

Jesus: Let me clarify this 'oath' thing...

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[0:00] 5. We're in the Sermon on the Mount.

At the beginning of the sermon, Jesus shared the Beatitudes, blessed is, blessed is, and he shows us a profile of what a Christian is, and that profile is a blessed life. And for those who have been born of the Spirit of God, we bear the beautiful fruit that we see there. The effect is being sawed in light in a decaying and dark world. In Matthew 5, 17, Jesus says something really interesting. He says, do you not think that I've come to abolish the law of the prophets? I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. So Jesus teaches the Sermon on the Mount, and what he teaches is the fulfillment of the law. And so he, in chapter 5, verses 21 and 26, he picks up this anger thing.

[1:04] And he says, you know what? Don't just murder, don't hate. Don't lust either.

And 5, 31 through 32, he says, be actively keeping your life-long exclusive vows to your spouse. And in this morning, we're going to be looking at something that Jesus had to say. And at the outset, he may say, what does that mean? Well, as followers of Jesus, we no longer speak lies, and we're no longer unfaithful to our word.

We speak the truth, and we are true to what we say. And you know what? We don't have to make oaths anymore. We don't have to build scaffolding around what we say to ensure people that what we need is what we need.

We can say something, let our yes be yes, and our no be no. I'm going to end this sermon today talking about this concept called *corum deo*.

[2:19] It's a Latin word. It means before the face of God. And we're going to be truth seekers because we live *corum deo*. And so hold on.

We'll get there. But right now, I want you to know that your words matter. What you say matters. It matters to God, and it affects the people around you.

And so here in Matthew 5, 33 through 37, Jesus is calling us, his disciples, to be truthful. Let me read it. Again, you've heard that it was said to those bold, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.

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. Let what you say be simply yes or no. Anything more than that comes from evil.

[3:28] Our Lord Jesus, our King, is calling us to be truthful. To be consistent with what we say in our lips and the walk we walk day after day.

We'll be truthful in what we say and true to what we say. And so to help you see this, I'm going to make three points in the sermon this morning. I want to help you see the truth about oaths, the swearing business, you know, what's that all about.

Let's look at the truth about that, what the Old Testament has to say about that. And then we're going to look at the truth distorted by Pharisaical technicalities.

And then finally, the last move is Jesus. He comes and clarifies this whole oath thing. The truth clarified by living in *quorum damn*.

So, what we're going to find is we're truthful because we're living for God.

[4:36] The truth about oaths. If you look at verse 33, you can guess. Again, you've heard that it was said to those of all, You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.

So, the swearing Jesus is talking about is not cussing. The swearing he's talking about is swearing to do something. Committing something with your words. And in verse 34, we see, he says, What I say to you, do not take an oath at all.

And so swearing and oaths are talking about the same kinds of things. It's not the same basket, including vows even. So, what we need to ask at the outset is, What is an oath?

What's a vow? What does it mean to swear to do something? Well, an oath or a vow or swearing to do something is a verbal guarantee for a serious commitment you're making.

So, one takes an oath or makes a vow when you're going to do something serious, something weighty. For example, January 20, 2017, we will have a new president being sworn into the Oval Office.

[5:49] I do solemnly swear that I will thankfully execute the Office of the President of the United States and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.

They're being sworn into office. Or maybe you've taken this kind of oath before. Left hand on the Bible, right hand up in a court of law.

I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So, help me God. Take you none. Take you none.

For wedding vows. For wedding vows, I had the privilege of officiating a ceremony this past Friday night, and I said to the bride and groom, having indicated your desire to join together as husband and wife, will you please turn to one other, join hands, and repeat these vows.

I groan, take you, bride, to be my wedded wife, to have and behold, for this day forward, for better and for worse, for riches, for poor, and sickness and health, to love, to cherish, put death to his heart, according to God's holy word, and to that end, I pledge you, I bow to you, my exclusive devotion.

[7:07] We're surrounded by oaths. We're surrounded by vows. We're surrounded by swearing to do things.

