

# Sermon on the Mount: Deceptive Speech

by J. Glyn Owen

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*Jesus teaches that honesty and integrity in speech are essential for those who follow him, and that frivolity of speech is condemned.*

**Duration:** 48:17

**Scripture:** Leviticus 19:12, Numbers 30:2, Deuteronomy 23:21, Matthew 5:33-37

**Topics:** "Sermon on the Mount"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of honesty and integrity in the lives of believers. He highlights that as subjects of Christ's rule and kingdom, Christians should strive to be known as people of their word. The preacher explains that in a society where truth is often compromised, Christians must stand firm in their commitment to honesty. He emphasizes that there are no degrees of honesty, and that one's word should be as trustworthy as a signed agreement. The preacher also emphasizes the significance of honesty in relationships, particularly in the context of marriage and family.

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## Transcript

Now let us prayerfully turn to St. Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, and our text for today comprises verses 33 to, sorry, 33 to 37. Matthew chapter 5, verses 33 to 37. Again you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.

But I tell you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is God's throne, or by earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair, white or black. Simply let your yes be yes, and your no, no.

Anything beyond this comes from the evil one. These words bring us to the fourth of six illustrations of the morality, the ethics of the kingdom of heaven. The ethics of the kingdom of heaven given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

The righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, to quote from verse 20, must not only be expressed in terms of abstention from outright murder, which is fairly obvious, but subjects of the kingdom of our Lord must not have in their hearts the kind of hate that generates, or genders murder. Verses 21 to 26. We must not only abstain from the overt act of adultery, subjects of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus must abstain from looking to lust.

Verses 27, verses 21 to 26. And then again, our abstinence from the, from the act of adultery, ourselves being involved in the act of adultery, is not adequate. We must be very careful, lest by divorcing our spouses for a reason that is totally unbiblical, we involve them in adultery.

That is the thrust of the passage that we were considering last Lord's Day morning, or the two weeks ago. Now today we come to the matter of oaths. In this realm it is essential for the subject of our Lord's rule and kingdom to do more than simply honor valid vows or oaths.

His subjects must also cultivate an honesty and an integrity that in the long run will not require anything more than a simple yes, and a simple no, because we are known as men and women of our words. That is the standard our Lord set for his people. And insofar as we claim to be the people of Messiah, that remains the standard for us today.

It may be hard, it may be very challenging, but here it is. And we dare not take away from it, nor add to it. Now let's look at this passage.

The first thing that we must look at, of course, is the situation envisaged, the background to it all. There is a background that we must spend a moment to consider, in order to see things in context, and to understand them the better. Now that first verse, verse 33, actually brings up the whole situation, if I put the emphasis in the right place.

Again you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord. Now you will notice I am putting the emphasis on the oaths you have made to the Lord. And I'm doing so because I believe that is the punch of the statement.

And I trust we shall all be able to see that in a moment. In the Old Testament scriptures, oaths were very commonly employed. Sometimes they were implicit in a statement.

Not always, but sometimes they were. As for example when God entered into covenant with Noah, and with his fellow men and women following upon the flood. And indeed with the whole of creation as it were.

We read in Genesis chapter 9, God said to Noah and to his sons with him, I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you. And with every living creature that was with you. The birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals.

All those that came out of the ark with you. Every living creature on earth God is entering into covenant with them. I establish my covenant with you.

And here it is. Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood. Never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.

Now there is no explicit oath there. But there is an implicit oath undergirding the covenant of the Lord. At other times of course oaths are very explicitly and unambiguously made.

Abram told the king of Sodom, you remember on the occasion when Abram had been instrumental under God's blessing of saving the king of Sodom. As well as his nephew Lot. Saving them from a confederacy of five kings that had made war on them.

And robbed Sodom of its treasures. Well Abram was successful in recapturing Lot and liberating the king of Sodom. And the king of Sodom wanted to endow him with one thing or another.

But you remember Abram's words. He said that he had gone on oath to the Lord God most high, creator of heaven and earth. That he would not accept the least gift from the monarch's hand.

