



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH
SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS



Nothing but the Truth So Help Me God

Tim Badal | January 12, 2014 | Matthew 5:33-37

The Upside-down Kingdom Series, Lessons Learned from the Sermon on the Mount, Part 14

Turn in your Bibles to the [Matthew 5:33-37](#). We are continuing our series on the Sermon on the Mount. We are currently looking at “kingdom actions” that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ calls us to live out. In this section of the sermon, Jesus has been reordering our understanding of God’s requirements for us concerning holiness. At the time Jesus gave this sermon, the Pharisees and chief priests had made a set of criteria saying what holiness looked like. They said that holiness was different from what the Law required.

Jesus challenges that idea in His sermon. In [verse 48](#), He says, “*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” That’s a tall order. The lessons in this sermon have been tough things to preach through and tough things to hear as listeners. It has been tough to realize that God wants us to be perfect when it comes to our anger, our lust and our marriages. We will see that He wants that regarding revenge and our enemies, too. We find ourselves asking, “Really God, are You serious? Do You really want us to be perfect in all these ways?” These are hard truths. Jesus’ disciples even say, “These are hard things. Who can understand them and live by them?”

We can take solace that we can live by these truths because we’ve been empowered by the Holy Spirit. He indwells us and we have the opportunity to tap into the grace available through Him. But we must also recognize that we are prone to ignore the Spirit because of our own sin. We have two options:

1. We can lower the standard. This is what the Pharisees, chief priests and rabbis of the day did. They minimized the requirements of the Law to make it easier. They said, “If you do half of the requirements and work through our man-made system, then you’ll be okay.”
2. Or we can take God’s Word at face value. We can say, “These are hard things and I’m going to need to roll up my spiritual sleeves and get to work to honor God with the way I live.”

It is human nature that we always try to do the minimum. Not only that, but we try to find teachers who will minimize things and find loopholes.

The Apostle Paul predicted this in [2 Timothy 4:3-4](#), “*For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*” That was true when Jesus preached this message and it’s true today.

My desire for all of us is that by God's grace we would humbly submit to the teaching of God's Word no matter how difficult it may be or how much we have failed in the past. I hope that we will submit to the teachings of Christ and not give in to the temptation to lower the standard.

As a student, I used to love when the teacher said, "This test is going to be graded on a curve." Inevitably, there was always a smart person in the room who would get a 99%. That one extra point never helped me. But I always loved it when the teacher would say that the grades were going to be on a curve because it enabled me to take a failing grade and do a little better.

God doesn't grade on a curve; God grades on the righteousness of Christ. Here's the great thing for us as followers of Jesus Christ to recognize: we will fail, but that is why Christ came. We have a failing grade for righteousness because of our sin which misses the mark of God's holiness. But He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God.

So are we perfect? We are in God's eyes because of Christ's righteousness. But now God is requiring us to live in such a way that we achieve the righteousness that has already been achieved for us.

Now let's look at Matthew 5:33-37:

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

Let's pray.

Lord, I pray that You would teach us how to speak. Teach us how to commit to things and how to make vows. I am struck by our flippancy and how often we don't live up to what we say we're going to do. I am guilty of this and I ask for Your forgiveness. I recognize that many people may be in the same boat I am. We need to understand Your teaching on the use of our words, oaths, vows and commitments. We submit ourselves to Your teaching and strive to live differently.

Lord, I pray that you would use this passage to teach us today. Help us see what was happening in Jesus' day and apply those things to our lives. In the days to come, help us to live differently so that You may be brought glory and honor through our attitudes, actions and the way we speak towards one another. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Our current text is a little different from our previous ones. Those have been easy to take Jesus' teachings and apply them to our lives. For instance, look at the issue of anger. Anger in Jesus' day was similar to the issue of anger today. The issues of lust and marriage are also very similar in the first century and the twenty-first century.

Now Jesus is talking about a first century issue that is a little difficult to apply directly to the twenty-first century. This idea of oaths in the first century is something that we don't do much of, at least not in the

same way. So we need to understand what this situation looked like for them and then apply that principle in our own lives to the best of our abilities.

Jesus is articulating something that we are all in great need of: He wants His followers to be men and women who are known for integrity in their speech. We need to be people who are totally trustworthy and faithful, whose word is our bond. It should be guaranteed that we will do as we say.

