



The Teaching of Jesus Christ - Perfect Righteousness (Part 3)

Matthew 5:33-37

Contrast #4: Speech (verses 33-37)

1. The teaching of the Pharisees (verse 33)
2. The teaching of Jesus (verses 34-37)

In recent weeks, we have seen Jesus piercing our hearts with conviction over our sin. Two weeks ago, Jesus addressed the issue of our attitudes and feelings toward one another. He put forth that those who are angry or feel resentment toward another are as guilty as any cold-blooded murderer. Last week, Jesus addressed the issue of sexual sin: adultery and divorce. Jesus said that thinking adultery in the heart is committing adultery, and many of the easy rules for divorce were merely legalized adultery. This morning, Jesus will address the issue of our speech. Allow me to read our text this morning, ...

Matthew 5:33-37

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' [or] 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of evil.

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount (since verse 21), Jesus has been teaching by way of contrast. He has contrasted the teaching of the Pharisees with His own teaching. In our passage this morning, Jesus is contrasting the standard of righteousness of the Pharisees with what God requires in the area of our speech. Thus, I have entitled this section, ...

Contrast #4: Speech (verses 33-37)

1. The teaching of the Pharisees (verse 33)

In verse 33, Jesus says, "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.'" As we have seen with the previous contrasts, Jesus again quotes the Old Testament to describe what the Pharisees taught.

In this instance, Jesus combines several verses together to make a single thought, to represent their teaching. The first half of the quote comes from Leviticus 19:12, "You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD." In this context, God is instructing the people of Israel not to swear falsely. In other words, don't say to your friend, "By God's name, I'll call you tonight" and then, fail to make the phone call. This neglect to fulfill your promise, profanes God's name, because you set up God's character as a pledge to the truthfulness of your promise to call your friend. When you violate your promise, God's name is degraded.

The second half of Jesus' quotations comes from Numbers 30:2, "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth." The standard given in the Old Testament is clear. When you make a vow to the LORD, or swear to do something in God's name, you are under divine obligation to keep that vow.

The teaching of the Pharisees here in verse 33 seems reasonable enough. The teaching, "YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD," is perfectly consistent with all of the Old Testament teaching. Don't break your vows to the LORD. Rather, fulfill your vows, fulfill your promises. However, the Pharisees of Jesus' day manipulated this teaching to justify themselves. They developed a system of righteousness, which justified them in their lawlessness. Nowhere is this seen better than in Jesus' rebuke against the Pharisees in Matthew 23. It is here that we see exactly how the Pharisees has manipulated the law to justify themselves.

Jesus said in **Matthew 23:16**, "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.' The Pharisees said that you could promise to do something, "by the temple," but you didn't have to do it. But, if you promised to do something, "by the gold of the temple," you had to do it. In this case your promise was binding.

For instance, ... perhaps you are talking to your wife. She is lamenting over how bad the lawn looks. It's Friday evening and your wife wants you to mow the lawn, but you are busy preparing for Men's Equippers on Saturday. You could say to your wife, "I'll mow the lawn tomorrow after Men's Equippers. I promise to you that I will. I swear by the temple, that I'll mow the lawn after Equippers." Well, Saturday morning comes, and the day is beautiful outside. You come home from Men's Equippers and take your children to the park to play. Later in the afternoon, you take a nap, (because you were up so late the night before preparing for Men's Equippers). In the evening you go out to dinner

with your family. Finally, about time the sun is going down, your wife says to you, "didn't you promise to me that you were going to mow the lawn today?" You say, "No I didn't." She says, "Yes you did. I distinctly remember you swearing by the temple that you would mow the lawn today." You say, "Ah, that promise isn't binding, because I didn't swear by the gold of the temple. I promise to mow it next week. I swear by the temple that I will."

In this way the Pharisees could break their promises in this way and never think themselves to be guilty of breaking their word, because they never swore by the gold of the temple. Jesus rebuked them in **verse 17**, "You fools and blind men; which is more important, the gold, or the temple that sanctified the gold?" He demonstrated how even this standard of righteousness was a poor standard.

