

Mt.5:33 ¶ "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. ³⁷ "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

Jesus continues his Sermon on the Mount with another of His "but I say to you" commands. While He is acknowledging what they have heard and have practiced concerning the matter of taking oaths and making vows, it is not one of the commandments in the Decalogue that He is addressing. He is addressing traditions and customs that have perverted other commands from Lev. 19:12 and Deuteronomy 23:23 that God gave them with the result of encouraging ungodliness by lying. Before we look to the context of what the practice was in Jesus day let's first correct an idea that many have concerning this Scripture and how it is horribly misapplied. There are those who use this Scripture to not be put under oath in a court of law. They say they are under God's law and do not acknowledge the public swearing in as a juror or as a witness or taking an oath of any kind that is secular in nature.

First of all this is completely ludicrous and second it has no Scriptural basis.

Those who would call them themselves Christians and hold to this are as extreme as the Anabaptists were at the time of the Reformation. They did not recognize nor would they participate in secular government. Even though the scripture says to be model citizens as a testimony unto Christ. There are so called Independent/Fundamentalist Baptists, for example, that are such separatists that they are actually in disobedience to Christ. Now we have to say, that in Canada and the US if you are opposed to taking an oath for religious reasons the court asks you to merely agree with a yes or no that you will give proper testimony and not lie, which is very biblical..

However, it is still faulty theology to not take an oath in a court of law and say it is what the bible teaches. To do so is a misintepretation of Scripture.

Here's some of what the Bible says about oaths:

God swears oaths. In fact, we could speak of the Bible itself as divided into the "Old Oath" and the "New Oath." A "Testament" is a promise to transfer property. The Bible

says God made these promises under a solemn oath. No oath, no salvation.

Numbers 5:19,21; Nehemiah 5:12; Exodus 22:7- 11

'The priest shall have her take an oath and shall say to the woman, "If no man has lain with you and if you have not gone astray into uncleanness, being under the authority of your husband, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings a curse; (Numbers 5:19, NAS95).

Then they said, "We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say." So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. (Nehemiah 5:12, NAS95).

"If a man gives his neighbor money or goods to keep for him and it is stolen from the man's house, if the thief is caught, he shall pay double. "If the thief is not caught, then the owner of the house shall appear before the judges, to determine whether he laid his hands on his neighbor's property. "For every breach of trust, whether it is for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, or for any lost thing about which one says, 'This is it,' the case of both parties shall come before the judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. "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, 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. (Exodus 22:7-11, NAS95).

Hebrews 7:20-22 And inasmuch as it was not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, "THE LORD HAS SWORN AND WILL NOT CHANGE HIS MIND, 'YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER'"); so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. (Hebrews 7:20-22, NAS95).

tThe Bible has numerous provisions regarding of oath-taking under the Old Covenant and Jesus' contemporaries would have been aware of them

- The most obvious is **the Third Commandment**, "Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain." "Taking the Lord's Name" means making an oath. The commandment is not that it should never be done, but that it not be done in vain, or falsely. In fact, God *wants* us to take His Name. It's a way of praising Him:
- Deuteronomy 6:13 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve Him, and *shalt swear by His Name*.
- Deuteronomy 10:20 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; Him shalt thou serve, and to Him shalt thou cleave, and *swear by His Name*.

In some circumstances, swearing an oath is commanded by God.

- Exodus 22:10-11 "If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing it, {11} then an oath of the LORD shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand into his neighbor's goods; and the owner of it shall accept that, and he shall not make it good."

Taking oaths has a long history among God's people.

Throughout the history of Western Civilization, oaths have been understood to be

solemn declarations made in the presence of God, to Whom we are accountable

But for some they say "No more traditional religion for us!! We're led by the Spirit!"

This is wrong. We need to be sensible and Godly people and we need to properly interpret the Scripture comparing precept upon precept.

Those who use the phrase led by the Spirit in such a way do not even know what they are saying.

The phrase comes from Rom.8:10 ¶ If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.¹² So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh ¹³ for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.¹⁴ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

The context of the passage is that when we are the sons of god we are being led away from sin by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. It is not just being guided by the hand as if we were blind but there is the sense that we are being ruled by the Spirit. How often has someone said I was led by the spirit and then the end is a complete contradiction to Scripture.

