

2. Profane swearing is a **positive evil**, when it leads one to believe that lying is less hurtful and less wrong when no oath is taken.
 - a. Profane swearing is evidence of an evil heart.
 - b. And it does not cause others to believe you more readily.
- C. *“But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one.”* (v. 37)
 1. A simple affirmative or negative, “Yes” or “No,” is sufficient in your ordinary conversations and everywhere sincere speech is accepted.
 2. The reason for this injunction, *“Whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one;”* because it comes from a lack of veracity on the part of him who makes the oath, suspicion of this on the part of him requiring the oath, and that *“ye fall not under judgment.”* (James 5:12.)

IV. GOD EXPECTS US TO KEEP OUR VOWS, PLEDGES, WORD.

- (Ecclesiastes 5:4; Deuteronomy 23:21.)
- A. Good examples are Abraham (Genesis 14:22-24); Jacob (Genesis 28:20-22); Jephthah (Judges 11:39); Hannah (1 Samuel 1:28); Prodigal son (Luke 15); Paul (Acts 18).
 - B. Let us keep the pledge we make to God in becoming Christians, to live always by his will and purpose. (Matthew 11:29; John 4:24; Romans 8:28; 2 Timothy 2:15.)
 - C. Let us always give as we have purposed in our hearts. (2 Corinthians 9:7.)
 - D. Let us always keep our sacred vows of marriage. (Matthew 19:1-9).
 - E. Let us pay our debts, promises to friends (Matthew 21:30), and to our brothers (Proverbs 29:20), and not be guilty as *“covenant breakers.”* (Romans 1:31.)
 - F. The destiny of all liars is clearly undesirable. (Revelation 21:8, 27.)
 - G. Dishonesty, one of mankind's greatest problems, works destruction in personal character, conscience; in home, church, society; in honor, peace, love.
 - H. Must put on *“whole armor of God,”* the first element of which is *“loins girded with truth.”* (Ephesians 6:14.) **Study Revelation 2:10.**

--Charles Crouch

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT -- LESSON FOURTEEN

“The Law of Oaths”

Matthew 5:33-37

INTRODUCTION -

- I. *“A false witness that uttereth lies”* is a sin extremely odious to God, and may be employed either to injure the innocent or to liberate the guilty. (Proverbs 6:19.)
 - A. Perjury is a sin condemned by every code of law, ancient and modern, which I know, except the Roman Catholic moral code of “mental reservation,” which permits the giving of a false answer as a means of covering the truth until proper time to reveal it. (Explanation of Catholic Morals, pp. 289-292.)
 - B. The sin of false and profane swearing was notorious among the Jews in the time of Christ.
 - C. Bearing false witness is one of the oldest and most common sins.
- II. This is the third illustration the Lord used to teach the difference between the righteousness practiced by the scribes and Pharisees and the righteousness God requires in the kingdom of Christ.
 - A. In a time of multiplied oaths, made with God's name, the temple, altars, heaven, earth, etc., a regard for truthfulness was shamefully low.
 - B. Lying and profane swearing not only injure the liar, it is a menace to the order of society.

DISCUSSION -

I. WHAT THE LAW OF MOSES TAUGHT.

- A. The *third* commandment forbade using God's name *in vain* (footnote: *“for vanity, or falsehood”*), and declared God will not hold him guiltless who uses his name in vain. (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11.)
- B. The *ninth* commandment forbade the bearing of false witness or perjury. (Exodus 20:16; 23:1,7; Deuteronomy 5:20.)
- C. False swearing--to *“forswear thyself,”* or perjury-- was strictly forbidden under the law. (Leviticus 19:12; Deuteronomy 19:18,19.)
- D. The law permitted swearing by God's name. (Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20.)

II. THE PHARISAIC EXTENSIONS AND PERVERSION OF THE LAW. (Matthew 23:16-22.)

- A. Their deductions had led to a vast number of oaths, lightly regarded.
- B. They taught that oaths were binding only when God's name was used at the time the oath was taken. (cf. Matthew 5:34-36.)
- C. One effect was the practice of oaths in ordinary conversation, swearing by created things which they did not regard as binding; hence, resulting in widespread dishonesty by breaking their word.
- D. In Matthew 23:16-22, Jesus does not denounce their *hypocrisy*, as he does in the paragraphs preceding and following, but of their *folly* as “blind guides” with reference to their oaths. “Here the people were taught the binding nature of every oath, and both the folly and wickedness of the distinction made by the Pharisees.” -- J.W. McGarvey.

III. THE LORD'S TEACHING CONCERNING OATHS. (Matthew 5:33-37.)

- A. **Swear not at all:** “*Again, ye have heard that it was said to them of old time Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths, but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black.*” (Matthew 5:33-36).
 1. There is no conclusive reason to believe that Jesus, by these words, meant to abolish what Moses allowed in the law, concerning oaths, as he did in the case of divorce and remarriage.
 2. McGarvey's comment seems most appropriate here: “The only oath authorized by the law of Moses was one taken in the name of God. (Deut. 6:13.) The oaths which Jesus here proceeds to prohibit--“*by heaven,*” “*by the earth,*” “*by Jerusalem,*” “*by thy head*”-- were all unauthorized by the law. Moreover, it was taught by the scribes that these oaths, and all others which did not include the name of God, had not the binding force of an oath. The universal prohibition, '*swear not at all*' is distributed by the specification of these four forms of oaths, and is, therefore most strictly interpreted as including only such oaths. Jesus surely did not intend to abolish now, in advance of the general abrogation of the law, those statutes of

Moses which allowed, and in some instances required the administration of an oath. (See Exodus 22:11; Num. 5:19.) What we style the judicial oaths of the law of Moses, then, were not included in the prohibition. This conclusion is also reached when we interpret the prohibition in the light of authoritative examples. God himself, '*because he could swear by no greater, swore by himself*' in confirming the promise to Abraham (Heb. 6:13); and he did the same in declaring the priesthood of Christ. (Heb. 7:21.) Jesus answered to an oath before the Sanhedrin--Caiaphas administering the oath in the form: '*I adjure thee by the living God.*' (Matt. 26:63.) Paul also made oath to the Corinthian Church, saying: '*I call upon God as a witness on my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet to Corinth.*' (2 Cor. 1:23. See also Rom. 1:9; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8; 1 Cor. 15:31; Rev. 10:5,6; 1 Thess. 2:5.) We conclude, then, that judicial oaths, and oaths taken in the name of God on occasions of solemn religious importance, are not included in the prohibition; but as these are the only exceptions found in the Scriptures, we conclude that all other oaths are forbidden. All of these remarks apply with the same force to the parallel passage in James 5:12.”

-- *Commentary on Matthew-Mark*, p. 57.

3. Matthew Henry says, in his *Commentary*, Vol. V, p. 63: “We may be sworn, but we must not swear; we may be adjured, and so obliged to it, but we must not thrust ourselves upon it for our own worldly advantage.”
 4. “But by no means does Jesus condemn swearing truly before a magistrate, or upon grave and solemn occasions; because that would have been to prohibit both the best method of ending controversies, Heb. 6:16, and an high act of religious worship, Deut. 6:13, Isaiah 65:16, an oath being not only a solemn appeal to the divine omniscience, from which nothing can be hid, but a direct acknowledgement of God, as the great patron and protector of right, and the avenger of falsehood.” -- MacKnight
- B. **Practical reasons** why Jesus forbade swearing profanely.
1. It is useless to honest men. (verse 36.) And a dishonest man will usually lie under oath if he lies when not under oath. Swearing will not bind a liar, and an honest man will tell the truth without it.