

Matthew 5:33-37

³³ “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.’ ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

Introduction: Oaths versus Vows:

Oath- to others calling on God as witness and Judge.

Vow- directly to God

Oaths versus Swearing

ESV: ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an **oath** at all,

KJV: ³⁴ But I say unto you, **Swear** not at all;

Same word: 33.463 ὀμνῶ or ὀμνυμι; ὅρκος, ου *m*; ὀρκωμοσία, ας *f*. to affirm the truth of a statement by calling on a divine being to execute sanctions against a person if the statement in question is not true (in the case of a deity taking an oath, his divine being is regarded as validating the statement)—‘to swear, to make an oath, oath.’¹

I. Three Paradigms to Consider Matthew:

1. Proclamation of Kingship

Mat. 26:63 And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” ⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Mat. 12:30 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

2. Rejection of Kingship

Mat. 21:42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “ ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?

3. Returning King

Mat. 28:18 “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Mat. 6:10 Your **kingdom come**, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

¹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 440). New York: United Bible Societies.

Q: How does the Sermon on the Mount fit into these paradigms?

“Here, the King is saying, “These are the conditions for belonging to My Kingdom. These are the qualities of life that My Kingdom demands. This is the nature of My reign and rule in the world.” What is so marvelous about it is that it is the very antithesis of everything that Judaism was in the time in which Jesus gave it. He literally crashes head-on into the Jewish system. ... It is a stripping bare of the phoniness of the Pharisees and the hypocrisies of those who followed their lies. **It is the unmasking of the religion of human achievement and the establishment, in its place, of the religion of divine accomplishment.** -John MacArthur²

II. III Lowering the Ethical Bar of Sanctification

Examples of Islam³; un-orthodox Christianity

III. Three Paradigms to Consider Sermon on Mount

1. Mosaic law:

- a. Provision for Oaths/ Vows- because all men are liars Romans 3:13 “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.”
- b. Used on solemn occasions when useful or necessary
 - i. Paul- 2 Cor. 1:23 But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth.
 - ii. Angels- Revelation 10:5, “And the angel ... swore by him who lives forever and ever.”
 - iii. Jesus- Mat. 26:63 And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” ⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”
- c. Used only in the Name of God
Deuteronomy 6:13 “You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name.”

Isaiah 65:16 “He that swears shall swear by the God of truth.”

Deuteronomy 10:20 says, “You shall fear the LORD your God, Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you cleave, and swear by His name.”

² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2014). *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You.

³ See Glaser, I. (1986). The Concept of Relationship as a Key to the Comparative Understanding of Christianity and Islam. *Themelios*, 11(2), 60.

Jeremiah 12:16, And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, 'As the LORD lives,' even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people.

2. Misuse at time of Pharisees

Should be a “religious experience”:

Hence an oath is an act of supreme religious worship, since it recognizes the omnipresence, omniscience, absolute justice and sovereignty of the person whose august witness is invoked, and whose judgment is appealed to as final. - A. A. Hodge⁴

Because we're calling as our Chief Witness the One who will be everywhere, And in every sphere to which that oath extends....We're appealing to One Who searches the heart, and therefore knows every nuance and implication of our oath. One Whom, at the risk of our own peril, we're calling on to exercise absolute justice and sovereignty over every syllable we say... so help us God.” – David Dickson⁵

a. Evasive

The first was what William Barclay calls *frivolous* swearing, that is, taking an oath when it was neither necessary nor proper. People who did this swore by their life (or whatever it might be) for almost nothing. The result was that even the most solemn statements appeared to be on this level also. It was exactly as if a servant who lived in the household of an honorable state official should go around talking about the honorable house, the honorable chair, the honorable mop, the honorable dishpan, and so forth. His speech would then have much less meaning when he called the lord of the house “your honor.” In opposition to this, Jesus often insisted (as many of the rabbis did also) that the use of an oath to substantiate a simple statement was wrong. –James Boice⁶

b. Frivolous

People who were afraid to swear by the name of the Lord because they were not telling the full truth began to swear by things, and because mere things were not thought to be as significant as the name of God this second class of oaths was not considered to be binding. Some persons swore by their own life (1 Sam. 1:26), or their health (Ps. 15:4). Others swore by the king (1 Sam.

⁴ Hodge, A. A. (1869). *A commentary on the confession of faith: With questions for theological students and Bible Classes* (p. 389). Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work.

