

The Heart of Deceit

Matthew 5:33-37 - NCBC, September 29, 2019

Main Point: **The heart of righteousness always tells the truth.**

- Righteousness rejects all verbal distinctions
 - Between profanity and perjury
 - Between secular and sacred
 - Between common and consequential
- Righteousness rejects all verbal deception
 - Because lying is hypocritical
 - Because lying is Satanic
 - Because lying is condemned

Application: **Ask God to cleanse the source of your deceptive words.**

Opening Announcements:

- **Biblical Counseling Available** through our church family. Anyone seeking help and hope through compassionate and competent biblical community should connect with this ministry.

<<Name above All Names>>



I invite you to continue your worship of King Jesus now by opening your Bible to **Matthew chapter 5**, as we continue our study of our need for the supernatural righteousness of Jesus through the Sermon on the Mount.



If you do not have a Bible with you this morning, simply raise your hand and we will gladly give you a Bible. Today we focus on the heart of deceit from **Matthew chapter 5:33-37**.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote that *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick.*¹ Only Jesus is able to search our heart,² and transform our heart³ to make us pleasing to God.

But did you know that your heart is biblically connected to your tongue?⁴ That's right – your mouth only speaks what overflows your heart. So again today our meditation on Jesus' sermon should deeply convict every one of us as He shows us our need for perfect heart righteousness that only comes through faith in His substitutionary death and resurrection.

Illustrating the Heart behind God's Law 		
Verse	You have heard...	But I say...
21	You shall not murder	Anger is real problem
27	You shall not commit adultery	Desire is real problem
31	You shall use divorce papers	A hard heart is real problem
33	You shall not swear falsely	Deceit is real problem
38	You shall retaliate eye for eye	Vengeance is real problem
43	You shall hate your enemy	Selfishness is real problem

Legalistic works-righteousness will try to tell you that as long as you don't murder anyone, you've kept the 6th commandment. Or, so long as you don't commit a physical act of adultery, you've kept the 7th commandment. Or that as long as you have followed a proper legal process, you're able to divorce.

¹ Jeremiah 17:9

² Jeremiah 17:10; Psalm 139:23; 1 Samuel 16:7

³ Ezekiel 11:19; Psalm 51:10

⁴ Matthew 12:34; 15:11, 18; Mark 7:20; Luke 6:45

But Jesus is exposing the true heart behind the law of God. Selfish anger, lust, and stubbornness are real problems of our hearts that deserve God's most severe judgment and eternal condemnation.

And now in **verses 33-37**, Jesus uses the illustration of oaths and swearing to uncover the real problem of deceit and lying that necessarily excludes people from His kingdom.

Psalm 58:3 teaches that *the wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.* In other words, you and I both have a problem with a lying tongue and a deceptive heart. **James 3** says that only a perfect man doesn't stumble in his speech.⁵ We all need to submit to whatever God says about our tongues and the hearts which control our tongues.

So let's approach God's Word this morning with great humility and dependence upon God's Spirit.



⁵ James 3:2

as we stand in honor of the reading of God's Word. From the English Standard Translation, I'll begin reading in **Matthew 5:33**:

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.

This is God's Word. Please be seated.

Let's Pray.

We must not become distracted or disoriented by Jesus' reference to swearing or making oaths in the Scripture before us. After reading **Matthew 5:33-37** some of us might think, I can't remember the last time I had to put my hand on a Bible in a public court, and say, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

Others might think ... well I hope my foul-mouthed neighbor is listening, because I don't curse or use vulgar profanity in *my* speech.

Still others might just be confused by **verses 34-36**... why is Jesus so wound up about making an oath?

What's the relevance of Jesus' teaching for us living in the 21st century today?

Listen careful to Jesus' main point:



The heart of righteousness always tells the truth.

It's simple, but profoundly convicting for all of us. Jesus teaches that righteousness requires truth-telling – all the time, every time, without exaggeration, or white-lies, or deceptive omissions, or external guarantees.