When you speak an oath, when you make a vow, you are binding yourself to your word. You are committing, you say, I'm going to do this no matter what.

What I'm saying is true. And I'm going to be true to what I'm saying. So the purpose of an oath is to guarantee the truthfulness of one's word.

That's the purpose of an oath. And as R.C. Sproul points out, there is a place for folks and vows on occasions of great importance and lasting significance.

We'll come back to that. But right now, I want you to realize that oaths are binding. Vows are binding. But there's more to the truth about oaths.

[8:22] Oaths frequently invoke the name of God. Or at least something greater to solemnize the importance of something.

I swear to tell the whole truth and the truth, the whole truth is nothing but the truth. So help me, God. What they're saying in the court of law is, hey, before God, as God is my witness, I'm going to tell you the truth as I know it best.

It's a very solemn event when you take an oath. When you swear to do something by invoking God's name, or vow to do something in God's name, or take an oath in God's name, the Old Testament would say, not only is that permitted, but it's encouraged.

Listen to Deuteronomy chapter 6. Deuteronomy chapter 6, verses 13 and 14, you read this.

It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve, and by His name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods and the peoples who are around you.

[9:45] What Moses is saying is, hey, if you're going to swear by a God, swear by your God, Yahweh, not Baal, not Molek. Swear by the name of your God. Deuteronomy 23, verses 21 through 23, we read this.

If you make a vow to the Lord, the Lord your God, you shall not delay in fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will surely require of you that you will be guilty of sin. But if you refrain from valuing, you will not be guilty of sin.

You shall be careful to do what is past your list, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth. So what we're learning is that in the Old Testament, vows were not prohibited.

They were encouraged in some way. And if you're going to make a vow, you better do it. And if you're familiar with Jephthah, Judges chapter 11, you read like the most tragic of vows ever. It points to the flawed character of Israel's leaders at the time. So just this brief sampling of the Old Testament, I just want to let you know that oaths were okay.

[10:59] Vows were appropriate. You can swear by God's name. You just need to make sure you did it. But here's a little piece that you need to remember. It's also in Deuteronomy.

Chapter 5, verse 11. This is kind of a summary of the Ten Commandments before Israel enters the promised land. God says, You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.

So here's what that means in connection to vows and oaths. If you were to make an oath in God's name and then fail to meet the oath, not only did you fail in the word, you have now profaned the name of God.

You have emptied the name of God of its glory. You're making a statement about God himself. So in the Old Testament, if they broke an oath in the name of God, they were profaned in the name of God.

So not only was it a failed commitment, they have defamed their God. So as you can see, making an oath is a pretty serious business.

[12:16] And so this first section, the truth about oaths, as you want to see, is that an oath is basically about guaranteeing the truthfulness of one's word. That's what an oath is about.

And oaths are binding, and when God's name is invoked, one's oath becomes a statement about God's character, and God will look to it.

So that's the truth about oaths. Now let's look at this truth that is distorted by Pharisees, Satan, and the truth about it. Amen.

Look back at verse 5, verse 33. Again, you've heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.

Jesus is not taking issue with the Old Testament. Jesus is taking issue with the fair saying, called twisting, of the Old Testament when it came to oaths.

[13:16] Let me explain. Now, you've got to realize that the religious leaders of Jesus said that Pharisees were fully aware of what the Old Testament had to say about oaths. And there's more to what the Old Testament said about oaths than what I shared with you just moments ago.

And so, the Pharisees certainly did not want to take God's name in the fair. They didn't want to do that. Yet, they wanted to keep giving oaths.

And, if they didn't have to be held accountable to it, that would be great. And so, they were seeking ways to speak oaths and vows and swear without binding themselves to have to do what they're saying they're going to do.

They wanted the ability to make an oath without being required to follow through with that oath. They wanted to keep their options open.

So, you know what they did? They devised a very complicated and technical system of determining when an oath was binding and when an oath was not binding.

