# **SOTM Pt 26 - Keep Your Word**

Pastor Carl Van Vliet

Sermon on the Mount / Oath; Vow; Integrity / Matthew 5:33–37; James 5:12; Leviticus 19:12

**Matthew 5:33–37 NKJV**

33 “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ 34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Remember: The Sermon on the Mount is about:

### A New Ethos (Christian Ethics)

The Sermon on the mount has been dubbed in some circles as the “Constitution of Christianity” it is the “treatise of Christ on Christianity” and it is the “Law” if you will of the kingdom of God.

**John Stott “I can sum up the entire Sermon on the Mount with these two words: "Christian Counter-Culture, and The church ought to be the ultimate expression of this Counter-Culture"**

In order for a thing to be ethical it requires three parts:

1. Right action - What we do must be in obedience to Christ Commands [John 14:15](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Jn14.15) ““If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

2. Right Motivate - Why we do it - Must flow from the greatest commandment - “Love God - Love People” any other motivation is the wrong motivation [Matthew 22:37-40](https://ref.ly/logosref/Bible.Mt22.37-40) “Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.””

a. ANY other motivation for right action creates legalism -

3. Right Goal - [Matthew 5:16](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Mt5.16) “16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” [Isaiah 43:7](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Is43.7) “7 Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.”” The Goal is that God is Glorified

A Counter-Culture life means we as Christians should “look” and “Act” differently than the culture of the world

### The Teachings of the Sermon on the mount cannot be seen as a list of behaviors one does “to be a Christian” But rather a list of indicatives that “one is a Christian”

The last few weeks we have really been getting into the heart of what a Christian ethic looks like by discussing topics the world today see’s one way but Christ has a totally different point of view:

1. Anger and Offense

2. Lust and a Biblical Sexual Ethic

3. Marriage and Divorce

This week we are going to get to the heart of Truthfulness in our speech. So lets get into it:

[Matthew 5:33–37](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Mt5.33-37) “33 “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ 34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”

The idea that a man’s word is his bond is quaint, but it is not realistic. This reality is not new; it was alive and well in Jesus’s day, Unfortunately, the religious teachers (Rabbi’s, Pharisee’s, Sadducee's, Scribes, etc) had developed an elaborate system of oaths to create loopholes for when they spoke. Jesus deals with this verbal system of loopholes and clears the air on the truth that should always characterize our words.

The rabbis and scribes of old said, “You must not break your oath, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord.” This is not a direct quote of the Old Testament but a paraphrase of a text like [Leviticus 19:12](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Le19.12) “12 And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.” they created a couple of loopholes that distinguished between speech not under oath and oaths not made to the Lord. **They taught that you must be honest and keep your word to the Lord, but this same commitment does not necessarily apply to human relationships.** There is “wiggle room” in their oaths.

They apparently missed the scripture in [Zechariah 8:16-17](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Zec8.16-17) which says “16 These are the things you shall do: **Speak each man the truth to his neighbor**; Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; 17 Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; **And do not love a false oath**. For all these are things that I hate,’ Says the Lord.””

By the time of Jesus, playing fast and loose with the truth had become a common practice.

Charles Quarles points out:

“Some first-century rabbis emphasized only the importance of speaking truth to God and downplayed the importance of absolute honesty in all communication. They thought that they had a special obligation to keep promises made to God specifically but could break promises made to others when it was convenient.”

Jesus calls these teachers who have put forth these loopholes in truthfulness “Blind Guides” as He calls them out for more of these loophole catches: [Matthew 23:16-22](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Mt23.16-22)

**Matthew 23:16–22 NKJV**

16 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged *to perform it*.’ 17 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 18 And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged *to perform it*.’ 19 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? 20 Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. 21 He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. 22 And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.

These religious leaders had taught and is recorded in the “The Mishnah” (written document containing the oral traditions beyond the law) there is one whole section given over to the question of oaths, including detailed consideration of when they’re binding and when they’re not on truthfulness:

1. Swearing by Jerusalem was not regarded as binding whereas swearing toward Jerusalem was binding

2. Swearing by the temple was not regarded as binding whereas swearing by the gold in the temple was binding

3. Swearing by the alter was not regarded as binding whereas swearing by the offering on the alter was binding

Today one might say:

I swear on my mothers grave this is truth; or

I swear on a stack of Bibles what I am saying is true.

If you remember as a child this idea of using an oath or swearing to “add credibility” to the words we said we learned this phrase: “Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye”

An oath in this context that Jesus is referring to is: “When a person calls upon a thing, a power or other person greater than himself, to bear witness to the truth of what he says”

A recent study by the scientific american discovered that people tell an average of 1.8 lies per day. The Gospel Truth reports statistics of 76% of people believe lying in some cases is acceptable.

But what about Christians? According to pew research 33% of Christians believe it is acceptable to lie.

He who tells little lies, will soon think nothing of great ones, for the principle is the same - Charles Spurgeon

Sam Storms in his work on the Sermon on the Mount poses the following questions:

So, is the Christian ever justified in communicating a falsehood?

• Is it ethical to post a “Beware of the Dog” sign on your fence to deter a burglar, even when you don’t own a dog?

• Is it ethical to leave the lights on in your house when you are away, again to deter a potential burglar from breaking and entering?

• In honor of this evenings Super Bowl - Is it ethical for a football team to send a man in motion to the left side of the formation in order to deceive the opposing team into believing that the play will be run in that direction, when in fact it will be run to the right?

• Is it ethical for the police to operate radar in unmarked cars? After all, by using unmarked cars they are deliberately deceiving us into thinking that they are civilians.

• Is it ethical for the police to conduct undercover, plain-clothes investigations which by definition demand that they deceive people concerning their identity and intent?

• Is it ethical to lie to someone about where you are taking them in order to keep the secret of a surprise birthday party that is planned in their honor?

• Is it ethical for those in the military to wear camouflage uniforms in order to mislead their enemies concerning their location?

These questions are obvious hyperbole (exaggerations) intended to cause us to think.

God is truth ([John 14:6](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Jn14.6)) and does not lie ([Numbers 23:19](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Nu23.19)), and we are to be like God. Truth-telling is **therefore a crucial moral duty** for those in the kingdom of God.

Jesus here in [Matthew 5:37](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Mt5.37) makes it clear in simple plain language - “37 But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.” If I can restate it this way: mean what you say, for anything else is from the devil [John 8:44](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Jn8.44) “44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, **and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.**”

James, Jesus brother, in [James 5:12](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Jas5.12) refers to Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and repeats: “12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.”

The scripture is clear - Christians, followers of Christ are to be truthful in our speech and not lie:

[Colossians 3:9](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Col3.9) “9 **Do not lie to one another**, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,”

[Leviticus 19:11](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Le19.11) “11 ‘You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, **nor lie to one another.**”

[Proverbs 6:16–19](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Pr6.16-19) “16 These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: 17 A proud look, **A lying tongue**, Hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, 19 **A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren**.”

[Proverbs 12:22](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Pr12.22) “22 **Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight.**”

[Proverbs 13:5](https://ref.ly/logosref/BibleNKJV.Pr13.5) “5 **A righteous man hates lying**, But a wicked man is loathsome and comes to shame.”

In living out this new Christian Ethic truthfulness and honesty of speech is the only bar and standard. Not deceit, not lying, not falsehood and not manipulative swearing to add credibility to your words.

For a our word is all we has, let our word be held in high esteem!

**Oaths (Matthew 5:33–37)**

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