

Name: _____



Advanced Bible Correspondence Course

Lesson 37: The Law of God – Third Commandment Continued

LORD'S DAY 37

Q. 101. MAY WE THEN SWEAR RELIGIOUSLY BY THE NAME OF GOD?

ANSWER: YES, EITHER WHEN THE MAGISTRATES DEMAND IT OF THE SUBJECTS, OR WHEN NECESSITY REQUIRES US THEREBY TO CONFIRM FIDELITY AND TRUTH TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE SAFETY OF OUR NEIGHBOUR; FOR SUCH AN OATH IS FOUNDED ON GOD'S WORD (A), AND THEREFORE WAS JUSTLY USED BY THE SAINTS, BOTH IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT (B).

(A) DEUTERONOMY 6:13, 10:20, ISAIAH 48:1, HEBREWS 6:16; (B) GENESIS 21:24, 31:53, JOSHUA 9:15, I SAMUEL 24:23, II SAMUEL 3:35, I KINGS 1:29, ROMANS 1:9, 9:1&2, II CORINTHIANS 1:23

Permitted Oaths

Some have maintained that, in order to prevent any misuse, it would be better to never swear an oath. The extremist Anabaptists at the time of the Reformation stated that it was forbidden to ever swear an oath. In this case, such people often appeal to the words which were spoken by Christ, "*Swear not at all.*" (*Matthew 5:34*).

However, to appeal to this word of Christ is improper. In this Scripture, He rejects rash and needless swearing, in which, out of some reverence for the name of God, they did not use His name, but swore by heaven or earth, or by Jerusalem or their own head ("my head may fall off, if...").

The fact that a sincere and earnest oath is permitted is evident from the fact that God Himself pronounced an oath many times. Among the many texts in the Old Testament, we mention only Genesis 22:16&17, where the Lord promised to bless Abraham, because he was so obedient that he was even willing to sacrifice Isaac at God's command, "*By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, (...): that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will*

multiply thy seed.” And in Deuteronomy 6:13, the Lord commands that *when* we swear, to do this only by His name. In the New Testament, we point to Paul, who called God as a Witness to confirm that he, to spare them, had not yet come to Corinth (II Corinthians 1:23).

When?

We must realize that with an oath, we always call upon God as witness.

Therefore swearing an oath is always a holy matter.

But *when* are we allowed to swear a holy oath? It is not to be done without reason, of our own accord. We may do so when the authorities require it of us, because they must, as the minister of God (Romans 13:4), maintain authority, truth, and justice. Therefore they may require an oath, for instance, the oath of obedience to the laws of the country upon the acceptance of an important government office, or an oath of loyalty at the commissioning of an officer in the army. It may also be required when a judge, as an extreme means in order to obtain the truth, requests of us to confirm our testimony with an oath. A false oath, which is called perjury, will be severely punished by the judge when discovered.

At the acceptance of some occupations, an oath of faithful devotion to duty may be required. Moreover, on some instances the promise of confidentiality must often be made regarding information that can arise in our profession. Think, for example, of a nurse, a doctor, a lawyer, or a certified accountant. Actually, all promises which we make in church, such as the acceptance of an office, at the time of marriage, and of holy baptism are oaths, because these promises are made before God’s countenance.

However, whenever an oath is not *required* of us, the word of the Lord Jesus applies that our yes must simply mean yes, and our no also really must be no (Matthew 5:37; James 5:12).

Q.102. MAY WE ALSO SWEAR BY OTHER CREATURES?

ANSWER: NO; FOR A LAWFUL OATH IS CALLING UPON GOD AS THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS THE HEART, THAT HE WILL BEAR WITNESS TO THE TRUTH, AND PUNISH ME IF I SWEAR FALSELY (A); WHICH HONOUR IS DUE TO NO CREATURE (B).

(A)II CORINTHIANS 1:23, ROMANS 9:1; (B)MATTHEW 5:34-36, JAMES 5:12

Swearing by a creature

Finally, the question is whether it is only permissible to swear an oath by calling on the name of God. Are we not permitted, in order to prevent the vain use of God’s name, to swear by someone who is, so to speak, close to God, for instance, because he or she lived exceptionally pious or died as a martyr? No,

that cannot be done and is not permitted. Only God deserves that honour, for God alone knows the heart and can discern truth and untruth. He alone can and will punish the person who commits perjury, even if that perjury is never discovered by any person. Of course, oaths taken with calling on idols or ancestors are also forbidden.

The final and unerring judgment is only God's due. It is His honour also, which He can and will not share with any creature, for He alone is the All-knowing and Almighty One.

In the Old Testament, we read: *"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; Him shalt thou serve, and to Him shalt thou cleave, and swear by His name"* (Deuteronomy 10:20).

Questions:

1. *What do we actually do when we swear an oath?*

Evaluator: _____

Meditation: "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." Hebrews 6:18

No: it is utterly impossible for God to lie. The earth may be dissolved, and all creation reduced to chaos before God could lie. He would cease to be God if the faintest breath of a change, or the shadow of a turn should pass over the glorious Godhead. But it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore this holds our strong consolation for those that have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them.

And what is the ground of this strong consolation? This is the ground, that God has eternally determined and sworn by Himself – that He will save and bless those that have "fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel." This is the foundation of their consolation, this is the ground of their hope, that God has made such and such promises, and confirmed such and

such promises by His solemn oath – that those who flee for refuge, and lay hold upon this hope, have an interest in and title to them, and have a manifest assurance of being “heirs of promise”.

Now, did you ever in your life feel spiritual consolation? If ever you did, it was by laying hold of the hope set before you in the gospel. There was no consolation ever got by looking at fallen self. If ever there was any true consolation, any hope raised up in the heart, any solid comfort, it came out of the actings of living faith, embracing the blood and righteousness of Christ, tasting a measure of His preciousness, seeing His glory and beauty, and feeling the heart in some measure dissolved into nothingness at His footstool. Not looking at ourselves, but receiving as empty sinners out of His fullness; not trusting to ourselves, or our own attainments, but going to Jesus, and receiving something into our hearts out of Him. Nothing but this can give us consolation; and the more this is felt, the more this will give us “strong consolation”.

Taken from: “Through Baca’s Vale” by J.C. Philpot