In **verse 18** we see a similar argument. The Pharisees said, "Whoever swears by the altar, [that] is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated." In other words, as long as you promised to do something "by the altar," you didn't have to do it at all.

Since Jesus used the same argument twice, let me illustrate it once more. ... You are talking to a neighbor, who is really proud of her daughter's accomplishments as a pianist. Your neighbor tells you, "Hey, my daughter is the featured pianist at the school's concert on Wednesday night. Could you come and listen to her? She would really like it." You aren't really interested in going to the concert, but would rather spend your time watching your favorite TV show. But you say, "Wednesday evening will be fine. I swear by the altar that I will be there." When Wednesday comes, you are watching television, rather than going to your neighbor's concert. Again, your wife reminds you, "Honey, didn't you promise that you would go to the concert tonight?" You reply, "Yes, I did. But I swore by the altar, but not by the offering on the altar. So, I don't have to go. In fact, I never intended on going in the first place. It doesn't sound too fun to me."

The Pharisees would think nothing of this sort of word manipulation to justify their speech. Again Jesus rebukes them in **verse 19**, "You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering?" (verse 19). You are using these minor technicalities to enable you to bold-face lie and feel no guilt from it. Such was the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees.

See, the problem with the teaching of the Pharisees was that they created these magical formulas which justified their breaking of promises. It is a little bit today like when we make a promise, but we have our fingers crossed, so we don't need to keep the promise. It is like the game "Simon says." See, if we use the magical formula, "Simon says," then you have to do it. But if we don't say, "Simon says," then you don't have to do it. In our family we used to play the "really" game. The rules of the game were that you could lie and tease all you wanted, but if you said, "really," you had to tell the truth, no matter how much it hurt. This is very similar to what the Pharisees used to do.

Look at the next three verses, "Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears [both] by the altar and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple, swears [both] by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. And he who swears by heaven, swears [both] by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it" (**verses 20-22**). Jesus says, "Don't play the technicality game. Don't try to differentiate between different parts of the altar or different portions of the temple." When you swear by heaven, don't think that you are swearing only by the atmosphere. This is where God is. When you swear by heaven and you swear by God. To swear by God is to make a promise that you cannot break, without incurring sin. Don't play these games.

Having understood Jesus' teaching in Matthew 23, when you come back to chapter 5 and verse 33, you can presume that Jesus had an inflection in His voice when He spoke these words to emphasize the words "TO THE LORD." Perhaps Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS **TO THE LORD**." In other words, as long as you didn't vow, "TO THE LORD," you were not obliged to keep your word. Thus taught the scribes and Pharisees.

This leads us into ...

2. The teaching of Jesus (verses 34-37)

Jesus first teaches in a negative way by correcting the false teaching of the Pharisees. Jesus said, "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black" (verses 34-36).

As an illustration, Jesus used four common phrases of the His day, (which I am sure, the Pharisees were prone to use in their daily speech) to illustrate His point. He says, don't swear ...

1. By heaven

To swear by heaven is to swear by the LORD. In Isaiah 66:1, the LORD says, "Heaven is my throne." We read earlier in Matthew 23, Jesus rebuking the Pharisees, "He who swears by heaven, swears [both] by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it" (Matt. 23:22).

2. By earth.

Isaiah 66:1, the LORD says, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool." By way of analogy, Jesus' argument would go like this, "He who swears by earth, swears [both] by the footstool of God and by Him who owns the earth" (cf. Matt. 23:22).

3. By Jerusalem.

Why? Jesus said that Jerusalem is "THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING" (quoting Psalm 48:2). Jerusalem is where God promised to dwell (see 1 Kings 11:36; 14:21; 2 Kings 21:7; 2 Chronicles 6:6; 12:13 for statements explaining that Jerusalem is where God chose to put His name). Again, by way of analogy, Jesus says, "He who swears by Jerusalem, swears [both] by the city of the King and by the King of the city" (cf. Matt. 23:22).

