

OATHS

— AND —

VOWS



BROTHER MARK

Of Oaths and Vows

But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. (Matthew 5:34-37)

As always when we embark on a study of any doctrine or teaching we need to understand definitions of words, context, and the meaning of Old and New Testaments, and what the early Church taught.

We're living in an age when Christians don't know what to believe or obey. And when there're giving up on all solid principles of the commands of God. More than ever we need to know what to believe and obey. We must always remember that God and His word is our final authority, not some group, priest, pastor, or committee, but the true and authoritative word of God.

Our focus in this study is on vows or oaths—is it ok to use them, speak them, and teach them? Again, we want to let the Scriptures speak to us and teach us about this subject. Once the Scriptures has given us a clear understanding we can then be able to best live in accordance of God's word.

Word Definitions

The following are the definitions of the words used in the Old Testament on this subject.

Oath – Hebrew *shbuw`ah* (sheb-oo-aw) oath, sworn, curse from the word *shaba* (shaw-bah) sware, charge, oath.

Oath – Hebrew *alah* (aw-law) curse, oath, execration, swearing.

Vow - Hebrew *neder* (neh'-der) vow, votive offering from *nadar* (naw-dar) vow, make a vow.

Swear - Hebrew *shaba* (shaw-bah) sware, charge, oath.

Swear - Hebrew *yad* (yawd) consecrate.

Oath “a solemn appeal to God as a witness OE trivial use of sacred names.” (T.F. Hoad, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, p.318, 1986)

Swear “pt. swore pp. sworn to take a solemn oath intr. and trans. OE. B. bind by an oath.” (T.F. Hoad, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, p.476, 1986)

Vow solemn promise of a religious nature. (T.F. Hoad, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, p.530, 1986)

Oath a solemn appeal to God, or to a sacred or revered person, by way of attesting the truth of one's word. (Webster's Dictionary, p. 578, 1961)

Swear to utter a solemn declaration, with an appeal to God for the truth of what is affirmed...to make a solemn promise. (Webster's Dictionary, p. 857, 1961)

Vow a solemn promise especially to God or some deity. (Webster's Dictionary, p. 958, 1961)

An oath is an invocation to God to witness the truth of a statement. It may be express and direct, as when one swears by God Himself; or implicit and tacit, as when we swear by creatures.... (The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XI Copyright 1911)

As you can see the words oath, swear, and vow all pretty much mean the same thing—some kind of solemn promise to God to have Him declare what you say is the truth.

As Christians, we know that Jesus is the only truth and always speaks the truth. We, on the other hand, do not always speak the truth.

Testimony of the Old Testament

As we look to the Old Testament on this subject we must keep in mind the true principle of interpretation—we always interpret the Old Testament in light of the New never the reverse.

This means that we never say the Old Testament says this and that and that we should obey it without looking at the New. The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old. The Old Testament was for our examples it was a shadow until Christ (1 Corinthians 10:6,11; 2 Corinthians 3:14).

God Vows

Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it. (Numbers 14:23)

But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:8)

That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and [that] he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. (Deuteronomy 29:13)

I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant. (Psalm 89:3)

The LORD hath sworn [in] truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. (Psalm 132:11)

But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. (Jeremiah 22:5)

See also: Genesis 8:21,22. Numbers 11:12; 14:30; 32:11. Deuteronomy 1:8; 6:3,12; 8:18; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9; 13:17; 19:18; 26:3,15; 30:20; 31:20,21,23; 34:4. Joshua 1:6; 21:43; 22:4. Judges 2:1,15. 1 Kings 8:20,24,25,56. 2 Chronicles 1:9; 6:10,15,16; 21:7. Nehemiah 9:15. Psalms 89:25,49; 95:11; 105:9,42. Isaiah 14:24; 43:23; 62:8. Jeremiah 11:5; 32:22; 49:13; 51:14. Ezekiel 16:8; 17:16,19; 20:5,6,15,22,23,28,42; 47:14. Amos 4:2; 6:8; 8:7.

