

**Jesus' Wisdom On How To Talk To Others And How To Treat Others**  
**Matthew 5:33-42**

**Introduction: 1)** “Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye;” a phrase we are all familiar with and one used almost exclusively by children. It is added to a promise or a statement to emphasize how serious we are about being honest and telling the truth. It’s cute, sorta, but it’s also sad. Already, at a young age, children are subtly being taught that there is wiggle-room is what we say as to whether it is true or false. Honesty, it appears, is on a sliding scale.

2) Actually there is a longer version to this rhyme though its origin is uncertain and several adaptations exist. The one most often referenced goes like this:

"Cross my heart  
and hope to die  
stick a needle in my eye.  
Wait a moment,  
I spoke a lie  
I never really  
wanted to die.  
But if I may  
and if I might  
my heart is open  
for tonight.  
Though my lips are sealed  
and a promise is true  
I won't break my word

my word to you.

Cross my heart  
hope to die  
stick a needle in my eye.

A secret's a secret  
my word is forever  
I will tell no one  
about your cruel endeavor.

You claim no pain  
but I see right through  
your words in  
everything you do.

Teary eyes  
broken heart  
life has torn  
you apart.

Cross my heart  
hope to die  
stick a needle in my eye.

I loved you then  
I love you now  
I'll still love you  
though I'll break my vow.

I can't hold this secret  
any longer.

It's hurting you  
not making you stronger.

You're my friend  
so I'll risk your respect.

by hurting you  
I can protect.  
I'll save yourself

since you will not,  
you might hate me  
but I'll give it a shot.  
I'm willing to risk  
our bond that we own,  
so long as you're safe  
you won't be alone.

Cross my heart  
hope to die  
stick a needle in my eye.  
Break my promise  
tell a lie,  
save my friend  
though, maybe it's goodbye."

3) Telling the truth and being honest with our words is something we should all care about. For those who follow King Jesus and are citizens of His Kingdom, there is no debate. The 4<sup>th</sup> (5:33-37) and 5<sup>th</sup> (5:38-42) antitheses in the Sermon on the Mount deal with how we talk to others and how we treat others. They form a beautiful complement to each other. Once again Jesus corrects the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the scribes and turn the ethics of this world on its head. Dallas Willard refers to these verses as “transparent words and unquenchable love” (*The Divine Conspiracy*, 173). I like that. Once again we are confronted with the truth, “the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.” What is on the inside will inevitably make its way to the outside.

## **I. Be A Person Who Speaks the Truth to Others 5:33-37**

Today we live in a world of “alternative facts.” The idea that a man’s word is his bond is quaint, but it is not realistic. This reality is not new. It was alive and well in Jesus’ day. Unfortunately, the religious teachers and spiritual guides assisted the people in their duplicity and hedging of the truth. They had developed a rather elaborate system of oaths. Jesus deals with this verbal system of loopholes and clears the air on “the steal” that should characterize our words (cf. also our Lord’s little brother’s statement in James 5:12. It is obvious he knew and loved the Sermon on the Mount).

### 1) Everything you say is witnessed by God 5:33-36

The rabbis and scribes of old said, “You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.” This is not a direct quote of the Old Testament, but a paraphrase of a text like Leviticus 19:12 which says, “You must not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God; I am Yahweh” (cf. Num. 30:3; Deut. 23:21-23). The scribes, apparently, created a couple of loopholes: 1) speech not under oath and 2) oaths not made to the Lord. You must be honest and keep your word to the Lord, but this same commitment does not necessarily apply to our human relationships. This is amazing in light of a text like Zechariah 8:16-17

which says, “These are the things you must do: Speak truth to one another; make true and sound decisions within your gates. Do not plot evil in your hearts against your neighbor, and do not love perjury, for I hate all this” – This is the Lord’s declaration.” By the time of Jesus playing fast and loose with the truth had become a common practice. As Quarles points out, “some 1<sup>st</sup> century rabbis emphasized only the importance of speaking truth to God and downplayed the importance of absolute honesty in all communication. They thought that they had a special obligation to keep promises made to *God* specifically but could break promises made to others when it was convenient” (137).

Jesus would have nothing to do with this logic or the elaborate system of oath-taking that was in vogue in His day. Verses 34-36 make this crystal clear. Disciples of Jesus are to be characterized by such honesty and integrity, that an oath of any sort is completely unnecessary to add credibility to their words. Don’t swear by heaven as if it counts less because God is there on His throne (v. 34). Don’t swear by the earth as if that gives you an out because it is His creation and where He rests His feet (v.35). Don’t swear by Jerusalem either, for it is the city of the great King, God Himself (v. 35). And, don’t say “may my head be cut off if I lie,” probably the intent of “by your head,” because you have no authority over your life,

only God does. In fact, even your hair color is His sovereign prerogative (v.36).

The simple fact is everything you say, do, and think takes place before the watchful eye of an omniscient and sovereign God who takes with the greatest seriousness the words that come out of your mouth. The Lord hears every single one of them.

