

Sermon Title: Yes Or No

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:33-37 (Sermon on the Mount #16)

Date: 11-8-20

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It is our privilege to again come to our study of the Sermon on the Mount. You know it as Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7. It is the longest recorded teaching of Jesus anywhere in the Bible. I'm sure that Matthew 5, 6, and 7 is not every word that Jesus said on that occasion (see Lk. 6:20-49), but it is Matthew's inspired record of it, recorded forever to teach us and bless us and encourage us for whatever time we have until we are with the Lord in person.

We're coming to another paragraph—the pattern of which ought to be familiar to you by now—in which Jesus sets up an antithesis between something the Pharisees taught, and the truth; and we'll see what that is. This one focuses on a sin that we have all committed. I'm quite sure that there has been a time when you promised to do something, and you failed; you didn't do it. Or, you promised to stop doing something, and, lo and behold—you did it again!

At some point in your life, you have almost certainly invoked some kind of promise, some kind of oath, to get people to believe you. I remember when I was a kid, you could do something impish or naughty, or say something rude to your friend, and then you could say: "I had *King's X!*" I never knew what that meant, but I *did* know how to use it to my advantage! Hide a hand behind your back, cross your fingers, and *all of a sudden*, whatever idiotic thing you just did that may have hurt somebody's feelings—well, that was okay, because you have "King's X." You might tell someone what you know he or she wants to hear, just because you want to get rid of them—even though you don't intend to follow through. You know how it goes—probably from *both* ends, if you're a parent. You look your mother in the eye, you *swear* that you're telling the truth, and you're afraid that even she can hear your conscience screaming, "Liar! Liar! Pants on fire!" You know. And that's what this passage is about.

This passage is the fourth in a series of antitheses that Jesus used to illustrate His theme. An "antithesis" is when you pit two things against each other: Not this, but this. It's actually a very good way to teach, and some of the best doctrinal statements that have been written are in the format of affirmations and denials—"We affirm this, and we deny this"—to clarify what the truth is.

Well, you know the theme of the Sermon on the Mount by now. Jesus said it; it's recorded for us in what we know as Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 20—"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." (NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted) He was speaking to a group of people who were under the influence of "the scribes and Pharisees"—they were the dominant religious teachers of that day in Israel. They were known to be—and they were happy to *proclaim* themselves to be—*the most righteous leaders* in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 23:6-7; Lk. 18:9-12); and Jesus says, "Uh-uh. Unless you go flying past them, you're not even going to *enter* the Kingdom of Heaven, because you need a *surpassing* righteousness!" You'll understand by the time we get to the end of Chapter 5, where He's saying that what you need is a righteousness that is *utterly impossible* for you! You need a righteousness *you can't produce*—not one that you can pat yourself on the back about, and say, "Look how good *I* am!" (see Phil. 3:9)

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The kind of righteousness that was practiced by the Pharisees, and then taught by them in the synagogues, was based on outward conformity to *their interpretations* of the Law of Moses. It was coupled with a gaggle of their own traditions that they added to the Law of Moses; and you'll see some of them this morning (cf. Mk. 7:3-4, 13). And Jesus's point is that the righteousness that God requires is one that can *only* be achieved when it's rooted in the heart, and it's a work of God's grace—it's *not* generated by you; it is *received* by you (Rom. 8:4; cf. Ezek. 36:27; Jn. 3:21; Phil. 2:13; Heb. 13:21).

On the other hand, by emphasizing outward conformity to a *massive* list of do's and don'ts, the Pharisees were producing *terrible* results! What they did *didn't* get to the real issues! It made people *feel good*, based upon their performance—but it didn't get to the heart. They did not understand the extent of sin; they thought that sin was *only* what you do or don't do; they didn't deal with the motivations, the thoughts, the intentions, the deceitfulness of the heart (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9). So they could convince themselves, and they could show off to others, that they were *truly righteous*—as they defined righteousness (Matt. 23:27-28). And the end result of it all is that they inoculated themselves against the message of their Savior! (Lk. 7:30)

This illustration that we come to today centers on one specific practice of the Pharisees which, in its own way, perverted the meaning of several Old Testament commands. Actually, this is a very straightforward passage. As the Master Teacher, Jesus chose simple illustrations—those are always the most powerful ones. The only work I really have to do with this passage is to show it to you in its historical context, and then get out of the way so that the Holy Spirit can apply it however it needs to be applied in your life.