God's kingdom citizens always tell the truth. You can't be right with God if you aren't a person of integrity who keeps your word with other people. You must see your own deceptive speech as evil as it truly is.

So before we start filling in our blanks and applying this Scripture to ourselves, I'm going to take some extended time first simply to explain what Jesus is teaching His original audience:

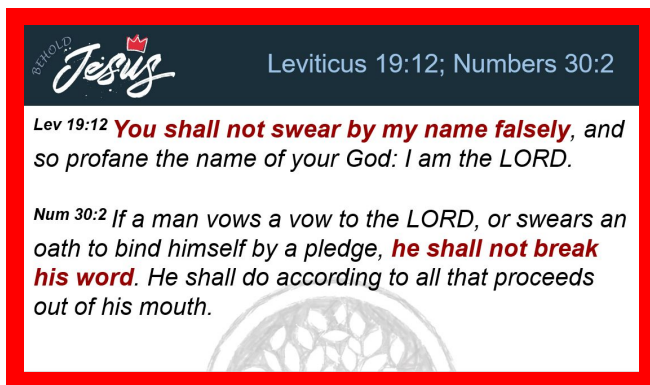
Verse 33 starts off saying,

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old,

Jesus here repeats exactly what He said in **verse 21**. He's quoting Jewish tradition again. He's quoting the common interpretations of the scribes and the Pharisees as it related to swearing or making an oath:

You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.

Now this rabbinic tradition is not a direct quote of Old Testament Scripture. However it seems to be an accurate summary of several texts,



including **Leviticus 19:12 and Numbers 30:2**.⁶ **Leviticus 19** taught clearly, *You shall not swear by My name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.*

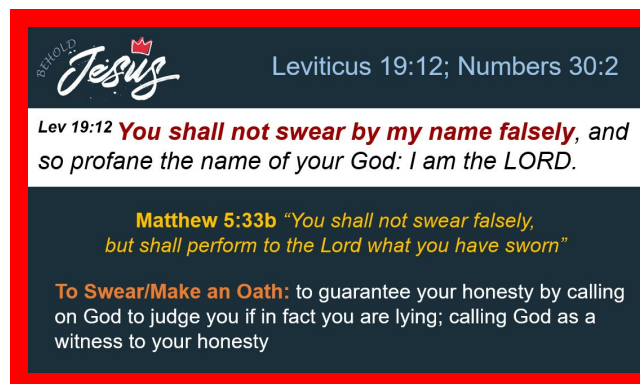
Just like the 3rd of the 10 commandments, *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*⁷

⁶ C.f. Exodus 20:7, 16; Deuteronomy 5:11; 10:20; 23:21-23; Psalm 50:14; Zechariah 8:17

⁷ Exodus 20:7

And then in **Numbers 30**, the law was clear that *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.*

You see, when **Matthew 5:33** speaks of *swearing falsely*, it means breaking your word. Breaking a promise. It's *not* referring to cursing or using offensive language. To *swear* at the end of **verse 33** means the same thing as to *make an oath* in **verses 34 and 36**.



In other words, **to swear or to make an oath here means to guarantee your honesty by calling on God to judge you if in fact you are lying.** To swear is to call God as a witness to your honesty.

We see such formal swearing in court, or at wedding ceremonies when couples make their vows “in the presence of God and these many witnesses.” Such oaths strengthen the force of the promise, while invoking God’s curse if the promise is ever broken.

So on the surface, the Pharisees’ tradition seemed to be a faithful summary of the Old Testament Scriptures. No

one should make a vow and then break it. God's law required His people to keep their word.

