

1. Matthew 5:33–37

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.’ **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.

Jesus is responding to a distorted interpretation of the Law, not the Law itself.

2. The Original Purpose of Oaths in the Old Testament

Oaths were not inherently sinful in the Old Testament.

Biblical purposes of oaths:

1. To affirm truth in serious matters (legal or covenantal)
2. To invoke God as witness, not as a tool
3. To restrain lying by placing one’s word under divine accountability
4. To seal covenants, especially where trust was fragile

Examples:

- God Himself swears by His own name (Genesis 22:16, Hebrews 6:13) (Paul’s reference)

“By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only *son*— **17** blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies.

- Israel swore oaths in covenantal and judicial contexts (Deut. 6:13, Lev. 19:12)

Oaths were meant to increase truthfulness, not replace it.

3. What Went Wrong by Jesus’ Time (Second Temple Period)

By the time of Jesus, oath-making had become a loophole system.

Corrupt practices included:

- Hierarchy of oaths
Some oaths were considered binding, others “safe to break”
- Swearing by substitutes instead of God:
- Heaven
- Earth
- Jerusalem
- One’s head
- Legalistic wordplay designed to appear honest while remaining deceptive

This is exposed even more clearly in Matthew 23:16–22, where Jesus rebukes the Pharisees directly for teaching which oaths “count.” They weren’t trying to be truthful. They were trying to control consequences.

4. Why Jesus Brings This Up at All

Because oaths had become a mask for dishonesty.

Instead of:

“I speak truth because God is holy”

People were saying:

“I speak truth only when I am cornered by the right formula”

Jesus exposes this as hypocrisy of the heart.

5. “Do Not Swear at All” — What Jesus Is (and Is Not) Saying

Jesus is NOT:

- Abolishing courts, vows, or legal testimony
- Contradicting God’s own use of oaths
- Condemning formal covenant language in all contexts

(We know this because Paul occasionally invokes God as witness — e.g., Romans 1:9.)

Jesus IS:

- Ending the casual, manipulative oath culture
- Calling His disciples to radical truthfulness
- Removing every escape hatch for dishonesty

6. The Spiritual Core: You Don't Own What You Swear By

This is one of the deepest layers.

Jesus says:

- You can't swear by heaven — it's God's throne
- You can't swear by earth — it's God's footstool
- You can't swear by Jerusalem — it's God's city
- You can't swear by your head — you can't make one hair white or black

We do not possess anything independently enough to use it as collateral for truth.

Everything already belongs to God.

So every word you speak is already spoken before Him — oath or no oath.

7. "Let Your Yes Be Yes" — The New Standard

Jesus raises the bar from external guarantees to internal integrity.

Truth is no longer:

- Activated by a formula
- Dependent on witnesses
- Conditional on circumstance

Truth is:

- Who you are
- How you speak
- What flows from your heart

Your word should be so reliable that adding an oath would cheapen it.

8. "Anything More Than This Is From Evil"

This is strong language — and intentional.

Why?

Because excessive oath-making:

- Signals lack of trust
- Suggests habitual exaggeration
- Reveals double speech
- Often arises from fear, manipulation, or self-protection

In Scripture, deception is consistently tied to the enemy:

- Satan is “the father of lies”
- Lies fracture trust
- Trust is the foundation of love and community

So Jesus is not being moralistic — He is being protective.

9. Historical + Spiritual Insight Worth Adding

A. Oaths reveal who we think is watching

If we need to swear to be believed, we are revealing that:

- We fear people more than God
- Or we assume God is not always present

Jesus dismantles both assumptions.

B. The Kingdom ethic restores Edenic speech

Before the Fall:

- No oaths
- No contracts
- No sworn guarantees

Why?

Because there was no deception.

Jesus is restoring speech to its original pre-Fall simplicity.

C. This prepares the way for reconciliation

Right after this section comes teaching on:

- Retaliation
- Loving enemies
- Integrity in relationships

Truthful speech is the soil in which reconciliation can grow.

10. Power to the Word

“Jesus is not removing seriousness from our words — He is making every word serious.”

“When truth lives in the heart, it no longer needs to borrow authority from oaths.”

11. Why then did God swear by his own name? If swearing by anything is not required?

In fact, God swearing by His own name actually supports Jesus' teaching rather than undermining it.

1. First Principle: God and Humans Are Not Equal Speakers

The mistake people often make is assuming:

“If God swore, then swearing must be good.”

But Scripture never presents God as a moral peer among humans.

God's speech:

- Creates reality (“Let there be...”)
- Cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2)
- Requires no external authority

So when God swears, He is not compensating for weakness. He is accommodating human weakness.

2. Why God Swore by His Own Name (Hebrews 6:13)

“Because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself.”

This verse is critical.

What it tells us:

- There is nothing above God
- There is no higher authority to invoke
- God's own being is the final reference point of truth

God does not need to swear —
He chooses to, for our sake.

3. The Purpose Was Assurance, Not Verification

God's oath was never meant to:

- Convince Himself
- Add truth to His word
- Create obligation He lacked

It was meant to:

- Give humans strong reassurance

- Anchor fragile faith
- Meet people where fear and doubt live

Hebrews 6:17 says it plainly:

“Because God wanted to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of His purpose...”

The oath is pastoral, not functional.

4. God Swears by His Name Because His Name Is His Nature

When God swears by His name, He is not pointing to a label.

In Hebrew thought:

- A name = essence, character, identity

So God swearing by His name is equivalent to saying:

“I stake My own being on this promise.”

That is something only God can do without sin.

5. Why Humans Cannot Imitate This Without Corruption

Humans swear because:

- We lack perfect integrity
- Our words fail
- Our power is limited
- Our future is uncertain

We swear to borrow authority.

God swears because:

- He is the authority
- His future is certain
- His word never fails

So when humans swear lightly, they are pretending to be more than they are. That is exactly what Jesus dismantles.

6. Jesus Is Not Rebuking God — He Is Restoring Humanity

Jesus’ teaching is not:

“God should not swear.”

It is:

“You should not pretend to be God.”

Jesus pulls human speech back into:

- Humility
- Dependence
- Truthfulness without self-exaltation

This aligns perfectly with:

“You cannot make one hair white or black.”

It is a rebuke of false sovereignty, not seriousness.

7. A Crucial Insight: God’s Oath Points Forward to Christ

God’s oath finds its fulfillment in Jesus Himself.

Christ is:

- The embodied promise
- The living “Yes” of God (2 Corinthians 1:20)

“For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”

- God’s final word to humanity

So once Christ arrives:

- Truth is no longer merely promised
- Truth stands before us in flesh

Which makes Jesus’ words all the more fitting:

“Let your Yes be Yes.”

God can swear by Himself because He alone is truth.

We are called not to swear, but to reflect His truth.