

Swear Not at All

By Mark Mayberry

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Introduction

In this lesson, we consider the words of Jesus, as given in the Sermon on the Mount, in which He forbids oaths. What type behavior is under consideration? How far does the prohibition reach?

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil (Matt. 5:33-37, KJV).

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, "YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD." But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, "Yes, yes" or "No, no"; anything beyond these is of evil (Matt. 5:33-37, NASB).

Relevant Greek Words

EPIORKEŌ #1964

The Greek verb ἐπιορκέω (*epiorkeō*), derived from *epiorkos* (sworn falsely, a perjurer), means "to swear falsely" (Thomas 1964).

BDAG define it as "(1) to swear that something is true when one knows it is false, swear falsely, perjure oneself, the context favors this sense for Didache 2:3 in which malicious speech about one's neighbor is castigated in various terms ["you shall not commit perjury; you shall not give false testimony"]. It is probable that also Matt. 5:33 belongs here, but #2 is favored by many; (2) to fail to do what one has promised under oath, break one's oath."

Louw and Nida say it means “to swear that one will do something and then not fulfill the promise—‘to forswear, to break an oath, to swear and fail to keep’ See also 33.465” (33.464).

This word occurs once in the NT (Matt. 5:33).

*Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not ***make *false *vows**, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord (Matt. 5:33).*

OMNUŌ AND OMNUMI #3660

The Greek verbs ὀμνύω (*omnuō*) and ὀμνυμι (*omnumi*) mean “to swear, take an oath” (Thomas 3660).

BDAG define it as “to affirm the veracity of one’s statement by invoking a transcendent entity, frequently with implied invitation of punishment if one is untruthful, swear, take an oath.”

Louw and Nida here provide the same definition as is found under *horkos* (see below).

This word occurs 26x in the NT (Matt. 5:34, 36; 23:16, 18, 20, 21, 22; 26:74; Mark 6:23; 14:71; Luke 1:73; Acts 2:30; Heb. 3:11, 18; 4:3; 6:13, 16; 7:21; James 5:12; Rev 10:6).

*But I say to you, ***make no *oath** at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God (Matt. 5:34).*

*Nor shall you ***make an *oath** by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black (Matt. 5:36).*

*Woe to you, blind guides, who say, “Whoever ***swears** by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever ***swears** by the gold of the temple is obligated” (Matt. 23:16).*

*And, “Whoever ***swears** by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever ***swears** by the offering on it, he is obligated” (Matt. 23:18).*

*Therefore, whoever ***swears** by the altar, ***swears** both by the altar and by everything on it (Matt. 23:20).*

*And whoever ***swears** by the temple, ***swears** both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it (Matt. 23:21).*

*And whoever ***swears** by heaven, ***swears** both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it (Matt. 23:22).*

*Then he began to curse and ***swear**, “I do not know the man!” And immediately a rooster crowed (Matt. 26:74).*

*And he ***swore** to her, “Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom” (Mark 6:23).*

*But he began to curse and ***swear**, “I do not know this man you are talking about!” (Mark 14:71).*

*The oath which He ***swore** to Abraham our father (Luke 1:73).*

*And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had ***sworn** to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne (Acts 2:30).*

*As I ***swore** in My wrath, “They shall not enter My rest” (Heb. 3:11).*

*And to whom did He ***swear** that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? (Heb. 3:18).*

*For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, “As I ***swore** in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest,” although His works were finished from the foundation of the world (Heb. 4:3).*

*For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He ***swore** by Himself (Heb. 6:13).*

*For men ***swear** by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute (Heb. 6:16).*

*(for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, “The Lord has ***sworn** And will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever’” (Heb. 7:21).*

*But above all, my brethren, do not ***swear**, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment (James 5:12).*

*and ***swore** by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there will be delay no longer (Rev. 10:6).*

HORKIZŌ #3726

The Greek verb ὀρκίζω (*horkizō*), derived from *horkos* (an oath), means “to make (one) swear, to adjure” (Thomas 3726).

BDAG define it as “to give a command to someone under oath, adjure, implore.”

This word occurs once in the NASB (Matt. 26:63), although some variant readings also include Mark 5:7, Acts 19:13, and 1 Thessalonians 5:27.

*But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, “I ***adjure** You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63).*

*Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and shouting with a loud voice, he said, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I *implore You by God, do not torment me!" (Mark 5:6-7).*

*But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I *adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches" (Acts 19:13).*

I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren (1 Thess. 5:27).

HORKOS #3727

The root Greek verb ὄρκος (*horkos*), akin to *erkos* (fence, enclosure), is defined as "an oath" (Thomas 3727).