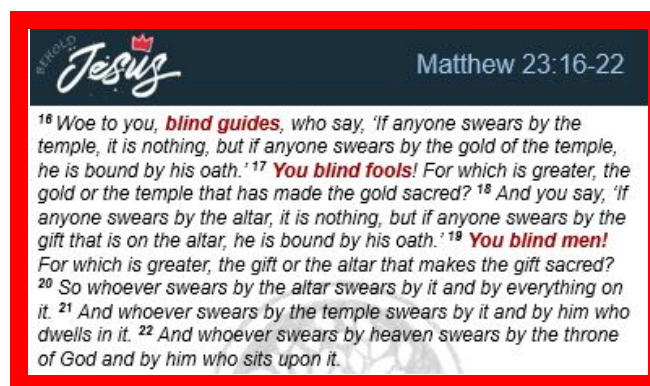
But here's the problem: by the time of Jesus, the way the Pharisees and scribes religiously applied these laws about swearing entirely missed the point.

Religious tradition put the emphasis on the wrong syllable. The focus of tradition now centered entirely on the phrase, "to the Lord," or "by my name." In other words, if you swore *by God's name*, that was a promise you had to keep. But if you swore *by anything else*, like heaven, or God's throne, or by Jerusalem, then you didn't have to keep those promises!

Remember the Jews had an extreme high regard and carefulness for God's name. They rightly understood that God's law recognized it was a serious matter to call God as a witness to your own promise. So they made all kinds of artificial and technical distinctions between their words. It wasn't that big of a deal to break your word as long as it wasn't a vow made in God's name specifically.

Now such focus on verbal technicalities and loopholes might sound crazy to us, but this was the cultural background behind Jesus' illustration here. In their legalistic approach to law-keeping, the Pharisees had missed the entire point of God's law that always required absolute truthfulness from His people.

In fact, **Matthew 23** provides insight to how the Jews were regularly excusing their dishonesty:



Jesus rebukes them in **verse 16**, *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.'* ¹⁷ *You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?*

¹⁸ *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.'* ¹⁹ *You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?*

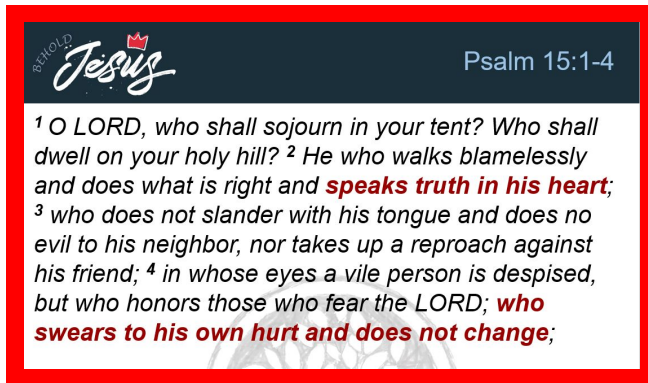
²⁰ *So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.* ²¹ *And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it.* ²² *And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.*

In other words, Jesus makes the same point in **Matthew 23** as He does in **Matthew 5:34-37**:

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.

You should never have to add all kinds of frivolous or evasive supports to your words in order for you to be trusted. When you say yes, it should mean yes. When you say no, it should mean no. Even if keeping your word becomes costly to you later.



Psalm 15:4 describes the righteous person as one *who swears to his own hurt and does not change.*

So let's say you are a teenage girl, and you agree to babysit for someone...and then the night before your babysitting appointment you find out all your friends are going to a movie together. Should you cancel your babysitting appointment now so that you don't miss out on a fun outing with your friends?

No... righteousness demands that we keep our word, and not selfishly seek some way we can back out.

Or if you're in business, and you give a quote to a customer, and then after agreeing to complete the job for a certain amount, you realize you made a mistake in your estimate and you're going to lose money on the job. What would God have you to do? God's people should be known for keeping their word, fulfilling their promises, paying what they've promised to pay when they've promised to pay it...even when it means their own personal loss or hurt.

Jesus' words are clear in **verse 37**, if you have to add any kind of qualification to your words in order for someone to believe you – then you've missed the entire point of God's law. The heart of righteousness always speaks the truth, and keeps its promises. Lying and deception is not an option for God's people.

So now with this background, let's quickly draw some applications for our truth-telling today.

First, we must understand that,



Righteousness rejects all verbal distinctions

Obviously the legalistic traditions of the Pharisees and scribes made all kinds of false distinctions between a promise made in God's name, and a promise made in the name of the throne of God, or heaven, or Jerusalem.

