

THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

Session 23

“Cross My Heart”

When I was growing up and wanted my friends to really believe I was telling the truth, I would say, “I swear it’s true. Cross my heart”. Sometimes they would reply, “And hope to die”? That was the ultimate for us. If a kid said, “Cross my heart and hope to die”, he had given the ultimate oath a kid say to convince someone that he was really, *really* telling the truth.

So today’s message is “Cross My Heart”, because it deals with what Jesus had to say to a culture that had found ways around telling the truth.

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.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' for whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Matthew 5:33-37 NKJV

We cannot really understand this text outside of the context of His teaching. So...

I. Welcome to the Sermon on the Mount!

A. A Most Serious Section of the Sermon

1. In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus is correcting the teaching of the scribes and Pharisee, showing how they read the letter of God's commandments and ignored the spirit of God's commandments. He began this section with this...

“Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven”.

Matthew 5:20

2. Then He takes 6 commandments from the Old Testament and shows us that the nature of God's Law is not legal, it is spiritual; it is about what's in our hearts.

3. He uses the same formula 6 times:

“You have heard it said...but I say unto you.”

- Thou shalt not kill-but you must not allow anger in your heart
- Thou shalt not commit adultery-but you must not let lust live in your heart

4. So now we come to the whole issue of the words that we say with our mouths, especially related to swearing and oath-taking.

5. We will follow the advice of our “hero”, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book “Studies in the Sermon on the Mount”.

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The best way to approach the subject is to consider it under three headings. First of all we must be clear in our minds as to what the law of Moses really did teach about this matter. Then we must be clear as to what the Pharisees and scribes taught. Lastly we must consider what our Lord Himself teaches.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

II. 3 Steps To Understanding the Text

A. What Does The Old Testament Actually Say About Swearing and Oaths?

1. The basic Law against swearing in God's name is the 3rd of the 10 commandments:

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Exodus 20:7

a. Modern Bible translations say, "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God..."

2. While Old Testament Law did not allow God's people to swear in His name, it did allow them to swear or make vows to the Lord.

If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

Numbers 30:2

3. In other words, if you swore an oath or made a vow to God, you had to keep it:

"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. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth.

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 NKJV

4. So here's a summary of what the Old Testament actually said:

a. Swearing by God's name was forbidden.

b. Swearing or making oaths to God was allowed, but not commanded

c. If one did make a vow or swear an oath to God, it must be kept

B. Second: What Were The Pharisees Teaching?

1. Since the Bible does not give us many details about how the Pharisees were misusing God's law, we have to look to other authority.

a. We find this in the Barnes' Quotes commentary:

It appears from this passage, as well as from the ancient writings of the Jewish rabbis, that while the Jews professedly adhered to the law, they had introduced a number of oaths in common conversation, and oaths which they by no means considered to be binding.

Albert Barnes

a. Barnes continues...

For example, they would swear by the temple, by the head, by heaven, by the earth. So long as they kept from swearing by the name Yahweh, and so long as they observed the oaths publicly taken, they seemed to consider all others as allowable, and allowedly broken. This is the abuse which Christ wished to correct.

Albert Barnes

2. So once again we see how the religious leaders were imposing the letter of the Law while ignoring the spiritual nature of the Law.

"The trouble with the Pharisees and scribes was that their attitude was legalistic. They were more concerned about the letter of the law than the spirit. They had confined the whole purpose of the Law to the one question of committing perjury.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

a. In other words: “You don’t have to tell the truth if you swear by anything less than God”.

b. In other words: “As long as you don’t lie in court, you’re safe!”

3. **Because of this bad teaching, Israel had become a nation of liars! People had found ways around the truth. You couldn’t trust what people were saying because there was no integrity, even among God’s people.**

4. It reminds us of our own country today; we don’t know who is lying and who is who is telling the truth!

- We can’t trust our political leaders
- We can’t trust the media
- Sometimes we can’t trust one another...

C. So What Does Jesus Say About It?

But I say to you, do not swear at all...But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' for whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Matthew 5:33-37 NKJV

1. Translation: Just tell the truth! Keep your word!

But your speech shall be, Yes, yes; No, no. Christ’s remedy is that men act towards each other sincerely and honestly: for then simplicity of speech will have quite as much weight as an oath has among those who are not sincere.

John Calvin

2. The righteousness of the Pharisees was they didn’t lie in court; but...

“Jesus taught that our conversation should be so honest, and our character so true, that we would not need "crutches" to get people to believe us. Words depend on character, and oaths cannot compensate for a poor character. ”

The Bible Exposition Commentary

- You don't have to say, "Cross my heart"
- You don't have to introduce your words with, "Let me tell you the truth"
- I always worry when I'm 20 minutes into a conversation with someone and they say, "Let me be completely honest with you"; it makes me wonder if they'd been completely honest up to then!

"A bad man cannot be believed on his oath, and a good man speaks the truth without an oath."

Charles Spurgeon

3. The normal Christian life truthfulness in all our words;

"The man who is always believed is he whose character is beyond suspicion in all things, who obeys all the laws of God, and whose simple declaration, therefore, is enough. A man that is truly a Christian, and leads a Christian life, does not need oaths and profaneness to make him believed."

Albert Barnes

4. God has given us the gift of righteousness by grace; but the righteousness God gives us is in the Holy Spirit, who is called the "Spirit of truth"!

"Have as little to do as possible with oaths. An oath will not bind a scoundrel nor a liar; and an honest man needs none, for his character and conduct swear for him."

Adam Clarke

III. Practical Application

A. Christian Salvation is Transformation

1. The righteousness God gives us deals with the heart of our trouble:

“The problem is deceitfulness which is in men, *All men are liars*; therefore men use these oaths because they are distrustful one of another, and think they cannot be believed without them.”

Matthew Henry

2. When God gives us a new heart, telling the truth is normal; lying is not normal.

3. As we grow in Christ, the Holy Spirit will convict us in the matters of our words.

a. The Old Testament says...

Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue...

Proverbs 18:21 NKJV

b. Jesus said...

I tell you that on the Day of Judgment men will have to give account for every careless word they have spoken. For by you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Matthew 12:36-37

4. A sure sign we are growing in the Lord is when the Holy Spirit helps us watch what we say!

- Being punctual-if we say we'll be there, we'll be there!
- Exaggeration: a statement that represents something as better or worse than what it really is.

We must not exaggerate because exaggeration becomes a lie. It gives those who hear a false impression.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

- **Another blind spot is telling “little white lies”-making distinction between harmful lies and “innocent” lies**

“I was just about to call you.”
“Sorry I’m late. Traffic was terrible”.
“I agree with you completely.”
“Your secret is safe with me.”

a. It seems so easy to lie; but not so easy to watch every word
(My favorite Joyce Meyer book title: “Me And My Big Mouth”)

B. Conclusion

1. God has called us to be a people of integrity, which means “wholeness”; where who we are on the outside matches who He has created us to be on the inside.

2. Our “yes” means “yes”; our “no” means “no”.

- a. We don’t need to add “Cross my heart”
- b. We don’t need to swear to something

3. The Apostle John said...

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

3 John 4

4. May the Lord help us to be a people of truth!