

The Sermon on the Mount (Part 2)

The New People of God

Study 5 – People of Truth

Introduction

We live in a world in which truth is sadly in short supply. It may be something as 'small' as not attending an event we said we would attend, without letting anyone know. It may be something irritating such as poor service delivery by a company or the failure of a contractor to keep to deadlines. It may be something which is common to so many of us, a 'mere exaggeration' in a story we tell or a way of presenting ourselves which gives a false impression of what we are actually like. It may be something far more serious, such as lying to avoid the consequences of our actions or cheating in an exam or plagiarising someone else's work or breaking the promises we have made, not because we can't keep them, but because we won't. We live in a world where truth is in short supply and in such a world talk is cheap and the cost of broken promises is high.

Think of the effect of a string of broken promises on children who trust their parents to keep their word, only to be let down again and again. What way of life will they imitate? Think of the relational cost of broken marriage vows and the emotional devastation that stems from broken homes and broken families. Think of the enormous spiritual harm that is done when promises are made in the Name of God, promises which God Himself never made. How many struggle with unbelief today because they have been let down not by God but by a false gospel. And so the list goes on, with each of us no doubt able to think of examples, some trivial, some deeply painful, all however underlining the fact that we live in a world in which truth is sadly in short supply.

In such a world Jesus' attitude to truth, summarised in Matthew 5:33-37, comes both as a surprise and as a wonderfully attractive alternative. For as we study this passage we see that Jesus calls his people not only to truthful lips but to a truthful heart. In Jesus' day as in ours truth was in short supply and talk was cheap, so much so that people had to back up their words with solemn oaths to be taken seriously, and in the end even that was not enough. For Jesus, however, knowing the God who is Truth meant being a person of truth, a person whose word could be relied on, a person who thought before he or she spoke and whose 'Yes' was 'Yes' and whose 'No' was 'No'. In this part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus thus calls His new covenant people to be people of truth.



Investigate and Think



Read Matthew 5:33-37

1. The statement that Jesus quotes was a selective interpretation of what the Old Testament teaches about oath taking. In what way does the statement as it stands limit the responsibility to keep *all* promises? (hint: compare the two parts of the statement with each other)

2. **Read Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21-23.** What do these passages teach about oath taking and oath keeping? How does the teaching of these passages differ from the statement that Jesus quotes?

3. Jesus' response to the popular understanding of oath taking was "Do not swear at all..." How would you answer someone who says that Jesus' words mean that it is wrong for believers to take an oath when required to do so by law?