[14:31] And you get a glimpse of that in Matthew chapter 23. So, we'll just skip ahead to Matthew chapter 23 verses 16 through 22. And I just want to let you know up front what you're going to read is a lot different than Matthew 5 and Matthew 23.

This is a poem. This is Jesus coming after the Pharisees. He is rebuking them. It's a series of woe to you scribes and Pharisees.

And so, look at verse 16. Woe to you blind guides who say if anyone swears by the temple that is nothing but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple he's bound by his own.

You see what's going on there? The Pharisees have this devised system where they were slitting hairs upon the gold of the temple and the temple as to whether they're bound to keep their word or not.

Let's read up. You blind fools for which is greater the gold or the temple that is made the gold sacred? And you say if anyone swears by the altar is nothing but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar he's bound by his own.

[15:42] You blind men for which is greater the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it and whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it and whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.

Jesus is getting after the Pharisees because they wanted to preserve the weightiness of their words but without the weightiness of having to follow through on it.

They were manipulating oaths for personal gain. Now I mentioned before that when you take an oath with God's name you're bound to it and so what the Pharisees were trying to do is they're speaking making oaths on the basis of important things that weren't God's name and the thing was if we make an oath that's not God's name but it's important well then we're not really bound to do it. And Jesus is just blowing that out of the water. Imagine what we make first century Palestine there's a widow her name is Rebecca she approaches the Pharisee named Levi and she says I need a fence built around my garden all these rock badgers are eating my cabbage I'm not going to have anything to eat can you please do something about it?

And the Pharisee Levi says Rebecca they're slammed by the temple we'll get it done by Thursday the following Saturday at synagogue Thursday is coming on widow Rebecca flies to Levi and says Levi you swore you had that fence up by two days ago and now the rock badgers are going to come they can eat all my cabbage I don't have anything to eat to which Levi would say yes I know I swore to you but I swore by the temple not the door of the temple let's get something on the books for next week and so when Jesus says you blind gods he needs it you're misleading the people you're bringing mistrust the Pharisees had devised for themselves a system of oaths and vows that kept them off the hook while soundly authoritative and truthful and maintaining their position now you might be saying well that's ridiculous

[18:33] I've seen through that in a heartbeat still not for me today we appeal to all sorts of technicalities to get ourselves off the hook maybe it sounds familiar I know I said that I would tar the driveway by the end of the day but technically it's still 11.15pm I still have 45 minutes to tar the driveway technicality or maybe you found yourself in a situation like this oh oh oh when I agreed to that what I really meant was that if I had time I would do it kind of changing the terms of the agreement technicality you said I couldn't watch this sexually explicit Netflix show on TV and you said I couldn't watch it on TV but you didn't say I couldn't watch that Netflix TV on my laptop technicality oh did you mean you didn't want me to watch it at all well you know what when we had that conversation about my gambling we had both agreed that

I couldn't spend our money on gambling so what I did was just open an account my own name and I'm using my own money to gamble technicality your risk is a point politics today technicalities the Pharisees were using the system of technicalities to shield themselves from taking responsibility what they said happens today happens with all of us I'll tell you that it's an evasive use of oaths and so what the Pharisees were doing what we are calling to do ourselves are use oaths and commitments and technicalities to the thing having to be true to our word and deal with the consequences of our decisions you see what the

Pharisees had done is they had twisted the very purpose of an oath the purpose of those was to guarantee the truthfulness of a statement and what the blind gods blind fools these blind men had done is they can make this system of oaths as a guarantee a way out and Jesus has a very sharp thing to say to them in Matthew 23 they were blinded by this they didn't see what they were doing and they were blinded by their own sinfulness and pride because this system was serving their personal interests they were entrenched in their thinking they just thought it was okay they didn't want to be accountable they didn't want to have to submit to somebody else so their practice of making oaths was actually distorting the truth in misleading people at this point we're like would someone please step into this mess and make sense of it and if you look at verse 34

Jesus steps in but I say but I say let me clarify this oath there Jesus says but I say now those three words are really three important words you gotta remember who's saying this is God incarnate saying but I say let me bring to you the true meaning of this oath of business let me just shed light on this clarify this because the Pharisees have just messed this thing up this is Emmanuel

