Study Guide: "Liars" (Matthew Lesson 90)

Sunday AM-November 22, 2026

Detailed Study Guide

Introduction and Overview

This study guide reviews the teachings from Matthew 5:33-37. In this text, Jesus Christ directly confronts the religious leaders of Judaism—specifically the scribes and Pharisees—exposing the lying hearts hidden behind their self-righteous behavior.

Jesus Christ teaches that true righteousness does not come from self-righteous confidence. Instead, He calls believers to have a "Beatitude mentality." This mindset means recognizing our spiritual poverty and acting like desperate beggars who:

- Cry out to God for His mercy.
- Mourn deeply over their personal sin.
- Stand meekly before a holy God.
- Hunger and thirst for a righteousness that they desperately need, but cannot achieve on their own.

The ultimate purpose of Jesus Christ in delivering this message is to prepare people to receive His gift of forgiving grace and the imputed righteousness granted by Him.

The Nature of Truth and Lies in Society

Human society operates within a framework deeply impacted by deception.

- **The Origin of Lies:** According to John 8:44, Satan is "the father of lies." Humans are born with a tendency to lie. Children do not need to be taught how to lie; rather, they must be taught how to tell the truth.
- **Everyday Deceptions:** Modern society is filled with various forms of dishonesty, including shading the truth, cheating, exaggerating, breaking promises, flattering others for personal gain, betraying confidences, making excuses, telling half-truths, and telling "white lies."
- **The Result of Complete Truth:** If every person in the world told the exact truth for just one entire day, society would collapse into complete chaos. This is because the world's systems are built on a foundation of lies.
- **Legal Protections:** Because human lying is so common, legal courtrooms force individuals to swear to tell the truth. Lying under oath is legally classified as a crime called perjury.
- **Quotes on Truth:** Historical statesman Daniel Webster noted two key facts about truth:
    1. "Truth is the highest thing a man may experience."

2. "There is nothing as powerful as truth and often nothing as strange/unusual/rare."

The Three Main Frameworks of the Text

When examining Matthew 5:33-37, the lesson divides the topic of oaths and truth into three major points:

1. **The principles of Mosaic law:** What the Old Testament originally taught regarding oaths.
2. **The perversion of Jewish tradition:** How human traditions twisted God's original commands.
3. **The perspective of divine teaching:** The truth affirmed and taught by Jesus Christ.

Understanding Oaths and Swearing

In Matthew 5:33, Jesus Christ states: "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'" While this exact sentence is not a direct quote from a single Old Testament passage, it summarizes Jewish tradition based on Old Testament principles.

- **Definition of an Oath:** An oath is a formal statement in which a person calls upon God to witness the truthfulness of what is said, while invoking a curse from God upon themselves if they are lying.
- **Language and Etymology:** The words "oath," "swear falsely," and "perjure" share the same original root. The word "swear" serves as a direct synonym.
- **Modern Examples of Oaths:**
    - Everyday Speech: Saying "I swear to God it's the truth."
    - Courtrooms: Placing a hand on the Bible and saying, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."
    - Marriage Vows: Declaring "Before God and these witnesses, I take thee..." which invokes God as a witness to a lifelong commitment.

Biblical Perspective on Oaths

God understands human sinfulness and recognizes that humans often distrust one another. Therefore, He permitted the use of oaths to bind people to the truth in serious situations.

- **Hebrews 6:16-17:** This passage provides a clear biblical explanation of oaths. Verse 16 explains that men swear by One greater than themselves (God), and an oath confirms a statement to end all disputes.