BDAG say it refers to an "oath."

Louw and Nida offer the following definition to an entire family of related Greek words: "to affirm the truth of a statement by calling on a divine being to execute sanctions against a person if the statement in question is not true (in the case of a deity taking an oath, his divine being is regarded as validating the statement)—'to swear, to make an oath, oath'" (33.463). Moreover, they add, "In a number of languages it is necessary to be quite specific in referring to the swearing of an oath, for example, 'to say something by calling upon God to listen' or 'to state that something is true and asking God to punish if it is not true' or 'to make God responsible for what one has said'" (33.463).

This word occurs 10x in the NT (Matt. 5:33; 14:7, 9; 26:72; Mark 6:26; Luke 1:73; Acts 2:30; Heb. 6:16, 17; James 5:12).

*Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your *vows to the Lord" (Matt. 5:33).*

*so much that he promised with an *oath to give her whatever she asked (Matt. 14:7).*

*Although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his *oaths, and because of his dinner guests (Matt. 14:9).*

*And again he denied it with an *oath, "I do not know the man" (Matt. 26:72).*

*And although the king was very sorry, yet because of his *oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her (Mark 6:26).*

*The *oath which He swore to Abraham our father (Luke 1:73).*

*And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an *oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne (Acts 2:30).*

*For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an *oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute (Heb. 6:16).*

*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 (Heb. 6:17).*

*But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other *oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment (James 5:12).*

ENORKIZŌ #1775A

The Greek verb ἐνορκίζω (*enorkizō*), a compound of *en* (the prep. in) and *horkizō* (to make one swear, to adjure), means “to adjure” (Thomas 1775a).

BDAG say it means “to put someone under oath, adjure, cause someone to swear by something.”

This word occurs once in the NT (1 Thess. 5:27).

*I *adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren (1 Thess. 5:27).*

Louw and Nida say that ὀρκίζω, ἐνορκίζω, and ἐξορκίζω all share the following common definition: “to demand that a person take an oath as to the truth of what is said or as to the certainty that one will carry out the request or command—‘to put under oath, to insist that one take an oath, to require that one swear’” (33.467).

*Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and shouting with a loud voice, he said, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I *implore You by God, do not torment me!” (Mark 5:6-7).*

*But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, “I *adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:63-64).*

Louw and Nida also offer the following clarification and elaboration:

It is extremely difficult to translate ὀρκίζω, ἐνορκίζω, and ἐξορκίζω in a literal manner, though in some contexts one can say ‘I put you under oath,’ but in a number of passages the person speaking is imploring and not necessarily in a position to command or insist. Therefore, in a passage such as Mark 5:7, one may render the meaning idiomatically as ‘for God’s sake, I ask you, do not punish me.’ In 1 Thess. 5:27 one may translate ‘in the name of the Lord, I ask you to read this letter to all the Christian brothers,’ and in Mt

26:63 one may translate ‘in the name of the living God, I charge you, Tell us who you are.’

In most languages one may translate ὀρκίζω, ἐνορκίζω, and ἐξορκίζω by simply adding a causative component to terms meaning ‘to swear’ or ‘to take an oath.’ In other words, ὀρκίζω, ἐνορκίζω, and ἐξορκίζω may be rendered as ‘to cause a person to say under oath.’

Biblical Examples

GOD

Consider the perfect example of Jehovah, involving the promises (oaths) that He made to Abraham (Luke 1:73-75, esp. v. 73; Heb. 6:13-20, esp. vv. 16, 17) and David (Acts 2:29-32, esp. v. 30).

*The ***oath** (horkos #3727) which He ***swore** (omnuō #3660) to Abraham our father, To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days (Luke 1:73-75, esp. v. 73).*

*For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could ***swear** (omnuō #3660) by no one greater, He ***swore** (omnuō #3660) by Himself, saying, “I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.” And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men ***swear** (omnuō #3660) by one greater than themselves, and with them an ***oath** (horkos #3727) given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. 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** (horkos #3727), so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:13-20, esp. vv. 16, 17).*

*Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had ***sworn** (omnuō #3660) to him with an ***oath** (horkos #3727) to seat one of his descendants on his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses (Acts 2:29-32, esp. v. 30).*

Consider also the oath of God to not allow faithless and rebellious Israel to enter into His rest (Heb. 3:7-4:13).

*Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, And saw My works for forty years. "Therefore I was angry with this generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they did not know My ways'; As I *swore (omnuō #3660) in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' " Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me." For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear (omnuō #3660) that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I *swore (omnuō #3660) in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; and again in this passage, "They shall not enter My rest." Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do (Heb. 3:7-4:13).*

HEROD

Consider the perversely foolish example of Herod involving the oath that he made to the daughter of Herodias (Matt. 14:6-12, esp. vv. 7, 9; Mark 6:21-29, esp. v. 26).

