

INTRODUCTION.

- A. The text for the lesson is **Matthew 5:33-37**.
- B. Another text which has relevance to swearing or the taking of oaths is Mt. 23:16-22.
- C. When Jesus said, "Do not swear at all," did He forbid every kind of oath, or only the kinds that He specified?
- D. We need to study all that the Bible teaches on this subject to be sure that our conclusion does not contradict the Scriptures, and the practice of inspired men, including Jesus Himself.
- E. Three parts to the study today:
 - 1. The Old Testament (OT) commanded oaths in God's name.
 - 2. Jesus and the other inspired men took oaths in the New Testament (NT).
 - 3. Jesus describes the swearing that he forbids.

I. DEFINITION OF TERMS.

- A. **SWEAR:**
 - 1. Strong's #3660 (omnuo)--a prolonged form of a primary but obsolete omo, for which another prolonged from (omoo (om-o'-o)) is used in certain tenses; TO SWEAR, i.e. TAKE (or declare on) OATH.
 - 2. W.E. Vine--affirming or denying by an oath.
 - 3. Webster's New World Dictionary--to make a solemn declaration with an appeal to God or to something held sacred for confirmation.
- B. **OATH:**
 - 1. Strong's #3727 (horkos); from herkos meaning A FENCE; (perhaps akin to 3725 which means to be bound or to limit); A LIMIT, i.e. (sacred) RESTRAINT (specifically, AN OATH).
 - 2. W.E. Vine--primarily equivalent to *herkos*, a fence, an enclosure, that which restrains a person.
 - 3. Webster's New World Dictionary--a ritualistic declaration, typically based on an appeal to God or a god or to some revered person or object, that one will speak the truth, keep a promise, remain faithful, etc.
- C. The Hebrews writer gave the principle of swearing oaths (Heb. 6:16).
For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.
 - 1. This means the more authoritative the name sworn by, the more reliable the oath.
 - 2. This is why the Jews quit swearing in God's name, and used lesser "authorities" for their oaths: they did not intend to keep them.
- D. Oaths were for three general purposes:
 - 1. An oath could be an appeal to God to confirm the truth of a statement.
 - a. See Ex. 22:10-11.
"If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep for him, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking, 11 an oath before the LORD shall be made by the two of them, that he has not laid hands on his neighbor's property; and its owner shall accept it, and he shall not make restitution.
 - b. See Neh. 10:29.
are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes;...
 - 2. An oath could be a sword covenant.
 - a. Abimelech made covenants with Abraham (Gen. 21:22-24) and Isaac (Gen. 26:28-29).
(Gen 21:22-24) Now it came about at that time, that Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God is with you in all that you do; 23 now therefore, swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me, or with my offspring, or with my posterity; but

according to the kindness that I have shown to you, you shall show to me, and to the land in which you have sojourned.” **24** And Abraham said, “I swear it.”

(Gen 26:28-29) And they said, “We see plainly that the LORD has been with you; so we said, ‘Let there now be an oath between us, even between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, **29** that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good, and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.’”

- b. David made an oath with Jonathan that he would deal fairly with him and his descendants (1Sam. 20:12-17). Jonathan swore, “...the Lord God of Israel is my witness...”
3. An oath is a curse or imprecation (blasphemy).
 - a. See Num. 5:21.

(then the priest shall have the woman swear with the oath of the curse, and the priest shall say to the woman), “the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people by the LORD’S making your thigh waste away and your abdomen swell;...”
 - b. See Dan. 9:11.

“Indeed all Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him.

II. THE OT COMMANDED OATHS IN GOD’S NAME.

- A. The godly patriarchs frequently swore in the Lord’s name:
 1. Abraham swore to Abimelech that he would deal fairly with his descendants (Gen. 21:22-24).
 2. Abraham made his oldest servant swear that he would not take a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites (Gen. 24:3).

and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live,...
 3. Jacob made Esau swear to give him his birthright for the lentil stew (Gen. 25:31-34).

But Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.” [32] And Esau said, “Behold, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?” [33] And Jacob said, “First swear to me”; so he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. **34** Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.
 4. Jacob made Joseph swear that he would not be buried in Egypt but be taken back to Canaan (Gen. 47:29-31).

