Years ago children, in an effort to convince their friends that they were really serious about a matter, used to make an oath of sorts. The oath was something similar to, “Cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye.” When that “cross my heart” vow was taken, the only legitimate way to break it, without any repercussions, was to have had your fingers crossed at the time the commitment was made. The thinking was that you could commit to anything, and as long as you had your fingers crossed you could renege with impunity.

While all the oath taking and finger crossing seemed to be quite innocent back then as kids, that same mentality seems to have followed many of them into their adult years. There are any number of adults in our society who have kept right on using that finger-crossing technique in order to find ways to justify breaking almost any commitment, especially when keeping the commitment becomes too difficult, too costly, or even just too inconvenient. As a society we are reaping the consequences of generations of finger-crossing. Each year we spend billions of dollars to cover the cost of broken commitments in businesses, in marriages, and in many other facets of life. The cost of broken commitments goes beyond the financial realm. There are also personal, emotional, and spiritual costs that need to be considered as well. Nearly all of us, at one time or the other, have experienced the pain of discovering that someone we trusted — a parent, a spouse, a child, a friend, an employer, a co-worker, or whoever — apparently had their fingers crossed when they made a “cross my heart” kind of promise. It’s because of this that these words of Jesus are so relevant to us today. In our text, Jesus is calling His followers to a new and different way of living — a revolutionary way of living — in terms of being truthful and keeping our word.

And speaking of being truthful, I recently read about this guy who got pulled over by a police officer for speeding. The officer walked up to his window and said, “The reason I stopped you today is because you were speeding. I need see your driver’s license.” The driver replied, “I don’t have one. I had it suspended after I got my 5th DUI.” The officer then said, “I need to see your regestration.” The driver said, “This is not my car. I stole it.” The officer, surprised at the answer said, “The car is stolen?” The driver said, “That’s right. But come to
think of it, I saw the registration in the glove box when I was putting my gun in there.”

The officer said, “There’s a gun in the glove box?” The man said, “Yes sir. That’s where I put it after I shot and killed the woman who owns this car and stuffed her in the trunk.”

“Yes, are you telling me there’s a BODY in the TRUNK?”

Sir.”

The officer said, “Sir, stay in the car and don’t move.” He then walked back to his car and immediately called his sergeant. In no time the car was quickly surrounded by numerous police cars, one being the sergeant. The sergeant approached the driver and said, “Sir, can I see your license?”

The driver said, “Sure. Here it is.” Sure enough, he had a valid license. The sergeant then asked, “Whose car is this?” The driver said it was his and handed him the registration to the car. The sergeant then asked him to open the glove box so he could see if a gun was in it. He opened the glove box and there was no gun. The sergeant finally asked if he would get out of the car and open the trunk. When he looked inside, there was no body.

The sergeant then said to the driver, “I don’t understand this. My officer said that you told him that you did not have a license, that you had stolen this car, that you had a gun in the glove box, and that there was a dead body in the trunk. The driver said, “He did huh, and I bet the liar told you I was speeding, too.”

That story makes me think of one definition I found for lying. It said that a lie is an abomination to the Lord and a very present help in time of trouble.

A fellow was walking through a cemetery one day and noticed a tombstone that read, “Here lies a honest man and a lawyer.” He thought to himself, “Well, how about that. Two men buried in the same grave.”

There was a bus load of politicians who were driving down a country road when, all of a sudden, the bus ran off the road, and crashed into a tree in an old farmer’s field. The old farmer, after seeing what had happened, went over to investigate. He then proceeded to dig a hole to bury the politicians. A few days later the local sheriff came out, saw the crashed bus, and asked the old farmer what happened to the politicians that were in the bus. The old farmer said he had buried them. The sheriff asked the old farmer, “Were they all dead?” The old farmer replied, “Well, some of them said they weren’t, but you know how them politicians lie.”

We laugh at that, but the sad truth is, for some people, lying has become a way of life, and there are studies to prove it.

It has been found that most people lie to others once or twice a day and deceive about 30 people per week. The average is 7 times per hour if you count all the times people lie to themselves.