Ken Hughes, the former pastor of College Church in Wheaton, said this of our society in his book The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom:

Today there is an urgent truth shortage! There was a time when western culture was distinguished from other cultures by at least a conventional outward sense of obligation to tell the truth. But now there is a pervasive indifference to truth-telling, and this has not only infected day-to-day conversation but the most solemn pledges of life. Perjury under solemn oath is epidemic. The sacred vows of marriage are broken almost as often as repeated. God's name is invoked by blatant liars who purport to be witnesses to the truth.

For as long as I can remember, every authority figure in my life—my parents, school teachers, people within the church—has taught the importance of telling the truth. It's something we all know and understand: the need to be honest in all that we do.

But—honestly—it's hard to tell the truth. As adults we know that it's not as easy as just telling the truth and then going about your business. Sometimes the truth really hurts. Sometimes telling the truth will create more issues than being a little dishonest would. Jesus tells us that no matter how difficult telling the truth is, we should still do so.

Once there were two very rich brothers. They were also as wicked as they were rich. Both brothers lived wild and unprofitable existences, using their wealth to cover up the dark sides of their lives. However, you would never have guessed it for on the surface they were both committed church members. They attended the same church every Sunday and even gave large sums of money to the church's projects. Eventually the church called a new pastor. He was a man who preached the gospel and God's truth with zeal and courage. Being a man of keen judgment, insight and strong integrity, the pastor was no fool—he saw through the hypocritical lives of these two brothers.

Before long, the church's attendance grew to the point of needing a larger building. Around the same time, one of the wicked brothers died suddenly. The day before the funeral the surviving brother pulled the pastor aside and handed him an envelope. He said, "There's a large check in there, enough to pay the entire amount needed for the new building. All I ask is one favor: tell the people at the funeral that my brother was a saint. I know it's not completely true but he's dead and that's what they need to hear."

So the pastor gave the brother his word and said, "I will do precisely what you have asked me." That afternoon he went to the bank and deposited the check into the church's account. The next day the pastor spoke before a great audience at the funeral. With firm conviction, he told the people, "This man who has gone to the beyond was an ungodly sinner, wicked to the core. He was unfaithful to his wife, hot-

tempered with his children, ruthless in his business and a complete hypocrite within the church. But compared to his brother he was an absolute saint." Not only is that integrity in words but it is also an amazing sense of humor and wit!

In our passage we are called by our Lord, Master and Savior to tell the truth. He compels us to be honest in all of our dealings. When we make a vow, we need to stand by our vow and our commitment. To understand this text we need to understand four things:

The Principle that Jesus States Regarding Oaths

The Perversions of the Law Both Then and Now

The Purpose for Oaths and Commitments

The Practicality for Today

1. The Principle that Jesus States Regarding Oaths

As we look at this issue of oaths and vows in the Sermon on the Mount, we must first recognize the principle behind what Jesus is saying. What is it that Jesus wants to tell us? In order to answer that question, what do we need to know about Jesus' day?

When Jesus speaks about solemn oaths and vows, He is addressing the sinful practice of lying in His day. It was common for a man to use God's name as a way to prove the solemn nature of his vows. We're going to see how we do that today as well, even though it's a little different.

Jesus doesn't exactly quote any particular passages in the Old Testament but He seems to summarize them when He says that by doing this you break the Law and are untrustworthy. Jesus is calling us to be people who do not swear falsely and who do exactly what we say we're going to do. We need to understand where Jesus is getting this idea. Let's turn in our Bibles to the Old Testament for a moment to get an understanding of what the Scriptures tell us about this idea. We need to understand that Scripture interprets Scripture.

So what does the Bible say about this? Turn in your Bibles to [Deuteronomy 10:20](#). It seems that Jesus is saying, "Don't take any vows or oaths at all. Don't make any commitments. Just let your yes be yes and your no be no." But let's look at what else Scripture says about this to understand what Jesus is saying. [Deuteronomy 10:20](#) tells us the following, "*You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear.*" That doesn't mean that you can curse; that's not the swearing referenced here. It means that you can invoke God's name to make a commitment. God wants us to do that.

