

# Matthew 5:33-37 “Contract Control”

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## 5 Message Sub-series on the Sermon On The Mount:

- How to be a faithful Christian among others:
  1. 5:21-26 “Anger Control”
  2. 5:27-30 “Lust Control”
  3. 5:31-32 “Marriage Control”
  4. 5:33-37 “Contract Control”
  5. 5:38-48 “Enemy Control”

Some think this passage means Christians cannot take oaths in courts or anywhere else. However, the **Old Testament** records that **Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Joseph and Jonathan** all took oaths; and **Jesus swore an oath in His trial**.

## Jesus is not warning us to never enter contracts or take oaths

- He’s warning us of not fulfilling them or not telling the truth under oath.
  - **In the N.T. Paul frequently made oaths and vows:**
    - Romans 1:9** For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,
    - 2 Corinthians 1:23** Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.
    - Philippians 1:8** For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.
    - 1 Thessalonians 2:5** For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness— God is witness.

## Jesus here speaks to the issues of:

- Truthfulness
- Integrity
- **Mark Twain** “If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.”
- **Benjamin Franklin** “Half a truth is often a great lie.”
- The average person tells 4 lies a day, or 1460 a year a total of 88,000 by the age of 60. And the most common lie is: “**I’m FINE.**”

## Truth-telling:

- Rampant indifference to telling the truth these days
- Politicians seem to be professionals at not telling the truth
- Perjury at the highest levels of position are taken as normal business anymore.

## Jesus speaks to this same issue later in Matthew:

**Matthew 23:16–22**

**16** “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.’

**17** Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?

**18** And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.’

**19** Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

**20** Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it.

**21** He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it.

**22** And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.

- The scribes and Pharisees had twisted the law *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain* (Exodus 20:7) to permit taking virtually every other name in a false oath. (Guzik)
- “The truly good man will never need to take an oath; the truth of his sayings and the reality of his promises need no such guarantee. But the fact that oaths are still sometimes necessary is the proof that men are not good men and that this is not a good world.” (Barclay)

**33** “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’

- The Pharisees developed elaborate rules governing vows, and only those employing the divine name were binding. Jesus teaches that a vow is binding regardless of what formula is used. The use of oaths is superfluous when one’s word ought to suffice. Oath-taking is an implicit confession that we do not always tell the truth.<sup>1</sup>

[Leviticus 19:12](#) “You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.”

[Numbers 30:2](#) “If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.”

[Deuteronomy 23:21](#) “When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you.”

**34** **But I say to you**, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne;  
**35** nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.  
**36** Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.  
**37** But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’  
For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

<sup>1</sup> *Spirit filled life study Bible*. 1997 (electronic ed.) (Mt 5:33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## 2 BIG issues with oaths in Jesus' day:

1. **Frivolous swearing** – like pinkie swearing
  2. **Meaningless swearing** – swearing on the gold of the Temple but not the Temple itself – ‘cause that’s God’s house.
- The **Mishna** devotes one whole section called *Shebuoth* (“Oaths”) to an elaborate discussion of when oaths are binding and when they are not. <sup>2</sup>
  - The Jews were past-masters in the art of splitting hairs about allowable and forbidden oaths or forms of profanity just as modern Christians employ a great variety of vernacular “cuss-words” and excuse themselves because they do not use the more flagrant forms. <sup>3</sup>

## Christians need to have a full understanding of what they are signing

- All the obligations of the contract
- What happens if they default
- Is there remediation

**Hosea 4:6** My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

## How does this translate into life? What deductions can we draw concerning our speech?

- **Simply this: Oath-taking is permitted, but it is not encouraged.**
  - In civil life oath-taking, as in the courtroom, is permitted, and when one does so, he does not sin against Christ’s teaching.
  - Oaths are not to be a normal part of our everyday conversation.
    - ♣ Barclay: “Frivolous swearing”
  - In normal relations oaths should never fall from our lips.
  - Kingdom men and women do not need such devices.
  - Their commitment to truthfulness should be evident to all. <sup>4</sup>

## Wikipedia on “Contracts”:

- When creating a contract, a negotiator is not only doing so to reach an agreement between two or more parties, but **to create an agreement that is durable**; whereby parties of the contract are legally bound and committed to its promises (Wade and Honeyman 2005, 7). A legally binding contract is defined as an exchange of promises or an agreement between

<sup>2</sup> *The Mishna*, Herbert Danby, trans. (Oxford: Oxford, 1974), pp. 408–421.

<sup>3</sup> Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Mt 5:34). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, R. K. (2001). *The sermon on the mount : The message of the kingdom*. Preaching the Word (128). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.

parties that the law will enforce, and there is an underlying presumption for commercial agreements that parties intend to be legally bound (Contracts 2007).

- Provided an agreement is contractual in nature (Curtis v. Chemical Cleaning and Dyeing Co [1951] 1 KB 805), and regardless of whether or not they have read it, a person is bound by a written contract as long as they have signed it (L'Estrange v. Graucob [1934] 2 KB 394).