

Series: Sermon on the Mount

Lesson: #18

Title: Swear Not At All

Scripture: Matthew 5: 33-37

Date: 9-13-2009

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, Princeton, NJ

Matthew 5: 33: Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: 34: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: 35: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. 36: Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. 37: But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

What is it to forswear thyself?

An oath is a solemn affirmation or declaration, made with an appeal to God that what is affirmed is true and calls for God's vengeance if it turns out to be false. A false oath is called perjury; or, as in this place, *forswearing*.

Leviticus 19:12: And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I *am* the LORD.

So those of old time said, that it was ok to swear but you must perform the thing you have sworn or else it is swearing by his name falsely. But the Lord Jesus says

Matthew 5: 34: But I say unto you, Swear not at all;

Our Lord is not here forbidding us to take a lawful oath, as one might be required to do in a court of law. But if you notice, even the most solemn oaths include a statement such as this, "I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, SO HELP ME GOD." For the believer, the statement is "if the Lord will enable me or if the Lord wills." The reason is because you and I have no way of fulfilling any oath except it be by the power and grace of our God.

Therefore, the Lord is forbidding the rash use of God's name in common oaths and common speech. To do so is to reveal a lack of reverence for and contempt of God. The law of God forbids taking the name of the LORD in vain

Exodus 20:7: Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

I. First, we do not have to add curse word to God's name to use his name in vain.

You do not even have to use his name specifically. Some who would not say "God", or "Jesus" think nothing of using alternate versions "Gosh", "Jeez" or "My goodness", "Lordy," "Holy Cow",...the variations are endless. All of these are taking the Lord's name in vain. But our Lord is teaching even more.

II. An oath carries an appeal to God, whether God is named or not.

Those of old time, like multitudes in our day, made oaths everyday in common speech, without using the Lord's name at all.

God is the Word. The heavens were created by his Word. They are held in place by the "Word of his power." The salvation of God's elect is by his covenant Word. In the beginning was the Word.

Hebrews 6: 13: For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, 14: Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee...16: For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation *is* to them an end of all strife.

When men are in a most solemn case--such as taking an oath of office--when done with deliberation in the fear of God, with a view to God's glory and the good of men, an oath may be lawfully taken. But even in those solemn occasions, men have to appeal to God.

Yet, there is none greater than God. He can swear by no greater. HE is the God of truth. In the eternal counsel the thrice holy God entered into covenant agreement. The Father, in order to justify his people gave his own Son to die in the room and stead of those he chose to save--in time he gave his Son as promised. The Son of God promised to lay down his life, he willingly suffered the wrath of justice for each one he represented. The Holy Spirit promised to regenerate, to wash, to sanctify dead sinners and to speak of only Christ Jesus in the hearts of God's elect, and so he does.

Hebrews 6: 17: Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath: 18: That by two immutable things, in which *it was impossible for God to lie*, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: 19: Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast,...that is Jesus Christ, who has entered into the holiest in heaven, who is made our high priest forever.

He gave Christ Jesus for a covenant to his people. Therefore the Word of God, God's Word, God's promise, God's covenant of salvation ought to be believed.

So then when any man swears, whether God's name is mentioned or not, the very use of a covenant word is a slight on the Word himself.

III. There is nothing by which you can make an oath that is not God's.

Those of old time would say that it is ok to swear by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem-the altar, the temple, etc, or by your own head. But listen to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 5: 34: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: 35: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool

Matthew 23: 22: And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

Matthew 5: 35:...neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. 36: Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

Swearing by ones "self" is the most absurd of all. You and I have no way of insuring we will be alive in a moment much less that we can perform any oath.

Matthew 6:27: Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

IV. Because God is true the believer the believer is constrained to be truthful.

Matthew 5: 37: But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

First, the Lord teaches here that when everything has to be confirmed by an oath, evil prevails. Our corrupt nature is to deviate from the truth and not only this but to suspect others of lying. Continual oaths do not do away with this but they aggravate our suspicions. I hear tale of time long, long ago when a man's word was enough. Why not now? It is because of a snowball effect. Because every man is a liar by nature, we began making oaths, which only results in more suspicion. The fine print, and the abundance of swearing, proves to us that men can not be trusted. But something worse happens than not believing men, God and truth and reverence for God's holy, unchangeable Word is taken more lightly by men. Someone wrote: "The practice of going beyond Yes and No in affirmations and denials springs from that vicious root of untruthfulness which is only aggravated by the very effort to clear ourselves of the suspicion of it." Only the grace of God, cast into the bitter waters of a sinful soul, heals and sweetens.

Secondly, the gospel, the truth of Christ, is our constraint for always being true to our word in every day affairs. Paul had said that "if be the Lord's will" he would come to Corinth. It was not God's will and Paul did not go. Some at Corinth began to raise accusation against Paul, and even his doctrine. But listen to Paul.

2 Corinthians 1:17: When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay?

Did I act rashly, unadvisedly, and without consideration? Did I base my word on my flesh? Or did I promise certainly that I would come, without saying, if the Lord will? I did not simply say yes but then not do it. Then next the apostle gives the reason why truth and sincerity were so important to him. And why he knew he would arrive if was the Lord's will and would not if was not the Lord's will.

2 Corinthians 1: 18: But *as God is true*, our word toward you was not yea and nay.

Paul is not appealing to God as his witness but rather he is giving the cause of why he did not base his answer to them on his flesh, but in God and that, because God is true. If God willed, Paul knew he would go and if God did not will, Paul knew God would not allow it. Paul goes on to show that he has every reason to believe God and therefore they had every reason to believe Paul.

2 Corinthians 1: 19: For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, *even* by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. 20: For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

So back in our text, as it is in each point of our Lord's sermon on the mount--Christ is the fulfillment of the law, Christ is our righteousness which exceeds, be first reconciled to God in Christ and come to Christ our Altar, walk in the Spirit whereby the offending eye and hand are mortified--again, our Lord's instruction leads the believer to cast all our care on the Word, the Truth, on Christ Jesus who is God's Covenant to us. Let your word be yes if it calls for a yes and no if it calls for a no. This is enough with those who are made members of Christ's body.

Ephesians 4:25: Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

Colossians 3:9: Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10: And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: