

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount Sermon Series

Sermon 19

Perform Your Oaths

Matthew 5:33-37 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'³⁴ "But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne;³⁵ "nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.³⁶ "Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.³⁷ "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

In the first sentence of this passage Jesus is quoting from two Old Testament passages. The first is this:

Leviticus 19:12 'And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I *am* the LORD.

This verse seems to be an application of two of the ten commandments. The 9th commandment forbids lying:

Exodus 20:16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

The 3rd commandment forbids taking the Lord's name in vain.

Exodus 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

The other passage of scripture that Jesus quoted from is from Numbers 30:2 which says,

Numbers 30:2 "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

The law of God prohibits lying and misrepresenting the truth. The law is spiritual. When we promise to do something, unless it violates one of God's other commands, we must keep our commitment. But in Jesus' day, many people tried to get around keeping their promises. They did this by making empty oaths. Let's look at an example.

Jesus said,

Matthew 23:16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged *to perform it.*'

By making an oath on the temple, a person would later say that they didn't need to keep that oath because the temple has no value for an oath. Thus they would deceive and cheat people.

When the Jews swore by the temple or something else, they were really using those things as a collateral or pledge. It was as if they were saying, "If I don't keep my word I will give you the temple." This is all foolishness because the temple was not theirs to give. Heaven is not theirs to give. Even their head was not theirs to give. It all belongs to God.

What are we saying when we make a promise with an oath? Aren't we really saying, "You can trust this word of mine because I made an oath." Does that mean when you don't make an oath there is a probability

that you are lying? Jesus said that this kind of oath-making is sin. You should be of such a fine character that whatever you say, people can trust your word as true.

Matthew 5:37 "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

When Jesus said, "Do not swear at all" He was speaking in the context that I just explained. He was not saying that every kind of oath is sinful. For example, in His own trial before Caiaphas the high priest, what happened?

Matthew 26:62-64 And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?" ⁶³ But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" ⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "*It is as* you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Jesus did not refuse to answer under oath. Also, Paul called upon God to be his witness that he was telling the truth.

2 Corinthians 1:23 Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.

But we must be careful when we call on God as a witness for several reasons. The first reason is that whatever we do is open to God's eyes. He sees everything and knows everything. Even if you fool people, you cannot fool God. There is a judgment day.

Another reason is that if we declare ourselves to be God's people and then we lie or commit any other sin, we break the third commandment which forbids using God's name without reverence and respect. Let me give an example from scripture.

Proverbs 30:8-9 Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches -- Feed me with the food allotted to me; ⁹ Lest I be full and deny *You*, And say, "Who *is* the LORD?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God.

How could stealing profane the name of God? We profane the name of God if we declare ourselves to be His people and we sin. We misrepresent God and true religion to others.

We see that a violation of one commandment involves the other 9 as well.

James 2:10-11 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

The third reason we should be careful when we call on God to be our witness is that we are using His name, and His name is holy. Let's look at the third commandment.

Exodus 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

This commandment forbids using God's name in a common or casual way. Many names and Turkish words contain God's name so we should be careful.

What does Abdullah mean? It means "servant of God." Is it sinful to use God's name in a name? No. We see this all the time in the Old Testament. In Hebrew, one of the names for God is "El." We see the name of God

in names like Daniel, Joel, Michael, and many others. Can you think of other names in Turkey that have God's name in it?

Now let's think about words that have God's name in it. What can you think of? İnşallah is a very often used word. Is it using God's name in a common manner? I think that depends on how it is used. Look what the Bible says:

James 4:13-15 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

Now the word inşallah neatly comprises what is being described in these verses. But if we use the word inşallah to mean, "I don't want to make a commitment because I really don't want to try to do what you ask" then aren't we using God's name in a common way? "Will you send the package to me tomorrow?" "İnşallah." The word could be spoken in sincerity asking God's blessing or insincerely covering our lack of desire to do something.

There are many words that use the name of God in them. Can you think of some others? (Estağfurullah, Allasmaldık (Allah'a ismarladık)).

What about vallahi billahi? What does that mean? It is really an oath we are making to declare that we are telling the truth. And it is an oath using God's name. If we are truthful all of the time, do we really need to resort to oath taking? When we say this are we saying, "You can't trust my word at other times, but this time I am really telling the truth!?" Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no."

What about valla? In a dictionary I found this: A colloquial expression for "vallahi." But this word has come into common usage to mean, "really." Do we need to use God's name to communicate the concept of "really"?

Many people are using the name of God for exclamation. Can you think of any expressions in Turkish that use God's name simply to express surprise or shock?

These expression may have become so much a part of your speech that you use them without thinking about their meaning. I want to encourage you to change your speech when it involves using God's name in a word that is used casually. The name of God is holy. He will not hold those innocent who use His name irreverently. If you concentrate and listen carefully to what you are saying and pray a lot, you can change these deeply ingrained habits with God's help.

Psalm 24:3-4 Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? ⁴
He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully.

Perform your oaths. Tell the truth in your personal life and in your business life. Do not make oaths simply to try to convince others that you are telling the truth unless required of you by law. If you need to call upon God as a witness, be very careful what you say and do not use His name casually. Have clean hands and a pure heart.