



A Systematic Expository Study of the Word of God

Special Study: **THE PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE OF TRUTHFULNESS**
Matthew 5:33-37

“Again, ye have heard that ... but I say unto you, Swear not at all; ... but let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” False swearing was forbidden in the Old Testament; but every kind of swearing is now forbidden by our Lord, Jesus Christ. He mentions several forms of swearing and oath-taking, and forbids them all. Then, He prescribes simple forms of affirmation or denial - yes, yes or no, no. That’s all that His followers should do.

Every form of oath or swearing, however solemn or true, is forbidden to a true believer in Christ. Whether in court of law or out of it, Christ’s command is, **“Swear not at all.”** All kinds of swearing is set aside by all who submit to Christ as the final Authority in their lives. A simple word of affirmation or denial, calmly repeated, is a sufficient bond of truth. A truly righteous man speaks the truth without an oath. As Christians, we should not yield to the evil custom of swearing, however great the pressure put upon us. We should abide by the plain and unmistakable command of our Lord: **“Swear not at all.”**

COMMON PRACTICE OF SWEARING BEFORE CHRIST

Matthew 5:33; Genesis 21:22-24; 24:1-4,9; 25:29-33; Genesis 31:51-53; Joshua 2:12-14; Jeremiah 38:16; Isaiah 48:1-4; Jeremiah 7:8-11,15; Zephaniah 1:2-6; Zechariah 5:3,4; Leviticus 6:1-7.

Before Christ came, indeed from the time of Genesis, taking an oath or swearing was a solemn way of confirming the truth or sealing an agreement. An oath is a solemn affirmation or declaration, made with an appeal to God for the truth of what is affirmed and forfeiting His favour or bearing His judgment if what is affirmed is false. A false oath is called perjury or “forswearing.” **“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not forswear thyself, (thou shalt not swear falsely) but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.”** Swearing had become common by that time. The people had lost the consciousness of the sacredness of oaths. They swore to everything and by every created thing in common conversation. They swore by heaven, earth, Jerusalem and their head, but the swearing was meaningless; it carried no weight. They were not sincere; they were not truthful to one another. They lied to one another and confirmed their lies with oaths - swearing falsely by heaven and earth.

CHRIST’S PROHIBITION OF SWEARING FOR CHRISTIANS

Matthew 5:34-36; James 5:12; Matthew 5:34; Psalm 11:4; Revelation 4:2-6; Matthew 23:22; Matthew 5:35; Isaiah 66:1; Acts 7:49; Psalm 48:1,2; Revelation 3:12; James 5:12.

“But I say unto you, Swear not at all.” Christ is the highest Authority on all points of christian doctrine and christian practice. Christ as the authoritative Teacher, Lord and Saviour, commands God’s people in the present dispensation: **“Swear not at all.”** We should faithfully and unhesitatingly take Him at His Word, not using the oath or swearing under any circumstances. Instead of taking an oath or swearing in a court of law, Christians, in obedience to Christ, would rather ‘affirm’ the truth of what they say. Instead of saying, ‘I do solemnly swear ...’ we say, ‘I do affirm that ...’ There is an essential difference between an oath and an affirmation. When we take an affirmation, we simply state that we mean to tell the truth so far as we understand it, knowing that if we violate this promise we are held under the same penalties as if we had violated an oath. Let us note that while we are definitely commanded to **“Swear not at all”**, the inspired writer does not hesitate to write, **“I will that thou affirm”** (Titus 3:8).

CHRISTIAN PATTERN OF SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION

Matthew 5:37; James 5:12; 2 Corinthians 1:17-20; Ephesians 4:15,25,29; Psalms 15:1,2; 34:12,13; Proverbs 12:19,22; Isaiah 63:8; Zechariah 8:16,17; Proverbs 8:7-9; 20:20,21; Colossians 4:6.

“But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay.” Christ’s absolute, unchanging standard is truth and sincerity in everything. In normal or legal matters, we should be totally truthful and dependable. Whether in the court or in our day to day conversations, we should be truthful in every detail. Every word spoken or written in the course of daily speech or daily transaction should be truthful - unqualified in regard to its truthfulness. A believer’s words should be as good as his bond and as good as an oath or as a vow. Our yes should be yes and our no should be no. God is holy and truthful. Holiness includes truthfulness. There is no lie or lying in holiness. There is no falsehood or deception in righteousness. God has called us to holiness and righteous living. Anything less than absolute truth is unacceptable to God because it is from the evil one. **“But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”**

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