



Oaths - Matthew 5:33-37

“Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.” Really, evil? This may strike us as a bit of an overstatement, but in a day and age in which the value and trustworthiness of one’s word has been cheapened, we may well lack the perspective to understand properly the gravity of what Jesus is getting at in this section of His famous sermon.

33 “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.’ 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

We need to keep in mind that to make an oath in a biblical sense, was to call upon God to bear witness to the truth and veracity of our words or promises. This puts a deeper seriousness into play. If I were to break my word it is just my own reputation that is at stake. Yet, if my words call upon God for verification, I ought to speak very carefully. Our culture spends a lot of time working on personal branding. The number of social media influencers who make a living based on the perceived value of their projected image is remarkable. Yet, many times it would seem that this focus on image is quite shallow, lacking almost any depth or any basis in reality at all.

Jesus’ words hold true and speak to our culture as well as they did two millennia ago. If we want to be trusted, if we want our word to be respected, it’s not about the oaths we swear that will give others confidence, but rather with the consistent manner in which our yes means yes and our no means no. Speaking with straightforward honesty was, and is still, the best way to work on our “brand.” This builds not only our own standing with others, but through our witness, the image of God in the minds of those in our lives is also built up.

Thoughts for Reflection

How have you been impacted by the honesty or lack thereof when dealing with others? How can the church be a starting place for a restoration of honesty in our society?