- **God's Accommodation:** Verse 17 states that God accommodated Himself to human habits. Wanting to show the heirs of promise the immutability (unchangeableness) of His counsel, God guaranteed His promise with an oath.
- **How God Swears:** Because no one is greater than God, He makes oaths by Himself, using the Old Testament phrase: "'As I live,' saith the Lord, 'I will…'"
- **The Use of "Verily":** When God or Jesus Christ uses words like "Verily I say to you" or "Verily, verily I say to you" (meaning "truly, truly"), He is not implying that His un-prefaced words are untrue. Every word from God is completely true. He uses these terms to emphatically highlight the solemn urgency and unique importance of a specific statement.
- **Numbers 30:2:** God commanded that when a person makes an oath to Him, it must be kept: "If a man makes a vow to the Lord or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."

Old Testament Examples of Oaths

Throughout the Old Testament, key leaders made formal oaths before God to confirm their truthfulness:

- **Abraham:** Genesis 24:2-3
- **Isaac:** Genesis 26:28-29
- **Jacob:** Genesis 31:44
- **Jonathan (to David):** 1 Samuel 20:16
- **David:** 2 Samuel 19:23

A Negative Example: Peter's Denial

Matthew 26:69-75 provides an example of taking a false oath and invoking curses. When questioned about his relationship with Jesus Christ, Peter denied Him three distinct times:

1. **First Denial (v. 69-70):** When a servant girl stated he was with Jesus of Galilee, Peter denied it before everyone, claiming he did not understand what she meant.
2. **Second Denial (v. 71-72):** When another girl at the gateway identified him as being with Jesus of Nazareth, Peter denied it **with an oath**, effectively stating, "As God is my witness, I do not know the Man!"
3. **Third Denial (v. 73-74):** Bystanders noted his Galilean accent. Peter then began to **curse and swear**, saying, "I do not know the Man!" This was not filthy language; Peter was calling down curses from heaven upon himself and asking God to punish him if he was lying.

Upon hearing the cock crow, Peter remembered what Jesus Christ had said, went outside, and **wept bitterly** (v. 75).

Quiz-Questions

1. How does the "Beatitude mentality" described in the lesson contrast with the self-righteous attitude of the scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus Christ confronted? What specific actions characterize a person with a Beatitude mentality?
2. According to the text, who is the original source of all lies, and how does this affect human nature from childhood? What are three specific examples given in the text of how people shade or break the truth in daily life?
3. What historical quote from Daniel Webster regarding truth is highlighted in the text, and what would happen to modern society if every single person told the truth for just one day?
4. What are the three main outline points used to analyze Matthew 5:33-37 in this lesson?
5. What is the precise definition of an oath provided in the lesson, and how are the terms "swear," "perjure," and "oath" related linguistically?
6. According to Hebrews 6:16-17, why do human beings take oaths, and why did God choose to confirm His promise with an oath even though He never lies?
7. When Jesus Christ uses the phrases "verily" or "verily, verily," does this mean He only tells the truth at those specific times? What is the actual purpose of using these terms?
8. Name three Old Testament figures mentioned in the text who lawfully made oaths, and summarize the command given in Numbers 30:2 regarding taking an oath.
9. Describe the progression of Peter's three denials of Jesus Christ in Matthew 26:69-74, paying special attention to how Peter used oaths and swearing during his second and third denials.
10. Why did Peter weep bitterly after the cock crowed following his third denial of Jesus Christ, according to the lesson's explanation of his actions?