Here's where we're going: It's Matthew 5:33-37. I've cleverly titled it: "Yes Or No." That wasn't too hard to come up with, from the text. In verse 33, you'll see—as we did last time—The Letter Of The Law. Verses 34 through 36—The Application Of The Law. And then, in this case, Verse 37—A General Principle from those things.

Let's start with The Letter Of The Law. In Matthew 5:33, Jesus says: "Again..." Well, let's stop there for a moment. "Again" what? Well, "Again: Just like I said about anger, just like I said about adultery, just like I said about divorce...Again—I'm teaching you the same principle again, applied from a different angle."

"Again, you have heard that the ancients were told..."—and that's the first half of the formula of all of these antitheses. "You've heard this told. This is what you've had passed down to you. This is what your teachers have taught you. This comes from the Scripture, and they have told it to you."

"Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' " And you know the custom in the New American Standard translation: When it's in all-caps, it means that that's a quotation from the Old Testament. Now, in *this* case, it's not a specific quotation of a certain portion of the Old Testament; it's an amalgamation of several Scriptures woven together.

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It *is* the Word of God, but there are three places in particular that are sort of mashed into this quote: "You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord." I want to show you these three passages, and then I'm going to use them to show you what the significance is of what Jesus said.

The first is Leviticus 19:12. I know this is probably "old hat" to you; I imagine that this morning when you got up after you prayed for a couple of hours, you were doing your devotions in Leviticus; you *probably* just saw this verse this morning...But, in case you haven't been reading Leviticus, here's what Chapter 19, Verse 12 says: "You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord."

Then, there's Numbers Chapter 30, Verse 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."

And the third one that is woven together is Deuteronomy 23:21—"When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you."

Now, understand: There isn't *anything* wrong with those verses. Nor is there *any reason* to diminish *in the slightest* their application to you and me today. Now, you might be thinking, "Well, that's the Law! We're not under the Law! Christ fulfilled the Law, and we're in Christ!" Yes, but the morality of God never changes (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8). When you have a clear statement of a moral principle like this, it applies *just as much* to you today as if you were an Israelite in the wilderness under Moses, when those verses were first recorded (see Rom. 6:15; Titus 2:11-12; 1 Jn. 2:4-5; Rev. 14:12).

But, the problem is the way that the teachings and the practices of the Pharisees *circumvented* the meaning of those passages (Mk. 7:8-9). They had an elaborate system of rationalization that actually *reversed* the teaching of those passages from God's Word.

To the Pharisees, oaths which implicated the name of God were binding, but other oaths were not binding. For example, a man was not under obligation to fulfill his word when he made an oath "by heaven" (vs. 34), "by the earth...by Jerusalem" (vs. 35), or by his "head" (vs. 36), but only if he mentioned God did he actually have to live up to his word.

So, by redefining and misusing these things, oaths—or, "promises," or, "vows"—had degenerated into cheap decorative language to spice up the things you say, and it really didn't have any true significance.

As with other illustrations Jesus used here in this chapter, these practices failed to deal with the *real* issues in *the heart*. In this case, the real issue is *integrity*, or the lack of integrity (Prov. 12:17). And it allowed for their false sense of righteousness to prevail in the *show* that they could put on in order to show other people how "righteous" they were (cf. Matt. 23:5-7).

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I'll show you how it all worked out as we move on to The Application Of The Law. Three verses in a chunk: 34-36—"But I say to you..." That's the second half of His formula that He uses: "You have heard that the ancients were told...*but* I say to you," and now He's explaining what it really means. "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."

I kind of doubt if, any time this week, you have said to somebody, "I swear by the City of Jerusalem that I will fix your plumbing problem on Tuesday afternoon." You probably haven't used an oath like that, so we have to put it in its context. Jesus is showing that the Jewish leaders taught something that wasn't just inadequate; what they taught was *totally wrong*. And what Jesus says in these verses makes sense *only* in light of the error that He was addressing.

Now, by the way—when you read that phrase, "Make no oath at all," there's a *context* to that; He is *not* forbidding taking formal oaths, like in a court of law—"I swear to tell the truth"—or a wedding vow, or signing your name on a contract. I'll circle back, and we'll fill that in later.

When the Lord said, "Make no oath at all," He was aiming at the custom of that day which said that only statements *sworn to* actually need to be kept; and even among *those*, there were certain forms of swearing to things that were not actually binding. And Jesus says, "No. *All* oaths are binding!" Therefore, in common everyday speech, no *trivial* oath is necessary! Just say what you mean, and mean what you say—a simple "yes" or "no" is sufficient (Jas. 5:12).

Oaths came into existence for a reason: because people are prone to lie, ever since Adam and Eve fell (Ps. 58:3; cf. Jer. 17:9). But it's wrong to suppose that a lie is somehow *excusable* unless there's a specific oath attached to it (see Prov. 12:22; Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9; Rev. 22:15). The teaching of the Pharisees violated that. They said that, in essence, lying was not sinful unless it was done in one particular form: According to them, the only binding oaths were those in which God's name was invoked, or some specific attribute of God was mentioned. Other oaths *not* naming God directly, or not suggesting the nature or the character or the existence of God—well, those just simply weren't binding.

So they came to be known for their *constant* use of oaths—putting in flowery language, like, "And I say to you, by the gold of the temple...I say to you, by the hairs of my head," and then whatever they're swearing to. And Jesus said, "That's bunk!"

Jesus was pretty strong about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. If you were to skip a few pages ahead, you'd come to Matthew 23. Let me just read to you Verses 16 to 22; it gets worse after that, but I'll just read these to you. Jesus says *to* the Pharisees, *in* the temple, in public, just a few days before He went to the Cross: "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold

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or the temple that sanctified the gold? And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' " Now, obviously, those things reflected practices that were actually in place.

He continued: "You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it."

Here's what was going on: You can take a statement and change the emphasis; and if you do it skillfully, you can make up a *completely different meaning*, in many instances. Here's what the Pharisees were doing with God's Word on this subject of integrity, truth-speaking, promises, vows, oaths, covenants—all of that. Consider those three Scriptures that were amalgamated into what we read in Verses 34 through 36. If you go back to Leviticus 19:12, here is God's intended emphasis on that: "You shall not swear falsely by My name." The meaning? "Keep your word! Honor your promises! I know every word that comes out of your mouth (Ps. 139:4), and I know the intention of your heart behind it (Ps. 44:21)—so if you make a promise, *keep it!*" That's what God meant.

Leviticus 19:12, in the Pharisees' emphasis: "You shall not swear falsely *by My name*"—in other words, "You can swear falsely in *anything else you want!* As long as you don't mention My name, you have"—well, "King's X!" It doesn't matter what you say; you're only bound when you swear by God's name.

Or, move over to Numbers Chapter 30, Verse 2. God's emphasis: "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 meaning is: Keep your word in every case. If you hand somebody one of those little magic plastic cards that we have, where you give them the card and they give you free stuff, and then they give you a little piece of paper, and you sign your name to it—you're taking a vow! You're saying, "I promise to pay this." And as a matter of fact, a company even *meaner* than the one where you just ate the meal is going to *pay in advance*, based on *your* good promise! And if you default on that, it can get ugly! Well, that's the meaning; it's obvious! Keep your word.

How did the Pharisees interpret that? Here's their emphasis: "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 meaning is: Well, *it doesn't really count* unless you use God's name in the oath.

In Deuteronomy 23:21, God's intended emphasis: "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you." The meaning is: God will hold you accountable for *whatever* you promise to do!

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And how did the Pharisees switch the emphasis to switch the meaning? "When you make a vow *to the Lord your God*, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you." In other words, the meaning is: There's *amnesty* for breaking promises made under *every* circumstance, *unless* you specifically make "a vow to the Lord."

The Pharisees' meaning of oaths, in general: You shall not break your oath, *if—and only if—you* swore it to the Lord. Otherwise—you really don't have to keep it.