Studies have found that people lie in 30 to 38% of all their interactions; College students lie in 50% of conversations with their mothers; 10,000,000 people lie to the IRS each year (An honest letter was sent to the Internal Revenue Service. It stated: “Dear Sirs: Last year, when I filed my income tax return, I deliberately
misrepresented my income. Now, I cannot sleep. Enclosed is a check for $150 for back taxes. If I still can’t sleep, I’ll send you the rest!”); 80% lie on their resumes; 70% of all doctors lie to insurance companies; 100% of dating couples surveyed lied to each other in about a third of their conversations; 20% - 30% of middle managers surveyed had written fraudulent internal reports; 95% of participating college students surveyed were willing to tell at least one lie to a potential employer to win a job, and 41% had already done so. It is estimated that we are lied to about 200 times each day.

The book The Day America Told the Truth says that 91 percent of those surveyed lie routinely about matters they consider trivial, and 36 percent lie about important matters; 86 percent lie regularly to parents, 75 percent to friends, 73 percent to siblings, and 69 percent to spouses.

Now, in case someone might think that God just winks at lying and goes on, consider these words from Proverbs 12:22, “Lying lips are abomination to the LORD . . .” Among the six things found in Proverbs 6 that God says He hates is “lying lips.” What about Revelation 21:8? “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

God is very serious when it comes to the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

From our text, I want to preach to you on the Commencement, Corruption, and Confusion when it comes to oaths.
I. THE COMMENCEMENT

A. An Oath Defined

1. The entire concept of oath-taking originated in the Old Testament, but before considering its origin we would do well to understand what an oath is by definition.

2. “An oath is a solemn affirmation or declaration, made with an appeal to God for the truth of what is affirmed, and imprecating His vengeance, and renouncing His favor if what is affirmed is false.” (Barnes’ Notes, The Gospels, page 57)

3. In other words, when a person takes an oath, he or she is making a solemn declaration or statement with an appeal to God to bear witness to the truth of what was affirmed, denied, or promised.

4. The individual taking an oath is calling upon God to be witness, judge, and revenger if they are not speaking truthfully.

5. An oath or promise was, and is, a very serious thing.

B. An Oath Demanded

1. Deuteronomy 6:13, “Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.”

2. The reason behind the commandment with regard to oath-taking was first and foremost to restrain man’s inclination towards lying. Because of sin, lying was prevalent among the people in Moses’ day just as it is in our day.

3. The taking of an oath in the name of the Lord was meant to bring to bear upon the minds of the people the seriousness of lying to their fellow man.

4. Another reason for the oath-taking command was to restrict the practice to serious matters only. The act of taking an oath had been trivialized and people were taking oaths in the name of God over the most insignificant matters.

II. THE CORRUPTION

As was the case with killing, adultery, and divorce, the religious leaders of Jesus’ day had corrupted the matter of oath-taking. The Pharisees had developed a teaching that made a distinction between what they referred to as binding and non-binding oaths.

A. Non-Binding Oaths

1. Non-binding oaths were oaths that were taken by the temple or the altar. Other oaths considered to be non-binding were oaths taken by heaven, the earth, Jerusalem, and even one’s own head.

2. The obligation of an oath depended upon the nature of the object by which the person swore.

B. Binding Oaths

1. The only oaths considered binding by the Pharisees, were those taken in the name of the Lord. As long as they did not invoke the name of God, they were free to renege, so they thought.

2. In His sermon, Jesus refutes the false teaching of the Pharisees by proclaiming that all oaths are binding. Even though they may not mention the name of God, He is nonetheless Creator and Owner of all things.

3. Jesus reminded the Pharisees that to swear by “heaven” was in effect to swear by God because heaven is where God’s throne is.
4. To swear by the “earth” would be to swear by the place that is considered to be God’s footstool and to do so would be to swear by the One whose footstool it is.
5. To swear by “Jerusalem” would be to swear by “the city of the great King” and consequently to swear by the King Himself.
6. Swearing by one’s head or by one's life as it meant, was also to swear by God because He is the Author of life and is in control of life even down to the color of one’s hair.
7. So once again, Jesus corrects what the Pharisees had corrupted.

III. THE CONFUSION

Not only were the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day guilty of misinterpreting, and consequently, corrupting this practice of oath-taking, but so are some who live in this day and age. Due to a misunderstanding of the teaching of Jesus in this passage, they refuse to take any kind of oath, legal or otherwise.

This confusion becomes unnecessary when Scripture is compared with Scripture. God would not condemn in one Scripture what He and His followers practiced in other Scriptures.