Answer Key

1. The "Beatitude mentality" replaces self-righteous confidence with a deep recognition of spiritual poverty. A person with this mentality acts like a desperate beggar who cries out for God's mercy, mourns over sin, acts meekly before a holy God, and hungers for a righteousness that only God can grant.
2. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), which means all humans are born with a natural tendency to lie without needing to be taught. Examples of daily deception include cheating, exaggerating, making excuses, flattering for gain, breaking promises, telling white lies, shading the truth, and betraying confidences.
3. Daniel Webster stated, "There is nothing as powerful as truth and often nothing as strange/unusual/rare," as well as noting that truth is the highest thing a man may experience. If everyone told the truth for one entire day, society's entire system would suffer complete collapse and turn into chaos because it is built on a framework of lies.
4. The three outline points are: (1) The principles of Mosaic law, (2) The perversion of Jewish tradition, and (3) The perspective of divine teaching.
5. An oath is defined as making a statement, calling God to witness to the truth of that statement, and invoking a curse from God if the statement is untrue. Linguistically, the words "oath," "swear falsely," "perjure," and "swear" all derive from the exact same root word.
6. Humans take oaths by calling on God (the Greater) to confirm their word and settle disputes. God accommodated Himself to human weakness and swore an oath to demonstrate the immutability (unchangeableness) of His counsel to the heirs of promise.
7. No, God and Jesus Christ always speak the absolute truth regardless of the wording used. The phrase "verily" or "verily, verily" is used simply to emphatically emphasize the urgent nature and singular significance of the statement being made.
8. Old Testament figures who made oaths include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jonathan, and David. Numbers 30:2 commands that if a man makes a vow or swears an oath to God, he must not break his word and must perform everything he spoke.
9. Peter first denied knowing Jesus Christ to a servant girl. In his second denial to another girl, he used an oath, invoking God as a witness that he did not know Him. In his third denial to bystanders, Peter began to swear and call down curses from God upon himself if he was lying about not knowing Jesus Christ.
10. Peter wept bitterly because he realized the severity of his sin: he had not only lied repeatedly about knowing Jesus Christ, but he had confirmed those lies by invoking God as a witness and calling down heavenly curses upon himself.

Essay Questions

1. Explain how Satan's role as the "father of lies" (John 8:44) has shaped the structures of modern human society, and discuss why a sudden standard of absolute truthfulness would cause societal systems to collapse.
2. Compare and contrast a self-righteous attitude with the "Beatitude mentality" demanded by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. How does understanding one's own sinfulness alter how a person approaches God?
3. Analyze the purpose and function of an oath as explained in Hebrews 6:16-17. Why does God accommodate Himself to human customs by making oaths, and how does He swear an oath when there is no authority greater than Himself?
4. Examine the Old Testament foundation for making vows and oaths as seen in Numbers 30:2 and the lives of the patriarchs. How does Mosaic law seek to enforce honesty among a sinful population?
5. Provide a detailed analysis of Peter's downfall in Matthew 26:69-75. How does his behavior illustrate the progressive danger of moving from a simple lie to taking false oaths and invoking divine curses?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Beatitude Mentality:** A spiritual posture of total humility where an individual recognizes their spiritual bankruptcy before God, crying out for His mercy, mourning over sin, and relying entirely on His imputed righteousness.
- **Fabrication:** The act of inventing, falsifying, or constructing lies; described as the underlying framework of human societal systems.
- **Immutability:** The state of being unchangeable; specifically used in Hebrews 6:17 to describe the unchanging nature of God's counsel and promise.
- **Imputed Righteousness:** The righteousness belonging to God that is credited or granted to a believer who acknowledges their inability to achieve righteousness on their own.
- **Oath:** A formal pledge calling upon God to witness the truth of a statement and invoking His judgment or curse if the statement proves false.
- **Perjury:** The criminal act of swearing a false oath or lying deliberately after promising to tell the truth in a legal setting.
- **Scribes and Pharisees:** The religious and legal leaders of Judaism during the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, frequently admonished by Him for masking lying hearts with outward self-righteousness.
- **Swearing:** Calling upon a higher authority or God to confirm the truth of one's speech; used synonymously with taking an oath.

- **Theocracy:** A system of government in which God rules directly; historical Israel functioned as a theocracy where swearing by God's name carried solemn fear and divine obligation.

Greek Terms and Pronunciation Guide

Horkos

- **Phonetic Pronunciation:** [hor'-kos] ^1
- **Brief Definition:** The Greek noun for an "oath." It carries the core idea of binding, holding, or strengthening a statement so that a person's word is confirmed through calling God to attest to its validity.

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[^1]: *Horkos* is the primary Greek term used in the original text of the New Testament for an oath, representing a binding affirmation that invokes God to witness truthfulness.