He says I will not have the king of Sodom say that he made Abram rich. I am depending upon the Lord he says. Who enabled me to deliver you for all my needs.

I'm not taking anything from your pagan hands. I don't need it. I have the Lord God of heaven and earth upon whom I can depend.

And he went on oath. Abram again also made the treaty with Abimelech. Genesis 21.

And we read the place was called Beersheba. Because the two men swore an oath there. You see they cemented their agreement with an oath.

The terms of the oath exactly we do not know. But we may understand that it was calling God to witness. That if they did not keep their oath they were answerable as it were in some sense or other to their God and their maker.

As we proceed through the inspired records we read of Abram requiring an oath from his servant before he sent him away to find a wife for Isaac. And then Jacob, Joseph the princes of the congregation and the whole of the children of Israel and a myriad others are involved in one way or another in the making or the accepting of an oath. So it continues.

One contemporary writer puts it like this. He says the Hebrews sensing the presence of God took joy in making an oath before God. And they found peace and comfort in his holy vows.

And he found that is the Hebrew found peace and comfort in his holy vows taken in the name of God. In this way he expressed his faith and his loyalty. Had not God himself accompanied his words with an oath.

Genesis 22 16 to 18. Psalm 110 4. Even guaranteeing the veracity of his declarations and the irrevocability of his promises. So the Hebrew would come at this stage in history the early stages of the Old Testament to see that there was there was a delight in making his oath to the Lord and assuring the Lord you give me the strength and I will perform.

Then came the misuse the gross misuse and abuse of oaths. Which had reached a climax in the days of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the days when Jesus uttered these words people were making oaths and swearing by all sorts of things.

They were swearing by heaven they were swearing by earth they were swearing by Jerusalem and even by their own heads blessed them. And our Lord really at one or two places makes fun of them and calls them fools. That they were so thoughtless about it all.

What is even more to be deplored however is the fact that the more often they involved themselves in oaths of this kind. The more senseless the whole thing became. Especially when it turned out that 99.9% of them did not keep their oaths.

So that in the process of time you have a people who are making oaths in almost every major statement and promising to do something in the name of the Lord. But they never meant it. Or promising to do something by Jerusalem or by the heavens or by the earth.

But they never kept them. So the call addressed to the ancients in verse is referred to in verse 33 again. The words of our Lord.

You have heard he says to his disciples his followers that it was said to the people long ago do not break your oath but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord. Now you say why do we put the emphasis there? Well in the process of time there had emerged the belief that if you make your vow to the Lord directly or you involve the name of God personally in your vow. Well you must keep that vow.

But you may make a hundred thousand other vows and really they're not important at all. Now it's very significant that that verse 33 does not refer to a particular statement in the Old Testament. But it's a summary of what the Old Testament said.

The Old Testament did stress that we should, that those alive at the time and those of us who are heirs of that same word of God today should keep our oaths we have made to the Lord. In so far as it goes that is very accurate, very true, very necessary. Let me quote to you three scriptures.

Leviticus 19 12 says this. Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of the Lord. God is telling them look don't make an oath that involves me unless you mean what you say.

In numbers 30 and verse 2 we read something similar not quite but something similar. When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge he must not break his word but must do everything he said. In Deuteronomy 23 and verse 21 if you make a vow to the Lord your God do not be slow to pay it for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin.

Now I would like you to notice the stress in those three statements. Do not swear falsely in the first. The emphasis is as we've indicated that a man must must must show some integrity.

Don't make a promise if you don't mean it. Don't enter into a vow unless you really and honestly mean to keep it. In the second the stress is that is in Numbers chapter 30 Numbers chapter 30 and verse 2 the stress falls on this.

He must not break his word which comes to the same thing. If you make a promise if you make a vow then you must not break it and the same again in Deuteronomy 23 and verse 21. Do not be slow to pay it.

Now by the time our Lord Jesus Christ came this is this is almost startling did not the same kind of thing happen in our own day and age. But the Jews had completely changed the meaning of those texts and they came to put the emphasis not where it falls in the language in the Hebrew and in the English and in any other language that truly represents the the original documents. They came to put the emphasis somewhere else and this is where they put it.

