

“Disciples Tell the Truth”

Matthew 5:33-37

It certainly comes as no surprise to us that we live in a world that is characterized by dishonesty and deception. Rather than being the exception, dishonesty has become the norm.

Daniel Webster - *“There is nothing so powerful as truth—and often nothing so strange.”*

Deception takes many forms and travels under many different names. Our times have been marked by major corporate fraud, political dishonesty and perjury, and lying for cover up. Deception rears its ugly head through exaggeration, telling stories while leaving out vital facts, and through little white lies.

Here are some of the more famous American fibs that we tell and are told:

- The check is in the mail.
- I'll start my diet tomorrow.
- One size fits all.
- You haven't changed a bit.
- Your luggage isn't lost, it's only misplaced.
- This hurts me more than it hurts you.
- I just need five minutes of your time.
- Your table will be ready in a few minutes.
- I don't remember seeing that email.
- Let's have lunch sometime.

Michel de Montaigne - *“Lying is indeed an accursed vice. We are men, and we have relations with one another only by speech. If we recognized the horror and gravity of an untruth, we should more justifiably punish it with fire than any other crime. I commonly find people taking the most ill-advised pains to correct their children for their harmless faults, and worrying them about heedless acts which leave no trace and have no consequences. Lying -- and in a lesser degree obstinacy -- are, in my opinion, the only faults whose birth and progress we should consistently oppose. They grow with a child's growth, and once the tongue has got the knack of lying, it is difficult to imagine how impossible it is to correct it.”*

Psychology Today - *"In her research, Bella DePaulo, Ph.D. found that people lie in one in five of their daily interactions. Pamela Meyer, author of Liespotting, claims that we're lied to from 10-200 times a day. It's important to consider: how honest is the world we've created around ourselves? How often do we ourselves tell lies? And, on the flip side, do we intimidate others in ways that might encourage them to shade the truth?"*

"Little White Lies" (Newsweek, 9-14-12):

Percent of adults who admit to telling lies "sometimes" or "often"	12%
Percent of women who admit to occasionally telling harmless half-truths	80%
Percent of people who admit to lying on their resumes	31%
Percent of patients who lie to their doctor	13%
Percent of patients who "stretched the truth" to their doctor	32%
Percent of patients who lied about following a doctors treatment plan	40%
Percent of patients who lied about their diet and exercise regiments	30%
Percent of people who lie at least once during a 10-minute conversation	60%
Average number of lies per day by men to their partner, boss, or colleagues	6%
Average number of lies per day by women to their partner, boss, or colleagues	3%

Man is not born naturally telling the truth. No one has ever had to learn how to lie! It comes natural due to our fallen nature. It's common for people to only say the parts of the truth that they feel are acceptable or that they think people want to hear, leaving the full truth hidden away. Or, people may lie by omission or tell "little white lies" that paint a very different picture of reality. It's no surprise that these lies don't just hurt relationships, they can outright destroy them. In fact, if you tell one lie, you will have to tell five more just to keep it propped up. I came across a poem that illustrates just how destructive lies can be:

*First, somebody told it,
Then the room couldn't hold it,
So the busy tongues rolled it
Till they got it outside.*

*Then the crowd came across it,
And never once lost it,
But tossed it and tossed it,
Till it grew long and wide.*

*This lie brought forth others,
Dark sisters and brothers,
And fathers and mothers--
A terrible crew.*

*And while headlong they hurried,
The people they flurried,
And troubled and worried,
As lies always do.*

*And so evil-bodied,
This monster lay goaded,
Till at last it exploded
In smoke and in shame.*

*Then from mud and from mire
The pieces flew higher,
And hit the sad victim
And killed a good name.*

According to Jesus, lying and dishonesty is an issue of one's heart.

Matthew 12:34 - "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

A truthful SPIRIT brings forth truthful SPEECH.

It is not an easy thing to be a totally truthful person in today's culture, but it is necessary if we desire to be fully devoted followers of Jesus. Our integrity as Christ's disciples can make all the difference to a lost and dying world.

Jesus takes up this subject in this section of the Sermon on the Mount as it relates to oath taking and following through on our promises to people. An oath or a promise, no matter how strong the words used, is only as reliable as the one who makes it. It is a matter of our character and integrity, not our convincing words.

Jesus says that His disciples are known for their truthfulness. Honesty is a character trait of kingdom citizens.

1. Telling the truth REQUIRES personal integrity

“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.”

God commands honesty and truth-telling because He is truth. He Himself is the standard of truth and has determined what truth is.

James 1:17 - “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”

This means that God is always perfect and true and never changes but always remains the same. Because God is true, His standard is truth. He desires that our lives be characterized by truth.

