



# How High Are Your Standards?

## Matthew 5:33-37

“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ But I say to you: Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

## Prayer:

Gracious God, I want to be a person of integrity. I want all the pieces of my life to fit together beautifully, according to your design. I want to live out my beliefs, to honour you in everything I do, especially at school and work. Sometimes this is hard, Lord. It’s so tempting to cut corners morally, to tell “little white lies;” forgive me when I give into temptation, when I shatter the wholeness of my life. Help me, I pray, to live each day with integrity. May I learn to trust you in every part of life, to be a person of integrity and trustworthiness so that others will know that what I say, I mean. In turn, I will make sure that my yes is yes and my no is no. Amen.

I swear by all that is holy...I swear on my mother’s life...I swear on my granny’s grave...I swear by all the saints... I wonder if you have ever heard someone use a phrase like this, or perhaps you have used one yourself. What do you think they mean by it and why don’t they just say, “I swear” and stop there?



When someone says, “I swear by....” And then adds something else, this usually means they are using that person as a guarantee that what they are saying is true; it’s a way of promising they can be trusted. The problem is, our bible reading this week tells us that type of swearing is wrong. Now, let’s be clear: Jesus is not talking about is not the bad language type of swearing, he’s talking about the swearing of formal oaths when doing business with someone else. So when we apply for a loan, buy a car, a house or start a new job, we have to put our signature on the bottom of a contract, or in some cases, we have to swear an affidavit in front of a magistrate or get a doctor or vicar to verify our documents and signature.

But in Jesus day, there was no such thing as contracts, signatures or the type of paperwork businesses now take for granted. So back then, people would swear a verbal oath that they meant to do what they promised to do and often they would add a phrase to strengthen that vow, like “I swear by heaven and earth” as a way of absolutely promising their word was law. So, at first glance, it seems odd that Jesus is taking issue with this – aren’t people just promising to be trustworthy?

Well yes and no. What Jesus was trying to do was to encourage people to look deeper into their behaviour and their character, to make sure they had real integrity and trustworthiness in everything they said and did. So, what Jesus was really saying was that we should have so much integrity and authenticity that no matter what we say or do, it would line up with our behaviour every single day and all we have to do is to say “yes” or “no” and people know we will be good for our word. So, this reading isn’t just about the actual words we say, when you look deeper, it’s about the standards we have for how we behave, speak, treat other people and who we are.

So I wonder: is this true of you? Can you be confident that you are so totally trustworthy and your standards of behaviour are so high that people know your “yes is yes” and your “no is no”? And would other people around you agree with your assessment? If “yes” then fantastic, well done...but if “no”, or you’re not sure, then what are you going to do about it? *Rev’d Charlotte*