Do not swear falsely by my name. And what they were saying you see was this doesn't matter if you swear falsely in some other way as long as you don't involve the divine name. Or you may promise you may go on oath but if you don't involve the divine name that it's not serious.

Then again the same goes as far as the second passage is concerned. This is how they understood it. When a man makes a vow to the Lord he must not break his word.

Because he's made it to the Lord he's involved the Lord. But if he makes a promise to somebody else well now that's not important. As if you see the Lord was separated from the rest of the world and the rest of life

and the society.

And again the same in the third passage. If you do, if you make a vow to the Lord your God do not be slow to pay. Now verse 33 is to be understood against the background of that kind of development in the thinking of the Pharisees and of the scribes.

You have heard that it was said to the ancient people do not break your oaths but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord. That's the situation. Now there was tremendous confusion that emerged out of that.

Two things I need to mention. I've already hinted at them and so I don't need to stay with them. One there emerged a multiplicity of oath making which was utterly meaningless.

Utterly meaningless because people did not keep their oaths. They swore, they used either the name of God directly or indirectly or swore by their own heads, swore by their own hands, swore by their own family, swore by this that or the other. But it came to nothing.

It was all a cloak to pretend that they were honest when they were not. They had no intention of keeping the oaths they were making. Now alongside of this then, coincidentally with this, there emerged a sliding scale of evaluating oaths.

Did you ever hear of such a thing? A sliding scale. Some were important, some were less important, some were not important at all. If you swore directly to the Lord or involved the name of God, you must keep it.

There were some others that may have approximated that in certain circumstances, but the lesser vows that you used in everyday language, they were not important at all. Now such was the situation to which Jesus addressed himself in these words. The subjects of his rule, he says, must follow his standard.

You've heard this said to the ancients. That's not what I'm going to say to you. I have something quite different to say to you, my people, subjects of my rule, and of my kingdom.

Now the second thing I want to notice therefore is the correction of the chaos that had ensued. The first thing that Jesus does in order to correct this, is to tell his disciples that all oath taking involves God. Whether you swear directly to God or not, whether you make use of his name or not, all swearing, all taking of oaths involves God.

It could not be otherwise. Listen to our Lord. I tell you, he says, do not swear at all.

Why not? Well, let's listen to him. Do not swear at all either by heaven, because it is God's throne, or by the earth, because it is God's footstool, or by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your own head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

God is the Lord of your head, and he determines whether your hair should be black or white at a given time. He's the Lord exercising lordship, even on the very hairs of your head, however many, however few you may have. God is Lord, and he's involved imminently in the whole of life, says our Lord, and whatever you swear by, you're involved in God.

He's Lord of the whole creation, of the whole cosmos, of all of life. I quote from William Hendrickson, whom I think is very good at this point. He says, there were even those who swore by their heads, meaning, may I lose my head, hence may I lose my life, if what I am telling you is not the truth, or if I do not fulfill my promise.

Jesus points out, says Hendrickson, that nobody is able to change the intrinsic color of his hair. It is God, and he alone who determines all things. He's involved in the whole of life, and you cannot swear by anything without involving God.

That's the first thing Jesus does. Later on, according to the Gospel of Matthew, he chides the folly of people who do this kind of thing. In Matthew chapter 23, verses 16 to 22, Jesus spoke thus to the Pharisees and the scribes, who were the leaders in all this.

Woe to you blind guides, he says. You say, if anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing. But if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.

You blind fools, which is greater, the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, if anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing. But if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath. You blind men, which is greater, the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it, and by everything on it.

And he who swears by the temple, swears by it, and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by God's throne, and by the one who sits on it. And again, it comes to the same thing.

Whatever oath you take, you involve God. There is no such a thing as an oath that does not involve Almighty God. All swearing involves Him.

Now, the subjects of God's kingdom, then, and of Christ's rule, need no oath. That's what Jesus said. Simply let your yes be yes, and your no, no.

Anything beyond this, says Jesus, comes from the evil one. Now, what have we got here? First thing is this. Frivolity of speech is condemned.