Now turn in your Bibles to [Jeremiah 12:16](#). This verse talks about what Jeremiah was supposed to do for foreigners coming into Israel out of captivity and wanting to become followers of Yahweh. In [Jeremiah 12:16](#) it says the following, "*And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, 'As the LORD lives,' even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up*

in the midst of my people.” Once again the criteria for being a part of the covenant people of God was to swear by the name of God. That was one of the ways to worship God because God is the standard of all truth. When we swear by His name, we are invoking a name that is the standard of all truth and life because He is the divine standard.

We might initially take Jesus’ words as condemning oaths, but when we look at these two Old Testament passages, we see that oaths are actually encouraged. God sees oaths, vows and commitments as a way for us to praise Him. When we invoke His name we are showing Him as the great Standard Bearer.

We need to notice not only are oaths encouraged by God but there are consequences to them as well. Turn for a moment to [Leviticus 19](#). Amidst these laws about loving your neighbor as yourself, [verses 11-12](#) say, *“You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.”*

Turn a couple of pages over to [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.”* The passage then goes on to talk about the vows between husbands and wives.

Turn now to [Deuteronomy 23:21-23](#), *“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, and you will be guilty of sin. But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin. You shall be careful to do what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.”*

Let’s pause for a moment. As we read Jesus’ words in [Matthew 5](#), we might think that Jesus is against all vows. We’ll talk later about how some groups have decided that is what Jesus is saying. We can certainly say that not all vows are created equal. We need to use wisdom and discernment about what vows are good and which ones are not.

Some of you may not be aware of this but one place where oaths and vows are very important is within secret societies; groups of people that have come together for various reasons. One such society is the Free Masons or the Masonic Lodge—you’ve probably seen their Masonic temples here and there. The Free Masons highly value oaths and vows. Now I don’t have time to get into this issue very deeply, but frankly my understanding of the Masons is that they are a satanic organization. I say that as someone whose grandfather was a very important Masonic member. If you would like to learn more, there are a number of biblical resources regarding secret societies like the Masons.

Here is an example of why discernment needs to be used. In order to become a Free Mason, you must pledge the following:

Of my own free will and accord, in the presence of Almighty God and this Worshipful Lodge, erected to Him and dedicated to the Holy Saint John, do hereby and hereon most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear that I will always hail, ever conceal, and never reveal any of the secret arts, parts or points of the hidden mysteries of Ancient Freemasonry, which have been heretofore, may at this time, or shall at any future period be communicated to me as such, to any person whomsoever, except it be a true and lawful brother Mason, or within a

regularly constituted Lodge of Masons, and neither unto him or them, until by strict trial, due examination, or legal information I shall have found him or them lawfully entitled to the same as I am myself.

Listen to what it goes on to say:

I furthermore promise and swear that I will not write, print, paint, stamp, stain, cut, carve, make, nor engrave them, nor cause the same to be done upon anything movable of immovable, capable of receiving the least impression of a word, syllable, letter or character, whereby the same becomes legible or intelligible to any person under the canopy of heaven, and the secrets of Freemasonry be thereby unlawfully obtained through my unworthiness.

To all of this I most solemnly and sincerely promise and swear, with a firm and steadfast resolution to keep and perform the same without any equivocation, mental reservation, or secret evasion of mind whatever, binding myself under no less a penalty than that of having my throat cut across, my tongue torn out by its roots and buried in the rough sands of the sea at low water mark, where the tide ebbs and flows twice in 24 hours, should I ever knowingly or willingly violate this my solemn oath or obligation as an Entered Apprentice Mason. So help me God and keep me steadfast in the due performance of the same.

You might be thinking, "That's a lot. What in the world are they saying?" This is the problem with some oaths; you don't even know what you're saying.

Let me be clear about this—Freemasonry is a cult. I don't have time to go into this deeply so you can take my word for it or do some reading of your own about Freemasonry. No solid Christian should find himself pursuing such things. Freemasonry is a brotherhood that mixes demonic rituals, ideals and responses with enough Scripture to make it sound biblical.

I wanted to address this issue because I have had three or four individuals come to me and say, "Hey, I know about oaths because of Freemasonry." Many of them are like me who had family members involved in it and it is easy to think that it's like the Lions Club or the Kiwanis. No, the Masons are not the same thing. They aren't helping in some lay area of philanthropy. Freemasonry is a spiritual thing where the members believe they're the only children of God and they alone know the secrets of God. We are not to pursue such things. So this is just a reminder—if you ever wonder where the church stands on that, I believe it's a cult, you need to stay away from it and we need to rescue people from it.