2) Everything you say should be true and good 5:37

- Jesus provided the essence of His thinking on oaths in verse 37. You should always be a man or woman of your word. No finger crossing behind your back. Those of us who claim to have and know the truth (John 14:6) must speak the truth. Simply stated, “Let your word ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no.’ Why? Because, “Anything more than this is from the evil one.” (cf. John 8:44).
- Jesus drove home this point with great force in his confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. There in verses 16-22 He said, “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, ‘If anyone swears by the

altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.”

- Now, as we consider the issue of oaths we need to provide a clarifying word. Some Christians, including Anabaptists and Quakers, take these words of Jesus in an absolute sense and forbid any and all oaths. I greatly respect their desire to obey God’s word, but I believe this is an over-reading of what our Lord meant. Quarles handles this beautifully when he writes,

“It does not seem that Jesus intended to prohibit all oaths in all circumstances. First, the oath formulas that Jesus’ condemned were formulas used in ordinary speech, not the formula employed in court. Second, Jesus Himself testified under oath in Matt. 26:63-64...[Christ’s] example serves as the best commentary on His teaching....Third, even apart from legal settings Jesus (“truly, truly I say to you”) and Paul often used special formulas to emphasize the truthfulness of a statement (Rom. 1:9; 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:23; 11:31; Gal.

1:20; Phil. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:5; 1 Tim. 2:7)...Furthermore not all oath-taking implies one's dishonesty when not under oath since in very important matters even God may swear an oath (Gen. 9:9-11; Ps 16:10 [cp. Acts 2:27-31]; Ezek. 33:11; Gen 22:17 [cp. Heb. 6:13-18]) even though "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18).

In summary Jesus prohibited the use of misleading oaths, but he did not intend to prohibit all use of oaths. Oaths in court, marital vows, oaths of office, and the use of other oaths on solemn occasions to emphasize one's truthfulness comport both with biblical teaching and Christian practice (143-144)."

So, in any and all circumstances and situations, be a person who speaks the truth. Be a person who is known, always, to be honest. It will reflect the character of the God and the kingdom you belong to.

## **II. Be a person who serve sacrificially others 5:38-42**

- Our words and our actions often go together. What we say and what we do are often traveling companions in life's journey. Perhaps no passage of Scripture makes this more clear than Proverbs 6:17-19 where the Bible weaves together in a tragic tapestry the evils we speak and the evils we do. There God's Word says, "The Lord hates six things; in fact, seven are detestable to him: arrogant eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent



blood, a heart that plots wicked schemes, feet eager to run to evil, a lying witness who gives false testimony, and one who stirs up trouble among believers.”

- Words and actions are a duet seldom separated. Both are before the constant gaze of our all-seeing, all-knowing God. Having dealt with the importance of our words in 5:33-37, Jesus moves to address the importance of our actions in the remainder of chapter 5. The issue of retaliation is the concern of verses 38-42. There are 5 principles our Lord puts before us to guide what we do as citizens of His kingdom called to serve others.

1) Do not retaliate against evil with violent aggression 5:38-39

Verse 38 is a direct and partial quote from texts in the Old Testament (Ex. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:17-21; Deut. 19:21) and concerns the law or principle of *lex talionis* which means “law of retaliation.” “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” is familiar to most of us. It was given as “a guide to the courts in their judgments and was not intended to guide individuals in exacting revenge” (Quarles, 145). The goal it would seem was to ensure fair and balanced judgments and sentences. It was to be applied without discrimination or prejudice.

Jesus did not oppose its legal application. He did oppose its use to justify acts of personal revenge and vengeance. Apparently, this was how the principle was now being used. As Carson notes, “the law was thus being dragged into the personal arena, where it could scarcely foster even rough justice, but only bitterness, vengeance, malice, hatred” (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 49).

Jesus’ response is sweeping and, no doubt, shocking to the ears of his congregation that day. First, He lays down the basic principle, “But I tell you, don’t resist an evildoer.” Don’t relate to others as enemies. Relate, if at all possible, to them as a neighbor. Be loving not hateful. Be kind not harsh. Revenge of any strip is not an option. The words of Paul in Romans 12:17-21 provide an excellent commentary on what Jesus says in this verse. There he writes, “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will

heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

The mindset, “I don’t get mad, I get even” is foreign to the ethics of the crucified Galilean. It must also be foreign to those who follow Him. We are to walk in His steps and follow His example no matter how hard it is to do it.

2) If someone slaps you, turn the other cheek 5:39

Jesus provides 4 examples to illustrate his command in verse 39. The first is an insulting slap.” If anyone (no exceptions) slaps you on your right cheek (a backhanded slap intended to embarrass you), turn the other also (be willing to endure further insult). Interestingly, the word Matthew uses for slap is the same word he uses in 26:67-68 when Jesus was blindfolded and slapped by Roman soldiers. The slap would be both insulting and painful. Again, I cannot improve on the insight of my good friend Chuck Quarles who says, “Jesus Himself was the perfect model of this gracious response to the abuses of others. He was mocked, spat on, beaten with sticks, slapped, scourged, and nailed to a cross. Nevertheless he endured this all without retaliation and even with forgiveness on His lips. Never is the

disciple more like the Savior than when he responds to abuses graciously and without retaliation” (151).

