

# Readings

## Scripture

<sup>33</sup> "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <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 take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."  
- Matthew 5:33-37 (English Standard Version)

## Reflection

One of the liabilities of an ethic that fosters a strong commitment to duty and at the same time posits multiple universal norms such as the Ten Commandments is that of a perplexed conscience when in extreme circumstances the norms make conflicting demands – as in the obligation to preserve life and the obligation to speak truth. The Holocaust produced numerous instances of this particular conflict, but none so telling as the conduct of the villagers of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in the mountains of southeastern France.

- David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (p. 125)

Speaking the truth is often not easy; it presupposes insight into difficult situations and wisdom for finding the right words. That is why it makes a difference who is lying in such difficult situations. Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave a memorable illustration of this. A child was asked by his teacher in front of the entire class whether his father came home drunk very often. Although it was true, the lad denied it. His teacher's question had put him in a situation that he could not cope with. He did not want to hear his family's misery broadcast to the class, so he denied the truth. A family has its own secrets to keep, and the teacher had failed to recognize this. In commenting on this illustration, Lee adds, that had the boy been older or more mature, perhaps he would have replied, "May we discuss this privately during recess?" But such an answer presupposes a maturity possessed by few schoolchildren. So then, when we ask who sinned more grievously against the ninth commandment, the teacher or the pupil, the answer is obvious.

- Jachem Douma, *The Ten Commandments* (p. 331)

# Sermon Outline

**Do You Promise?**  
Matthew 5:33-37

*And His Disciples Came to Him*  
Brad Anderson

**Because Jesus is the incarnation of truth, as his disciples we are called to live a life of truth.** (Matthew 5:17; 5:37; John 14:6)

*Living in a fallen world presents many challenges to living a life of truth:*

**The challenge presented by the Evil One...** (Matthew 5:37)

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**The challenge presented by the flesh...** (Matthew 5:33)

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**The challenge presented by the world...** (Matthew 5:34-36)

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**Reflection Questions** (taken in part from the *Serendipity Study Bible for Groups*)

- How do you imagine the Old Testament teaching about oaths is being misapplied in Matthew 5:33-37? What ought always be true about our speech?
- What does Jesus tell his disciples to do to avoid this misapplication? How does that apply to you?
- How is what Jesus says here to be reconciled with the fact that God himself uses oaths in Scripture? Read Hebrews 6:13-20, Genesis 22:15-19 to help shape your answer.
- In what contexts in our culture do we take oaths? Why? How many have you taken over the course of your life?
- How does this deepened standard related to oaths impact you? Does it move you to hunger and thirst for righteousness? Does it move you to mourn? Does it move you to consider your own spiritual poverty? Does it move you toward greater humility?
- How does Jesus meet you in your need related to this command?