God's meaning of oaths, in general: You shall not break your oaths. You shall keep them before the Lord.

You understand: God sees *every promise* that you make, no matter what *words* you phrase it in (cf. Matt. 12:36); *and* He also sees your heart—the thought behind it, the *intentions* behind it, the motives that are involved (see 1 Chr. 28:9). And in each case God deals with making promises, the emphasis is on *truthfulness* and *integrity*. What I say is true, and I will stand by what I say.

You have to be truthful when you solemnize a promise with an oath—like signing your name, taking a marriage vow, signing a contract, whatever you do—you have to *really mean it!* You have to be faithful in keeping that oath, and carrying out your promise.

By the way: God doesn't just tell *us* to do this; He sets the example! Do you realize that God has taken oaths to secure our own spiritual future with Him? Let me just give you a couple of them:

Psalms 132, Verse 11 is a reference to the Davidic Covenant, God's promise to David. He says: "The Lord has sworn to David a truth from which He will not turn back: 'Of the fruit of your body I will set upon your throne.'" In other words, the King of the Kingdom of Heaven—the Messiah—He is going to be a physical descendant of David. God swore an oath to that! It happened—because God promised (cf. Lk. 1:32).

Or, Hebrews 6:17-18—"In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us." Why do we have such confidence in our hope? "God interposed with an oath," and, "it is impossible for God to lie." *That's why* we can stand on the promises of God! They're *certified*, if you will (cf. Eph. 1:13-14).

And just as with the previous illustrations: When Jesus talked about anger, it's the same sin as murder—only a matter of degree; lust is the same sin as adultery—only a matter of degree; divorce—that is also participating in something God hates, and only in the most *extreme* of situations does He allow it. In the same way here, Jesus is teaching: God desires to work *in your heart*—not *only* in your obedience, but connecting your obedience with the reality in your heart (see Ex. 20:6; 1 Jn. 5:3).

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It *misses the point* if you concentrate *only* on outward behavior! He's saying: "Let God deal with you on the inside; *then* you can see true and lasting change in your behavior!" God wants you to speak truth—not just with your fingers behind your back, not just when it's convenient, not just *shaded* your way—He wants truthfulness from *within*.

I'll give you just a couple of examples here, but there are many. Psalm 15:1-2: "O Lord, who may abide in Your tent?" Well, that obviously has a historical reference: It's referring to the Tabernacle in the wilderness (1 Chr. 21:29), and then, by extension, the Temple (2 Sam. 7:13; 1 Kings 6:1). "Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and *speaks truth in his heart*." *That's* what a true worshipper does! And if you're not willing to deal with the heart, the validity of your worship is highly suspect (see Mk. 7:6; cf. Lk. 11:41; 2 Cor. 8:5).

Psalm 51, Verse 6, also in a very specific context: This is after David had committed adultery, and lied about it, and covered it up—making it a whole lot worse than it was, and it started out terrible. And then when he was confronted, and he finally confessed, this was part of his confession: "Behold, You desire truth *in the innermost being*, and in the hidden part, You will make me know wisdom."

Psalm 24, Verses 3 and 4—very similar to what we read in the first psalm: "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands"—that's symbolic of your actions—"and a pure heart"—that's symbolic of your motives—"who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully."

Just one more: Zechariah 8:16-17: " 'These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates. Also let none of you devise evil *in your heart* against another, and do not love perjury"—that's just failing to live up to an oath—"for all these are what I hate,' declares the Lord."

I told you it wasn't a really hard passage. Let's move on to The General Principle. The Letter Of The Law—"You have heard that the ancients were told..." And then, The Application Of The Law—"But I say to you..." Now, a General Principle in Verse 37. He hasn't done this with all of these, but He does with this one. He says: "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil."