It was like the children's game that says, Guess what... I had my fingers crossed! So I don't have to do what I said now! Got you!!

Or, I was just kidding. You didn't really expect me to follow through on that did you?

So let me ask you: How does Jesus' teaching here expose the sinfulness of our own hearts this morning?

Do you ever justify verbal distinctions,



Between profanity and perjury?

When it comes to your own speech, do you find it easier to excuse offensive language more than outright lying? Clearly this text today has to do with perjury, or lying. But my guess is that some of us here this morning may actually believe we are justified to use Jesus' name as a curse word at times, while we would never purposefully break a promise to another. Yet I'm guessing others of us would never use certain cuss words, and yet we are justified in not paying our bills or breaking our business contracts.

Isn't this just another false verbal distinction similar to what the Pharisees were teaching in Jesus' day? True righteousness rejects all any verbal distinction which seeks to justify an inner falsehood.



Loved ones... clearly I'm not interested in legalistically regulating which syllables can be linked together in your mouth as Christian. But listen please... we must not excuse any language which stains the glory of God.⁸ Either by dirtiness or deceit. Whenever we make a verbal distinction which justifies our practice of either kind of these sins – we fall short of the glory of God.

Now righteousness also rejects all verbal distinctions,



Between the secular and the sacred.

The Pharisees taught that you only had to keep your promise if it was sacred – made explicitly in the name of God Himself. But promises by the earth, or by Jerusalem were secular and therefore not binding.

Are we guilty of such distinctions in our speech? Do we practice a different standard of honesty in the marketplace than in the church house? Again, I believe this could go both ways... some who love money may only keep promises when it is to their financial profit. Others may justify their dishonesty as simple legalese or marketing or a necessary and expected falsehood.

Jesus says, *Let your yes mean yes, and your no mean no*. It doesn't matter if you're signing a business contract, or your replying to an invitation to serve in ministry. Be a person of your word, without verbal distinction.

Finally reject all verbal distinctions,



Between the common and the consequential.

⁸ Ephesians 5:4, 4:29; Colossians 4:6, 3:8; c.f. Matthew 5:16
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One of the results of the religious tradition's attack upon truthfulness was that the Jews of Jesus' day were constantly having to swear by something in order to make their words believable.

In other words – don't miss this – the frivolous practice of oath-giving only testifies to the reality of falsehood in people's hearts, right? Oaths aren't necessary for truth-tellers. Oath's only testify to the wickedness of men's hearts!!

But sometimes we make this false distinction between the common day-to-day and the really significant in our lives. We say – I'd never lie in a legal-situation, but there's no harm done if I bend the truth a bit when I'm talking with my spouse. After all... I wouldn't want to hurt them, right?

Or sometimes our words betray the fact that we don't believe others have reason to believe us unless we add verbal force to our speech.

For example, I have a mentor who interrupts me every time I say, "Well to be honest..." What do you mean, Kevin? Haven't you been honest so far in our conversation?

Like the religious legalists, it's so easy to think we have to add force to our common words at times to make others believe us. "I'm not kidding!" "I guarantee it!" "Cross my heart."

Righteousness rejects all such verbal distinctions, and instead simply is committed to keeping one's word at all times, without distinction.

Now it's probably worth just pulling the bus over for a moment here and address the matter of legal swearing, or oaths in serious consequential matters. Some of us grew up in legalistic traditions which taught from this Scripture that we should never swear in a court of law. Instead we could affirm, but never swear.

