



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Be Trustworthy

MATTHEW 5.33-37

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As a state leader and politician you are all too familiar with the frustration often expressed by constituents regarding what they perceive as double talk from candidates for office and the failure of some elected officials to follow through on campaign promises. Yet you face the same frustration as people assure you they will do one thing only to turn around and do another. And there are those that don't hesitate to misrepresent important facts when trying to influence you to a certain course of action. You cannot help but echo the question posed in Proverbs 20.6—"Who can find a trustworthy man?"

The question above borders on cynicism, yet it points out the rare virtue of being trustworthy. Warren Buffet once said that "in looking for people to hire, you look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence, and energy. And if you don't have the first, the other two will kill you." Trustworthy people are hard to find.

Matthew 5.33-37—"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 the Lord'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.

In the passage we consider this week, Jesus calls on subjects of His heavenly kingdom to be dependable, reverent, and truthful as the essential qualities of being trustworthy.

I. BE DEPENDABLE

John D. Rockefeller once said, "I believe in the sacredness of a promise, that a man's word should be as good as his bond." Dependable people can be relied upon to follow through on even the smallest of commitments. The most dependable people can be relied upon to fulfill even the expectations of those whom they serve.

Old Testament law was clear on honoring commitments made. Numbers 30.2 requires that "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." The various formulas that had become common among these Palestinian Jews and approved by the religious leaders were used to leave wiggle room for getting out of commitments. Swearing by heaven or the temple or Jerusalem was considered less than binding.

"...perform your oaths to the Lord."

Jesus affirms the importance of following through on commitments. In Psalm 15.4 the psalmist describes two qualities of one who may dwell with God and says, "He swears to his own hurt and does not change." Even if following through on a commitment costs much more than anticipated, the trustworthy person does not alter their course. A dependable person honors commitments without being bound by an oath. Experience reveals that the ungodly are not bound by oaths and the godly do not need them.

II. BE REVERENT

Reverence is recognizing that God is present with me in all situations and hears every word that I speak. To take an oath before God and fail to perform it demonstrates irreverence. Jesus points out that Heaven is the Lord's throne, the temple is His footstool, and Jerusalem is His city. To swear by any of them is to swear before the Lord. And since God is sovereign over a person's natural hair color, to swear by your head is to swear before God as well. Jesus exposes these formulas as thinly veiled craftiness and deception.

To summon God as witness in making a deceptive statement violates the third commandment which forbids taking the Lord's name in vain. Jesus is not teaching that oaths are evil. He is exposing the loopholes created by the scribes and

BIBLE STUDIES

SENATE MEMBERS: TUESDAY AT 7:30AM IN CAP 1E.9

HOUSE MEMBERS: WEDNESDAY LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30AM OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS EARLIER)

CAPITOL STAFF STUDY: THURSDAY LUNCH @ NOON IN REAGAN BUILDING, ROOM 140

Texas

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Pharisees for honoring commitments and the frivolous irreverence of how it was done. Dishonest dealings were excused by these silly formulas. Jesus calls subjects of His heavenly kingdom to recognize the Lord as a party to any commitment made. He calls you and I to be trustworthy.

But I say to you, do not swear at all...

Matthew Henry, the noted Bible commentator made the following application of this teaching of Jesus. “If our fidelity be known, that will suffice to gain us credit; and if it be questioned, to back what we say with swearing and cursing, is but to render it more suspicious. They who can swallow a profane oath, will not strain at a lie.”

III. BE TRUTHFUL

Liar, liar, pants on fire... a phrase we likely used as school children to express our lack of confidence that someone was speaking the truth. We learned very early in life that you cannot trust someone who bends the truth to suit their own purposes. Yet few would deny having failed in this area on countless occasions in their lives. Some justify lying so often and with so little cause it seems to have become a sport to them.

But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’

Jesus calls us to speak the truth when He says, “Let your Yes be Yes and your No, No.” Truth can be defined as accurately reporting past facts in order to earn future trust. In so many situations we find ourselves tempted to leave out important facts or exaggerate insignificant facts to mislead. We may use little white lies and selective memory to get our way or to put ourselves in a good light. Technically, we may not be lying, but our conscience tells us that we are not being truthful either.

Renowned English writer, Dorothy L. Sayers extolled truthfulness as an essential virtue, “The only ethical principle which has made science possible is that the truth shall be told all the time. If we do not penalize false statements made in error, we open up the way for false statements by intention. And a false statement of fact, made deliberately, is the most serious crime a scientist can commit.” Notable events in the scientific world in recent years give this statement a prophetic ring. If truthfulness is vital to the character of a scientist, how much more vital is it to the character of a Christian?

CONCLUSION

Do you keep your word? Are you careful to follow through on commitments you make to others even when it costs you more than you thought it would?

Do you recognize that God is a party to every conversation you have and the most important audience member of every speech you deliver? Do you recognize that God holds you accountable for every idle word you speak?

Do you accurately report past facts in order to earn future trust in all situations? Do you ever engage in double talk to mislead others with ambiguity, simply to avoid being caught in contradictions or false statements?