What does that mean? Let your "Yes" *really mean* "Yes"; let your "No" *really mean* "No" (Jas. 5:12). "Beyond these is of evil." What is He saying? He's saying that *in normal conversation*, the Pharisees just peppered it with a whole bunch of meaningless, flowery, spiritual-sounding language that had *no import* to them at all; they were just absurd, how much they used oaths. And Jesus says that in normal conversations, it is "evil" to spice up your speech by oaths. Say what you mean, and mean what you say. Just like with anger (murder), just like with lust (adultery), just like with divorce, the same thing is meant here: The *real* solution has to be dealt with *in your heart*. It's the work of Christ in you (Rom. 8:9, 14; Phil. 2:13; Heb. 13:21). A bunch of hair-splitting distinctions of classifying oaths into that which is absolutely binding, not quite so binding, and not binding at all—that's just so silly, it's *evil*!

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He used some examples in Verses 34 to 36. An oath "by heaven" has to be truthful and kept because, isn't heaven God's "throne"? An oath "by the earth" has to be binding, because the earth is God's "footstool." An oath "by Jerusalem" is binding, because "it is the city of the great King." An oath "by your head"—apparently, the meaning is: "If I don't keep my promise, may I lose my head, and hence: my life"—well, that's binding because, ultimately, God is in control of even the *color* of your hair—or even if you can *produce* hair. So, swearing by your own head is just as important as swearing by God Himself—*it is binding!*

The ultimate issue is *not* what words you can say to get people to believe you. The ultimate issue is: the spiritual condition of your heart. Truth has to reign supreme *in your heart*. And in normal conversations, just *avoid oaths altogether!* "Yes" means "Yes"; "No" means "No."

Now, a short side-trip. I promised you this. What about a *formal* oath, like in a court of law or in a legal affidavit? What if you've been called to Jury Duty? What if you've been called to testify? The other day, I was driving behind a car that drove off the road, up the curb, into the hedge, swerved, zoomed back, accelerated across the road, back over the other curb, through the next hedge, and plowed a tree head-on. I was the only witness, and I talked to the police officer. He said, "Would you be willing to testify?" Well, yeah, I would; and if I did, I would say, "I witnessed the car do this and this and this." I would *not* say, "I promise you, by the gold in the temple in Jerusalem, that *that jerk...*" That's not how you talk! You say the truth.

It's *not a problem* for a Christian to take an oath, like: "I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." That just means: "I promise to be *me!*" That's what a Christian does. The standard of God's Word is complete truthfulness, so there's no problem with promising to be completely truthful.

Also, realize: Jesus did not prohibit *all* oaths. He rejected the Pharisees' *perversion* of the practice, but He didn't change any of those verses that He quoted; they are still absolutely true.

There are examples in the New Testament that *verify* that oaths are permissible. Remember when Jesus went through that *mockery* of a trial? He went through three phases with the Jews, and three phases with the Romans. And remember, in the midst of it, He wasn't answering? And we come to this, in Matthew Chapter 26, Verse 63—"But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, 'I adjure You by the living God'—in other words, he put Jesus under oath—"that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.'" And *then*, Jesus answered. He didn't answer all the cockamamie nonsense, when they were trying to come up with an accusation against Him; but when they asked, "Tell us the truth about Your status," He answered in a straightforward way.

The Apostle Paul, in a form, took an oath. In Romans Chapter 1, Verse 9, he said: "For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you." He's writing to the Romans; the Romans



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didn't know him; he hadn't been there yet. He was hoping to *go* there, and he wanted to let them know that he *constantly* prayed for them. He knew about the church there, and he even had plans to hopefully partner with them in greater ministry for the spread of the Gospel (Rom. 15:24). So, just pick out the parts of the sentence: "God...is my witness..." That is, in essence, taking an oath. "I'm saying, by the name of God, I *do* pray for you unceasingly." He did the same thing in Second Corinthians 1:23, and the same thing in Galatians Chapter 1, Verse 20.

Here's an interesting one: An *angel* took an oath. Now, why would an *angel* need to take an oath? The obvious answer to that is: "I don't know!" I guess, as opposed to a demon—which always tells a lie. In Revelation 10:5-6, John is receiving this avalanche of revelation about the end-times, and he writes: "Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there will be delay no longer." I don't know why, but I can tell you: Obviously, God doesn't prevent an oath! That angel put himself under oath (cf. Gen. 22:16; 24:7; Ex. 6:8; Heb. 7:21; etc.).