Unfortunately such teaching is more like the religious legalism of the Pharisees than the teaching of Christ. When **verse 34** says, *Do not take an oath at all*, I believe Jesus means you should not require any specific verbal formula in order to be honest. I do not believe Jesus forbids Christians from taking oaths since,

Why All Oaths Are Not Biblically Forbidden	
1. God's law instructed making oaths	Deut 6:13; 10:20; 23:21-23
2. God acquiesces to giving oaths	Gen 22:16; Heb 6:13-18
3. Jesus submitted to being under oath	Matt 26:63-64
4. Paul frequently used oaths	Rom 1:9; 2Cor 1:23; Gal 1:20; Ph 1:8; 1Th 2:5, 10
5. Heavenly angels use oaths	Rev 10:6
6. Anger and divorce have exceptions	Eph 4:26; Matt 5:32; 19:9

God's law instructed the making of oaths in several places. Further, God himself acquiesces to swearing by Himself to help increase our confidence that He cannot lie, and that He will remain faithful to His Word.

Third, I believe it's wrong for Christians to forbid all taking of oaths since Jesus Himself submitted Himself to being under oath during his mock trial before Pilate.

Fourth, the apostle Paul frequently used oaths, using such phrases as *God is my witness*, or *before God, I do not lie!*

In **Revelation 10**, a heavenly angel swears in God's name.

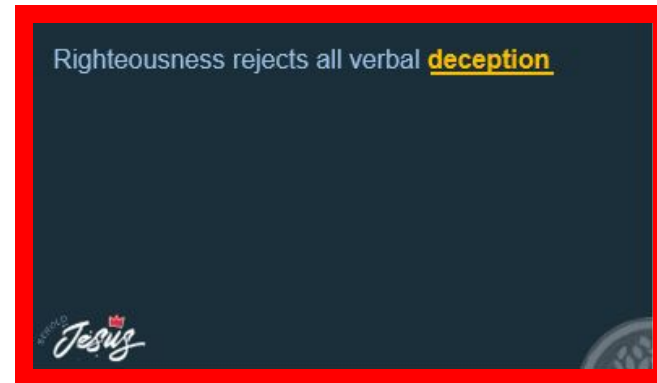
And then consistent with the context of Matthew 5, Jesus has forbidden anger and divorce, but not without biblical exemption. Therefore in view of the strong Biblical witness to the contrary, I do not believe **Matthew 5:34** forbids all Christians from swearing in an oath.

An oath is not necessarily wrong – but it should always be unnecessary for God's people. And its use should be limited to especially rare or solemn occasions.

Look carefully at **verses 34-35**. Isn't Jesus making the point that all of our speech is always in the hearing of God Himself? It is impossible to appeal to ourselves or anything on earth without somehow involving God by extension.

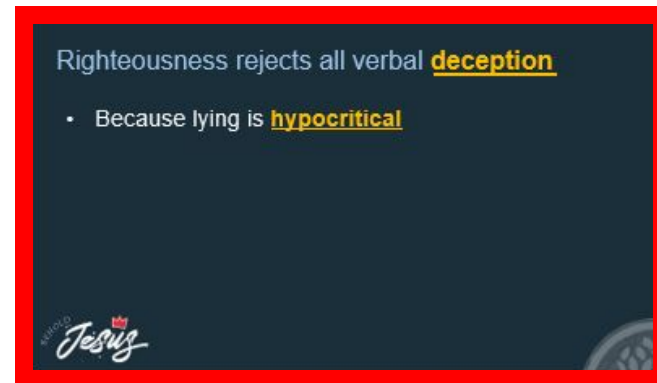
You can't divide your life or your words into these neat little compartments wherein some areas are exempt from God's presence. God is everywhere. God is always listening. Therefore righteousness rejects all verbal distinctions which tries to make some promises more binding than others. The heart of righteousness always tells the truth.

