

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
XLV. The Sermon On The Mount: False And True Righteousness
G. Christ's Righteousness Regarding The Issue Of Oaths
(Matthew 5:33-37)

I. Introduction

- A. Christ's great Sermon on the Mount provided valuable insight on God's true righteousness, what Israel's religious leaders greatly lacked as seen in their dead traditionalism.
- B. To illustrate the contrast between the false righteousness of Israel's leaders and God's true righteousness, Jesus gave six illustrations, with the fourth illustration regarding the issue of oaths in Matthew 5:33-37.
- C. We study this passage in view of other Scriptures for insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. Christ's Righteousness Regarding The Issue Of Oaths, Matthew 5:33-37.

- A. "The practice of taking an oath was deeply rooted in Pharisaism. A man took an oath to affirm the truth of the word that he spoke." (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 180; Matt. 5:33)
- B. However, Leviticus 19:12 ESV strictly forbade the taking of an oath in the name of the Lord under false pretenses lest one profane the name of the Lord.
- C. Accordingly, the Pharisees "made allowances for mental reservations within their oaths. If they wanted to be relieved of oaths they had made by heaven . . . by the earth . . . by Jerusalem, or by one's own head, they could argue that since God Himself had not been involved in their oaths they were not binding." (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 31) This way they could actually manipulate their listeners to believe a statement they had made in a business transaction, etc., what they had confirmed by an oath that did not actually use God's name and thereby cheat their hearers without believing that they had actually sinned in violation of the Law!
- D. The Mosaic Law did not forbid the taking of oaths, but Christ told His hearers "not at all" (*holos*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 568) to take oaths, Matthew 5:34a. They should not take an oath by heaven, for it was God's throne, nor by the earth, for it was God's footstool, nor by Jerusalem as it was the city of the Great King, nor by one's head, for no one (but God) had control of his head even to make one hair white or black! (Matthew 5:34b-36). These typical items used to replace the name of the Lord so the Pharisees could excuse themselves from the sin of making false oaths while simultaneously manipulating their hearers so as to take advantage of them were actually a violation of the Leviticus 19:12 prohibition, for each of these items named by Christ were under the sovereignty of the Lord Himself!
- E. In contrast, Jesus declared that his hearers should let their "yes" mean "yes" and their "no" mean "no," for whatever "goes beyond" (*perissos*, Ibid., p. 657) this by way of meaning in taking oaths comes from evil, Matthew 5:37. "Since Christ allowed Himself to be put under an oath (Matt. 26:63-64), we conclude that He did not forbid His hearers to put themselves under an oath. He was telling them that their character, reputation for honesty, and word should be so true, undefiled, and without duplicity that no one would think it necessary to put them under an oath, for no one would suspect them of deception." (Ibid., Pentecost) Thus, "(b)elievers should affirm only what is true. Christ demanded trustworthiness in speech," Ibid.

Lesson: *Contrary to the Pharisees who TECHNICALLY obeyed Leviticus 19:12 in not profaning the name of the Lord by actually using God's name in taking their oaths, they violated the SPIRIT of the Law by MANIPULATING hearers in taking oaths in ways that misled their hearers and thus became a form of deception! Jesus directed His hearers NOT to DECEIVE AT ALL, and though they could put themselves under an oath, their REPUTATIONS before OTHERS for being HONEST in their words should make taking oaths UNNECESSARY.*

Application: *(1) If we are to let our "yes" mean "yes" and our "no" mean "no," not only should we avoid taking oaths to certify the truthfulness of our speech, but we should also be cautious about trusting the claims of others who profusely take oaths! (2) Since Christ's burden was to avoid misleading people with our speech, even remaining silent can deceive if that silence causes others to believe an error that is being asserted! Thus, we are responsible to speak up in order to counter such an error that others might not be misled by our silence! (3) In today's "legacy" or "mainstream" media, deception occurs in many ways to mislead the public: journalists can either omit certain facts or allow outright lies by others to be repeated without the journalists clarifying that these lies are lies! Accordingly, not only should we protect ourselves from such deceit, but WE need to watch that WE have the FACTS on a news report before we share it with others lest we promote either false right-wing conspiracies or false left-wing misrepresentations of the truth!*