To say what you do not mean, is everywhere condemned in Scripture. It is everywhere, and at all times, wrong and reprehensible. If we do not mean what we say, we should not appear to give our statements the aura of an oath, implying that we are doing it in the sight of God, and therefore we are calling God to witness to what is ostensibly truth, when as a matter of fact, it's a cover-up for a lie.

Of course, we may have found some better way of shielding our real intentions in the 20th century. I think that one of the saddest things, one of the saddest of all phenomena in our 20th century society, and even in the churches, is that of evasive speech. Rather than utter a downright lie, we just evade the questions that are asked, and we beat around the bush.

So what we do, is to mislead without actually telling a lie, and there are some who are absolutely champions of this. Some folk exaggerate, others deal in understatements, all of which are meant to mislead in the same way as the Jews took their oaths, with the end in view of misleading. One has known some people who rarely answered the question clearly, and honestly, and unambiguously.

And it brings the judgment of God upon us, when we do that. They're always equivocating, evading a frank statement. They're so contrary to what the Apostle John requires, when he says that we should walk in the light, as God is in the light, and then we have fellowship with one another, and with God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Beware of men and women who are always equivocating, always qualifying, or modifying, or making statements which actually make meaningless what they've said before. Don't fall into that trap, my friend. It's a very difficult groove to get out of.

Someone was acknowledging to me, not all that long ago, that he had got into this groove, and he found it very difficult to get out of it. You can get into a habit, and it's like a grave, and the more you try to climb out of it, the more terrifying is the result. And of course, such people become known as shifty, deceptive, double-minded people.

The successors of the casuists that history has subtracted and evidently condemned, some of them in the Church of Jesus Christ. You know your history. Frivolity of speech is condemned.

Integrity in speech is required. Simply let your yes be yes. Let your no be no, and be a man or a woman of your word.

Now this is nothing other than the outworking, of course, of the whole Spirit, inculcated by the Beatitudes. And I think it's necessary to say that at this stage. Our Lord is not introducing something into his Sermon on the Mount that was not in context.

You see, if you and I are seriously going through the experience that is gendered by an honest acceptance of the Beatitudes and their significance, then take for example the stress on purity of heart. It'll deal with this. Because you see, the reason why I want to lead you astray is this, because my heart is wrong.

The reason why I want not to tell you all the truth is because my heart is wrong. The reason why I want to hide something and live furtively is because my heart is not right with God. If my heart was pure, I have nothing to hide.

Out of the heart, says Jesus, out of the abundance of the heart, the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. And if the heart is full of duplicity, well the speech will be likewise. The speech is the child of the heart.

It's the fruit of the heart. And my friend, if you are a liar, don't blame your lips. The trouble lies deeper.

The trouble is in the heart. I don't know whether I ever told you in the city where we began our ministry, the city of Cardiff in South Wales, there was one very large church which has seen great revivals really. And they had a very famous clock.

It always faced the preacher. Some of you would like to have one here. Well, not whilst I'm here.

But there it was right in front of him. But the caretaker found real difficulty in keeping this clock on time. I don't know how the preacher found it, but the caretaker found it very difficult.

It was always wrong. And one day he thought, because people were, you know, caretakers of a very difficult time, they take the criticisms of everybody. And this good man had had enough of it.

But anyway, he wrote a piece of paper and pasted it over the face of the clock. Don't blame my hands, the trouble lies deeper. Don't blame my hands, the trouble lies deeper.

And I would say, don't blame your lips, the trouble lies deeper. The fact that we equivocate and lie and cover up and have our own little water gates, and then of the audacity to judge other and other people in their water gates, because our heart's not right with God. Honesty must spring from a pure heart, and it can only spring from there.

Integrity of heart is what is required. You see, we should not lie one to another, says Paul to the Colossians, chapter 3, verse 9. God does not lie. Now, let me just bring this before you, so that I don't dwell over much upon it.

God is light. And God, according to Paul, writing to Titus, chapter 1 and verse 2, God does not lie. And according to a passage we've read this morning, God cannot lie, from Hebrews 6. Now, if you and I are lying, then we are not in fellowship with God.