Psalm 51:6 - “Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.”

This is what Jesus is getting at here in this text. In His day, the truth was hard to find.

He gives the illustration of oath taking and vows among people whereby they swore that they were going to do something or that something was true. According to Jesus, God’s law demanded that people come through on their word.

Numbers 30:2 - “If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.”

Deuteronomy 23:21 - “If you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will surely require it of you.”

In Jesus’ day, oath taking had become greatly abused and misused. At some point, many of the religious leaders began to teach that an oath was not binding if it were not in God’s name. In other words, if you swore by someone else’s name or by the temple, you were not bound to your word.

(This is like children saying something with fingers crossed.)

What is the reason behind a lie? It is because a person who tells the lie thinks he benefits in some way that he wouldn't were he to be honest.

Unfortunately, many in our day have forfeited personal integrity for personal gain.

The point that Jesus is making in these verses is that oath taking and swearing should not be necessary because of the personal integrity that sets His disciples apart from everyone else in the world. They are marked by radical honesty and truthfulness!

2. Telling the truth REFLECTS Christ-likeness

“But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, 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. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.”

Jesus confronts the culture and says that a radical commitment to honesty and integrity characterizes the citizens of God's kingdom. As the result of greater righteousness, His followers don't have to swear at all to insist that something be true. Their word is their bond because they reflect the honest character of their Lord.

John 14:6 - “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

Jesus is the perfect embodiment of truth. When Pilate asked Him what truth was, he had no idea that truth was the very Person who was standing in front of him. John describes Him as the True and Faithful Witness in the book Revelation.

Here in the text, Jesus is saying that those who are truly righteous don't need to swear that they are telling the truth because they are known for their honesty. Their word is true and trustworthy.

The Message - *“Don't say anything you don't mean... You only make things worse when you lay down a smoke screen of pious talk, saying, 'I'll pray for you,' and never doing it, or saying, 'God be with you,' and not meaning it. You don't make your words true by embellishing them with religious lace. In making your speech sound more religious, it becomes less true. Just say 'yes' and 'no.' When you manipulate your words to get your own way, you go wrong.”*

There should be no need for us to needlessly swear to the truth.

Helmut Thielicke - *“Whenever I utter the formula 'I swear by God,' I am really saying, Now I'm going to mark off an area of absolute truth and put walls around it to cut it off from the muddy floods of untruthfulness and irresponsibility that ordinarily overruns my speech. In fact, I am*

saying even more than this. I am saying that people are expecting me to lie from the start. And just because they are counting on my lying I have to bring up these big guns of oaths and words of honor.”

The point is that the disciples of Jesus Christ don't need to swear and won't need to convince people when they are telling the truth because they are known by their honest character.

3. Telling the truth RESISTS the enemy

“Let what you say be simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”

Dishonesty and lying is reflective of sin and its presence in one's heart and life. In fact, the origin of all deception is sinister.

“Evil” - *some translations render this as ‘evil one’*

Lying and all untruths ultimately find their origin in the father of all lies, Satan himself.

John 8:44 - **“He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”**

It should be no surprise that God hates deception and all of its forms.

Proverbs 6:16-19 - **“There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.”**

An illustration of this is seen in the life of the early church. Acts 5 records the account of God judging a man and his wife who lied to the Holy Spirit.

Acts 5:3-4 - **“But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? After it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”**

Dishonesty is a serious thing, so serious that God keeps all liars out of His kingdom.

Psalm 15:1-3 - **“O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; who**

does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.”

Honesty and integrity distinguish those who are in fellowship with God.

4. Telling the truth RESULTS from gospel transformation

In other words, telling the truth is the result of believing the truth. Jesus changes us by His truth. Honesty is a result of salvation.

Words depend on character, and no amount of oaths can ever compensate for poor character.

Frank Gaebelin - *“Tongue control will never be achieved unless there is first of all heart and mind control. The tongue is the servant of the mind and the emotions...Christ only is worthy to have full control of a man’s mind. And He who is worthy is also able to do what no man can do for himself. Salvation applies to the whole man. The cleansing of the soul includes also the cleansing of the mind. When any Christian comes to the point of yielding to the Lord—in full sincerity, cost what it may—control of his thought life, the problem of managing his tongue, will be solved...Words that are truly godly come only from a godly heart. Such a heart is one that is possessed first of all by a deep love for Christ.”*

Jesus says, “Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no!’”

God intends for us to use our words in a positive way. Wisdom may even mean that we choose to refrain from speaking at times.

Proverbs 10:19 - **“When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.”**

Because the gospel of Christ transforms our hearts, it transforms our speech. Disciples TELL the truth because they have been TRANSFORMED by the truth.