

Oh what I would give to have known in the past many of the things I know now.

Every speaker I know has verbal idiosyncrasies. For example, my high school principal loved to say "for example." The funny thing was he would use that expression incorrectly. He would say "for example" and then not give an example. Personally, I use "you know" and "anyway" a lot in casual conversation.

Early in my ministry I had another one. I would be preaching and sometimes I would say, "to be honest with you." A former member approached me one day and addressed this turn of phrase. Their position was, it implied that I had not been honest in the other things I had said. I thought about it and it made sense. It helped that I knew the heart of the person and I knew they weren't being critical for the sake of criticizing but in order to help me be a better preacher. With that in mind, I worked to remove "to be honest with you" from my presentations and sermons.

However, as I have continued to learn and grow, both as a preacher and a Christian, I have gained a different perspective. When I would use that phrase I was trying to draw attention to what followed. Most times what followed was a blunt or hard truth that needed to be heard and taken to heart. My intention was not to call into question anything I had said previously.

As I have spent more time in the Bible I have realized that Jesus had a similar "catch phrase." Depending upon your translation it goes as follows, "Truly I say to you" or "truly, truly I say to you" The KJV renders it "verily I say unto you" or "verily, verily I say unto you." Certainly, Jesus was not implying that anything he said without that phrase was untrue. It was simply his way of driving home an important message.

Truth and honesty are important when teaching and preaching God's Word, his will, and his ways. But truth and honesty are important in our everyday lives as well. We desire that all people be honest and truthful. But it is especially important for Christians to be men and women of integrity and honesty. There is an old acronym for guiding our speech: T.H.I.N.K. Is what we are about to say true, is it helpful, is it inspiring, is it necessary, and is it kind? Notice that the first question we ask is, "Is it true?"

The call to be truthful and honest is not a new commandment from Jesus. God has always demanded that his people conduct themselves in such a way. And in today's passage, Jesus addresses that teaching because it had become, and remains today, something we struggle with and seek to evade.

Scripture: Matt. 5:33-37; 23:16-22

I. To Be Honest With You

A. **Function of Oaths**

1. Give greater credibility to what is being said or promised
 - a) Heb. 6:16
 - (1) Of course, the greatest "greater" is God himself
2. God's provision for oaths
 - a) Lev. 19:12; Deut. 23:21; Num. 30:2
 - b) Oaths were to be made invoking God (Deut. 6:13)
 - (1) This called upon God to bear witness to the truthfulness of the statement or promise and invited his judgment upon the one making the oath

B. **Faulty Oaths (23:16-22)**

1. Frivolous Oaths
 - a) Swearing when it is unnecessary for the sake of making the unimportant seem important
2. Fraudulent Oaths
 - a) Swearing by something "lesser" in order to make an oath worthless while seeming to be honest
 - (1) Deception
 - (2) Loopholes or crossing your fingers

C. **Faulty Interpretation & Application Regarding Jesus on Oaths**

1. Oaths are evil and Christians should not make them or take them
 - a) God made oaths (Heb. 6:13; Jer. 51:14; Amos 6:8)
 - b) Godly men made oaths (Gen. 21:31; 50:4-6; Ezra 10:5)

D. **Fundamental Principles of Jesus on Oaths**

1. Oaths should involve God
 - a) We should not swear by anything or anyone other than God
2. Oaths should be kept and not seen as tools of deception
 - a) We must fulfill our oaths
 - b) We must not use oaths to deceive or manipulate
 - (1) This undermines the very purpose of oaths and involves God in our lie
3. Oaths should be unnecessary
 - a) Our lives should be marked by such truthfulness and honesty that our "word is our bond"

In 1956 a television game show called To Tell the Truth debuted. The premise of the game was deceit. Four panelists had to choose which of three contestants was telling the truth. One of the contestants had to tell the truth while the other two were allowed to lie. Dishonesty had become a game.

Fast forward about 50 yrs and you have Survivor; a "reality" game show which encourages dishonesty and deceit for the sake of winning a million dollars. Promises and pacts are made to be broken whenever it best suits those involved. Even the idea that this "reality TV" is reality is deceptive.

Humanity struggles with the truth. We have gone from a person's word being good enough, to needing a handshake, to needing contracts, to no rules. We excuse lies by classifying some as "white lies." Our media is notoriously dishonest. Our entertainment encourages lying. Even our churches are being filled with false teachings.

Christians are to be better than that. We are to have a righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees. We are to be men and women of integrity and honesty. We are to be holy as our Father in heaven is holy. And our Father in heaven does not lie (Num. 23:19) As a matter of fact, it is impossible for him to lie (Titus 1:2). This is an area of our lives upon which we can and must improve if we are going to have the impact God desires for us to have on this world. Will you commit to being honest and truthful? Will you repent of being deceitful and dishonest? Will you live in such a way that your "yes" is "yeas" and your "no" is "no?"