Now, that's bad enough. But you see, in John 8, 44, Jesus says something which is even worse than that. Where do our lies come from then? Where do they come from? Well, he says, the devil is the father of lies.

He's a liar from the beginning, and when you are indulging in lies, you are in fellowship with the father of lies. You know, it's as serious as that. Child of God, don't be tempted.

Keep in fellowship with your own father, and your own Savior, and the Spirit who indwells you, and you will not lie. Lie not one to another. Now, let me come to apply this very briefly.

Some applications of the principle. The historical setting, of course, has long passed. We don't have the same situation.

We don't have the same background to address ourselves to, as Jesus did here. All right. Nevertheless, the principle enunciated remains intact, and is very much with us.

The general practice for us to follow, who are subjects of the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is clear. Simply let your yes be yes, and your no, no. Anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

It's when we go beyond the plain truth, that the devil comes in and makes additions, and leads us astray. Don't let him. Keep your language crisp and clear, says Jesus.

Don't add too many words. That's the entrance for the evil one. Be honest, and keep it down to a minimum.

Now, this remains clear and unambiguous, but it's challenging, isn't it? We who are members of our Lord's kingdom, however, and subjects of his rule, should go out of our way to cultivate honesty of speech. Now, this is important for everybody, whether you're single, whether you're married. But in this context, I would suggest to you that it is doubly important for families, where there are children, and where husband-wife relationship needs to be developed in such a manner, that the marriage can be God-honoring, rather than lead in another direction.

That's the context in which we find it here. You cannot, my friend, you cannot develop a wholesome, healthy marriage, where one of the partners is dishonest in his words, or her words. We've got to be truthful.

It's coming right down to brass tacks. It's simple, but it's terribly challenging. You've got to be straight.

I've got to be straight. We should so live under the shadow of God's own throne, and in the awareness of his pervading presence, that that presence of God that we enjoy from day to day, should have a compelling impact upon our lives. Walking in fellowship with him, he'll not influence us that way.

That much, then, is clear and unambiguous. We should never need to have recourse to oaths in order to cover up our evil intentions and duplicity. But now, some occasional exceptions to that otherwise universal rule.

God went on oath. God went on oath, for example, in order to assure us sinners, who are so slow to believe him and to trust him, in order to assure us of the absolute dependability of his promise. He did that to Abram in the Old Testament.

He has done that to us, who are Abram's spiritual children in the New Testament. But now you notice the difference. The oaths that we have been countering and arguing against, as we believe Jesus and the whole of the Bible does, are oaths that we make to cover up a lie, a cloak for duplicity.

But God goes on oath in order to assure his children and his people of his honesty, of his good intention. And the reason he does it is not to lead us astray, but to assure us. Indeed, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews puts it, to encourage us.

We won't be encouraged. His word is not enough for us. And so he goes beyond the mere word.

He goes on oath. Let me read to you. Hebrews 6, beginning with verse 16.

Men swear, says the writer, by someone greater than themselves. And the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Now, because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.

God did this so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. Have you got the point? You see, God wants you to know that his promise of forgiveness is true. God wants you to know, him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.

God wants you to know that when he forgives you, your sins are cast behind us back into the depths of the sea. And the sins he forgives, he forgets. Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

And there are men and women in our congregation this morning that find it impossible to believe God on that. God says very well, he says, I'll go on oath. I'll swear to you, I mean what I say, bring your sins to my son, bury them under his blood, and I will, I swear I will.

And God does that. Not that he needs to, save only because of his love for us. He wants us to get the truth, you see.

He wants us to see that he means it, and he does it, he swears. Jesus also allowed himself to be put on oath in a court of law. You remember the record? I just refer to it.

In Matthew chapter 26, we read, he's before the high priest, being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. And then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, are you not going to answer? Jesus was not answering the questions that were put to him. What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you? You remember they paid false witnesses to speak against him.

But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, I charge you under oath by the Living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. And under oath, Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, replied.

He wouldn't reply before. He accepted the oath. Yes, he says, it is as you say.