Men in the Old Testament Vowed to God

Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. (Deuteronomy 6:13)

But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; [even] a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth. (Deuteronomy 23:22,23)

Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows. (Job 22:27)

See also: Genesis 14:22; 28:20-22; 31:13. Leviticus 7:16; 27:2-13. Numbers 6:2,21; 15:8; 30:2-16. Deuteronomy 10:20; 12:6,11; 11:10,17,26; 23:18,21; 29:14. Judges 11:30; 21:5. 1 Samuel 1:11. 2 Samuel 15:7,8; 19:7. 2 Kings 11:4. 2 Chronicles 15:15; 36:13. Ezra 10:5. Nehemiah 5:12,13; 10:29; 13:25. Psalms

22:25; 50:14; 61:5,8; 63:11; 65:1; 66:13,14; 76:11; 106,14,18; 119:106; 132:2. Isaiah 19:18,21; 65:16. Jeremiah 4:2; 12:16. Ezekiel 17:18. Daniel 9:11. Hosea 4:15. Jonah 1:16; 2:9. Zephaniah 1:5. Zechariah 5:4.

Men Vowed to other men by God

And they said, We saw certainly that the LORD was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, [even] betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee. (Genesis 26:28)

But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD'S oath that [was] between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. (2 Samuel 21:7)

See also: Genesis 21:22-24; 24:3,7-9,37,41; 25:33; 31:53; 47:29-31; 50:5. Exodus 22:10,11. Numbers 5:19,21. Joshua 2:12,17,20; 6:22; 9:19,20; 1 Samuel 19:6; 20:3,17,42; 24:21,22; 30:15. 1 Kings 1:17,29,30. 2 Chronicles 6:22; Isaiah 45:23.

God Vows or Swears to Men

Genesis 24:3,7; 26:3. Exodus 6:8; 13:10; 32:13; 33:1. 1 Samuel 3:14.

Men Swore or Vowed

And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and [is] a witness, whether he hath seen or known [of it]; if he do not utter [it], then he shall bear his iniquity. (Leviticus 5:1)

See also: Leviticus 5:4; 6:3,5. Joshua 9:15; 14:9. Judges 15:12; 21:18. 1 Samuel 14:24,26-28. 2 Samuel 19:23; 21:2,17. 1 Kings 1:13,51; 8:31; 18:10. Psalms 15:4; 24:4. Proverbs 20:25; 31:2. Ecclesiastes 9:2. Isaiah 3:7. Jeremiah 5:7; 7:9; 23:10; 44:25.

Ezekiel 17:13; 21:23. Hosea 4:2; 10:4; 12:1. Amos 2:8; 8:14. Nahum 1:15.

God called a Religious Service Vow

Judges 13:5,7; 16:17.

Angles Vow and Swore

Daniel 12:7.

There Were Very Serious Consequences of Vowing and Swearing

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter [any] thing before God: for God [is] in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few...When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for [he hath] no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better [is it] that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it [was] an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? (Ecclesiastes 5:2,4,5,6)

See also: Judges 11:30-39. Job 22:27. Zechariah 8:17. Malachi 1:13; 3:5.

We've discovered that the majority of vowing or oath making was done by God Almighty Himself that's very clear. Men did vow and make oaths; however, there were very serious consequences. For example Judges 11:30,31,34.

And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return

in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

Then

And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she [was his] only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

And the fact must be stressed that vowing and oath taking was very serious, and was not to be taken lightly.

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter [any] thing before God: for God [is] in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few...When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for [he hath] no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better [is it] that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it [was] an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? (Ecclesiastes 5:2,4,5,6)

As we mentioned before the Old Testament does not dictate the doctrines to be obeyed alone, but only when it agrees with the New Testament.

Testimony of the New Testament

God Swears or Promises

So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest. (Hebrews 3:11)

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:4)

See also: Hebrews 3:18; 4:1,3; 6:12,13,16,17,18 (in these verses it's talking about how God is greater in oaths a swearing, but men must take oaths or swear to prove truth in what they say) 7:6,28; 8:6; 9:15; 10:36; 11:9,11,13,17,33,39; 12:26. James 1:12. 2 Peter 3:9,13. 1 John 2:25. Notice, a large amount of oaths or swearing is identified in the book of Hebrews which quotes the Old Testament the most.

God Swears Oaths or Promises

The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear. (Luke 1:73,74)

Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures, Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh. (Romans 1:2,3)

See also: Luke 24:49. Acts 1:4; 2:30,33,39; 7:5,17; 13:23,32; 26:6. Romans 4:13,14,16,20,21; 9:4,8,9. 2 Corinthians 1:20. Galatians 3:14,16-19,21,22,29; 4:23. Ephesians 1:13; 2:12. 1 Timothy 4:8. 2 Timothy 1:1. Titus 1:2.

Peter's Swearing

Then began he to curse and to swear, [saying], I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. (Matthew 26:74)

Surly no one would say we could swear or curse because Peter did it here? That would be ridiculous. Did Peter curse and swear as we think it means today? Peter actually said his curse and swearing in Hebrew, and would have been the words *shaba* charge, oath and *arar* curse.

However, this account was written in Greek so what do these words mean in Greek? Curse, *katanathematizo*, this is actually a compound word meaning to hold down to declare one's self liable to the severest divine penalties. In a sense Peter was saying God curse me down if I know Jesus!

Swear, of course Peter was not using foul language, but *omnuo* to affirm, promise, to threaten, with an oath, in swearing to call a person or thing as witness. Peter was saying in effect I'm affirming, or promising that I don't know Jesus! In both cases the use of those words provide a very serious picture for us. All the more reason he went and wept bitterly.

The Heathen Promised because they were not true

Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded [it] to be given [her]. (Matthew 14:7-9)

See also: Matthew 26:59-61. Mark 6:23,26. Luke 22:6.

Heathens made Men Promise or Swear

Woe unto you, [ye] blind guides, which 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 whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? (Matthew 23:16,17)

See also: Matthew 23:18,20-22.

Saying you will but then don't

But what think ye? A [certain] man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I [go], sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of [his] father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. (Matthew 21:28-31)

This is not good. In a sense one can be guilty of lying, and this is what vow, oath taking, and swearing are. We have no guarantee we can perform what we say which would be lying, and lying is of the devil John 8:44.

God is the only one that cannot lie

In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began. (Titus 1:2)

We should speak the truth

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

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds. (Colossians 3:9)

See also: 1 Timothy 1:10. James 3:2-6, 8-12. 1 Peter 3:10. 2 Peter 2:19.

The New Testament does not have the prohibition of vows, oaths, and swearing in every verse, but it is there, and if it's there in principle it should be obeyed.

If he hath wronged thee, or oweth [thee] ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written [it] with mine own hand, I will repay [it]: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.
(Philemon 1:18,19)

The above verse is what I mean by principle. Paul does not say he vows to pay, or swears to pay, but simply says put that on mine account...I will repay. He rightly invokes the directive of our Lord Jesus by letting his yes be yes and his no no.

Angles vowed or Swore

Revelation 10:5,6.

Hebrew 7:20,21 tell us of oaths made to God by men in the Old Testament. And again, this was a practice of the Old Testament. There's not one place in the New Testament where a believer swears and oath to God.

Our Lord Jesus tells us the following:

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: But I say unto you,

Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. (Matthew 5:33-37)

James follows this same directive.

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and [your] nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. (James 5:12)

When Jesus teaches us about swearing and oath taking He goes back to the Old Testament it hath been said by them of old time. Notice, He says,

Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. He says they said you should perform your oaths to the Lord, but then He says, but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

He could have said swear and perform oaths to God but not to men. But He didn't He said in the clearest tone swear not at all! Why? Because He wants His disciples to speak truth and not be found with guile.

Then He adds but let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. Did you catch that? He says if you have to vow, swear, or take an oath to show you are true these cometh of evil. We are to let our yes be yes and our no no.

Again, the Lord Jesus says to you.

Swear not at all.

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and [your] nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. (James 5:12)

Testimony of the Early Church

Understand we do not believe everything these men taught, only that these quotes are given as a comparison.

"Now one named Quintus, a Phrygian, who was but lately come from Phrygia, when he saw the wild beasts, became afraid. This was the man who forced himself and some others to come forward voluntarily [for trial]. Him the proconsul, after many entreaties, persuaded to swear and to offer sacrifice." (Polycarp, The Encyclical Epistle to the Church Smyrnam, A.D.160)

"And when he came near, the proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On his confessing that he was, [the proconsul] sought to persuade him to deny [Christ], saying, "Have respect to thy old age," and other similar things, according to their custom, [such as], "Swear by the fortune of Caesar; repent, and say, Away with the Atheists." But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on all the multitude of the wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hand towards them, while with groans he looked up to heaven, said, "Away with the Atheists." Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ; "Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" (Polycarp, The Encyclical Epistle to the Church Smyrnam, A.D.160)

"Let no one of you cherish any evil in his heart against his neighbour, and love not an oath of falsehood." (Barnabas, The Epistle of Barnabas, late 1st century)

And with regard to our not swearing at all, and always speaking the truth, He enjoined as follows: "Swear not at all; but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." And that we ought to worship God alone, He thus persuaded us." (Justin Martyr, First apology of Justin, A.D.165)