4. By your head.

Jesus says that you aren't in control of your head. It is God who makes your hair white or black. (Today, we simply cover

up the obvious fact). Once again, we might say, "He who swears by his head, swears by the one who created his head" (cf. Matt. 23:22).

The thrust of Jesus' words here in verses 35 and 36 are simply this: when you swear by anything, whether it be the temple, the altar, the gold in the temple, heaven, earth, Jerusalem, your head, Rockford, your mother's grave, or when you say, "cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye," or whatever you may invent, your oath is as binding as if you made it to God Himself. And according to Numbers 30:2, vows made to the LORD must be kept! In effect Jesus is saying, if you swear by anything (be it a creature, a place, a person, a thought, a thing, ...) realize that God made it all and you are making an oath to the LORD which must be kept. Don't break your promises based upon technicalities of how you made your oath. This is the sense of Ecclesiastes 5:5 which said, "It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay."

Jesus says in verse 34, "make no oath at all." Rather than making this grand promise, where you swear by some object that you will do this thing, Jesus would encourage us simply to keep our word. I believe that Jesus is simply calling us to be truthful in all things. Our words need to hold weight. When we say that we will do something, we need to do it. There ought to be no reason for people to question our words.

The only reason that we would use some of these phrases, "I swear to God, that I will do (such and such)" or "I swear to God, that I am telling the truth ..." or "I swear by heaven, that I saw him do this ..." is because we are in the habit of lying in the first place.

In other words, if it is your common habit to tell the whole truth, you won't feel the need to swear by other things or other people or by God, Himself, to confirm the veracity of your statement because you always speak the truth. I would go further than this. If you meet anybody who is in the habit of using these types of phrases, be rest assured that they are in the habit of lying, and they need to have some sort of magical formula for them to communicate to you when they are finally telling the truth. Be wise around these sorts of people. For they are so used to telling lies that even their swearing to God will hold no assurance to the truthfulness of their words (case in point ... our former president).

Jesus is simply calling us to be truthful in all things. There ought to be no reason for us to make an oath, swearing by God that we are telling the truth. This is what Jesus means, in verse 34, when Jesus says, "make no oath at all." Be truthful in your words.

Down through the ages, there have been those who have taken this statement of Jesus to "make no oath at all" to mean that we ought never to put ourselves under any sort of binding oath at all, lest, we bring down the name of our God in telling a lie. In our society you are required to take an oath when you go into a courtroom and take the witness stand. You repeat after the bailiff, "I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God." Sometimes, you even place your left hand upon the Bible and raising your right hand as you make this vow. You are also required to take a vow of honesty when you are summoned in by lawyers to make a sworn deposition, "I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God." When we are married, we stand before witnesses and vow our faithfulness to our spouse in the presence of other witnesses (and before God).

Those who say that we ought never to take an oath will simply refuse, on religious grounds to take these oaths. The Anabaptists of the reformation believed this. Also, the Quakers believed this, which is the modern day, Society of Friends. Furthermore, the Jehovah's Witnesses believe this today as well.

I do not believe that Jesus is never telling us to take such a solemn oath. I believe that there are occasions where it is permissible to bring in the name of God to bear witness to the veracity of your statements. Here are a few reasons why I believe that making vows during these solemn occasions is permissible...

1. We are told in Hebrews 6:13, that God "swore by Himself."
2. God made an "oath which He swore to Abraham" (Luke 1:73; see also Acts 2:30; Ps. 132:11).
3. When confronted by a high priest to answer under oath before the Sanhedrin, Jesus made a willing reply (Matt. 26:63-64).
4. On several occasions, Paul made a solemn oath to emphasize the truthfulness of what he was saying (2 Cor. 1:23; Rom. 9:1; Gal. 1:20; 1 Thess. 2:5 to name only a few of the instances).
5. In Revelation 10:6, we see an angel swearing by God.
6. Furthermore, God instructed Israel, "You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him, and swear by His name" (Deut. 6:13).