But I say to all of you, in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One, and coming on the clouds of heaven. Under oath, he says, I will answer your question, but I'll tell you more than you're asking for. I am He, and one day you will know it, when it's too late.

Not only that my friends, but the Apostle Paul likewise, in one or two places, involves himself in an oath. He does so again for the same reason as God has gone on oath. He does so in order to assure people who are doubtful of him.

He does it, for example, in the epistle to the Romans, when some were doubtful as to his good intentions concerning his own nation, the nation of the Jews, in the light of the fact that he had said that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Surely he's downgrading the Jews. Surely he's not got no concern for his own people.

That's what they said. When it comes to that great ninth chapter, the Apostle speaks out. He says, I speak the truth in Christ.

I am not lying. My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit. I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart, for I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

And again, there was a misunderstanding about his visit to the church at Corinth, or a pending visit, and the Corinthians were saying, oh, he's washing his hands of us now. He's going elsewhere. He doesn't care anymore for us.

You see, that was an important charge. That was a terrifying charge against an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul couldn't take it.

He went on oath. I call God as my witness, he says, that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. We conclude from all this, therefore, that it is not absolutely wrong to take an oath when truth is at stake, and when known veracity and truthfulness are not accepted by those in question.

God, his Son, and his apostles would not have gone on oath, or taken anything akin to an oath, if it were always and inherently wrong. For this reason, we would respectfully differ from the early Anabaptists, and from the later Quakers, and the great George Fox, the Society of Friends, who refused then, as they refuse today, on any condition whatsoever, in peacetime or wartime, in a court of law or anywhere else, they will not take an oath. We must respect them.

But for my part, I would have to say that I cannot agree with them. God would not have sworn, if it were inherently wrong. His Son would not have allowed himself to be put under oath, if it were necessarily and inherently wrong.

Nevertheless, the law for his people is this, don't live by your curses. Don't live by your oaths. Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay, your yes, yes, your no, no.

In other words, cultivate an integrity of life, that your word becomes your bond, and men know who you are, and they don't need to ask twice. Finally, the overwhelming consideration at all times, then, is that we should cultivate integrity of speech, as we should cultivate a God-like character in all things. And God's glory should be our aim.

God must never be associated with any word or promise of ours that is less than strictly true. To make an oath to cover our dishonesty, like these people of old, is something terribly reprehensible. And lastly, if an oath is to be justified at any time, and under any circumstances, it is in order to reaffirm our intention to be truthful, it is alongside of our known integrity and honesty, not to cover it.

And thus, if needs be, in some circumstances in life, we are found, even in our oath-taking, to be in fellowship with the Father and the Son. Brothers and sisters, so much of this has gone into history, but the very real heart of the matter remains. You and I are living in a society that doesn't know what it is with any measure of consistency to say the truth.

And it is beyond question. All of us, from time to time, are tempted to vacillate, to deny our Lord in this. Honesty is not the best policy.

It's the only policy for citizens of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are no degrees of honesty. One is either honest or dishonest.

The very life of an honest man is his oath in the long run. One's mere word should be as trustworthy as a signed agreement, attested by legal witnesses. May the Lord grant us such grace, such enabling from his throne to overcome every temptation wherever it may spring, to seek in this as in other matters, first of all, the kingdom and the glory of our great God and Father, and to be prepared to discipline ourselves, including our tongues, to the end, that some may say of us what that dear old chief in what is now called Zaire, what used to be called Belgian Congo, said of Christians of seven years standing, this man cannot tell a lie.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, our first request of you is to forgive us our sins. Forgive us that we have not seen this to be so important.

And because we have not seen it to be so important, we have sometimes minimized the consequences of a lack of integrity. Because of that, our children too have taken note, and other children besides our own. And we have led others astray by our folly, our weakness, our vacillation, our lack of dedication to seek first your kingdom and your glory.

Please forgive us. So teach us that we may become different from what we have been. Send us out, we pray, from this morning's worship as men and women, young men and young maidens, concerned for your glory.

And even though this aspect of life may cost us dearly at some stage, O Lord, make us truthful and honest to the nth degree for the glory of your name, through Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

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