A. The Pattern of the Sovereign
   1. God Himself swears numerous times in the Scriptures.
   2. Psalm 89:34-37
   3. Psalm 110:4
   4. Psalm 132:11
   5. Isaiah 45:23
   6. Amos 4:2; 8:7
   7. Hebrews 6:12

B. The Precedent of the Saviour
   1. Matthew 26:59-63
   2. The words “I adjure thee by the living God” was an official oath which demanded an answer.
   3. The High Priest was calling upon God to witness the truth of what was being said. In essence, Jesus was being put under oath to tell “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”
   4. This was the perfect time for Jesus to set a precedent concerning the taking of oaths, and He did establish a precedent, and that was to vow, in a court of law, to tell “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

C. The Practice of the Saints
   1. Saints of both the Old and New Testaments made vows and swore one to another.
   3. Abraham required an oath from his servant (Genesis 24:8-9).
   4. Jacob swore to Laban (Genesis 31:53).
   5. Joseph swore to his father (Genesis 47:31).
6. Paul often put himself under oath (2 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 1:20; Philippians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:5, 10).

7. But what about verse 34 where Jesus said, “But I say unto you, Swear not at all . . .”?

8. Here’s what about it. Jesus was not saying that we couldn’t or shouldn’t participate in the legal system as a juror or witness by stating some religious prejudice we have against taking oaths.

9. What Jesus was saying was that every promise you make is binding, so if you can’t make a promise and keep it, then don’t make a promise. It’s as simple as that.

10. I personally believe it is our civic duty to participate in our legal system as a juror when we are called and able to do so.

IV. THE CONCLUSION

In the end, Jesus said this, “But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay . . .” In that statement we see . . .

A. What is Required

1. What is required is honesty and integrity.

2. Mark Twain said, “Always tell the truth and you don’t have to remember anything.” That goes along with what Abraham Lincoln once said, “No man has a good enough memory to make a successful liar.”

3. Jesus is saying, “Be a man or woman of your word. Let your word be your bond. Do what you say you are going to do.”

4. Parents, if you make a promise to your children, keep it. Young people, if you make a promise to your parents, or teacher, or employers, keep it. Employers, if you make a promise to your employees, keep it. And visa versa. Employees to employers. If you sign a promissary note of some kind, promising to pay this amount of money back in this many months, then pay it.

5. If this is expected in commitments made to men, how much more should it be expected when we make commitments to God?

6. The Bible speaks very clearly about keeping your vows.

a. We read in Numbers 32:2, “If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.”

b. Deuteronomy 23:21, “When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee.”

c. Ecclesiastes 5:4, “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.”

7. Our vows to God are to be taken seriously. If you have ever promised
God that you would do something, He holds you to that promise. Though we may forget about it, God never does.

8. Perhaps we should join the psalmist in praying “Remove from me the way of lying,” and “Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.”

9. The Bible says in Proverbs 13:5, “A righteous man hateth lying.” The closer we get to God, the more we will hate lying, and the more we will be truthful in all we say and do.

B. What is Revealed

1. Note the close of verse 37, “. . . whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”

2. Do you know why, in this day and age, a simple hand shake is not good enough on a business deal? Do you know why on any financial transaction you have to sign enough paper to start a small forest? Because of the evil that exists in the hearts of men.

3. It all goes back to this, the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart.

4. Jesus said in Mark 7:21-23, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”

CLOSING: In his book called Integrity, Ted Engstrom told this story of Coach Cleveland Stroud who coached the Rockdale County High School Bulldogs from Conyers, GA. It was their championship season. They had posted a 21 and 5 record on their way to the Georgia Boy’s State Basketball tournament. In the state finals, they posted a dramatic come-from-behind victory to win the championship. However, the thrill of victory however was short-lived after school officials said that a player who was scholastically ineligible had played 45 seconds in the first of the school’s five post season games. Coach Stroud was quoted as saying that they didn’t know he was ineligible at the time he played. There were many people who said that Stroud and the other school officials should have remained quiet about it since it was just 45 seconds and the player wasn’t an impact player. But Stroud responded to his critics by pointing out the fact that you’ve got to do what’s honest and right and what the rules say. He then told his team that, “. . . people forget the scores of basketball games; they don’t ever forget what you’re made of.”

I guess the question to close our time together would be, “What are you made of?” What would you have done in Coach Stroud’s situation?

Remember, Jesus said, “. . . That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no way enter into the kingdom of heaven.” I have a feeling the scribes and Pharisees wouldn’t have said a word about the ineligible player who played for 45 seconds. I hope, fo