



A Theology of Swearing

Small Group Work Sheet
October 16, 2011

Part 1 - Ice Breaker

- Have you struggled or do you struggle with profanity?

Part 2 - Sermon Review

- Why does God want us to honor his name in our speech?
- What kind of swearing is James talking about in James 5:12?
- In the Old Testament, the Jews were commanded to swear oaths in God's name. Jesus and James tell us not to swear oaths in God's name. How did it change from God commanding us to swear oaths in his name to James and Jesus telling us not to swear them?
- What was wrong with the evasive swearing the Jews practiced?
- What is profanity? What is the connection between profanity and James 5:12?
- Why does profanity pertain either to God, the later portion of our digestive system, our sexual parts or sexual acts?
- Since everyone knows how to be profane by nature, not by teaching, is this evidence for the existence of God and the imprint of his character upon all of our lives?
- What is Christian profanity? What are some Christian profanity expressions?
- Is the use of Christian profanity similar to the Jews attempt to take oaths that only *appeared* binding?
- If my word is to be my oath and my life the witness of my integrity, is there something the Holy Spirit is calling me to change?



"All along I thought our level of corruption fell well within community standards."

Part 3 - Digging Deeper - Can I swear an oath in court?

The Reformation's Anabaptists and later the Moravians and Quakers have taken James 5:12 as a prohibition against taking oaths in any circumstance. George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, gave this famous answer when he was sentenced to prison for refusing to swear on the Bible.

You have given me a book here to kiss and to swear on, and this book which you have given me to kiss says, "Kiss the Son," and the Sons says in this book "Swear not at all." Now I say as the book says, and yet you imprison me; how chance you do not imprison the book for saying so?"¹

Today, because of George Fox', you do not have to lay your hand on a Bible in a court of law and swear you are telling the truth "so help me God." You may simply affirm that you are telling the truth.

While we admire George Fox's courage, do you think he was correct? If we look at the teaching on oaths in Matthew 5 and Matthew 23, in its original context, it is against the very thing George Fox was fighting for! Jesus' examples of oath taking abuses come from *everyday common speech, not legal or formal circumstances.*

For example, Jesus, in a legal circumstance, honored the oath he was put under by Caiaphas.

But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." Matthew 26:63–64 (ESV)

We also have repeated examples of Paul, in a formal circumstance, using an oath to affirm he was telling the truth.

But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. 2 Corinthians 1:23 (ESV)

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you Romans 1:9 (ESV)

Paul would have never taken these oaths if all forms of oath taking were sinful. How does this translate into life? Oath taking is permitted, but it is not encouraged. In civil life, as in a courtroom, oath-taking is permitted. Even in religious life, such as a marriage ceremony, we take an oath before God. To be put under oath or to take an oath is not sinning against James or Jesus' words. On occasions, oaths are permitted to prove a point, as it was for Paul. That being said, oath taking simply should not be part of everyday Christian conversation. As Christians, we simply should not need oaths in our everyday language. We are to be known as people of truth.

¹ ¹ James Hasting, *The Speakers Bible, James*, (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI), 1971, pg. 128