

The Swearing of Oaths

Lakewood Family Church | Pastor Jonathan L. Vorce | April 12, 2026

Scripture Texts: **Matthew 5:33-37**

Revelations 21:8

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

INTRODUCTION

- So far in the Sermon on the Mount, we've unpacked Jesus' radical teachings on murder, anger, adultery, lust, and divorce.
- Now in verses **33-37**, Jesus tackles the everyday practice of swearing oaths—promises we make to sound more believable or to lock ourselves into commitments.
- We'll explore what He taught by asking four practical questions that still matter today.

I. THE HEART OF THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW

First question: "What did the Old Testament Law actually say about swearing oaths?"

A. Three clear passages show exactly what God expected:

1. **Tell the Truth:** *"You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD."* (**Leviticus 19:12**)
2. **Keep Your Word:** *"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."* (**Numbers 30:2**)
3. **Pay Your Vows to the Lord on Time:** *"When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin in you."* (**Deuteronomy 23:21**)

♦ **The consistent emphasis? Truthfulness and faithfulness.**

B. This wasn't just about external words; it was about "Integrity in the Heart". The Psalms and prophets drove this home:

1. **Psalm 15:1-2** – Who can live in God's presence? *"He who walks uprightly ... and speaks truth in his heart."*
2. **Psalm 24:3-4** – Who can stand before the Lord? *"He who has clean hands and a pure heart ... who has not sworn deceitfully."*
3. **Jeremiah 5:1-2** and **Hosea 4:1-2** paint a heartbreaking picture of a society full of false swearing, lies, and broken trust.

Application Today:

Think about your last conversation. Did you casually say, **"I swear," "I promise,"** or **"Cross my heart"** to make someone believe you? In our world of exaggerated social-media posts, **"I'll get back to you"** texts we never answer, or **"I'll pray for you"** comments we forget, God still calls us to the same heart-level honesty. **Our word should be enough—no extra drama needed.**

II. THE TRADITIONAL LOOPHOLE CULTURE

Second question: **"How had the scribes and Pharisees twisted the Law?"**

A. By Jesus' day, the focus had quietly shifted. Instead of demanding truthfulness in **"every"** statement, religious leaders taught that **"only oaths made directly 'to the Lord'"** were truly binding.

1. Oaths sworn by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, the temple, or even your own head, were considered less serious—you could bend or break them without guilt (see **Matthew 23:16-19**).

B. The result? Everyday speech became sprinkled with meaningless exaggerations:

- **"I swear by heaven..."**
- **"I swear by God's throne..."**
- **"I swear by the temple..."**

1. These phrases sounded spiritual but carried zero weight. They were basically verbal emojis to make people take you seriously.

Application Today:

We do the same thing with modern loopholes.

- “It was just marketing talk.”
- “I was just being polite.”
- “Technically I didn’t promise.”
- Or the classic: “I said ‘maybe’—that’s not a real commitment...”

Jesus calls this hypocrisy!

III. JESUS’ CLEAR CALL TO RADICAL INTEGRITY

Third question: “What did Jesus say in response?”

A. Jesus exposed the loopholes and brought everything back to the heart:

- **Swearing by heaven?** That’s God’s throne.
- **Swearing by earth?** That’s His footstool.
- **Swearing by your head?** You can’t even control whether one hair turns gray!

B. **Bottom line:** Every oath ultimately involves God. There’s no such thing as a “harmless” casual oath.

1. Instead of elaborate promises, Jesus gave us the simplest, most powerful standard:

“Let your ‘Yes’ be yes, and your ‘No’ be no. Anything more than this comes from the evil one.” (Matthew 5:37)

Application Today:

- **In your marriage or dating relationship:** Stop saying “I promise” to smooth things over—actually follow through.
- **At work:** When you say, “I’ll have it by Friday,” make sure you do. Your reputation becomes your best reference.

- **On social media:** No more exaggerated stories or “I can’t even right now” drama to get likes. **JUST SPEAK TRUTH!**
- **With friends:** Be the person whose simple “yes” is so reliable that no one ever needs to ask, “You sure?”
- ♦ **When your character is consistent, you don’t need extra words to be believed.**

IV. WHAT ABOUT OATHS IN COURT OR SOLEMN SETTINGS?

Fourth question: “Does this mean Christians can never take an oath—even in court?”

A. This part has been debated for centuries. Here’s a balanced look:

1. Arguments that allow solemn oaths in certain situations:

- Jesus and James qualified their statements—they were clearly targeting the flippant, hypocritical oaths of daily life.
- God Himself swears oaths (**Hebrews 6:16-18**).
- Jesus answered under oath before the Sanhedrin (**Matthew 26:63-64**).
- Paul used strong, oath-like statements in his letters (**2 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 1:20**).
- Even an angel in Revelation swore an oath (**Revelation 10:5-7**).

2. **Many believers therefore conclude:** Jesus condemned casual, manipulative swearing, but solemn oaths in judicial settings or serious religious contexts **MAY** still be appropriate.

B. The “safe” approach: Don’t swear at all...

1. I recommend the “swear not at all approach” in everyday life.
2. When it comes to the court system I recommend “Let your heart guide you.” (Thankfully, in our country (the U.S.), the courts allow us to “solemnly affirm” instead of swearing an oath, if you so choose.

Php 2:12

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

C. I don't judge brothers and sisters who choose to swear a formal oath in court or on important occasions, as long as their heart is sincere.

1. The key is to stay consistent with the rest of Jesus' teaching—truthfulness in every area of life.

Application Today:

Whether you affirm or swear in court, your everyday life should already show such integrity that no one is surprised when you tell the truth under oath. Our private words and public commitments should match.

CONCLUSION

- Once again, we see that the righteousness Jesus demands far exceeds the external rule-keeping of the scribes and Pharisees.
 - They spiced their speech with oaths to be believed.
 - Citizens of the Kingdom are so truthful that a simple “yes” or “no” is enough.
- **Reflection:** Can this be said of us?
 - Do people “bank” on our words?
 - When we say we'll do something, is it as good as done?
 - Are we known as people whose character needs no extra guarantees?
- This kind of integrity isn't just old-fashioned honesty—it's revolutionary in a world full of broken promises, ghosting, and half-truths. It's exactly the kind of light Jesus wants His followers to shine in our culture today.