Of course the second application for all of us to consider this morning is that,



Righteousness rejects all verbal deception

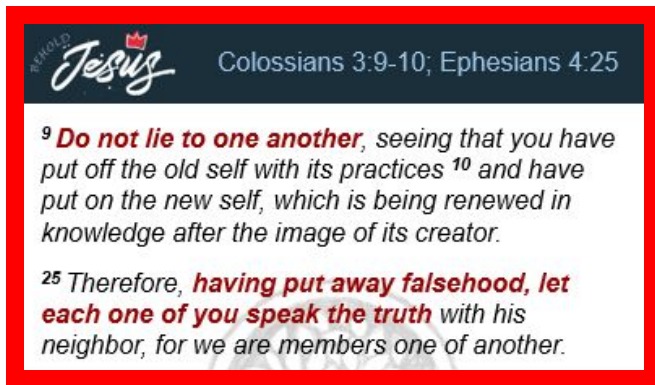
One of the primary reasons the Jews were so prone to lying was for their own financial and social profit. They could make more money if they weren't entirely honest. If they weren't entirely forthright about their products. But church, if we have been born again by the Spirit of God, we too must reject all verbal deception,



Because lying is hypocritical.

We already saw how deception makes us hypocrites in Jesus' stern rebuke of the blind guides in **Matthew 23**. But think with me a bit more about this. Whenever you lie, you are acting as if you are still part of the kingdom of darkness rather than the kingdom of light.

Listen carefully to,



Colossians 3:9, *Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*

Every time you twist the truth or purposefully mislead someone in their beliefs, you are acting like an unbeliever while still believing that you're a Christian!

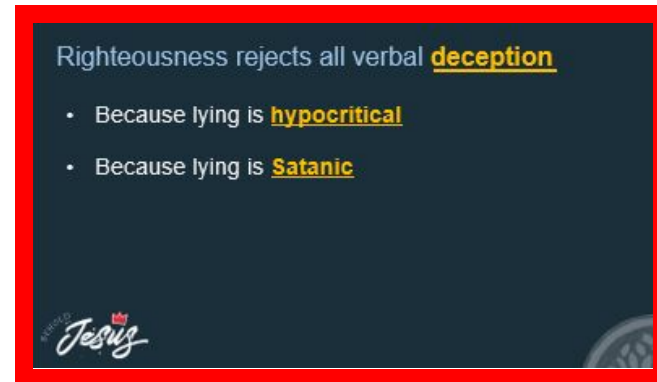
O may God cleanse our hearts from such hypocritical deception!!

Then consider **Ephesians 4:25**, which calls us to *put away falsehood, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

What hypocrisy and pretending must we do in order to purposefully deceive other members in Christ's body, while we are claiming to be united to Christ ourselves? Lying is not mere hypocrisy – lying and deception are sins of self-destruction!! Harming the very body of believers that we claim to be a part of ourselves.


This is why Jesus says that *anything more* [than simple truthfulness] *comes from evil*. Literally, it could be translated, *comes from the evil one*.

Because after all,



According to Scripture lying is Satanic

Hebrews 6:18 says clearly that *it is impossible for God to lie*. But from **Genesis 3** and **John 8**,


Genesis 3:4; John 8:44

Genesis 3:4 But the serpent said to the woman, **“You will not surely die.”**

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because **there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.**

Satan has shown that *there is no truth in him, and When he lies, speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

You must see the lying tendencies of your own heart as serious as it really is! No matter if you exaggerate your fishing exploits, or your tax deductions... No matter if you use your words to inflate people’s opinions of you, or whether you use your words to inflate your pocketbook... your lying is from Satan, and you must recognize this morning that all such,



lying is condemned.

We need to walk away from this sermon with the same sense as the original audience around the Sea of Galilee when it was first preached. We’re all born liars!⁹ And our amazing ability to rationalize and excuse our verbal distinctions and our verbal deceptions must be repented of!

After all,



Revelation says clearly that *all liars* [will only inherit an eternity] *in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.*

Everyone who loves and practices falsehood cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, but will be outside heaven’s gates with all the other unbelievers, spiritists, impure, angry, and idolaters.

There’s no way around Jesus’ words here. Righteousness rejects all verbal deception since,

⁹ Psalm 58:4



The heart of righteousness always tells the truth.

Righteous hearts don't need the constraints of formal oaths before they are completely honest. Righteous hearts don't play fast and loose with their tongues in order to get ahead in life.