I do not think protecting ourselves or our family from harm is in view here. Nor do I think justice for those who commit violent crimes is to be excused. The guiding principle is one of neighbor love for all and the putting away of a heart of anger, malice and revenge. Justice and forgiveness are not mutually exclusive.

3) Where demands abounds, let grace abound even more 5:40

- Jesus has addressed how citizens of the kingdom should respond to a violent and dishonorable insult. He now moves to address how his disciples should respond to a legal attack. His example would have been both familiar and relevant in a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish context.
- A man brings a lawsuit against you. Perhaps he even has a legitimate complaint as in verses 25-26. The “shirt” he wishes to take was the tunic, a long inner garment worn under the coat (ESV, “cloak”) next to the skin. It was usually made of wool or linen and was often used for bartering or making payments in Jesus’ day (Quarles, 153). The coat or cloak was the outer garment and considered the more valuable. It was not only used as a coat, but

also for bedding, especially if one had to sleep outdoors. In fact Old Testament law said the poor should not be made to surrender their coat (Ex. 22:25-27; Deut. 24:12-13) [Osborne, 209]. Jesus, however, calls his followers to go beyond what the law requires. Respond to your accuser and adversary with grace. In our day we might say it like this, “if he takes your coat, offer him the shirt off your back.” The *Message* puts it like this, “If someone drags you into court and sues for the shirt off your back, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it.” In other words do what the law requires and then go further. By doing this God becomes your defense and provider! A “radically unselfish attitude” will amaze the world, but it will invite the blessing and pleasure of your heavenly Father who is witness to all that is taking place (R.T. France, Matthew, *TNTC*, 127).

4) Always be willing to go the extra mile 5:41

“Be willing to go the extra mile” has long been a colloquial saying in our culture. It has its source in verse 41. Israel was occupied territory under the rule of mighty Rome. Her people could legally be compelled to assist the Roman military as Simon of Cyrene was forced to help carry the cross of our Lord as recorded in Mark

15:21. Sinclair Ferguson points out, “The Jews hated the practice because it publicly illustrated the humiliation of being a subjugated people. We can easily imagine how open to abuse it was” (101).

The phrase “one mile” means 1000 paces. You are legally required to assist a Roman soldier by carrying a load he gives you for 1000 steps. However, when you reach the limits of what the Roman law requires, don’t stop and drop the burden at the oppressor’s feet! Keep going!! Carry the load another mile!!! Do it voluntarily, not for a king in this world, but for the King of Heaven. Obligation dictated the first mile. Compassion directs the second! The Roman soldier would no doubt be shocked and wonder why you would serve him, your enemy, when you do not have to. Gospel opportunities abound! I serve you because I have been served. In fact, let me tell you about the One who comes to serve us both, who came to serve the world, bearing its burden of sin all the way to the cross.

5) Be ready to help those in need      5:42

Someone comes across your path with a desperate and legitimate need. They are not slothful, lazy or irresponsible (see 1Thess. 5:14-15; 2 Thess. 3:10). They are hurting, need your help, and you have

the means to assist them. Jesus says “jump in with all fours!” Old Testament teaching repeatedly affirms our responsibility to help the poor (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:25-36; Deut. 15:7-11; Prov. 28:27). Jesus will reaffirm this in Matthew 25:35-36.

“Many Jews would rather die than beg” (Quarles, 156). The one before you has almost lost all hope. Don’t lecture him. Feed him. Don’t shame him. Share with him what God has given you without expecting anything in return. Spurgeon nails it, “Be generous. A miser is no follower of Jesus” (*Matthew*, 51). Carson helpfully adds, “Christ will not tolerate a mercenary, tight-fisted, penny-pinching attitude...Don’t be asking yourself all the time, “What’s in it for me? What can I get out of it?” (52).

Our motive in helping others is quite simple: we have been helped by our heavenly Father where our need for forgiveness as sinful beggars and spiritual paupers was greatest! We have been blessed and showered with blessings above all in this world. Once again Gospel opportunities abound as we share with others both what we have and what we have been given. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though He was rich, for your sake

he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

**Conclusion:** Working through these verses I have become aware of why they have a powerful and attractive nature to those who love and follow Jesus. They remind us of Him during His passion. In 1 Timothy 6:13 Paul points out that our Lord, “gave a good confession before Pontius Pilate.” He spoke the truth and He spoke it clearly just as he did before the High Priest Caiaphas and under oath (Matt. 26:63-63). But, no one puts it more beautifully than the Apostle Peter when he wrote, “he did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth; When He was reviled, he did not revile in return; when He was suffering, he did not threaten but entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:22-23). What an example He gave us as He bore not only the wrath of God in our place, but the wrath of men for our benefit.

So, and Sinclair Ferguson says it so very well, “‘Let the insults come,’ says Jesus, ‘and show by your response that you feel no need for retaliation, because you have your reputation secure with God, as his child. Let your response to insult be gracious – just as your Father’s response to your insult of sin against him has been so gracious. Will anyone be won for the kingdom by your retaliation, by your standing on your rights? How could they be, when the King in the kingdom is one who did not retaliate?’” (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 100).