

# FIRM FOUNDATIONS

## Study #8 (Updated 8-11-17)

### Read Matt. 5:33-37 (NIV)

*“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’<sup>34</sup> But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne;<sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.<sup>36</sup> And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.<sup>37</sup> All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”*

- Compare this passage with what Jesus says here:
- **Matt. 23:16-24 (NIV)** *“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’<sup>17</sup> You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?<sup>18</sup> You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’<sup>19</sup> You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred?<sup>20</sup> Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.<sup>21</sup> And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it.<sup>22</sup> And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.<sup>23</sup> Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. **But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.** You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.<sup>24</sup> You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.”*

### Q: What is an oath?

- It is making a solemn affirmation that what you are saying is true by invoking a higher virtue than your own (**Heb. 6:16**).
- **The purpose of an oath was much like the purpose of a contract today.**
  - A contract anticipates people’s natural tendency toward unfaithfulness, and provides a legal recourse for someone if the contract is broken.
- To invoke God’s name in a vow, was to say, *“even though you may not believe my virtue and honesty enough to trust me, I’ll appeal to God’s virtue and honesty instead of my own.”* In other words, it was like saying, *“If you can trust God, you can trust me.”*
  - To renege on such an oath, was to say God couldn’t be trusted either; and thus would bring the wrath of God down on you... which would be far worse than the wrath of a court of law.
- **The Pharisees and Rabbis had developed an elaborate system of vows, declaring some to be binding, and others not.**
  - Only a trained legal scholar would know which vows were binding, and which ones were not. The average man on the street wouldn’t really know which vows meant anything. This allowed people to defraud others by making some vows they didn’t intend to keep.

**Q: What is Jesus saying about oaths?**

- Jesus is saying that, even though oaths had been used as a means of guaranteeing a person's honesty, oaths were really no guarantee at all.
- **Jesus is saying we should just be truthful, because telling the truth is part of being faithful, which is part of being Loving.**
  - We should be known as people who will be faithful to do what we say, not people who are looking for ways to deceive and take advantage of others.
- It should be our integrity before God, our respect for His faithfulness, and a desire to be like Him, that compels us to keep our word... not an oath.

**Q: Which of the “weightier matters of law” is in view here?**

- Faithfulness.

**Q: Can you be loving, and yet not be faithful?**

- If you are unfaithful, then you are not loving!
- God is love (**1John 4:8, 16**), and God is faithful (**Deut. 32:4; 1Cor. 1:9, 10:13**), because faithfulness is an intrinsic part of love.
- If you want to be loving – like God is – then faithfulness is not optional!

## **What About You?**

Q: **Matt. 7:12** says to treat others the way you want to be treated. Do you want others to tell you the truth and keep their word, in the same way you tell the truth and keep your word? If not, why not?

Q: When was the last time you told a lie? Why did you lie?

- What does this tell you about your love for God, and the person you lied to?

Q: Do you have a habit of saying you'll do something, and then not following through?

- Do you pay your debts?
- If you promise to serve someone, do you follow through?
- Do you show up for things at the time you said you would?

Q: What do you need to do to start becoming a more faithful, loving person?

- Is there a lie you need to confess, and/or a truth you need to tell?
- Is there a habit of “not doing what you say” that you need to repent of?