

# TAKING AN OATH

*“But I tell you, Do not swear at all; either by heaven, for it is God’s throne or by the earth for it is his footstool.... Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’, and your ‘No’, ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” —MATTHEW 5:34-37*

Taking an oath is swearing by something bigger than ourselves, and promising that what we say is true. But Jesus says, “I say to you, do not swear at all.” Some people have used this as a prohibition against taking oaths in a courtroom or taking an oath of allegiance, but swearing an oath is not, in itself, wrong. God, Himself, swore an oath several times. Genesis 22:16 tells us, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD”. (God swore by Himself because there is nothing greater for Him to swear by.) Hebrews 6:17 says, “Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.” That would be enough to justify the fact that swearing an oath is not the issue.

The point that Jesus is making is that oath taking is not the only time you tell the truth, because if something is said by taking an oath, there is reason to believe it. We firmly stand by it, but if it isn’t said on oath are they going to believe us? That is the issue because oath taking is, if you think about it, a confession of dishonesty as it implies that other times we may not be telling the truth.

The alternative Jesus puts to the people is that you don’t need to swear in order to be believed; you need to be believed because you speak the truth, period. And the background seems to be that the people were swearing even over little things. In Matthew 23:16-21, Jesus rebukes the

Pharisees for swearing by the gold on the temple and the gifts on the altar, implying they were greater than the temple or altar itself. In other words, what kind of collateral is this? What value does that give to your word?

It isn't that swearing an oath is not valid, and it may be necessary in a court of law or taking an official position, but in Jesus' day it was common practice. Today we often hear the expressions, "Cross my heart and hope to die" or "I swear on the Bible," or "I swear to God", which suggests, "You have to believe me. It's really true". Jesus is simply saying, "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No', 'No'," and speak the truth all the time, because anything else comes from the evil one.

***PRAYER: Dear Lord, keep me honest in everything I say. Thank You, Lord.***

***TO REFLECT UPON: Am I in the habit of swearing upon something to be believed?***