"...but also to love their enemies; and enjoined them not only not to swear falsely, but not even to swear at all; and not only not to speak evil of their neighbours, but not even to style any one "Raca" and "fool; "[declaring] that otherwise they were in danger of hell-fire." (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book 2, late 2nd century)

"For they do not receive from the Father the knowledge of the Son; neither do they learn who the Father is from the Son, who teaches clearly and without parables Him who truly is God. He says: "Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King." (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book 4, late 2nd century)

"And they also taught us to refrain from unlawful idolatry, and adultery, and murder, fornication, theft, avarice, false swearing, wrath, and every incontinence and uncleanness; and that whatever a man would not wish to be done to himself, he should not do to another; and thus he who acts righteously shall escape the eternal punishments, and be thought worthy of the eternal life from God." (Theophilus, Theophilus to Autolycus, book 2, A.D.181)

"Above all, let an oath on account of what is sold be far from you. And let swearing on account of other things be banished." (Clement of Alexandria, A.D.195)

Of perjury, I am silent, since even swearing is not lawful. (Tertullian, A.D.200)

"You are compelled to swear, which is not lawful." (Cyprian, A.D.250)

"We must not swear....of this same matter, according to Matthew..."I say unto you swear not at all." (Cyprian A.D.250)

What others have to say

"A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein the person swearing in truth, righteousness, and judgment, solemnly calleth God to witness what he sweareth, and to judge him according to the truth or falseness thereof." (1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 23)

"An oath calls upon the name of God, Who serves as a witness that we are speaking the truth or that we intend to speak the truth in that which we are about to say. It can also take the form of calling upon God as our witness that we fully intend to fulfill a vow." (Rev. Steven R. Kay, A Lawful Oath, L.D. 37)

"An oath is licit, and an act of virtue, under certain conditions. It is, in effect, an act of homage rendered by the creature to the wisdom and omnipotence of the Creator—it is, therefore, an act of the virtue of religion; moreover, it is an excellent way of affording men security in their mutual intercourse." (The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XI, A.D.1911)

"Jesus said, "Swear not at all . . . let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these

cometh of evil" (Matthew 5:34, 37). Every word of a Christian will be the truth regardless of oaths. A simple yes or no is as truthful for him as an oath. So, to what purpose is taking an oath? It is superfluous. To take an oath is to imply it might otherwise be a lie. But this cannot be for a Christian. So he should never use oath words in his everyday language." (Marvin Rickett, Cursing, and Swearing, 5-1-1998)

"The very need for any oath assumes that truth cannot be guaranteed without it, and that lies can be told, expected and tolerated if there is no oath! Such a system ignores the fact that lies are equally as offensive to God, with or without an oath!... There is a reference (in Acts 18:18) which is often quoted by some who want to set aside the words of Jesus, to make it obligatory for Christians to swear oaths. That obligation is even built into the creeds of some Churches!" (Allon Maxwell, What Jesus said about Oaths, Bible Digest - Number 60 August 1996)

"Anabaptists found explicit prohibitions in the Bible against oath-taking (Matthew 5:34, and James 5:12). This alone made them poor citizens, for they could not participate in most juries and could not swear oaths of allegiance. It also meant that they could not serve in public office." (Dr. E.L. Skip Knox, Anabaptist Beliefs—the Christian and the State, History of Western Civilization, 18 October 1998)

"You see if I have to take an oath for you to get to believe me, then what does that say about my daily speech? Is that what you want to have people think of your daily speech?...Is James forbidding all oaths, even those taken in a courtroom, or those written down in legal documents? No, I don't think so. As we saw in the Old Testament, there certainly wasn't anything inherently wrong

with making an oath. God did. But the practice became so corrupted that it took on other meanings." (Exangello web site, Truth or Consequences)

"101. Q. But may we swear an oath by the Name of God in a godly manner?

A. Yes, when the government demands it of its subjects, or when necessity requires it, in order to maintain and promote fidelity and truth, to God's glory and for our neighbor's good. Such oath-taking is based on God's Word[1] and was therefore rightly used by saints in the Old and the New Testament.[2] [1] Deut. 6:13; 10:20; Jer. 4:1, 2; Heb. 6:16. [2] Gen. 21:24; 31:53; Josh. 9:15; I Sam. 24:22; I Kings 1:29, 30; Rom. 1:9; II Cor. 1:23." (The Heidelberg Catechism)

"We commit ourselves, to tell the truth, to give a simple yes or no, and to avoid swearing of oaths." (Mennonite Confession of Faith, Herald Press, 1995)