Emmanuel speaking this is Emmanuel speaking this is the one and came through without giving in this is the one who said after being baptized the father is my son with whom I want to please this is our king and he speaks with all authority because he's God in the flesh would you just look back to the last words of Matthew chapter 7 verses 28 29 it says and when Jesus finished this sermon the crowds were astonished as teaching for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their strongness

Jesus was set apart in what he's saying that what I say is God speaking to us and so we're going to come under what he says in verse 34 he says what I say do not take an oath at all and I'm guessing in your mind you're wondering things like well is that everything does this mean everything out there is that is that an exclusive prohibition well the simple answer that is no it's not Jesus is not saying no you can't speak any oath so here's why all throughout the New Testament we see people taking oaths we see people making vows swearing by God's name the apostle Paul will use the phrase regularly he'll say as God is my readiness Romans 1 9 2 Corinthians 1.23

[24:47] Philippians 1 8 1 Corinthians 2 5 10 surely Paul knew what Jesus is teaching here and surely Paul understood it not as a exclusive prohibition to taking the oath even in God's name and Hebrews chapter 6 God himself takes an oath guaranteeing our salvation salvation and maybe what's most interesting is Matthew 26 verse 63 Jesus is standing before Caiaphas and Caiaphas says what he says I adjure you by the living God tell us that you are the Christ the son of God he's putting Jesus under an oath swear by God your answer what does Jesus do uh Caiaphas you shouldn't take oath what you say is true you accept so when

Jesus says do not take an oath at all it's not an exclusive prohibition but he's he's prohibiting something so what's he prohibiting what he's saying don't do this my followers don't do this and what he's going to say is don't do what the Pharisees do don't do this business of turning oaths into guarantees of ways out so remember in Matthew 5 Jesus is teaching his followers and he's saying to them do not misuse oaths he's not challenging the scriptures he's exposing and rebuking the Pharisees practice of taking oaths without any intent to follow through Pharisees were misusing oaths and so what Jesus is saying he's saying no that's not why that's in the Bible oaths are in the Bible to guarantee the truthfulness of what you're saying don't do what these

Pharisees are doing they messed up you've heard it said them all don't do that so Jesus presses in verse 34 35 36 exposes the false in the Pharisee and he says you shall not swear falsely excuse me do not take oath at all either by heaven verse 35 or by earth or by Jerusalem verse 36 or by your head that's what the Pharisees were doing they were taking oaths and making oaths based upon heaven earth Jerusalem and on their heads don't do that they were trying to avoid taking God's name and making an oath in God's name and binding themselves to what they had to say and Jesus here in Matthew 5 and he makes the same case in Matthew 23 he makes a linkage he reunites what the

Pharisees were trying to split apart he says don't you know that heaven is God's throne don't you know that the earth is God's foot stool don't you know that Jerusalem is the city of the king don't you know that you have no power to change the color of your hair before heaven happens God God's God's promise determines the color of your hair and the point that Jesus is making is that the God over all anything you swear by it's connected to God you can't escape accountability with him there's no way all of your swearing God hears it and is going to hold it what Jesus is doing here is reviewing the practice of the Pharisees and he's calling his disciples to be don't do that be truthful watchers be truthful these saints in verses 34 35 they're not in

God's name they all belong to him they're all under his authority not name God doesn't excuse them for being responsible for what their commitment is on so Jesus exposes the false distinction the Pharisees are making and he exposes it in us there's another thing I want you to hear it's not in Matthew 5 it's actually Matthew 12 and what it is this it's another shot at the Pharisee Jesus takes appropriately so if you look at Matthew chapter 12 verses 36 and 37 he's talking about trees are known by their fruits a good tree produces good fruit bad tree produces bad fruit and then it says out of the abundance of your heart the mouth speaks and so