I believe that Jesus is telling us here in verse 34 that **we ought to have no need to make an oath at all**. You ought to be able to be able to go right up to the witness stand and allow any question to be asked of you, to which you will respond in the truth, because the plain, straightforward truth is how you always speak. You ought to have no need to make an oath, because you always tell the truth anyway. Do you realize that the need for taking an oath is simply an acknowledgment of the general evil of the day that will seek to lie, rather than to tell the truth? Charles Spurgeon once wrote, "A bad man cannot be believed on his oath, and a good man speaks the truth without an oath" (The Gospel of Matthew, p. 60).

Having stated His teaching in the negative (in verses 33-36), Jesus now states the matter positively, "Let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of evil" (**verse 37**). Once again, Jesus raises the standard of righteousness. Christians are to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," just as if we were on the witness stand all the time. The Pharisees and scribes would play games with the formulas used in promises that they made. If they used certain formulas, and broke their promises, they didn't think that this was wrong at all. According to the technicalities of the law, they were blameless, though they were liars. Jesus instructs us to put the matter plainly before anyone and be true to your word.

Just say, "yes." Or just say, "no." Just say, "Yes, I'll be there." Or "No, I won't be there." Just say, "Yes, I'll do it." Or "No, I won't do that." Just

say, "Yes, that's right." Or "No, that isn't right." When you go beyond the simple, "yes" or "now," you begin to play games with others, so as to be deceitful in your words. When you begin to be deceitful, you have simply figured out a way to say true things, while communicating false things to others. Thus, you can tell lies, while justifying yourself, that you are really telling the truth. We often refer to these as "white lies." They are called "white" in the sense that they seem pure and clean and honest. Yet, they are called "lies," because this is what they really are. For instance, ...

When mom says, "Did you take a cookie from the cookie jar?" The child replies, "No" and is confident that he tells the truth. See, the truth of the matter is that the child took several cookies and didn't just take a single cookie from the cookie jar. So, when mom asked, "Did you take a cookie from the cookie jar?" the child could reply, "No" (because he took several cookies).

Or when the creditor calls inquiring about your account and you say, "the check is in the mail." But when you said this, you were actually referring to another check, not the one the creditor was asking about. Thereby, you have been able to tell the truth, but in so doing, you have been able to communicate a lie.

Or when a police officer stops you and asks if you know how fast you were going. You say "no," because you aren't sure exactly how fast you were going. It was somewhere in the range of 75-ish, but you don't know exactly how fast you were going.

We say true things, but communicate lies. It isn't just us, who do this type of thing. Those in the Bible experienced it as well.

Abraham played games with his words. Perhaps you remember when Abraham journeyed to Gerar, where Abimelech was the ruler, as recorded in Genesis 20. Abraham introduced Sarah as his sister (Gen. 20:2), so Abimelech took her with the intention of marrying her. Then one night the LORD appeared to Abimelech in a dream to tell him that Sarah and Abraham were married. The next day Abimelech arose and confronted Abraham about his lie. Abraham said, "I thought, surely there is no fear of God in this place; and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides, she actually is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother" (Genesis 20:11-12). You see Abraham telling the truth, but communicating a lie.

Let's come back again to the main point of the passage before us. Jesus is seeking to raise the standard of righteousness, by extending it to all of our speech. Whereas the Pharisees would say you have sinned if you didn't fulfill a vow that you made "to the LORD," Jesus is saying, that anytime the words of our mouth don't measure up to simple, and straightforward declarations of the truth (i.e. "yes, yes" or "no, no"), we sin. Anything less than this is sin.

When we play games with our words, so as to deceive, Jesus says in verse 37, that these words are "of evil." These last two words are difficult to translate exactly. They may be translated, "of evil" or "of the evil one." They both are legitimate translations, which communicate the same truth: when we elaborate on our words, so as to deceive others, we speak evil and become the mouthpiece of the devil, himself. In such instances we speak what Satan longs for us to say. Remember that evil entered this world in the garden, when Satan deceived Eve with his crafty words (Gen. 3:1-7). As such, Jesus called him, "the father of lies" (John 8:44). Any speech not adhering to Jesus' standard is evil, which has its origin in the evil one.

