

# Command #6: Tell the truth; don't take vows.

Matthew 5:33-37 // Jerry Barber

<sup>33</sup> "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' <sup>34</sup> But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. <sup>36</sup> And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

## Condensed Version

Read Matthew 5:33-37 and discuss these questions with your disciple(s):

1. What two ways to honor God with your communication are found in verses 34-37?
2. What are some of the ways people today try to "get around the truth"?
3. Think about motivation. WHY does God so strongly condone truth-telling in this passage? Look for two reasons (one in verses 34-35 and the other in verse 37).
4. In the context of a few Christian brothers/sisters that you trust (small group, ministry team, etc.), discuss the following questions together: Why is it hard for you sometimes to tell the truth? What can we do to help each other be more truthful?

## Study (answers follow below)

1. Meditate on Matthew 5:33-37 and make several observations about the passage.
2. Verse 33 is not a direct, complete quote from any one Old Testament Scripture, but it is a good summary of several OT principles that talk about such things as keeping the vows one makes to God, the importance of not making light use of the Lord's name, and broken vows. Read the following passages: Exodus 20:7, Leviticus 19:12, Numbers 30:2, and Deuteronomy 23:21.
3. Background: The Pharisees (Jewish religious leaders of that day) tried to restrict these commands by shifting the focus from the VOW itself to the FORMULA used when making the vow, and they developed guidelines for taking vows. For example, if God's name was used in the vow, it was considered binding; but not so if God's name was not mentioned in there. Considering that background, what principle can you derive from verse 34-36 about how to honor God with your communication?
4. What are some of the ways people today try to "get around the truth"?
5. Do you think that this is intended to be an absolute prohibition against taking vows under any circumstances—as certain groups do (Anabaptists, Quakers, Jehovah Witnesses)—like an oath in court? Look to Matthew 26:63-64 for help.
6. Another way to honor God with your communication is found in verse 37. What is it?
7. Read Proverbs 6:16-19 to see if you can discover anything striking in that passage about truth-telling.

8. Think about motivation. WHY does God so strongly condone truth-telling in this passage? Look for two reasons (one in verses 34-35 and the other in verse 37).
9. Having studied this passage, can you summarize its teaching in one sentence?

### Answers:

1. (many answers possible here)
2. (no answer required)
3. Ensure that your communication does not attempt to “get around the truth.”
4. Outright lies, telling some or most of the truth (but leaving out “incriminating details”), and exaggeration.
5. As we see in Matthew 26:63-64, Jesus appeared to speak under oath in a “trial” setting. So this passage does not seem to forbid you from taking an oath if an external civil authority requires you to do so. Rather, this passage is about what we might call “frivolous oaths”—indicating that there is NO NEED to resort to oaths in the context of everyday conversation—it is not legitimate to try to get around the truth through some fancy formulae.
6. Simply tell the truth.
7. TWO of the seven things named here that God hates deal with truth-telling (*a lying tongue* and *a false witness who pours out lies*).
8. Because God witnesses every word (34-35) and because dishonesty originates with Satan (37b).
9. To honor God, simply tell the truth rather than finding ways to get around it.

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## Worship

1. Read the following passages and identify the Person or entity that is described as "truth." Worship God as you reflect on these truths.

Isaiah 45:18-19 \_\_\_\_\_

John 14:6 \_\_\_\_\_

John 16:13 \_\_\_\_\_

John 17:17 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Meditate on John 14:1-6 and John 18:28-40. What do you admire about Jesus?

## Obey

1. What are some specific areas in which you can apply these principles about truth-telling to your life? Read the following passages for some suggestions: Ephesians 4:25; Psalm 15:4; and Proverbs 20:23.
2. Read *Honest to God: Becoming an Authentic Christian*, by Bill Hybels. Also, you might want to read and discuss it with others.

## Train

### How to help disciple others:

1. Study Matthew 5:33-37 yourself, ask your disciple(s) to study it, then discuss it and pray about it together.
2. In the context of a few Christian brothers/sisters that you trust (small group, ministry team, etc), discuss the following questions together: Why is it hard for you sometimes to tell the truth? What can we do to help each other be more truthful?