Now let's get back into the series. Where are we to apply these principles? We just looked at an example of a bad oath, "...having my throat cut across..." and all of that. You are probably thinking, "That's just sick!" In a moment, you're going to learn that we say some pretty sick things too. We're going to learn that the people of Jesus' day did as well. This seems odd to us but it shouldn't, because the heart is deceitfully sick and out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. So when we wonder where this garbage comes from, we can be confident that it comes from the heart. We say stupid stuff because we believe stupid stuff.

So where does this principle flesh itself out? What Jesus articulates concerning discernment in our oaths fleshes itself out in three ways.

This Principle Addresses Courtroom Proceedings

At some point in your life you may be called on to stand before a jury of individuals or a judge in this country and you will be asked to swear to “tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God.” We bring God into our courtroom proceedings. We often put our hands on the Bible.

Did you know that swearing on the Bible is an optional thing? Some of you might say, “It’s those atheists again, messing things up for us. We can’t even swear on our Bible.” That provision in the law was not made because of an atheist but because of a born again Christian—a Quaker. Quakers don’t give oaths. They believe Jesus’ words to mean, “I cannot give any oaths.” So this Quaker was asked to share an oath in the courtroom and was told to put his hand on the Bible. He refused and was then held in contempt of court, put in prison and was then questioned about it before the judge. The judge asked, “Why will you not swear an oath on the Bible?”

The Quaker replied, “Because as I read the Bible, the Bible says, *‘Kiss the Son,’* meaning Jesus Christ. Then in Matthew 5 the Son says, *‘Do not swear an oath.’* So you say that book is good enough to swear by but you’re not even affirming its words when Jesus says, ‘Don’t swear an oath.’” I don’t agree with his conclusion, but the man’s logic is amazing.

So we aren’t required to swear by the Bible because a Christian man had a conviction that he was not to give an oath. But our courtroom proceedings are very clear: if you lie under oath you’re under the crime of perjury. You can go to jail for that. I am thankful for that because if we want rule of law we have to have truth. And if there isn’t truth, then we could get on the witness stand and lie all we want. We would have no order in this world and we would end up with a whole heap of trouble. I’m glad we live in a country that brings God into the courtroom proceedings by way of oath and that we’re guilty of perjury if we don’t honor that oath.

This Principle Addresses Contracts Between Two Parties

Whether it’s in the business world or in our personal finances, in any major activity between two different people we will be asked to live up to a contract. If you own a home, you’re in a contract that’s called a mortgage. You sign your life away on those 7,000 pages of mortgage agreement and really it is just a bunch of legalese saying, “You’re going to pay back what you borrowed.” Then you and the bank have a statement from each other saying, “This is what we commit to and we’re going to stay true to this. This is what you commit to and you need to stay true to that.”

Another example of a contract is in the business world. As a business owner, I have contracts with my customers. These contracts say, “I’m going to live up to my end of the bargain. I’m going to have your food at this time, at this place, for this amount of people, and you—the customer—are going to pay this

price.” As long as I fulfill my end of the bargain and my customers fulfill their end of the bargain, everybody’s happy.

We have contracts all the time. Another place we have contracts is in our work place. We have a job description that has laid out how we’re supposed to do our job and what we are supposed to be paid. Jesus’ words address things like this.

This Principle Addresses Commitments and Promises

Vows and oaths are simply solemn promises and commitments that we make. So in our passage, we see that Jesus is asking the people, “What are you doing after you’ve committed to something or after you’ve promised somebody something?” He is asking what we are doing with those commitments.

Nowhere in any way, shape or form does Jesus prohibit any of these from being done. The point is that He wants to make sure that when we do such things, we are men and women of integrity and trustworthiness. When we say we’re going to do something, we need to do those things that we’ve laid out. We need to be truthful in all of our ways.

2. The Perversions of the Law Both Then and Now

Jesus lays out these perversions in our text. He says in [Matthew 5:33](#), “*You shall not swear falsely.*” That’s the first issue. But then He goes on and says, “*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*” ([vs. 34-36](#)).