When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, “Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt, **30** but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.” And he said, “I will do as you have said.” **31** And he said, “Swear to me.” So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed.
- B. God commanded Israel in the Law of Moses to take oaths in His name:
 1. See Deut. 6:13.

“You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him, and swear by His name.”
 2. See Deut. 10:20.

“You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name.”
 3. See Num. 30:2.

“If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.”
 4. God would require all to take an oath (Isa. 45:22-23).

“Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other. **23** “I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.

III. JESUS AND THE APOSTLE PAUL TOOK OATHS.

- A. Jesus’ prohibition could not apply to legal oaths, because he took an oath in a court of law. We have already seen that God required the people to take oaths in His name to establish truth in court.
 1. When a woman was accused by her husband of uncleanness (Num. 5:21).

2. When there was an unsolved murder, the people of the nearest town had to swear that they did not know about it (Deut. 21:1-5).
3. One may be required to swear that he did not use or take something left with him for safekeeping (Ex. 22:11; Lev. 6:2-6).

(Ex 22:11) an oath before the LORD shall be made by the two of them that he has not laid hands on his neighbor's property; and its owner shall accept it, and he shall not make restitution.

(Lev 6:2-6) "When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted to him, or through robbery, or if he has extorted from his companion, 3 or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do; 4 then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery, or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him, or the lost thing which he found, 5 or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full, and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day he presents his guilt offering. 6 "Then he shall bring to the priest his guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without defect from the flock, according to your valuation, for a guilt offering.

- B. Jesus took a legal oath that He was the Christ, the Son of God, when "adjured" or placed under oath (Mt. 26:63-64).

But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." [64] Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN."

- C. Paul also frequently used oaths to confirm what he wrote and did:

1. Paul told King Agrippa (Ac. 26:29).

And Paul said, "I would to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

2. In the letter to the church in Rome Paul said (Rom. 1:9; 9:11).

(Rom 1:9) For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you,

(Rom 9:11) for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls,

3. In 2Corinthians 1:13; 11:31, Paul again called God as his witness.

(2Cor 1:13) For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end;

(2Cor 11:31) The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

4. He wrote the following in Gal. 1:20.

(Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)

5. In Phil. 1:8 the text reads... "for God is my witness,..."

6. Finally, in 1Th. 2:5 Paul calls God as his witness, invoking an oath.

For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed-- God is witness--

IV. JESUS DESCRIBES THE SWEARING HE FORBIDS.

Jesus rebuked the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees for using almost everything but God's name for their oaths.

- A. They swore by **heaven**, the **earth**, by **Jerusalem**, and even their own **head** but not in the Lord's name (Mt. 5:33-36).

"Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' 34 "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

- B. They counted some oaths as being binding and other as not-binding (Mt. 23:16-22):

1. The **temple** is not binding; the **gold** of the temple is binding.

2. The **altar** is not binding; but the **gift** on the altar is binding.

"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever

swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.’ 17 “You fools and blind men; which is more important, the gold, or the temple that sanctified the gold? 18 “And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.’ 19 “You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering? 20 “Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. 21 “And he who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. 22 “And he who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

- C. Jesus was teaching that the temple sanctifies the gold and temple is just as binding; the altar sanctifies the gift, so that the altar is just as binding as the gift.
- D. He goes on to say that swearing by heaven is to swear by the throne of God, and Him who sits on it.

V. JESUS GIVES A BETTER WAY.

- A. Jesus is making the point that one should tell the truth, and not need to swear (Mt. 5:37).
“But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil.
 - 1. In our everyday affairs, we should not have to swear. The honest man does not feel a need to swear—he tells the truth anyway.
 - 2. It is the liar who knows that people have no confidence in him, and feels the need to swear. But a liar is not reliable even when he does swear!
- B. Paul gave a solution in Eph. 4:25.
Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH, EACH ONE of you, WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.
- C. James says the same thing about oaths as does Jesus in Jas. 5:12.
But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.

CONCLUSION.

- A. Jesus did not contradict the Law He was living under with this teaching (Mt. 5:33-37).
- B. Jesus did not condemn the very thing that He did.
- C. Paul’s practice of confirming with an oath what he wrote by inspiration did not disobey what Jesus commanded about oaths.
- D. Let us tell the truth so that we do not need to swear.
- E. Let us make our oaths in the Lord’s name as he commanded, and keep them faithfully.