

It Is Written

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"SWEAR NOT AT ALL"

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I trust you will read the whole article and follow the material till the end. Should you do this, it will be easy to understand the conclusion drawn. When I see the title of this article, "Swear not at all" I am reminded that the Bible teaches there were those who did swear.

God Swore

"Since he could swear by none greater, he swore by himself" (Heb. 6:13). This had reference to a promise God made to Abraham. From this text we learn God did swear. Immediately, I am confronted with the problem, did God do something he forbade his people to do? It would be as if he is saying, "You are not to swear; but, I am going to do it!"

Jesus Swore

Jesus was told by the high priest, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63). The definition of "adjure" is, "to cause to swear, to lay under the obligation of an oath," but this word is "an intensive form" of the definition I have just given. The high priest called upon him, under the highest oath; called upon him to swear, "whether or not he is the Christ." Under these circumstances, Jesus answered--under oath. One is compelled to ask, "Did Jesus do what he told others not to do?"

Angels Swore

"And the angel that I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swear by him that liveth for ever and ever" (Rev. 10:5-6). After observing that God swore, it is not strange to find an angel doing the same. Since the angels are lower than God, they can swear by someone greater; thus, he swore by "him that liveth for ever and ever." He confirmed his word with an oath. This made it sure and steadfast; he could swear by none greater than "him that liveth for ever and ever." Did the angel do what God forbade man to do?

Paul Swore

"But I call God for a witness upon my soul, that to spare you I forbear to come unto Corinth" (2 Cor. 1:23). Here is an apostle, in the New Testament dispensation, engaging in an act to "call God for a witness upon my soul," which is swearing. There is no question about what Paul did; but, did he sin? I think not, and hope to offer proof that neither he, the angel in Revelation 10 sinned, nor Christ sinned.

Matthew 5:33-37

The first part of this text says, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself" (v. 33). This obviously appeals to Leviticus 9:12, Numbers 30:2, and Deuteronomy 23:21. A casual reading of these passages will show that one is not to perjure himself or, "foreswear," or give a false testimony under oath. Of course, a false testimony is always wrong; you do not make a false thing true by swearing. The text of this passage states, "but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths."

Matthew 5:33-37 is parallel with Matthew 23:16-22. In these two contexts there is dealt with the idea that oaths are only binding when there are certain things involved; and if those certain things are not involved, then the oath is not binding. This was a religious way to lie! Jesus condemned it. "Woe unto you, ye blind guides, that say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind: for which is greater, the gold, or the temple that hath sanctified the gold?"

(Matt. 23:16-17). He also deals with swearing by the altar. Consider the same argument made by the “heaven,” “earth,” “Jerusalem,” or thy “head” in Matthew 5:34-36. In the middle of all of this he says, “Swear not at all.” You can understand what kind of swearing he is talking about – “Foreswearing.”

Truthful Speech

We are taught to “lie not one to another: seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings” (Col. 3:9). James teaches concerning the tongue, “Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men, who are made after the likeness of God: out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (Jas. 3:9-10). How can one think of swearing for truth and error? Swear by one thing and you must do it; swear by other things and you do not have to keep your word! Amazing! My brethren “these things ought not so to be.” Even old Herod, as mean as he was, respected an oath when he made it (Mark 6:23: “And he swear unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom”).

The solution to this problem is, “Let your speech be, Yea, yea: Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than this is of the evil one” (Matt. 5:37). Tell the truth! “And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37). Tell the truth!

James 5:12

“But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath: but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay: that ye fall not under judgment.” Note the idea of swearing by the heaven or earth; and, consider the information in Matthew 5:33-37; also, that found in Matthew 23:16-22, and immediately one is compelled to note that he is dealing with men who swear but do not perform unto the Lord their oaths. This same passage--James 5:12--clearly states that our speech is to be yea, yea; and nay, nay. One has to consider James 5:12 in the light of what the Bible teaches in other places, the extended text, and in so doing we learn the truth. We are to “perform unto the Lord thine oaths” (Matt. 5:33).

Swearing and Cursing

I have heard men, preaching, who would begin on the subject of “swearing” and end up talking about “cursing,” as if they were the same. A statement in Mark 14:71 is worthy of consideration: “But he began to curse, and to swear, I know not this man of who ye speak.” In this text a distinction is to be made between “cursing” and “swearing.” Should you make the mistake of saying the two are equal, then you have God swearing, thus cursing; Christ swearing, thus cursing; an angel swearing, thus cursing; and Paul swearing, thus cursing. Did they sin? No, the terms are not equal. Notice that Peter was swearing to that which was a falsehood! “I know not this man!” (Mark 14:71). That, my friends, was a lie.

Courts of Law

The passages we have dealt with do not teach concerning this, Matthew 5, 23, James 5. All of these passages have to do with “performing unto the Lord thine oaths” (Matt. 5:33). The closest you would come to oaths in court is found in Matthew 26:63, when the Lord was before the high priest. In this passage he was under oath—“I adjure thee.” Jesus did not forbid the practice: but rather, practiced it.

Today

A common practice was to find ways to be relieved of one's responsibility: “Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is given to God: he shall not honor his father. And ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition (Matt. 15:5-6). Then we are told by the religious world, and some of my brethren: “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt. 7:1), as if this would keep me from dealing with the man's sins. The rest of the passage teaches, “then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye” (Matt. 7:5). Jesus tells us clearly in John 7:24, “Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” We are not to look for ways out of what we have said; or, from doing our duties to the Lord.

Don't try to find ways to get out of doing what you said you would do. “Perform unto the Lord thine oaths.” When I obeyed the gospel, I made a confession to the Lord: “I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” In this confession I made a pledge, a vow, to be faithful to the Lord, all the days of my life (see W.E. Vine, Vol. 1:224). I need to perform unto the Lord my word, and be faithful to him all the days of my life. My speech is to be “yea, yea; nay, nay; what is more than these is of the evil one.” If I am going to swear something that I do not intend to keep, “Swear not at all.”