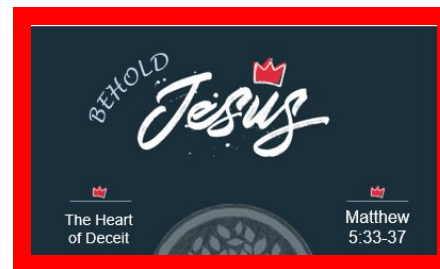
So are you a person of your word? Can others rely on you to keep your promises – even at times when it causes you personal loss? Do your words always reflect the truthfulness of our God – who never lies? Are you prone to try to add emphasis to your words to make yourself more believable at times?

Verse 37 is clear – anything more than our plain words is evidence of a heart of deceit.



Therefore Ask God to cleanse the source of your deceptive words.

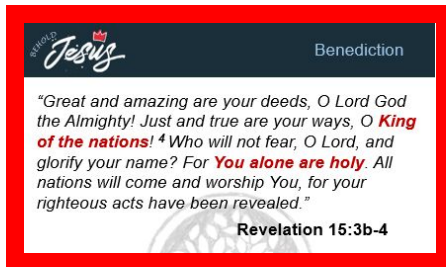
The mouth simply communicates what is already in the heart. So Jesus uses the illustration of our promises to show us that our hearts need to be made new. Our words will never be righteousness until our hearts have received the righteousness of King Jesus Himself – the righteousness that comes by faith in the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Do you believe that Christ is your life today? If so, then put off all falsehood. Pursue radical honesty – without distinction and without deception.



Let's pray.

<<Take my life and let it be>>

Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.



Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! ⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

Revelation 15:3b-4

Recommended Resources on The Heart of Deceit:

- Exodus 20:7, 16
- Leviticus 19:12
- Numbers 30:2, 8
- Deuteronomy 5:11; 6:13; 23:21-23
- Psalm 15:1-5; 51:6; 58:3; 119:29, 163; 120:2
- Proverbs 12:22
- Ecclesiastes 5:4-7
- Zechariah 8:17
- Matthew 12:26-37; 15:18; 23:16-22
- Ephesians 4:29
- Colossians 3:9
- 1 Timothy 1:10
- James 3:6-12; 5:12

Examples of Sinless Oaths:

- Genesis 22:16
 - Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20
 - Isaiah 65:16
 - Jeremiah 12:16-17
 - Ezekiel 33:11
 - Matthew 26:63-64
 - Romans 1:9
 - 2 Corinthians 1:23
 - Galatians 1:20
 - Philippians 1:8
 - 1 Thessalonians 2:5, 10
 - Hebrews 6:13-18
 - Revelation 10:6
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- <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/2222/the-spiritual-credibility-gap>
 - <https://www.crossway.org/articles/whats-so-wrong-with-a-little-white-lie/>
 - <https://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/matthew-5:33-37>
 - <https://www.familylife.com/podcast/familylife-today/honoring-god-in-your-speech/>

- *Deception: Letting Go of Lying*, Lou Priolo
- *War of Words*, Paul Tripp
- *Conversation Peace*, Mary Kassian
- *The Power of Words*, Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Psalm 51:6. What does it mean to be a truth teller who is a person of integrity? (C.f. Psalm 15)
2. Read Hebrews 6:13-18. What is the definition of an oath? What is the purpose of an oath? Why does God use oaths?
3. Read Matthew 26:63-64, 2 Corinthians 1:23, and 1 Thessalonians 2:5 and 10. When is it right for Christians to give an oath? Does Matthew 5:34 prohibit all swearing in court? Why or why not.
4. Review Matthew 5:37. When do you find it most tempting to emphasize your words? Exaggerate your words? When are you most likely to break your word? Or mislead other with your words? Why do you deceive?
5. Review Matthew 5:34-36. How should a conscious awareness of God's presence and power affect your speech? How can you become more aware of God's presence every time you open your mouth?
6. Compare Hebrews 6:18 with John 6:44. Then discuss the significance of honesty in view of these verses.
7. Read Colossians 3:9 and Ephesians 4:25. How should our union with Christ affect our tongue? How should our union with our church family affect our tongue?