We can take heart that the Bible is filled with liars (like you and me). Here are a few liars...

Adam

When God asked Adam, "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Gen. 3:11). He replied, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (Gen. 3:12). Where do you think his answer came from? Jesus tells us in verse 37, that he should have answered, "yes." Rather, his other words were evil, from the evil one.

Cain

When God asked Cain, after he murdered his brother Abel, "Where is Abel your brother?" (Gen. 4:9). Cain replied, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9). According to Jesus' words, Cain should have said, "dead on the ground, where I left him after I murdered him." Instead, Cain's words were evil, from the evil one.

Aaron

Perhaps you can remember when Moses went up to the mountain to meet with God, as recorded in Exodus 32. The people at the base of the mountain were getting anxious that Moses hadn't returned. So Aaron told the people, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me" (Ex. 32:2). With this gold, Aaron made a molten calf, and told Israel, "this is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Ex. 32:4). When Moses came down from the mountain, he asked Aaron, "what did the people do to you that you have brought such great sin upon them?" (Ex. 32:21). Aaron tried to justify himself by saying, "you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. For they said to me, 'Make a god for us who will go before us; for ... we do not know what has become of [Moses].' And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf" (Ex. 32:22-24). Aaron should have simply confessed his sin and his guilt. Where do you think his answer came from? Sure, there was some truth in what Aaron said, but his self-justifying answer came from the evil in his heart, which was a reflection of the evil one.

Saul

Saul's son, Jonathan, heard about Saul's jealousy and desire to kill David and confronted Saul about this. Saul replied to

Jonathan, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death" (1 Sam. 19:6). A few verses later, we find Saul trying to pin David to the wall with his spear, though David slipped away (1 Sam. 19:10). And throughout 1 Samuel, we find Saul chasing after David in attempts to kill him. Why did Saul lie to his son? It was a reflection of the evil in his heart.

David

He refused to acknowledge his sin of murder of Uriah and his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. Why? The evil in his heart.

Peter

At the last supper, Peter pledged to Jesus, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away" (Matt. 26:33). Yet, when a servant-girl said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean" (Matt. 26:49). Peter said, "I do not know what you are talking about" (Matt. 26:70). To other inquirers, Peter said, "I do not know the man. ... I do not know the man!" (Matt. 26:72, 74). Why did Peter respond this way? Evil in his heart.

The Bible is filled with liars. We ought to be encouraged with our own failings in that we have other saints who are just like we are. We shouldn't take this and lower the standard of righteousness that God calls us to. We ought not say, "David hid his sin. Therefore so can I." This would not be the advice of David to us. He faced terrible consequences of his sin (and his deception). In fact, in David's prayer of confession, he longed for a pure heart before God so that he might "teach transgressors Thy ways and sinners would be converted to Thee" (Ps. 51:13). David would teach us to confess our sins and be straightforward with the truth.

Many of those in the Bible who lied, found mercy and forgiveness in the cross of our Lord Jesus. This is the glorious message of the gospel. It isn't that we have never lied about anything. It is that we have repented of our lying and have come to hate the sin that proceeds out of our mouth. The apostle Paul puts it forth so plainly, when he said, "I was formerly a blasphemer ... and yet ... I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Christ Jesus might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:13, 16). What is a blasphemer, but one who speaks lies about God? Yet, forgiveness was granted when Paul placed his faith upon Jesus. The great saints of the Bible, Paul, Peter, David, and Abraham, all repented of their false speech and found forgiveness in Him, who alone can forgive: "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15).

Have you cried to Him for mercy? Has He saved you? Do you know His forgiveness? Again, like last week, we don't gather here because we are perfect in what we say. Rather, when we do lie, and distort the truth, it grieves us. But we know of the forgiveness that we have found in Jesus. Thus, we readily extend forgiveness to others who offend us as well.

