

Keep your Word!

“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. But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your Yes be Yes, and your No, No. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”
(Mt. 5: 33-37)

People lie. They don’t keep their word, which is what created the necessity of oaths. But God expects us to keep our words, whether confirmed with an oath or not. One’s own word ought to suffice. Oaths are an implicit confession that we don’t always tell the truth.

This goes to the heart of God’s character. He keeps His word.

My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. (Ps. 84: 34-36)

When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. (Heb. 6: 13-15 NIV)

In Matt. 5: 33 Jesus confirmed what was said in the Old Testament.

Num. 30: 2 If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

However, the rabbis and other religious leaders argued that it was only your oaths TO THE LORD that had to be performed, and “for the these others you may do as you like,” so long as the other ones avoided using His name. Jesus mentions the other ones they used in their colloquial expressions of the day in vss. 34-35. This was not meant to be an exhaustive list.

This is another example of hypocrisy and actually profanes the Lord by defaming His nature and character of truthfulness and honoring His own word.

Jesus is showing us that every oath, even one that avoids the Lord's name, is in essence an appeal to God. The irony is that in swearing and yet avoiding the divine name to avoid the obligation is profaning His name and is "from the evil one." (v. 37)

Some of our oaths include the following:

On my mother's grave

I swear to God

Scout's honor

Hand to God

I swear on a stack of bibles

On my life

To be honest with you... So you weren't being honest with me before?

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Some of the oaths we take today:

Oaths to hold public office

An oath of citizenship when you become a citizen of the U.S.

Wedding vows in which you make a solemn promise to be faithful

Oaths taken when you join the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts

Hippocratic Oath taken by physicians

There's even a fiduciary oath taken to become a person's financial advisor

In prior ages and in some cultures today they kiss their holy book as a form of oath.

There is a false idea that swearing by an oath gives a guarantee of truthfulness that a simple affirmation does not give.

What is perjury? It's lying under oath. But in God's eyes we perjure ourselves every day since we are always under Him and therefore under oath.

Witnesses and officials in the U.S. can now opt to make an affirmation rather than take an oath. The affirmation omits references to God and uses the words "I affirm" rather than "I swear."

In common conversation, whatever is more than affirmation or negation arises from the temptation of the devil, who tempts men to curse and swear, to lessen in them and in those who hear them a due reverence of God's divine majesty, which can bring judgment on them. (Luke 22: 31; Matt. 26: 74)

James 5: 12 "But above all, my bretheren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your Yes be yes, and your No, no, lest you fall into judgment."

The first Yes and No represents the promise or assertion, what we said we'd do. The second yes and no represents the fulfillment.

Based on this scripture, is there the possibility for judgment when we don't keep our words? Apparently so.

When Paul says in I Cor. 1: 20 that all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, he is affirming the truthfulness and faithfulness of God to do what He says. If we are to be like Christ, we are to be truthful and faithful to our own words as well.

Rev. 3: 14 "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness..."

So when we give our word, we are expected by God to be honest and do what we say we will do, or not do what we say we will not do. Here are some things to keep in mind.

1. Ask forgiveness. Whenever we fail to keep our word we should be honest and ask forgiveness from God and from the one(s) we broke our word to. This will close the door to the evil one and keep us from judgment. (Ps. 32: 5; Ps. 51: 1-4, Lk. 19: 8)

2. Don't promise something if you know you can't do it. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. (Eccl. 5:5, NIV)

3. Come clean. Avoid half-truths. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. (Eph.4: 25 NIV)

Is every statement a promise? How about things like "Let's do lunch, "I'll call you later," and "I'll be there in five minutes?" Are these broken promises when they're not kept? Not necessarily, but when broken enough, the one making the promise loses credibility to the people they're made to.

What about promises in a marriage? To say you will do something and fail to do it, like to pick up something from the store, and forget to or just choose not to? Some believe breaking a big promise is inexcusable, but breaking a small one is acceptable. This is not so. It creates a lying character, or at least one where your word is no good.

Remember, get in the practice of keeping your word. In this way you will not need to swear what you are saying is true, but your word will be enough. Also, you will avoid giving place to the evil one and avoid condemnation.