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# BIBLE TALK

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This week the question is: **Did Jesus forbid swearing in a court of law?**

## **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 your oaths to the Lord.'

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

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

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

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

In Matthew 5 Jesus is comparing the teachings of the Law of Moses with His own New Testament teachings. The Law of Moses, Jesus said, taught that it was wrong to foreswear -- that is, it was wrong to swear falsely. When a man swore with an oath, he must perform unto the Lord his oath!

But Jesus gives His New Testament law. He says, "But I say unto you, Swear not at all." Our question this week is, Did Jesus forbid men from swearing even in a court of law?

## **NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF MEN SWEARING**

To begin our study of this verse we notice this critical point: some people in the New Testament swore with God's approval, even though Jesus said, "Swear not at all."

## **1) Jesus answered a question under oath**

### **Matthew 26:63-64**

63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. ...

Jesus did not denounce the high priest and say, "You shouldn't talk like that." He did not condemn him for using God's name in that manner, but seemed to regard it as perfectly legitimate. Then, and only then, did Jesus answer the question.

(To refuse this oath would have been looked upon as an admission that Jesus was not God's Son.)

(It seems rather strange that Jesus would answer under oath when He instructed His disciples to "swear not at all." Jesus usually practiced what He preached to others.)

## **2) Paul swore in God's name**

### **Romans 1:9**

9 ... **God is my witness**, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, ...

### **2 Corinthians 1:23**

23 Moreover I **call God as witness against my soul**, ...

If we used these same words in a court of law today, every civil authority present would accept it. They would agree we were taking an oath and swearing to the truth.

### **3) An angel from God swore**

#### **Revelation 10:5-6**

5 The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven

6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, ...

### **4) God Himself swore**

#### **Hebrews 6:13**

13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, **He swore by Himself**,

### **A LIMITED COMMAND**

**NOTE:** The fact that God, Jesus, an angel and Paul all took oaths, swore and made vows shows that the prohibition against swearing in Matthew 5:34 is limited!

Jesus was not forbidding all swearing in all places for all time! He was only forbidding a certain kind of swearing -- a certain kind of oath. When Jesus said, "Swear not at all," He went on to explain exactly what He meant. He was saying:

#### **Matthew 5:34-37**

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

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

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

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

Jesus forbids swearing:

- by heaven
- by earth
- by Jerusalem
- by your head

But, no where did He forbid swearing in God's name!

### **WHY THIS PROHIBITION?**

Why did Jesus give this new prohibition on swearing? Because men were not only lying, but they were swearing to lies!

Lying had become a plague among these Jews. They had developed a system of swearing. The more valuable the object is by which you swear, the more binding the oath becomes.

**ILL:** If one swears by the earth, that oath is not as binding as if he swore by heaven.

Only when they swore in God's name did they feel duty bound to tell the truth.

#### **Matthew 23:16-19**

16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.'

17 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?

18 And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.'

19 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

Their reasoning was this:

If a man swears by the temple, he does not have to keep his oath. BUT, if he swears by the GOLD of the temple, then he must keep his oath!

If a man swears by the altar, he does not have to keep his oath. BUT, if he swears by the gift of the altar, then he must keep his oath!

This reasoning lead to the following conclusions:

- a) Only the oath offered upon the gold of the temple was binding.
- b) Only the oath offered upon the gift of the altar was binding.

To swear simply upon the temple, or the altar was not binding and one did not have to keep his oath/vow.

(They didn't believe they were obligated to tell the truth except under oath, and then it had to be a special kind of oath -- an oath in God's name!!)

Jesus condemns their entire system. Their oaths were defeating the very thing for which the oath was designed to serve: truth!

### **ALL OATHS FORBIDDEN?**

Are all oaths forbidden today? What about taking a judicial oath in a courtroom? before a notary public?

**ANSWER:** NO!

On solemn occasions before magistrates even Jesus answered under oath (Matthew 26:63-64).

## **Hebrews 6:16**

16 For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute.

An oath puts a serious matter to rest. Paul doesn't say it's wrong to swear; he accepts it as legitimate and right.

The swearing Jesus and James condemned was:

- by heaven
- by earth
- by Jerusalem
- by your head
- or by any other oath of a similar nature

The object of Jesus' legislation was to stop this indiscriminate, glib oath-taking, and to show that to take an oath is a very solemn matter -- something that must be reserved only for those occasions that are solemn and vital.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Well ... thanks for listening to our message this week. To speak with someone from the congregation simply you may call **405-567-0575** or you may leave your name and number at the sound of the tone and one of our brethren will be glad to call you back. We also invite you to visit our web site [www.WillOfTheLord.com](http://www.WillOfTheLord.com). There you may download the notes and the message you just listened to.

Call again next week when we consider a new subject on ***Bible Talk***.