But the standard of righteousness that Jesus would hold us to is "perfect righteousness." I have mentioned it before and I will mention it again. If there is anything that you remember from this section of chapter 5, I hope that it is these two verses (because I have repeated them in every sermon in this section and will repeat them again next week):

"Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

Let us never lower the standard to which we are called. We are called to be perfect in our speech. The Pharisees erred when they lowered the standard. Today, we are living in a society that has lowered the standard. In fact, we live in a society today where truth and honesty and integrity are at an all-time low.

A few years ago, we saw what happened with our president, who out-right lied under oath. Many think that he taught us that it is permissible to lie under oath. Rather, I would contend that our former president simply represents our society today. He is "everyman." He is us. He is the rule, not the exception.

What happened to the model of presidents in the past? Where are the presidents who will be known for their integrity? We remember George Washington, who told the truth and readily confessed that he cut down the cherry tree. We remember Abraham Lincoln with the simple title, "Honest Abe." But today, we have presidents who lie under oath. We have congressmen who have affairs and only confess them after great reluctance. A generation ago, it was the Watergate scandal.

Today, people will tell straight-faced lies and think that nothing is wrong with it. Many of you know that I don't watch much television. However, one evening, I happened to have the box on and there was some type of show on. I don't even remember the name of the show, but its topic was re-dating meat in supermarkets. You know that the meat you pick up at your local grocery store often has a date on the label, which gives you some idea of the freshness of the meat. Anyway, a news team from NBC, with hidden cameras, came into random stores across the nation and began to mark some of the meat packages with the dates that were on the meat containers on the Styrofoam along the bottom of the package (for instance, if the date on the meat said, "sell by June 5," they would take a stamp and press a "5" on the Styrofoam). A few days later, they visited these same stores and found that the dates on these meat packages were changed. For instance, the meat that used to say, "sell by June 5," now said "sell by June 8." They knew it was the same package, because of the imprint they made along the bottom of the Styrofoam. (That's deceitful, but according to the law is permitted). But the amazing thing about it was that they spoke, with hidden cameras, with the meat cutters and asked them if they ever changed the date on a package of meat. Right on down the line, they all said something to the effect of, "Oh, no. We would never change the dates on meat. We have cameras around here. If the management found out about this, we would lose our jobs." This was true of about 10-15 different meat cutters and managers. (There was only one that said, "Oh, yeah, we change the dates." I believe that he simply wasn't yet informed of their "policy" yet.) The shocking thing was how they all lied and were not straightforward about the truth.

Today, resumes are padded to further job opportunities. In recent months, I have heard of several people stepping down from their jobs

because they falsified their resume.

In the business world, it's not integrity and honesty that matter. What matters is the sale. I remember dealing with numerous salesmen at Kishwaukee Hospital, where I used to work, who outright claimed that their computer product could do something, which it never could do. As I was in the process of coming here to Rockford, I remember talking to a sales representative. I told her that I was moving to Rockford to be pastor of Rock Valley Bible Church. She said, "Yeah, I know where that is." (This is obviously impossible, since we have no building yet).

Many couples stand in a church before God and promise to love each other, "for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, in poverty and in riches, so help me God." Yet, the high divorce rate today simply demonstrates that this means nothing.

Even advertisements are deceptive. This week I inspected a can of "Pork and Beans" (which we have brought to share at our picnic this afternoon). I looked at the list of ingredients. Here is what my can said, "Prepared white beans, water, tomato puree (water, tomato paste), sugar, Less than 2% of: high fructose corn syrup, salt, distilled vinegar, pork, baking soda, onion powder, natural and artificial flavors, spice." In other words there is more salt in "Pork & Beans" than pork! Perhaps we ought to call it, "**Beans** and Pork." Look at the ingredients to some of the non-stick sprays. One serving size is a spray of 1/3 second and contains less than the daily trace of fat and so they can call it "fat-free" even though it is nearly 100% fat.