So what do we need to understand about this law? It can be a little difficult to understand because we don’t do some of these things today, but two perversions took place in Jesus’ day.

These Perversions Involved Focusing on Formulas and Not on the Facts

Somewhere along the line between Moses and Jesus, the articulation of Moses and the Law has been altered. At some point the Pharisees and rabbis began teaching people that an oath wasn’t binding unless it had God’s name in it. That meant people could use vows and oaths with no intention of doing the things they’ve promised. So in Jesus’ day giving oaths had become a system of rules as to how you could stretch the truth—or lie—without getting into trouble. If you said just the right words and did the right things, you could lie without any fear of reprisal. All you needed was the right formula.

Now remember, this is what the Pharisees have done with other commandments. Last time we looked at how they said, “All you need to do is have your certificate of divorce. As long as you have your T’s crossed and your I’s dotted, you can do whatever you want. Forget that God wants us to live faithfully in marriage. You can do whatever you want as long as the formula is right.” In essence the Pharisees and rabbis were telling the people, “It’s okay to lie as long as you lie in the right way. Then you can’t get in trouble.”

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 23:16-22. In this passage, Jesus confronts the Pharisees concerning this very issue and it'll help us understand our passage in chapter five a little bit more. I have to believe that Jesus is using a whole lot of sarcasm in this passage. Read it with that in mind. He's dealing with the utter hypocrisy of these formulas and games that the people were playing. He says:

"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.' 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."

These Perversions Involved Making Truth a Game Not a Guarantee

They had built this whole system of giving oaths that was as childish as saying, "Well I did say that but I had my fingers crossed." Or, "You didn't see that I winked when I said it." I remember when I was in fourth grade the game was that you could lie in school as long as you had your foot on the crack of the tile. So you would say, "Oh you didn't see? I had my foot on the tile crack."

These were the kinds of games that were being played. If you had the right formula and played the right game, you could lie and not be held accountable by the law. Jesus said, "This is malarkey! This is not what the Law is all about and this is not being truthful."

You swear by altars but that isn't right, you have to swear by the gold. You can't swear by that so swear by the city of Jerusalem. Swear by your beards. There were all of these different things to swear by and you think, "Man, these people were really dumb. I'm glad we're sophisticated and don't do those things." Yes we do! We lie all the time. How do we make sure people believe our lies? We say, "I swear to God!" You just invoked God. You've just brought God into it and whether you're telling the truth or not you sound really compelling so you've used the formula.

We say weird things. A salesman come in the other day; I always feel bad for salesmen when they come in and I'm on a hot button issue in the text. This salesman wanted to convince me how committed they were so he said, "I swear to you on my mother's grave."

I thought, "Bingo! That's what I was looking for." So I said, "I'm so sorry, has she passed?"

He seemed confused and said, "No."

So I asked, "Why would you say such a thing?" The poor man didn't see it coming.

We say other dumb things, too. "I swear on a stack of Bibles." Why? Is one not good enough? If you get mad at the Freemasonry oath, listen to what we teach our children, "I swear to God, cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye." I don't think that idea is innate within them. Why do we say such things? In essence, we are playing a version of the shell game. You've see the person on the street playing the shell game where they hide the shell under the cup and then switch the cups around. The whole time you're trying to keep your eye on the shell and see where it went. That's what we're doing to the truth. We're saying, "Let me fake you around a little bit and keep you guessing where the truth is. Listen to what I swore." We think that if we say, "I swear to God," that means it's important. It must be because it means that God is in this thing. But really we are failing because we're swearing falsely.

Let me tell you why this is such a sin:

1. God is uniquely concerned with what we are saying. Scripture tells us that we will be judged for every careless word that we say. If that doesn't hit home for you then you must be mute. I have said a lot of careless things. On Judgment Day people are going to be saying, "Why did the line slow down up there?"

Someone else will say, "Badal is up there. God's talking to him because that boy had a big mouth and said a lot of stupid things" We're going to be judged for the careless things we've said. Why? We're going to be judged because whether we take an oath or not, whatever we swear on involves God.