So now we have to ask, is Jesus contradicting Scripture? If oaths are meant to be God honoring then and now, is Jesus saying that under the New Covenant no oaths are acceptable? Is He completely doing away with the idea of taking oaths and swearing by God's name?

The answer is no.

This command has to be seen in the context of sins and abuses by those who are hypocrites just as all the other "but I say unto you" commands Christ has previously given for His kingdom people..

Jesus is trying to end an *abuse* of something good, not to end that good thing itself. Eyes are good, if we use them right so we don't pluck them out to cure our sin. Hands are good if we use them correctly so we do not chop them off as we have previously

Although Jesus command language sounds absolute it is not.

He is forbidding using oaths and swearing for the purpose of looking good and the end result being that the person has actually lied. Jesus is defining for His New covenant people that we are to be truth tellers.

Jesus makes tgis very clear in a later message in the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew 23:16-22

"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' "You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? "Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. "And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. "And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. (Matthew 23:16-22, NAS95).

The Jewish leaders were trying to appear to be holy ("I will take *a sacred oath!*"), and trying to get people to believe them ("I swear by the Temple!") but *they had no intention of keeping their promise* ("I didn't swear by the *gold* of the Temple!" So Jesus is talking to liars and hypocrites.

So again we read our text for this morning

Mt.5:33 ¶ "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. ³⁷ "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

Jesus says it would be better *never to swear an oath at all* than to use it like the Jewish leaders were: for the purpose of lying and for untruthfulness which are sin.

A well-known expositor of the theology of the Reformation, A.A. Hodge, a Professor at Princeton, wrote in 1869 about the requirements of God's Law:

1. A lawful oath consists in calling upon God, the occasion being of sufficient seriousness and importance, to witness the truth of what we affirm as true, or our voluntary assumption of an obligation to do something in the future-with an implied

imprecation of God's disfavour if we lie or prove unfaithful to our engagements. This last is generally expressed by the phrase forming the concluding part of the formula of most oaths, "So help me God;"-*i.e.*, Let God so help me as I have told the truth, or as I will keep my promise.

Hence an oath is an act of supreme religious worship, since it recognizes the omnipresence, omniscience, absolute justice and sovereignty of the Person whose august witness is invoked, and whose judgment is appealed to as final

2. It hence follows that it is a sin equivalent to that of worshipping a false god if we swear by any other than the only true and living God; and a sin of idolatry if we swear by any thing or place, although it be associated with the true God.

This principle is fully recognized in Scripture.

Throughout the history of Western Civilization, oaths have been understood to be solemn declarations made in the presence of God, to Whom we are accountable.

We have Scripture that continues to help us here. James comes full circle to the teaching of Jesus in his epistle.

Jas 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.

This verse is in the context of James 5 where beginning in verse 1 James is warning, with strong language, against the excesses of the rich and that many things that Jesus had condemned and that the Old Testament Scriptures had condemned as being unjust were being done by the Christians He was writing to and he then says above all do not swear.

He is warning them do not use an oath to cover a lie. I can't help but think that he may also have been remembering Annanias and Sapphira to whom judgement came when they lied.

We have ample application for the teaching that Jesus is giving.

As His New Covenant people we are to be salt and light. How can salt and light which the world so sorely needs be tainted with lies and liars.

How can those who are to be hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of god in Christ be identifying more with their old nature and the devil who was our old father **Joh 8:44*** "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

We have already established through out our Sermon on the Mount study that the heart is the heart of the matter

For Christians to lie, especially to other Christians is a wretched and a horrible thing. It is a relationship with the old self that we do not want.

Paul echoes Jesus when he writes to the Colossians

3:8*¶ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth.⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices,^{10*} and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him-^{11a} *renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

We must see here that Paul is saying that all these sinful acts are to be put away as filthy rags in the fuller context of the passage. They are pagan attitudes and wicked heart attitudes and we could also say that each at one time or another could be expressed by words and lies could be used to make it seem that we were not acting in such a manner.

