

## ***DON'T SWEAR AT ALL***

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ showed that “kingdom living” lives out this deeper dimension of the law which is what He came to bring about or as He said which He came “to fulfill.”

In Matthew 5 there are six areas that the scribes and Pharisees had a legalistic external code of righteousness for and yet missed the deeper intent of the law. In each case Christ brings correction about which presents an even higher standard of “kingdom ethics”.

### ***Six Sections – Six Topics***

- 1) Murder/Anger – Mt. 5:21-26
- 2) Adultery – Mt. 5:27-30
- 3) Divorce – Mt. 5:31-32
- **4) Oaths – Mt. 5:33-37**
- 5) Vengeance – Mt. 5:38-42
- 6) Love for Enemies – Mt. 5:43-48

Speaking generally, we have noted that at the heart of murder is anger; at the heart of adultery is lusting, and at the heart of divorce is unfaithfulness. In each case, the religious Jews considered only the outward externals, but Jesus goes deeper, showing there is a HEART problem in each case.

The next subject Christ deals with is the issue of oaths or vows. It is fitting that the emphasis on marriage and divorce is immediately followed by this emphasis on vows. In human relations, other than our relationship with God Himself, there is nothing more sacred than marriage vows.

### **Matthew 5:33 (NKJV)**

**33 “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.’**

Once again, this is basically a summary of what the Mosaic Law said (cf. Ex. 20:7; Lev. 19:2; Num. 30:2; Deut. 5:11; 6:3; 22:21-23).

### **Leviticus 19:12 (NKJV)**

**12** And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

To swear falsely here is the idea of making a false vow or vowing something that you then don’t carry through on. Today the offense of willfully telling an untruth in a court after having taken an oath or affirmation is called “perjury”.

In context, here is the deal. The Jews were afraid to use the name of God in the making of oaths because they understood it was totally binding. Therefore, they came up with forms of “oath” making that were not so binding (at least in their minds). These kinds of oaths supposedly had “loopholes”. In the greater context of Scripture, I don’t think Jesus goes on to forbid all “oaths,” but He does get to the heart of the matter in dealing with oath abuse. This is the real issue Jesus is dealing with here.

**Matthew 5:34 (NKJV)**

**34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne;**

The first thing we should note is that when Jesus says, “do not swear at all” it is qualified by the common practice of the Jews at this time. That is swearing by heaven, swearing by the earth, swearing by Jerusalem, or swearing by your head.

Note that God is left out! Biblical oaths were made in the name of God.

**Deuteronomy 6:13 (NKJV)**

**13 You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name.**

And that was the point. The Jews were trying to get around swearing in God’s name, realizing that to swear falsely in God’s name called for divine punishment. So, they thought they had figured out a way around it by swearing by these other things.

As we consider the whole counsel of God, it does not appear that Christ was prohibiting all swearing, and by swearing, we are referring in context to the making of a binding oath before God. But note the following:

- God Himself swears oaths (Heb. 6:13).
- Jesus spoke under oath (Mt. 26:63-64).
- Paul made oaths (Rom. 1:9, etc.).

This would indicate there are some qualifiers in place here and that Jesus is addressing the ABUSE of oaths as commonly practiced by the Jews.

The sense is that there is a place for oaths but they are always to be made in God’s name and there are no loopholes. The sense is that in common everyday speech we should not need to use oaths because we should not

need to do so. We should not need to strengthen what we are saying with an oath each step of the way. And when one does swear, it is binding!

Oaths should be reserved for special situations such as in a court of law where people don't know you; or in the case of a wedding commitment which is a special and unique occasion. But there is no place for playing "word games" with oaths. That is the point! There is no place for the making of the kind of oaths ordained by the scribes and Pharisees.

Paul shows us the right balance in 2 Corinthians. He was a man of his word, but he also, on occasion, used the language of making a solemn oath.

### **2 Corinthians 1:17–18 (NKJV)**

**17** Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No?

**18** But as God is faithful, **our word to you was not Yes and No.**

### **2 Corinthians 1:23 (NKJV)**

**23** Moreover **I call God as witness against my soul,** that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.

Did Paul violate the teaching of Jesus by invoking an oath to confirm the solemnity and truthfulness of his statement? (cf. Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8)

*"I don't believe Jesus' point in [Matthew 5](#) is that oaths are evil or that an oath can never be legitimate. I believe His point is that the swearing of oaths as practiced by the scribes and Pharisees was evil, in its entirety – because they deliberately swore their oaths by everything EXCEPT God in a foolish effort to sidestep their accountability TO God! ... The heart of the matter in our passage has nothing to do with the formality of an oath or vow. *The heart of the matter is the heart.*" – **Bob Deffinbaugh***

This was the problem! It was not oaths in and of themselves; it was the very nature of the oaths they were practicing. Their whole system had to go! It was unethical in its entirety. Their entire practice was essentially wrong. They tried to remove oaths from the reality of God and accountability to Him and that is impossible. To even try to do this speaks of evil intentions.

What does it even mean to swear by heaven? Remove God from the equation, and what is heaven going to do? Without God heaven is no longer heaven as we know it to be. The point is this type of oath was

meaningless if God is removed from the equation. And yet more to the point is that in swearing by heaven God is not really removed at all because it is the place of God's throne. The heaven being sworn by is occupied by God.

In truth there is no loophole in swearing. You can't bypass God! This is the main issue in context. They were trying to strengthen their statements with an oath and yet stop short of invoking God. Jesus is showing that no matter what, God cannot be bypassed. People are accountable to God for any vow. There is no way around it.

Don't play games with God. Don't act all spiritual and make some kind of a vow with no intention of carrying through or claiming some kind of immunity because of special wording. That's playing games with God! Just remember, people often try to play word games, but God looks on the HEART and He sees right through it.