

I Swear...The Foundation of Truth

Jeff Rogers / Lamplighter Bible Study

Matthew 5:33-37

Playing fast and loose with truth is a common theme since the fall in Eden:

- To understand men, you must start with their spiritual condition. **John 8:43–44**, *Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. 44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* (Psalm 58:3; 62:4; Jeremiah 9:3-5)

The Natural Man (as opposed to the spiritual, one in whom the Holy Spirit is at work) cannot understand God's word.

- **1 Corinthians 2:14**, *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly [ridiculous thought; wildly mistaken or unfounded opinion and ideas] to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*
- **Proverbs 28:5**, *Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it completely.*

I. What is the Teaching about Oaths and Truth in the Bible?

- A. The Scriptural foundation for truth-telling.
 1. **Leviticus 19:12**, *You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.*
 2. **Numbers 30:2**, *If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.*
 3. **Deuteronomy 23:21**, *"If you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin.*
- B. False vows and Vows. **Matthew 5:33** *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'*
 1. To swear falsely (false vows) – to knowingly tell an untruth while swearing an oath, or perhaps to break an oath previously sworn. It means to perjure oneself (as in a court of law).
 2. "Have sworn." (oath) – a solemn promise, usually invoking a divine witness; often includes penalties for failure within the contents of the oath. Literally, it means to "enclose, as with a fence, or to bind together."
 3. **Hebrews 6:16**, *For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.* Naming someone greater than the person making the oath gives credibility to what is said. Any oath calling on God invites Him to witness the truthfulness of what is said or to avenge if it is a lie.
 4. Jews returning from Babylon took on an oath and a curse to walk in God's laws. **Nehemiah 10:29**, *Join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and his statutes.*
 5. Other Examples (Genesis 14:22-24; 21:23-24)
- C. God Makes Vows and Oaths
 1. **Genesis 22:16–17**, *And said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,*
 2. **Hebrews 6:13–14**, *For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."*
Hebrews 6:17, *So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath,*

II. How was this teaching distorted by the Religious Elite?

- A. For the elite, oaths were made frivolously for their benefit.

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- B. For the elite, the only vows or oaths that mattered were to the Lord.
 - 1. In other words, oaths, vows, and promises made to other things were okay if it was done falsely. You can renege on anyone but God.

III. What is Jesus Teaching Us About This Truth?

- A. Is He teaching us not to take an oath at all?
 - 1. Jesus is not forbidding oaths under any circumstances
 - 2. *“What we have here in Matthew 5:33–37 (cf. James 5:12) is the condemnation of the flippant, profane, uncalled for, and often hypocritical oath, used in order to make an impression or to spice daily conversation. Over against that evil Jesus commends simple truthfulness in thought, word and deed”* (Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973], p. 309).
- B. Examples
 - 1. Jesus's use of “Truly, truly” in the Gospels is an example of certain promises and teachings taking greater, higher importance or emphasis
 - 2. God’s Oath to Abraham (**Hebrews 6:13–17**, *For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” 15 And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. 16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. 17 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath,*
 - 3. **Luke 1:73**, *The oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us*
 - 4. **Acts 2:30**, *Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne,*
 - 5. **Romans 9:1**, *I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—*

IV. What Now?

- A. Hebrews 6:16 affirms the place of oaths. (Marriage vows; the Psalmist to God)
 - 1. **Psalm 15**. *O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?*[who comes into the presence of God?] **2** *He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; 3 who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; 4 in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; 5 who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.*
 - 2. Our word must be more important than our welfare (verse 4)
 - 3. True sons in the kingdom hate lies.
- B. The importance of Fulfilling an oath (Lev 5:4-6)
- C. An oath is only as reliable as the person making it.
 - 1. **Matthew 26:69–75 (ESV)** — **69** *Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” 70 But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” 71 And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” 72 And again he denied it with an oath: “I do not know the man.” 73 After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” 74 Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the rooster crowed. 75 And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.*
- D. Do not be rash to make an oath
 - 1. Joshua made a rash treaty with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:15)
 - 2. Jephthah made a rash vow that affected his daughter (Judges 11:30-31)
 - 3. Saul made a rash vow that affected Jonathan (1 Sam 14:24)
 - 4. Herod made a rash vow that affected John the Baptist (Matthew 14:7)