God grant us grace to repent before we are liars. And if we do lie to be driven to repent with remorse for blessed are they who mourn over their sin for they shall be comforted.

This verse applies to all believers in all circumstances whether in our relationship to the world or with each other as Christians.

But how heinous it is to imagine Christians lying to one another, but sadly it occurs more often than we want to acknowledge.

But, God's word says beware! Habitual liars will not enter into the kingdom of God.

Paul gives us sound counsel as to why we should not lie, especially one to another as Christians.

Eph.4:14* As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;^{15*} but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,^{16*} from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Those who would desire to cause harm to the growth of the body by lying are doctrinally and spiritually immature. They are nothing but children.

The body is out of joint when lies and deceptions become common practice

Eph 4:25* Therefore, laying aside falsehood, **SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR**, for we are members of one another and we do damage to one another not just ourselves if we lie to one another.

But does our lying always have an evil intent behind it even though lying is sinful? Why are we afraid of the truth?

Why would we lie? Sometimes we lie to flatter other people. We see an outfit on a woman or a suit on a man that is just absolutely horrendous for them, and when we are asked, what do you think we respond and say Oh, it is beautiful. And we are lying.

Why? Because we want to flatter them. We don't want to discourage the person.

Other times we fear the consequences of our speech. We fear if we admit what we have done, we will be held accountable and we will but we would much rather lie and avoid those consequences, temporarily rather than face those consequences.

There was a little boy, who, when he was in the fifth grade in science class was assigned the hefty responsibility of washing the beakers after an experiment and his teacher, Mrs. Finley, said to him, "Now, when you wash those hot beakers, under no circumstances put them under cold water." "Yes, Mrs. Finley," he said. And when the time came to wash those beaker, he promptly put them under cold water. Now you could imagine his surprise when he saw them begin to fragment. And like spider webs, cracks shot through those beakers. Fear entered into that little boy's heart. And so he thought quickly, and he devised a brilliant plan. He took masking tape and wrapped the beakers in masking tape. I have never quite understood why that young man thought that his teacher would notice this masking tape on the beakers. And then he declined to admit what had happened to his teacher, a vital mistake young people, a vital mistake. Oh, he thought he would avoid the consequences of what he had done, if he just didn't tell the truth to Mrs. Fanny Finley, and he rued the day that he did not tell Mrs. Fanny Finley what he had done. He thought that the consequences would be spared him if he lied. He was wrong. Not a very smart child.

In other cases, we perhaps have a fear of being rejected, or desire to be accepted, and so we do not tell the truth. A prominent governor of a southern state was addressing a

class of teenagers, and in the heat of the moment, that governor decided to tell them some stories about his childhood, his college years. He claimed to have run a 9.5 hundred yard dash and been on a national championship baseball team. And the press looked into this and found out that neither of these things were true. First of all, a 9.5 hundred yard dash would have been the world record. They had never heard of this guy. He was found out and the next week at the stadium in the capital city as the whole city was gathered for a great football game, a flag was flying behind a plane circling the field which said, "Governor 'blank' for Heismann." Vote for him for the Heisemann Trophy. He was mocked and ridiculed, but he sought to gain the approval of his audience by telling them that which was untrue. All of these are ways in which we are tempted to be untruthful and Christ is telling us that God demands godly speech. The whole purpose of this but I say unto you that we have studied this morning is that we are to consciously make every effort not to lie or do anything to substantiate a lie or do anything with our words to lead someone astray or harm them in any way.

And this is especially true in our relationships with one another as believers.

I like what Pastor Ligon Duncan preached at the end of a sermon on this passage:

To believers Christ is saying this, you are not perfected, you are not entirely sanctified, you are not free from sin, and the continuation of struggling with tongue sins which reeks so much havoc in the life of the congregation, both in families and in the congregation itself, reminds us that we need to grow in the Lord. We need the continuing sanctifying work of the Spirit in our life and we need to run back to Christ and we need to say, 'O Lord, as I have looked at myself, I have not come into accord with the standards of Your word. My speech has not been perfectly pure as You require. By the Spirit, by grace, work in me righteousness. Deliver me, O Lord from a continuation in sin.'