

was bound to fulfill his oath. A sharp lawyer working on this principle found it easy to devour the estate of a widow who didn't know which oaths were binding and which were not! (An analogous situation today would be exemption clauses in the fine print at the end of a contract!)

Jesus rebukes the scribes and Pharisees for such practices. The obligation to use the name of the Lord in oaths in a reverent, meaningful, and truthful manner is a religious obligation.

What then is Christ teaching the citizens of His kingdom concerning oaths? Is His command an absolute negative or a negative of comparison? The form of it (understood in isolation from the context) appears to be absolute. He says (Matt. 5:34) "But I say to you, make no oath at all" But the force of it (in the context) appears to be relative.

Three scriptures support the concept that Christ was condemning sharp legal practices in oath-taking rather than oath-taking itself. In Deuteronomy 6:13 we read, "You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him, and swear by His name." In Matthew 26:63 the high priest said to Jesus, "I adjure you by the living God [I call on you to swear by the living God] that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus answered, "You have said it" [which is equivalent to saying, "That is correct"]. And in Hebrews 6:16-17 we find God Himself swearing an oath: "For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute [Notice no criticism or condemnation of oath-taking]. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us." Notice that O.T. believers are told to swear by the Lord's name, that Jesus did not hesitate to respond positively to a call to swear whether or not He was the Christ, and that God Himself has sworn that His purpose in our salvation is unchangeable.

James 5:12 should also be understood in this manner. James writes: "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment." This exhortation should not be made to contradict Deuteronomy 6:13 or Matthew 26:63 or Hebrews 6:16-17, but rather seen against the background of traditional Pharisaic rulings concerning which oaths were binding and which were not. Jesus stressed truthfulness in speaking. He did not condemn oath-taking but iniquitous oaths and double talk, and insisted that for a child of God his/her word should be absolutely dependable, especially when he appeals to God to witness the truth of what he says.

Once again it should be stressed that Jesus is not teaching a higher level of righteousness than that of the O.T., but one that is in perfect agreement with the O.T. (although opposed to the oral law of Judaism).

**MAT 5:38** "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'

**MAT 5:39** "But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.