**Do Not Swear**

*Matthew 5:33-37*

**Introduction**

1. While establishing kingdom law and emphasizing the need for righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (**Matthew 5:20**), Jesus addressed and corrected a common practice of the theirs concerning swearing oaths **(vv. 33-37**).
   1. James also seems to have addressed the same problem – **James 5:12**
2. The teaching of Jesus, and James, has been misunderstood by some – especially in reference to swearing oaths in the court of law.
3. What was Jesus teaching? What was Jesus prohibiting? What was the nature of the problem? What is the application for Christians today?
4. The Prohibition
5. The Teaching of the Law
   1. ***“You have heard that it was said”***
      1. In reference to the law – said in the law.
      2. But ultimately addressing the misrepresentation of the law by SCRIBES and PHARISEES. (**cf. Matthew 15:1-6** – tradition of elders)
      3. **(v. 33)** – not a direct quote, but perhaps a general summation.
   2. **Exodus 20:7** – do not take Lord’s name in vain.
      1. Vain – *shâv'* – emptiness, vanity, falsehood (Brown-Driver-Briggs)
      2. “a falsehood, a lie” (Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon) (specifically linked to this text)
      3. One way to do so is taking an oath falsely in His name – i.e. lying.
   3. **Leviticus 19:12** – prohibition of swearing falsely, and thus profaning God’s name.
      1. Hebrew – the negative appears only in the first clause.
         1. Translators assume the negative in the second clause.
         2. Some translations do not – ***“And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, and profane the name of thy God: I am Jehovah.” (ASV***)
         3. One profanes the name of the Lord, not by swearing by His name, but swearing FALSELY.
      2. Such comes after the prohibition of lying – **(v. 11)** – nor deal falsely, nor lie.
   4. Emphasis on performing oaths – **Numbers 30:2** – he shall not break his word.
      1. **Deuteronomy 23:21-23** – if you make a vow and break it you sin. But if you never make the vow to do something, you don’t sin.
   5. **Matthew 5:33** – the general summation is in emphasis on the truth in oath taking and performing said oaths.
      1. I.e. not swearing falsely.
      2. NOT IN PROHIBITION AGAINST SWEARING OR SWEARING BY THE LORD’S NAME.
6. The Vice of the Scribes and Pharisees
   1. Jesus’ prohibition – **Matthew 5:33-36** – mentions swearing by other matters and shows their connection with God. (Head – have no control over it, i.e. as God does.)
      1. This in reference to a vice of the scribes and the Pharisees.
         1. **(v. 33)** – Their emphasis was not on “FALSELY,” but on “TO THE LORD.”
         2. I.e. if you swear by something other than the Lord it is not BINDING TO PERFORM.
      2. **Matthew 5:20** – righteousness must exceed theirs.
   2. Their common practice condemned – **Matthew 23:16-22** – making random distinctions which God had not made, and which were not logical anyway.
      1. “it is nothing” VS “he is obliged to perform it”
      2. Such distinctions minimized oath taking as long as it was not “to the Lord.”
      3. “In order to make an impression a person might utter such an oath, ‘talking big’ and dispensing enormous promises. If the affirmation which he had made was a lie or if the promise was never even meant to be kept, that was not so bad, as long as he had not sworn ‘to the Lord.’” (Hendriksen)
7. Teaching Against Swearing Oaths
   1. **Matthew 5:34** – Jesus said “do not swear at all”
      1. Was Jesus saying that swearing oaths in general is wrong?
      2. **(vv. 34-36)** – qualify the statement with the vice of the scribes and Pharisees.
   2. Jesus was not suggesting swearing oaths was sinful:
      1. The law forbade the swearing of oaths in the name of another god **– Deuteronomy 6:13-15; Joshua 23:6-7; Jeremiah 5:7**
         1. However, this did not forbid the swearing of oaths.
      2. **Zechariah 8:16-17** – Positive: speak truth; Negative: don’t love false oaths.
      3. Oaths had to be sworn in the name of the Lord, and had to be performed – **Numbers 30:2**
   3. Jesus was teaching against the perverted tradition of the scribes and Pharisees:
      1. Any oath was ***“to the Lord”*** – **Matthew 5:34-36** – the distinctions they were making were meaningless.
         1. **Matthew 23:16-22** – implication: any oath, regardless of the distinction one seeks to make, is solemn, and “HE IS OBLIGED TO PERFORM IT.”
      2. Their words were to be true, not masked by an oath they never intended to keep – **Matthew 5:37**
         1. Greek – “one” not included.
         2. ***“anything more than this comes from evil” (ESV); “anything beyond these is of evil.” (NASB)***