We live in a society in which the standard of speech has been lowered. But God's word is clear when it comes to God's attitude when it comes to lying. All lying is evil and God hates it. Solomon listed seven things which the LORD hates. One of them was "a lying tongue." Here are a just a few samplings of Proverbs that speak against lying:

- "Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment" (Prov. 12:19).
- "A truthful witness saves lives, but he who speaks lies is treacherous" (Prov. 14:25).
- "Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool" (Prov 19:1).
- "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape" (Prov. 19:5).
- "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will perish" (Prov. 19:9).
- "It is better to be a poor man than a liar" (Prov. 19:22).
- "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor, the pursuit of death" (Prov. 21:6).
- "A false witness will perish, but the man who listens to the truth will speak forever" (Prov. 21:28).
- "Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips" (Prov. 24:28).
- "Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor" (Prov. 25:18).
- "Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death, so is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, 'Was I not joking?'" (Prov. 26:18, 19).
- "A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin" (Prov. 26:28).

I finish this list of Proverbs against the lying lips with a Proverb that Steve Belonger brought up a few weeks ago. Proverbs 12:22 says that "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight." Though God hates the evil words, He delights in the faithful words. Consider the following Proverbs: "Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and he who speaks right is loved" (Prov. 16:13); "An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips" (Prov. 24:26).

And so, I ask you, church family, what is your speech like? Does it delight God? Or is it an abomination to God? Are you truthful? Are you a man or woman of integrity? When you say that you will do something, will you do it? When you promise to do something with your children, will you do it? **Could they take your normal, everyday speech, and put it on the witness stand?**

I'm not talking about profanity (which is covered in the 3rd commandment, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.") because this text isn't taking about profanity. Though the spirit of this text certainly addresses profanity. Of course we ought not to use God's name in vain in our speech. Those who do, need to learn new habits. Perhaps you are sanctified enough to use a substitute, "Gosh, Jeeez, darn, ..." I remember working as a carpenter one summer for a man who used to say, "Gall-darn." He used to say, "The gall-darn board isn't straight. ... The gall-darn shipment should have been here. ... The gall-darn compressor isn't working too well." I believe that the spirit of Jesus' words apply to such speech as well.

I'm talking about your truthfulness. I ask you, "Is your 'yes,' yes? Is your 'no,' no?" What sort of model are you placing before your children? When your children leave the house, what sorts of thoughts will they have concerning you and your truthfulness and your honesty? Do you make promises to your children, which you have not fulfilled? (I have made a few promises to them recently, that I need to work hard at fulfilling). Do you speak forth what is truthful in every circumstance?

Oh, we need the grace of God to help us in this matter.

To speak forth what is truthful, in every circumstance, is a difficult thing. James tells us that the one who doesn't stumble in what he says is a perfect man (James 3:2). Why is it so difficult? Jesus said, "out of the heart come evil thoughts, ... false witness, [and] slanders" (Mark 7:21, 22). Here is what makes it so difficult: this tongue of ours, which we think is only 6 inches long is actually about 18 inches long. Our tongue goes back into our throat and descends into our heart and becomes the mouth-piece of what the heart thinks. The tongue goes down into your heart and pulls out whatever it finds in there.

We, who know our own corruptness, realize that our mouth simply reflects what is in our heart. Psalm 51:6 says that God desires "truth in the innermost being." It is only when we have truth in our innermost being that we will have speech which pleases the LORD. Listen one last time to Proverbs 12:22, "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight." Oh, may our speech find favor in God's eyes.

I close with one illustration of the impact of integrity. As many of you know, my father is an orthopaedic surgeon. About eight years ago, he had a mal-practice suit brought up against him. The trial went for about a week. I was able to see about half of it (due to my school and work schedule). It was really quite fascinating, as an insider, to watch this thing. After the courtroom events took place in the morning, we would grab some lunch and talk about the events that took place (i.e. the things that were said or that weren't said). I remember during one lunch one time, after my father had been on the stand, his lawyer turned to him and commented on how he conducted himself on the stand. Particularly he was concerned with how he had answered certain questions (and had perhaps said too much in his answers). He said to him, "Your problem is that **you are too honest.**"

I have never forgotten that testimony of my father. I have not known anything else from him but straightforward honesty. May God teach us to be truth tellers at Rock Valley Bible Church.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 2, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
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