

BE A TRUTH-TELLER

Oaths (vows) are binding commitments made before God and for which we are accountable before God. When Jesus said “do not swear at all” (Mt. 5:34), He was addressing the ABUSE of oaths. The Jews had a system where they would swear by something lesser than God’s name, which (in their minds) made them not so accountable for the vow. Thus, they thought they had a “loophole” concerning the rigid making of an oath. Jesus corrects this, emphasizing there is no place for “lesser loophole” oaths.

In Matthew 5:34, Jesus said not to swear at all, “neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne,” and continues on from there...

Matthew 5:35 (NKJV)

35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

Don’t swear by the earth for it is God’s footstool. Again, God is still in the equation. God is sovereign over the earth – not us.

In a sense, when one tries to take an oath and leave God out of the equation, in a real sense, they are trying to play God. They are now making up the rules. But God doesn’t appreciate these hypocritical games.

God ALONE is sovereign over heaven and earth, and to swear by them thus involves God. There is no way around it.

To swear by Jerusalem is to swear by the city of the great King, as seen in Psalm 48:2. Yet again, God is tied in. In this matter of swearing (making an oath), it is really hard to escape the God-factor; yea, impossible.

Matthew 5:36 (NKJV)

36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

Swearing by one’s own head is profoundly ridiculous -sinfully ridiculous because “you cannot make one hair white or black.” Certainly, not without the help of beauty aids – meaning you don’t really do this. Your natural color still remains.

The issue here involves authority and control.

“Jesus insists that whatever a man swears by is related to God in some way, and therefore every oath is implicitly in God’s name – heaven, earth,

Jerusalem, even the hairs of the head are all under God's sway and ownership." – **D.A. Carson**

We are not in control. To make vows that try to evade God is to act like we are in control. We are not. The hairs of our head are ultimately under His sovereign control – not ours.

The implication here is that the Jews, in their braggadocio oaths that left God out, were claiming some kind of authority over the realm they were swearing by, such as heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or their own head. That was heady indeed, but also exceedingly sinful. They had no such authority, and swearing by any of these things actually did involve God since He is the maker and sustainer of them.

Matthew 5:37 (NKJV)

37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Again, in context, Jesus is addressing sinful oaths of the kind being described. God's kingdom people are not to do this.

Our lifestyle is to be that of being people of our word who don't need to play hypocritical "oath games" to try and come off like we "really mean it this time." Jesus is saying we are to be people of our word! We are to be truthful and honest. We are to be people whose bond is our word.

In our ordinary conversation, day in and day out, we should never need to swear at all. We should be so honest that people know when we say "no" it means "no" and when we say "yes" it means "yes". It doesn't need to be strengthened with a vow.

Now of course, as already pointed out there are occasions when a vow is appropriate but in such a case, we better make sure we are honest and not hypocritical (cf. Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:5, 10; Phil. 1:8). We had better realize this is binding before God and we are certainly accountable for it.

The disciples of Christ are to be identified by our truth speaking as a way of life – not just when we take an oath. Our God is a God of truth and as His children that is to be reflected in how we carry on in our day by day living.

To need to back everything up with some kind of an oath would indicate that normally you are a habitual liar. That is not to be the case.

Jesus is saying that in the normal course of life you should not have to vow at all. As a way of life, your YES or your NO should be good enough.

God calls His people to be TRUTH TELLERS. We are not to be like the Jews of old who deceptively played word games with oaths -pretending to be people of integrity when in fact they were liars at heart. We are not to be like the postmoderns of our day who claim to have their own truth according to their own dictionary.

For true believers, our God is the God of TRUTH. We are all about the revealed truth of God. A half-truth is a whole lie. God's standard is Himself and His Word. His standard is absolute truthfulness. God never shades the truth a bit.

In a court of law, it has been common to ask a witness: “***Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?***” It is appropriate to swear in that case. It is appropriate to make vows on special occasions such as a wedding, and so forth.

But in our normal day-to-day living and casual conversation, we should not need to take an oath or make a vow to affirm we are telling the truth because we should be people of our word as a way of life. This is Christ's point! Truth and truth-telling is to define kingdom citizens!

Let your “‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”

Be a truth-teller as a way of life. It's a matter of the HEART!