         3. “Proceeds from some evil disposition or purpose.” (Albert Barnes)
   4. James’ parallel passage confirms that the act condemned was not any inherent evil in oath taking, but the hypocrisy behind such oath taking noted – **James 5:12**
      1. “***judgment”*** – (7x in NT) – “hypocrisy” (6x, NKJV) and “judgment” (1x, NKJV – James 5:12)
      2. *Hypokrisis* – acting under a feigned part, i.e. (figuratively) deceit (“hypocrisy”) (STRONG)
         1. “a public impression that is at odds with one’s real purposes or motivations, play-acting, pretense, outward show, dissembling” (BDAG)
      3. I.E. TO SWEAR OATHS AFTER THE MANNER OF THAT CURRENT VICE (SCRIBES AND PHARISEES) WAS TO PLAY THE HYPOCRITE, WHICH WAS NOT FITTING FOR THE CHRISTIAN.
   5. Jesus is condemning the hypocritical character and actions of the scribes and Pharisees, and demanding His disciples speak truthfully (**cf. Matthew 5:20** – righteousness which exceeds).
8. The Question of Oaths in the Court of Law
   1. Some would suggest according to Jesus’ words that all oaths, including those in the court of law, are forbidden. Is this the case?
   2. Note that God swore:
      1. In covenant with David – **Psalm 89:3-4, 35-37** – regarding his posterity on his throne.
      2. In covenant with Abraham – **Genesis 22:16-18** – regarding his descendants through Isaac, and the blessing to all the earth through his Seed.
         1. Recorded for our own confidence – **Hebrews 6:13-18**
      3. Regarding the priesthood of Christ – **Psalm 110:4**
   3. Note that Jesus consented when being put under oath:
      1. Caiaphas put Jesus under oath in His trial – **Matthew 26:62-64**
      2. Some suggest that this meant nothing of Jesus’ thoughts on oaths, for He did not necessarily take an oath.
      3. However, He did not seek to rebuke Caiaphas’ actions.
         1. Such was in keeping with the Law.
         2. **Leviticus 5:1** – if one is put under oath and knows the answer to the questioning (witnesses a sin) but does not answer he is guilty.
      4. In answering directly after being put under oath Jesus consented to the oath.
   4. Note that Paul swore:
      1. Concerning the truthfulness of his traveling plans and actions – **2 Corinthians 1:23**
      2. Placing the Thessalonians under oath – **1 Thessalonians 5:27**
         1. Charge – *horkizō*; from 3727; to put on oath, i.e. make swear. (STRONG)
         2. Would an apostle have put Christians in a position to sin without bearing guilt himself?
   5. Jesus’ prohibition, ***“do not swear AT ALL” (Matthew 5:34***) is limited in context to His following specifications.
      1. EX: **1 Corinthians 10:23** – are all things actually lawful, or was Paul simply speaking of things which are in the realm of liberty, i.e. lawful things?
      2. Jesus’ prohibition included the flippant and hypocritical oath taking of those who belittled the oath, and their responsibility to truth, and never intended to keep their word.
   6. Men and oaths – **Hebrews 6:16** – end of all dispute.
      1. “In this world of dishonesty and deception the oath is at times necessary to add solemnity and the guarantee of reliability to an important affirmation or promise.” (Hendriksen)
      2. Such is the case in judicial matters, and Jesus’ teaching in no way condemns the swearing of oaths in such circumstances.
      3. NOTE: The ability given to “confidently affirm” in the court of law is not really vastly different, if different at all, from swearing an oath. (Semantics don’t make the difference.)
9. The Truth and the Christian’s Word
10. Jesus is teaching that the Christian should possess such a proven character that his word becomes trustworthy enough – **Matthew 5:37**
    1. This does not come by taking an absurd amount of oaths. (And that from evil motives to deceive)C
    2. This comes from always speaking the truth, and letting your actions follow.
    3. LETTING YOUR ‘YES’ BE ‘YES,’ AND YOUR ‘NO,’ ‘NO’ IS NOT SIMPLY SAYING SUCH, BUT LIVING SUCH.
11. Christians follow Jesus who IS the truth – **John 14:6**
12. Christians are to be those who love the truth – **2 Thessalonians 2:9-12**
13. Christians are to be those who gird their waist with truth **– Ephesians 6:14** (Gospel truth, but also simply truthfulness.)
14. Christians are to always speak the truth – **Ephesians 4:15** (in love); **Ephesians 4:25** (putting away lying)
15. The Lord has favor on those who speak truth – **Proverbs 12:22**

**Conclusion**

1. Christians are to be trustworthy. They must always speak the truth, and must not seek to deceive with the taking of oaths.
2. We must understand the solemnity, not simply of all oaths, but of our speech. When we affirm (yes) or deny (no) something, it is imperative that we speak the truth.