⁵ See Truth's Victory Over Error, David Dickson, 1583-1683, (first Commentary on the Confession) p162

⁶ Boice, J. M. (2002). *The Sermon on the Mount: an expositional commentary* (p. 131). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

17:55). Still others swore, as Jesus indicates, by their head, the earth, heaven, the temple, or Jerusalem (Matt. 5:34–36 cf. 23:16, 22). All such oaths were evasive. James Boice⁷

Isn't it amazing what a system they had invented? They were playing footsie with all these objects, and they wanted to con someone by saying, "I swear by the altar in the holy temple." The guy would say, "That's straight up for me, you're a Jewish leader." But that was King's X, it didn't count. Here they were, trying to purport to everyone in the world that they were righteous. Jesus says, "You're liars to the core, and your system only betrays the reality of your rotten hearts." - MacArthur⁸

3. The Original Intent Renewed; the Law and the Prophets Fulfilled

Matthew 7:12 "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Deut. 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Proverbs 6:25 Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes;

Gen. 2: 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Deut. 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

What does it say to Christians? If you're a Christian and a child of the King, you should live like one. He is the Father of truth, so when we open our mouths, the truth ought to come out. On those solemn occasions when we vow a vow to God, we ought to keep that vow. On those other occasions, in the daily matters of life, our 'yes' should be 'yes,' and our 'no' should be 'no.' Anything more than that reveals an evil, untrustworthy heart. - MacArthur⁹

IV. Application

⁷ Boice, J. M. (2002). *The Sermon on the Mount: an expositional commentary* (pp. 131–132). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

⁸ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2014). *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You.

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Motivations for Negative Speech

The tongue is like a bridle. The tongue is like a rudder. The tongue can turn us for good or for ill. The tongue can be used out of faith or out of faithlessness.

How do we restrain our words, blessing others and refusing to curse them? We ought to note that the greatest way in which we fall into this is by tearing others down to build ourselves up. So often, of course, when you gossip, when you insult, when you speak ill of another, what you're really doing is seeking to build yourself up—making yourself sound better, currying favor from others by providing insider knowledge that frankly they ought not know and you ought not say. We show that we're on the inside. We exalt [ourselves]. We speak ill of and bear false witness of others so that we might bear good witness of ourselves. We want our names to matter. We want our reputations to grow. We want our friendships to deepen. We want to be exalted, and so we don't mind humiliating someone else.

Strong Identities Lead to Blessed Speech

The gospel tells us that we have a name. The gospel tells us that we have a standing. The gospel tells us that in Jesus Christ, united and yoked to Him, we possess His name. We are the beloved son. We are the beloved daughter. With us, God is well pleased. We need not go in whatever way we deem fit, whatever way we deem expedient, whatever way we deem effective to build up our name, to curry favor, to exalt ourselves even when it costs the humiliation of another. As we seek to bear good witness, blessed witness, truthful witness of others, we seek to use our words accurately and appropriately—not as daggers but as blessings, not as curses but as gifts. We don't use our words to find our way in the world on our own strength. Rather, we use our words to witness to the fact that we live in the strength of another.

Conclusion

We follow the ninth commandment by entrusting ourselves to the God of the first commandment—the only one whose words call life into being, call the dead unto resurrection, call the ungodly justified. Knowing God's power, knowing the significance of God's words, and knowing that God has, in His Son, named us "Beloved," we need not attempt to use our words to make things happen, to build ourselves up, to tear others down that we might prosper. We honor the ninth commandment by following, in faith, the God of the first commandment. —Dr. R. Michael Allen¹⁰

Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 22. - Of Lawful Oaths and Vows.

¹⁰ Allen, R. M. (2016). *ET101 Law and Gospel: The Basis of Christian Ethics*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

1. A lawful oath is part of religious worship, wherein, upon just occasion, the person swearing solemnly calleth God to witness what he asserteth, or promiseth, and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he sweareth.
2. The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear, and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence. Therefore, to swear vainly, or rashly, by that glorious and dreadful Name; or, to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful, and to be abhorred. Yet, as in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the Word of God, under the new testament as well as under the old; so a lawful oath, being imposed by lawful authority, in such matters, ought to be taken.
3. Whosoever taketh an oath ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth: neither may any man bind himself by oath to any thing but what is good and just, and what he believeth so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform.
4. An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation, or mental reservation. It cannot oblige to sin; but in any thing not sinful, being taken, it binds to performance, although to a man's own hurt. Nor is it to be violated, although made to heretics, or infidels.
5. A vow is of the like nature with a promissory oath, and ought to be made with the like religious care, and to be performed with the like faithfulness.
6. It is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone: and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made voluntarily, out of faith, and conscience of duty, in way of thankfulness for mercy received, or for the obtaining of what we want, whereby we more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties: or, to other things, so far and so long as they may fitly conduce thereunto.
7. No man may vow to do any thing forbidden in the Word of God, or what would hinder any duty therein commanded, or which is not in his own power, and for the performance whereof he hath no promise of ability from God. In which respects, popish monastical vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, and regular obedience, are so far from being degrees of higher perfection, that they are superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself.