

LET YOUR YES BE YES AND YOUR NO BE NO

Job 31; Matthew 5:33-37

INTRODUCTION: Jesus' teaching about kingdom righteousness and oaths is radically different from the world we live in.

I. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OATHS AND VOWS (Matthew 5:33)

- A. The NASB95 translation of verse 33 is not especially helpful because it confuses vows with oaths.
1. Verses 33-37 all deal with oaths and not vows.
 2. Matthew 5:33 is better rendered by the NIV; KJV, NKJV, or the ESV: "Do not break your oath (swear falsely), but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord."

Did you know?

The number of lawyers in the United States exceeded 1 million for the first time in 2003. And the number of people taking the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) in 2003 is near the record 152,242 set during the last recession, in 1991.

Vow - a vow is a solemn promise made by a person to his deity. ...[I]ts direction is vertical, not horizontal. Whereas oaths are between persons (horizontal), the vow is directed toward God (vertical). It always takes place within the context of prayer since it is always addressed to God (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*). "The biblical "vow" is always to deity, never a promise between man and man" (Harris, R. Laird. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*)

Oath - An oath is an abbreviated covenant (Gen 26:28), a promise between two or more persons in which the name of a deity is invoked as witness and guarantor. The oath is normally represented by the act of "swearing" (making a solemn promise) or by placing oneself under a curse (Job 31). In his denial of Jesus, Peter did both (Mk 14:71). (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*).

B. Examples of oaths:

1. Marriage "vows" are really "oaths."
2. "Do you promise to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"
3. "As the LORD my God lives" (Judges 8:19).
4. "God is my witness" (Rom.1:9; 2 Cor.1:23; Phil.1:8).
5. "I assure you before God" (Gal.1:20).
6. "I adjure you by the Lord (1 Thess.5:27).
7. Oaths are not unique to Judaism or Christianity. In Greece there was the Hippocratic Oath taken by physicians.

"Honesty is such a lonely word,
everyone is so untrue."
— Billy Joel

"The Oath of Hippocrates," holds the American Medical Association's *Code of Medical Ethics* (1996 edition), "has remained in Western civilization as an expression of ideal conduct for the physician." Today, most graduating medical-school students swear to some form of the oath, usually a modernized version. Indeed, oath-taking in recent decades has risen to near uniformity, with just 24 percent of U.S. medical schools administering the oath in 1928 to nearly 100 percent today.... According to a 1993 survey of 150 U.S. and Canadian medical schools, for example, only 14 percent of modern oaths prohibit euthanasia, 11 percent hold covenant with a deity, 8 percent forswear abortion, and a mere 3 percent forbid sexual contact with patients -- all maxims held sacred in the classical version.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/doctors/oath_today.html

C. Oaths are to be taken in the Name of Yahweh (Deut.6:13; 10:20).

1. To swear in God's Name, whether it be in marriage, in court, or any other situation we are saying that we believe that God hears and judges what we are say.
2. To swear in God's Name reminds us that God is the Judge and that if we break our Word, He will hold us accountable.
3. By taking oaths in God's Name, we are saying that God is truth (cf. Psalm 12).
4. When you swear an oath, you are enlisting God on your side. You are saying, "God is with me in this."

Moreover, we confess several of God's attributes as revealed to us in Scripture: we testify that He is omnipresent and omniscient, that He is eternal and immutable, that He is just and true, that He is powerful and wrathful. By confessing His existence and attributes, we also confess that He is the Supreme Judge over all the earth and that we are accountable to Him for all that we do and say. Though the word of men may fail, the word of God never fails. Though men may fail, God never fails. By taking oaths in God's name, we confess God to be the ultimate arbiter of truth....(David G. Hagopian, *So Help Me God: A Biblical View of Oaths*).

II. THE MAIN POINT JESUS MAKES IS THAT THE WORDS WE SPEAK ARE TO HAVE THE TRUTHFULNESS OF AN OATH (Matthew 5:34,37).

- A. Jesus is arguing for truthfulness of speech. Our speech is not to contain equivocation, prevarication, evasion, fibbing, white lies, ambivalence, double-talk, or doublespeak.
- B. *What does it reveal about a person's heart when they evade the truth and try covering it up with words?*
- C. Letting your yes be yes and your no be no means that every word you speak should be as if you were standing before the Judge of all the Earth at the Final Judgment (**Matthew 12:36-37**).
- D. *Please pray for your pastor (James 3:1-2)!!!*

“William Penn wrote a whole treatise on the subject (*A Treatise on Oaths*). It contains a treasure of pagan, Jewish, and Christian testimony against oaths, testimonies that consistently recognize that oaths are only necessary because people so often lie. Penn himself states that his position contradicts the law of Moses. Tolstoy... went so far as to affirm that Jesus' words require the abolition of courts” (Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount* p.86).

III. DOES JESUS FORBID OATH TAKING? DOES JESUS CONTRADICT MOSES AND THE REST OF THE OLD TESTAMENT? (Matthew 5:34,37; cf. Exodus 20:7; Lev 19:12; Num 30:2; Deut 5:11; 23:21–23; **James 5:12**).

- A. There are several instances in the Old Testament when God swore an oath (cf. Hebrews 3:11; 4:3).
 - 1. God swore an oath by Himself after Abraham offered up his son Isaac (Gen.22:16-17; cf. Ex.6:8; 45:23; Deut.4:31; 7:8; Luke 1:73).
 - 2. God swore an oath to David (2 Sam.7:12,13; Psalm 89:3-4; 132:11; Acts 2:30).
 - 3. God swore an oath to Jesus (110:4).
- B. Jesus swore under oath (**Matthew 26:63-65**).
- C. The Apostle Paul took oaths (Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 1:20; Philippians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; cf. Rev.10:6).
- D. What Jesus forbids is an evil motive for swearing. Jesus is teaching that our speech should be such that it advances the glory of the kingdom of God (cf. Matthew 6:33; see even Joshua 2:4-6 with James 2:25 & with Hebrews 11:31; 8:2; Jeremiah 38:24-27).
- E. The scribes and Pharisees had found many ways of evading truthful speech (**Matthew 23:16-22**).
 - 1. Oaths were meant to establish truth in a world of lies. The religious leader of Jesus' day had used oaths as a means of undermining truth.
 - 2. In the Old Testament, most of God's oaths were taken in the context of advancing the Kingdom of heaven. In Jesus' day, the oaths of the scribes and Pharisees were advancing the kingdom of the father of lies (John 8:44).

QUESTIONS FOR SABBATH DISCUSSION & MEDITATION:

Take what you have learned this morning and make it into a prayer. Please remember to pray for your pastor and that his speech and life would reflect more of God's truth.

What is the difference between an “oath” and a “vow”?

*Why do we have to take an oath in **God's** Name or swear by His Name? Why can't we just say, “I swear...”*

What is the main point of Jesus' teaching concerning oaths and our speech?

Does Jesus forbid oath taking? Why or why not?