In Jesus' day they said, "Just swear by smaller things and then you're not profaning the name of God." Here's what God says, "Whatever you swear by in all of creation, it's Mine. I'm in control of that. Do you want to swear by the hairs on your head? Go ahead, but I made those hairs. I turn them dark; I turn them white. I'm the One Who controls that. Because I am sovereign over everything, you are bringing Me into the mix." On a side note, stress doesn't turn our hair gray; God says He's in control of that.

When we deal with the issue of stewardship, Abraham Kuyper reminds us there isn't a square inch of all Creation about which Jesus doesn't cry out, "This is Mine! This belongs to Me." So if you swear by something that is God's, He says, "I'm uniquely involved in it so I'm concerned about what you are saying." So if you think it's not really a big deal, know that it is a big deal to God! He's there and He's a part of it. This is a big thing.

2. God is omnipresent. He's everywhere at all times. That means everything we say includes God because He is in the audience.

This is why God hates divorce. We stand up here—as Amanda and I did some years ago—and we say to one another, "I commit to this, so help me God. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Here's the thing: I didn't just make these vows and oaths to Amanda, I made them to God. And there were a bunch of witnesses to that. So when we divorce, God says, "You haven't just offended your spouse by not living up to those vows, you've offended Me."

We do this with all types of things, not just in our marital contracts. We live in an epidemic where truth telling, honesty and integrity are not lived out. We live in a day where the news channels will facts-check

what the politicians say. I think it's funny that news channels will even facts-check other news channels. We can't get anywhere because it seems that nobody is telling the truth.

3. The Purpose for Oaths and Commitments

So how do we know that God isn't saying oaths are bad? One reason is that God Himself gives oaths. All throughout the Old Testament God promises things. Every one of the covenants is a vow. Every time He says, "I commit to you the following and I will see through to the end," He is making an oath.

Now why does God do that? Is God known to be a liar? No, the Bible says, "God does not lie. He is truth." The Spirit of God is called "the Spirit of Truth." So why does God make oaths? The reason we have oaths today is seen in the way God uses oaths. In times of weighty issues, God chose to elevate His speech with an oath.

Let me give you an example. After the Flood God said to Noah, "I make this oath/promise/vow to you: I will never destroy the earth by flood again. You don't have to worry about that. I stand by it." Why did He do this? He wanted to elevate His speech. He was saying, "I want you to hear this loud and clear. I want everybody to know that I'm not going to do what I've said I'm not going to do. It's solid. It's iron-clad."

Both the Westminster Catechism of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism do a very good job of articulating the reason why we have oaths: for weighty matters where truthfulness and trustworthiness is needed. That fidelity is established for the good of the community and the good of your neighbor because there are times that we are called to commit to some things whether in the courtroom, in marriage or even within the church.

Why do we take vows in the church? One example of an important vow, oath or commitment is one that we take here at Village Bible Church. The way to become a member here is by signing a membership commitment. You can call it an oath, vows or promise, but whatever you call it you are committing to several things.

Some people may say, "That's an ungodly practice. That's something we don't need to do. Can't you just take my yes to be yes and my no to be no?" I would answer that there are times in life when we need to take oaths.

Do we need to take an oath every time we do something? Do I need to go to the elders and say, "I vow to never miss church?" No, but there are some times when we should commit to certain things. Some years ago, the elders and the congregation affirmed that membership is one of those times. We believe that as members we need to commit to a set of ideals and principles that are steeped in God's Word. These things talk about what it means to live personal lives of holiness amidst a corporate body.

Now why do we make such a commitment? There are three reasons why we do it.

Oaths and Commitments Form a Common Agreement

A commitment like this says that we are in common agreement of what should be done. We don't have the luxury of the church telling us as people what to do. There's no hierarchy of authority; the church is the people of God. There has to be some level of common agreement about what we believe and do. So the church as a whole gets together and forms a constitution and a statement of faith. Our statement of faith states how we are going to teach, affirm and hold to the Word of God. That commitment helps us understand exactly where we agree with one another.

Oaths and Commitments Allow for Accountability

After reading the membership agreement, every member of the church says, "Not only do I agree with it just in my heart where nobody can hear or understand, but I publicly agree with it." Nobody can read the heart of man except for God Himself. So we ask for more than just a passive approval in your heart; we ask all of our members to sign this document on a yearly basis.

Do we do this because we want to push paper around until Christ returns? No, we do it to have accountability. Once a year we gather and say, "We affirm that this is what we believe. This is how we want to be held accountable." We want to know the guidelines for living out the Christian life and know that when we don't live them out, the body is going to hold us accountable so that we can pursue Christ-likeness.

Oaths and Commitments Address the Consequences

One thing we wanted to make abundantly clear in our commitment is what happens when we fail. We believe this is a good, biblical thing to do. We want to look at what Scripture says is the appropriate course of action in various circumstances. So our membership commitment is a document that lays forth how we are going to respond to certain situations, both good and bad. It forms a common agreement, allows for accountability and addresses the consequences that are laid forth. That's what an oath does.

So our church has taken one singular place and said, "In the area of membership we believe an oath is an important thing. It's a solemn response before God and one another that I'm going to live according to the things that have been laid out before me. I understand it for accountability and I understand the consequences." Now think about that. It's no different from the oath that we take before a judge in a courtroom that allows for trustworthiness and it's no different from the oath of office many of us take in the military, as citizens or even as the President of the United States.

4. The Practicality for Today

So now we understand what was going on in Jesus' day. They were violating God's commandments about honesty. We understand that there are places for oaths. We understand that our own church pursues an

oath with its membership commitments. But what does this passage mean for us practically? How are we to live in light of it? There are a couple of things I want you to take away from this passage.

Our Text this Week Commands Honesty in Our Conversations

You might walk away thinking, "I don't give many oaths but when I do, I do a pretty good job of keeping them." But that's not all that Jesus is saying. Jesus is addressing the command for us to be honest. Some of us are liars and we say things that we know are lies. I have a friend who calls me at times and says, "Hey, I have to be honest with you."

I ask, "Well everything else you said isn't honest?"

He replies, "Yeah, you're right. It wasn't honest. I just lied to you." He recognizes that it is quick and easy to tell lies.

After our sermon concerning divorce, many of our divorced brothers and sisters came to me and said, "Boy, that was a hard sermon." Divorce is an easy thing to be convicted of because it's a public thing that happened at a certain point in time. You can't pretend that it didn't happen.

On the other hand, it's very easy for us to say, "I don't lie." As I prepared for this sermon, I spent some time thinking about some of the lies I've told. George Mueller said something like, "I desire not to tell lies but when I think about lies I find out how many I tell."

We lie so often and so casually that we don't even know that we're lying or telling "half-truths." You might say, "I don't lie. I don't try to deceive people." We tell lies when we tell people that we're going to be somewhere and then come up with a reason not to be there. There's a lot of lying that goes on within our churches. But we are called to be people characterized by honesty in our churches, our communities and our work places. Ephesians 4:25 says to "*put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*"

Our Text Calls Us to Consistent Christianity

This means that when we say we are going to do something, we do it. This is why the mouth is such an important part of our Christianity. "*Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks*" (Luke 6:45). We say a lot of sanctimonious things all while thinking something totally different deep inside. Jesus is saying, "Allow your words to be a picture of what you believe. Don't be dishonest with them."

The worst testimony we can have as believers is to be liars who are not trustworthy. The mechanism by which people are saved is through the proclamation of the gospel. If we fail in our trustworthiness then why in the world would an unbelieving world listen to us when we preach the gospel? If we're known to be liars and to be insincere with our words, nobody will listen to us when we proclaim this truth. That's why Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:12 to be "*an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*"

Our Text Compels Us to Meet Our Commitments

This is an all-important one that we don't always remember. Do you tell people that you're going to do things and then not live up to them? Let me ask you about a couple of areas of commitment.

You committed to some things regarding your marriage. You vowed to do certain things in light of the witnesses before you and God. Are you living up to them? Why did you say them in the first place if you had no intention of living up to them? Why did you bring God into the equation if you weren't going to live up to them? Live up to your marital commitments.

Let's talk about commitments regarding your children. From time to time, we bring our cute little babies up here and make certain commitments. I've been seeing a lot of car seats these days, so we're going to be doing this again with more babies soon. Pastor Keith holds up these babies in their cute little outfits while the parents stand up here and we commit to raising our kids in the fear and admonition of the Lord. We commit to make sure that we're spiritual role models for our children. We commit to a number of things. Do we mean them? Have we even thought about these commitments since we made them publicly? Have we thought about how it's going to be difficult at times? Our kids won't be our biggest fans when we put our foot down on some things. I'm becoming unpopular with my son right now because he is seeing that not every parent operates the way we do. He doesn't like that. This weekend we had some time alone where I talked with him about the commitments I've made to God. I want to be true to those commitments even if it means I'm going to be unpopular with my son.