"In these verses, is Jesus prohibiting all oath-taking as Anabaptists and Jehovah's Witnesses do? Jesus himself submitted to an oath at his trial recorded in Mt 26. In verse 62, he is silent. In verse 63, he is bound by an oath to reply and does. Paul invokes God as his witness (a form of an oath) in Rom 1:9. And God himself swears by his own name that we might be encouraged and certain of our hope (Heb 6:17). If this is the case, then what could Jesus have meant when he spoke regarding oaths?" (Oaths and Vows, Grace Valley Christian Center, 2-7-1997)

"Are you going through a dry season? Well, take an inventory of vows. Perhaps, you deferred on one or two. Perhaps, you committed to partner up with a ministry to support them with prayers and financial offerings and you've stopped giving. Beloved, no longer waffle and make ex-

cuses, but be diligent to fulfill your promises. When parents and grandparents uphold commitments made by earlier generations, a marvelous legacy is passed on to their children. Their commitment reflects the truth that we serve a promise-keeping God." (David Holt Boshart Jr., Sacred Vows, Christ-centered Mall)

"Now, there are circumstances in which men are expected to take an oath. One, of course, is in a court of law. Even secular society recognizes that most men are not trustworthy but need to be coerced into honesty. Men will not be honest if it does not serve their interests and therefore their truthfulness must be artificially guaranteed or, failing that, they at least must be brought under the law of perjury so that there is some way to judge their dishonesty. So if a Christian takes an oath in a court of law he is not violating James' command. He is simply accommodating himself to a recognition of man's fallen condition, and of the fact that court proceedings would otherwise be impossible. But he also fully recognizes that he does not need the oath to guarantee his own honesty." (David H. Roper, Swearing, Praying, and caring, Discovery Publishing, February 13, 1972)

"That war was looked upon as contrary to the will of God, and oath-taking was forbidden." (Uxbridge Quaker Heritage, By Allan McGillivray, 1996)

"One of the first things the candidate for acceptance into an Asatru kindred should learn is what taking a kindred oath means. It is easy to speak the verbiage of an oath, but what about its substance? Oath taking was serious business in ancient times among the Scandinavian peoples. An entire culture was built around the intricate web of dependency and responsibility created by pledging oaths and blood kinship. We will begin a very cursory examina-

tion of the types of oaths commonly seen in modern Asatru, and what each can mean to the one making it." (On The Taking Of Oaths by Gunther Hraefngrim, obtained from the Internet)

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter: So help me God."
(United States Senate Oath of Office)

"Oath, vocal affirmation of the truth of one's statements, generally made by appealing to a deity. From the earliest days of human history, calling upon the gods of a community to witness the truth of a statement or the solemnity of a promise has been commonly practiced. The force of the oath depends on the belief that supernatural powers will punish falsehood spoken under oath or the violation of a promise." (Encyclopedia)

Conclusion

We have seen that God vows, swears, and makes oaths. The majority of evidence in the Scriptures shows He is almost the only one that does.

Men swore, vowed, and made oaths really only in the Old Testament, and even in that, the warning against it was very severe and serious (Ecclesiastes 5:2,4-6; Judges 11:30-34). We must remember we don't use the Old Testament to prove a doctrine—we look at the New Testament with the Old Testament in support; not the other way around.

There are many debates about whether one should swear an oath of office, allegiance, or court oaths. Most, out of fear of retribution, will try and make legal oaths ok. However, Jesus says swear not at all! Do we feel we can override Jesus' commands?

If we are eager to disobey Him in this how much more in matters of higher seriousness? The early Church frowned on vows, oaths, and swearing, and for good reason—our Lord's command swear not at all! You cannot vow or swear such and such it is impossible. Why? Because you can't control all circumstances as God can.

Say you vowed you would be at a such and such a place at a certain time, and your intention is to do it, but when you are ready to go something happens to prevent you from doing so. Whether you meant to or not you failed on your promise (Matthew 21:28-31). Also to vow, swear, or make an oath can be disastrous, as I believe the Old Testament example of Jephthah's foolish vow shows (Judges 11:30-34).

We must obey Christ. We must not swear, vow, or make oaths because we cannot always fulfill them, and that is considered lying and that's a sin.

Finally, we must heed the simple yet direct words of our Lord Jesus, and not try and escape them because of personal fears or prejudices.

- Do you believe the words that our Lord speaks are true?
- Do you believe He means what He says and does not play words games?

Consider very, very carefully the closing statement.

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: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. (Matthew 5:33-37)

Let me repeat those words so we never forget.

Swear not at all.

Swear not at all.

Swear not at all.