D. What Can We Do?

If we are going to be people of integrity, we have to take our position in Christ seriously first of all. **I realize at times there will be unforeseen circumstances that arise, but that should be the exception and not the rule of our lives.** Here are just a few practical things to consider:

## II. THE NEW STANDARD OF PRACTICE (Matthew 5:33-34, 37)(Contd.)

**1. Set Our Priorities in God** - If God is important to us, we need to make sure that we do not commit to things that will get in the way of us doing for God what we have promised.

**2. Set Our Priorities in Marriage** - When we are getting married (or are married), we have made a **VOW** or taken an **OATH** before God as well as our invited friends and family. We need to make sure we go into it realizing the importance of what is taking place. Never do things that jeopardize that vow, like cheating or spousal abuse. If you have, confess it, receive forgiveness and put guards in place to insure it never is repeated.

**3. Set Our Priorities in our Daily Routine** - If we are one who has trouble with being on time, we need to get a watch or a Daytimer so that we can keep on schedule. If we tell someone we will do something, write it down. If our voice mail says we will call people back, we need to return our call.

**4. Set Our Priorities in Spiritual Matters** - If we say that we will pray for someone, pray! WRITE IT DOWN. If we have decided to read our Bible more consistently, follow a daily reading guide to keep track of where you left off and be encouraged to keep reading.

“Words depend on character, and **oaths cannot compensate for a poor character.**”

Warren Wiersby  
“*The Bible Exposition Commentary*”  
Vol. 1, p. 24

People will judge **OUR GOD** by the way **WE ACT**. Jesus should affect how we conduct ourselves. When we say we are going to do something, it should be as good as done! Jesus says that if we are going to be a part of His kingdom, then we **MUST** be people of our word! We must be the kind of person that others can count on.

Modified from “*Jesus on Integrity*” by Jeffery Anselmi

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Place: FCA

Time: 10:30 Am

Song: All of Me - G

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**B. The Practice of Jesus' Day** - *Matthew 23:16-22*

**C. How Does this Apply Today?**

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**A. In Jesus' Teaching**

**B. We Are to Show Integrity by Our Words** - *James 5:12; I Timothy 4:12*

**C. We Are to Show Integrity in Our Actions**

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- 1. Set Our Priorities in God**
- 2. Set Our Priorities in Marriage**
- 3. Set Our Priorities in Our Daily Routine**
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