So, how are we going to summarize this, and apply it properly to ourselves? Four times now, you've seen the same principle: God knows your heart. Your anger on the inside is not hidden to Him; it is *wide open* to Him (Prov. 15:11; Heb. 4:13)—and it is the same as *murder*; you just haven't had a chance to play it out to the full extent of it yet. That's why the title of that sermon was, "Are You A Murderer?" And the answer is: "Well, yes." So you need a *Savior*—One who can deal with your *heart* (Acts 15:9).

How about your lustful thoughts? They're no secret to God; they're *wide open* to Him—and they are the same as *adultery*. What was the title of that sermon? "Are You An Adulterer?" "Well, yes." So what's the point of it? You need a *Savior* who can deal with the issues of your heart (Heb. 20:22).

Your marriage vows? *They're sacred!* How are you going to stand for them? God, in His great grace, has allowed for a provision when that which He hates still needs to happen because of the hardness of heart. Again, the whole issue goes to the *heart*.

One of the verses that we read in Psalms says you must deal with integrity (Ps. 15:2; cf. Ps. 101:2). "Integrity" means "wholeness," or, "soundness." Remember back to Junior High mathematics, when you learned what an "integer" is? An "integer" is a *whole number*. It's not 1.1; it's not 3.1415926535. Those aren't "integers"; those are "fractions." A person with "integrity" is a person who acts with "wholeness"—not fractionalized (Jas. 1:8; cf. 2 Cor. 1:17). What *any part* of that person says, the whole person says, because it comes from the heart.

So, do I even *need* to suggest any applications? This has to do with what you say in your house—to your children, to your parents, to your spouse. It has to do with your integrity with your employer or your employees, or your coworkers. It has to do with your financial obligations, and what you do with them.

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How is the quality of your speech? Are you good at fooling people? Or does your "Yes" mean "Yes," and your "No" mean "No"?

It was interesting: While I was working on this, I ran across some interesting quotations from people who had absolutely no Christian axe to grind whatsoever. And do you know what? We don't fool anybody! Even *the world* understands what integrity is. I ran across this one from that great theologian, Mark Twain. He taught a lot of theology...*wrong*, but he taught a lot of theology. He said this: "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything." Is that *practical*, or what? If you make up a story, then you have to remember who you told which story to—and hope they don't get in the same room together with you!

Then there's Thomas Sowell, another theologian—not in Biblical Theology, by any means. I agree with *most* everything that Thomas Sowell says in the world of *economics*. He said this: "It is amazing how much panic one honest man can spread among a multitude of hypocrites." You see, God deals in *truth*, and speaking truth sends hypocrites into a *tizzy*! They either run like cockroaches to get out of sight (cf. Jn. 3:20), or they attack like lions—because you're exposing what's within them (cf. Jn. 7:7; 8:44).

Does this convict you, just like the other ones did? It should. You need to let the Lord Jesus Christ deal with your *heart*, and bring the forgiveness that only He can bring. What do we celebrate at the Lord's Table? Christ took on flesh so that He could die as a man (Heb. 2:14)—a perfect man, a perfectly *righteous* man (Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:19), taking upon Himself the penalty of the wrath of God against all of our sins (Is. 53:5-6), so that He could give us His righteousness: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Or, as Romans 6:23 put it: "The wages of sin is death..." "Wages"? That's what we've *earned* (see Rom. 4:4). "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God"—a "free gift" is what you *can't* earn—"the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Let's pray:

*Father, You know our hearts today. On the one hand, that is comforting. It's comforting when we are understood; it's comforting when we are confessing our sins. On the other hand, Father, You know our hearts today—and that's terrifying when we try to pretend that it's not true, when we act like there's such a thing as a "secret sin." Father, You know all things; and not only do You know our hearts, but You have made the provision for us to be forgiven through Your son, Jesus Christ. Please do not let a soul leave this service today, do not let a single person who is watching us click off from this website, without absolutely coming to You in faith—trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to do what we cannot do: to provide that righteousness that surpasses anything that any human can do, so that we can stand in Your grace in Christ Jesus. Have Your way with us, and use us for Your glory, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*