[30:23] Jesus said in verse 36 I tell you on the day of judgment people will give an account for every careless word to you for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be done what Jesus is saying

there is for those of you who may think that not by swearing by God's name somehow you're not accountable for what you say Jesus is saying that on that day every word every careless word is going to be judged by God he's getting track of it all he sees all he knows all it's not some formula that saves your speech Jesus gets right at the heart of the matter what we need is not new oath formulas what we need is a new heart and that is something only

God himself can bring about by his grace a heart that's transformed by God's grace bears the fruit of words that are transformed by God's grace let me put it this way a pharisaical heart that is consumed with oneself is going to speak words consumed with oneself out of the abundance of the heart of God's grace but a heart radically changed by God's grace that has been made alive by the spirit of God because of what Christ has done on the cross and raised from the dead that heart now wants what God wants God delights in truth he's the God of truth and he sets Jesus who is the truth so that we can speak truth and be true to our words what this all points to is the need for a new heart a heart that is transformed by

God's grace lives quorum deo before the face of God the face I'm most concerned about with my speech is God's face what he thinks his eyes his ear he is the God of truth the God of truth is overall he sees all he sees your heart and he knows the word that flow from it and so when you live quorum deo you no longer care about using technicalities to evade consequences you don't care anymore because you want to use your words for the glory of the living God and for the upbuilding of those people within ear of your speech and so the question within yourself becomes if I say this will I get caught up in it will somebody hold accountable to it it becomes oh God with what's in my mind right now will that glorify your name if when I seek that love will that build up people around me when you live the cora of deo all of your words matter not if some are oaths or vows all of them matter your jokes your whispers your oaths and your minds it's no longer what can I get out of this it's how do I give my glory when you live cora of deo you take every thought captive before God before it comes out and when you take that thought captive and ask God will this glorify you when you speak it you speak it in love to build Jesus is saying don't look like the Pharisees live for God let what you say be simply yes or no we don't need to make a vow vows and oath are to be a few and far between and when you're not making oaths and vows let your yes to yes and no you don't just do what you say say what you mean mean what you say you don't get scaffolding around everything you say let it stand because God is my children because God hears living corn down will ensure that you speak truthfully and are true to what you speak and that's what Jesus died he died so that you couldn't you couldn't afford and with him living in us as Rick was speaking of we are now able to do that so the truth about oaths is that the Old Testament allowed for it and they were made in order to ensure the truthfulness of what you said the truth distorted by technicality this is a Pharisee that's twisted oaths into a practice of self protection and self promotion and then Jesus speaks right into it and clarifies no no we don't live like that we don't live like the Pharisees we don't live politically we live for the glory of God in your speech let me just brief through some applications first is this there's a place for oaths and vows they should be reserved for occasions of great import and lasting significance

[36:44] R.C. Cole says they're very appropriate on wedding days second be slow to speak J.A.

119 calls us to be slow to speak consider your words consider they glorify God consider their effect on others live for them day would you think of your practice like this every day God may my words bless those around me for the glory of your name you may be asking what if my life has undermined my credibility what if my lack of keeping my word has caused people to not trust me the solution is not putting in formulas the solution is quorum down the solution is being truthful before God and that starts with acknowledging that you have been speaking in ways that is perfect what if I foolishly found myself by my words and am unable to follow through with them

I'll do there more times than I like to admit be honest be honest before God on others if you're taking notes write down Proverbs chapter 6 1 through 5 we've got instructions from Proverbs of what to do in that case if you're being convicted this morning that's God's kindness to you and you want to grow in your speech let me encourage you take September and go through the book of Proverbs and as you go through the book of Proverbs you pay attention to words like tongue lips words and especially the effect of one's words on others a word physically spoken is like apples of

gold in the setting of silver Proverbs 25 and finally when you feel condemned by your sinful words I do regularly remember the sinless incarnate word who said for you on the cross it's finished it's painful it's cross work forgives the sin of your mouth and purifies you so that now you're able to speak words of a righteousness that exceeds that of even of fairness he's the way he's the truth he's the life that's what's right Lord Jesus we are you you you you you you you