Think about your commitments regarding your job. Does your boss know that when you say something you're going to do it? I know a lot of things about being a boss. Not having to worry about it when I say, "Guys, I need you to be at this place at this time," is one of the greatest joys a boss can have. It is a great solace for a boss when their employees say they're going to be somewhere and there isn't a litany of excuses about why they're not where they should be. Do you pursue your job as if you were serving God not man? This is real life.

Now think about your commitments in the church. Members, are you living up to your commitments? On Friday, we will start signing our commitments again for this new year. Please don't say, "Well I signed it before so I'll just sign it again." Instead, prayerfully consider what you're doing. You're making an oath before your brothers and sisters and before God. Are you going to live by it? I love that our membership commitment doesn't say, "I'm going to do all these things." It says, "I'm going to strive to do these things. I'm going to try my best to pursue godliness knowing that sin is a tough enemy. " Have you committed to that? Are you willing to look once again and prayerfully ask, "Am I up for this?"

Non-members, I have a question for you. Why aren't you a member? What has caused you not to commit to this local body? Now I'm not talking to first time visitors. I'm not expecting you to become a member of this church today. I'm talking to non-members who have been here long enough to see the church operate. You've seen the church to be trustworthy in the places where they need to be trustworthy. You've seen the church to be people of the Word. So why do you keep dating the church? Why do you come and not commit? Why do you have a consumer mindset instead of a family mindset? We're a family. We're the body of Christ. The Bible says that we are to commit ourselves to that family. We are to be so

unified that we are the arms, legs, fingers and toes of one body in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). This body is seen in the local entity of the church.

Think about it. How well would your family operate if every time you tried to do something as a family, your kid says, "I haven't bought into it yet. I'm going to see what other families are doing right now. If there's a better offer maybe I'll go to that." When we have this attitude, we have nullified commitment to the local church and have made the evangelical Christian a spectator. Some people here have no commitment to this church. They say, "Just keep doing what you're doing Village Bible Church. As long as you meet my criteria I'm here. But the second you preach something I don't like, play music I don't like or do anything I don't like then I'm out of here."

Brothers and sisters you're dating the church; you're not in a committed relationship with it. Does this mean that once you're committed you can never go? No, the Bible says only marriage is that way. But while you're here I would ask, "Why aren't you committed?" This is a question we all have to ask—are we willing to put our word to the test knowing that it will cost us?

Some of you might say, "I'll just say 'maybe' about everything. That keeps me out of trouble because I don't commit to anything." Here's the problem: maybe doesn't work. The last verse of our passage says, "Let what you say simply be yes or no, not maybe."

So let's be people of truth and integrity, whether in oaths or everyday conversation. Let our yes be yes and our no be no to the glory of God and for the evangelism of the unbeliever who hears our word whether we are proclaiming the gospel or saying a project will be done when it's supposed to be done. Let us be truthful in all our endeavors. This is what the Word of the Lord is teaching us today. Let us live according to it.

Father God, we come before You and thank You for Your Word. Your Word is tough. I have failed in this area this week and I admit that before this body of people. I pray that each of us would look anew at the issue of oaths and vows, at our everyday conversation and at the issue of lying. Help us to look at all of these issues of the tongue. I pray that we would seek to know why we say the things we do. Let us be careful with every word that we share knowing it's in Your presence. Help us to look at the things we say by way of exaggeration or storytelling. Whether it's in the small things or the big things, I pray that we would be seen by others and by You as people who are trustworthy and have integrity of speech.

Lord, we live in a world that glamorizes lying. It glamorizes being deceitful and that is not to be part of the church. I pray that You would rid us of all falsehood so that we may put on truth and speak the truth in love even when it hurts. By doing so, I pray that we would glorify You and be able to evangelize to the lost through the fidelity of what we say. Now send us out into the world where telling the truth is a commodity that's seen less every day. Let it be everything that we say and do. Let it be truth that compels us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.