

Counter Culture Matthew 5:33-37 - "As Good As Your Word?"

Honesty is not often expected today, but why?

Jesus tells us that our honesty should never take people by surprise. In fact, it should be so normal and expected, that people should just take us seriously by our plain yes and no.

Matthew 5:33-37 - "You have also heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the Lord.' But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne. And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is his footstool. And do not say, 'By Jerusalem!' for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. Do not even say, 'By my head!' for you can't turn one hair white or black. Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one."

Matthew 23:16-22 tells us that religious leaders of Jesus' day had come up with a formula for oaths that could allow them to disregard their promises. To them, what was important was not the promise, but what they swore by.

1. Jesus makes clear that the formula used in our promise is irrelevant.

A. The Pharisees idea, was that 'what' you swore by either made the oath binding or not.

- Swearing by God or something made holy by God was binding. (See Matthew 23:16-22)

- Swearing by something else was non binding.

How might we mimic that behavior?

Jesus' point here is that any formula is irrelevant. Whether you swear by God or something He made, the promise is binding.

James 5:12 - "But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned."

2. Two questions come to mind from Jesus' teaching here.

A. Why does God use oaths? E.g - Gen. 22:16,17; Hebrews 6:13-18
It is not to increase His credibility (Hebrews 6:18, Numbers 23:19). Instead it is because of our unbelief.

B. Is the prohibition against swearing absolute? Should we refuse to take an oath, for instance, in a court of law or to sign an affidavit?

- Jesus spoke under oath. Matthew 26:63-64.

Are you as good as your word? Does honesty pervade your life? Let's apply this teaching of Jesus to a few parts of life.

1. Exaggeration and emphasis.
2. Inattentive prayers.
3. Cheating.
4. Lying on the phone.
5. Misrepresenting something you are selling.
6. Slander or gossip.
7. Untimely silence can be dishonest as well.

James 4:17 - "Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it."

Conclusion: Jesus' point is that we should be people who have pure hearts that ooze honesty. We should not use oaths, because we should not need them to be trusted. We should be people of our word.

This is possible because Jesus made it possible for our hearts to be changed.

- Ezekiel 36:26 - "And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart."

- Our heart is recreated in Christ - 2 Corinthians 5:17 - "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"

- And so we are challenged to be honest from the heart, the mind - Ephesians 4:23-25 - "Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body."