*But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod, so much that he promised with an *oath (horkos #3727) to give her whatever she asked. Having been prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a*

*platter the head of John the Baptist.” Although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his ***oaths** (horkos #3727), and because of his dinner guests. He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. His disciples came and took away the body and buried it; and they went and reported to Jesus (Matt. 14:6-12, esp. vv. 7, 9).*

*A strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee; and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you.” And he ***swore** (omnuō #3660) to her, “Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom.” And she went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask for?” And she said, “The head of John the Baptist.” Immediately she came in a hurry to the king and asked, saying, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” And although the king was very sorry, yet because of his ***oaths** (horkos #3727) and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring back his head. And he went and had him beheaded in the prison, and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about this, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb (Mark 6:21-29, esp. v. 26).*

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

Consider the covetous example of the scribes and Pharisees, who thought they could deceive the unsuspecting by nit-picking differences in the wording of an oath, or the object upon which it was made (Matt. 23:16-22).

*Woe to you, blind guides, who say, “Whoever ***swears** (omnuō #3660) by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever ***swears** (omnuō #3660) by the gold of the temple is obligated.” You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And, “Whoever ***swears** (omnuō #3660) by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever ***swears** (omnuō #3660) by the offering on it, he is obligated.” You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore, whoever ***swears** (omnuō #3660) by the altar, ***swears** (omnuō #3660) both by the altar and by everything on it. And whoever ***swears** (omnuō #3660) by the temple, ***swears** (omnuō #3660) both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. And whoever ***swears** (omnuō #3660) by heaven, ***swears** (omnuō #3660) both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it (Matt. 23:16-22).*

SIMON PETER

Consider the cowardly example of Simon Peter, who denied having been with Jesus, denied the second charge with an oath, and the third charge with cursing and swearing (Matt. 26:69-75, esp. vv. 72; Mark 14:66-72, esp. v. 71).

*Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." And again he denied it with an ***oath** (horkos #3727), "I do not know the man." A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away." Then he began to curse and ***swear** (omnuō #3660), "I do not know the man!" And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:69-75, esp. vv. 72).*

*As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Nazarene." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about." And he went out onto the porch. The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, "This is one of them!" But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too." But he began to curse and ***swear** (omnuō #3660), "I do not know this man you are talking about!" Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And he began to weep (Mark 14:66-72, esp. v. 71).*

THE ANGEL

Finally, consider the example of the angel whom John saw standing on the sea and on the land. He *"lifted up his right hand to heaven, and ***swore** (omnuō #3660) by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there will be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets"* (Rev. 10:5-7, esp. v. 6).

Biblical Application

GENERAL RULE

Consider the instruction that Jesus offered to the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, in which He contrasted things "you have heard" (that, depending on the context, may have come from either the Law of Moses, or their misguided human traditions) with His deeper spiritual understanding (Matt. 5:33-37, esp. v. 33). Consider also the related instruction that James offers to believers in his epistle, echoing the teaching of Jesus Christ, affirming the same points as previously affirmed (James 5:12).

*Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, “You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your ***vows** (horkos #3727) to the Lord.” But I say to you, ***make no *oath** (omnuō #3660) at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you ***make an *oath** (omnuō #3660) by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, “Yes, yes” or “No, no”; anything beyond these is of evil (Matt. 5:33-37, esp. v. 33).*

*From James But above all, my brethren, do not ***swear** (omnuō #3660), either by heaven or by earth or with any other ***oath** (horkos #3727); but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment (James 5:12).*

Several Old Testament verses appear here in the NASB marginal reference (Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21, 23). Noting the context, especially Jesus’ reference to the Jewish tendency to swear by heaven, earth or Jerusalem, it is my conviction that He is not only drawing a contrast between the Law and the Gospel, but also between corrupt traditions that had developed regarding oaths (that, depending upon the exact wording, were either obligatory or meaningless, cf. Matt. 23). Accordingly, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly affirms that disciples need to manifest integrity in thought, life and speech. In daily conversation, in everyday interactions, there is no need for oaths: our word should be our bond. We must not be vacillating, unreliable, untrustworthy. If we say, “Yes,” we mean it; so also if we say, “No” (2 Cor. 1:15-19).

You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord (Lev. 19:12).

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 (Num. 30:2).

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 (Deut. 23:21).

You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised (Deut. 23:23).

In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing; that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea. Therefore, I was not vacillating when I intended to do this, was I? Or what I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, so that with me there will be yes, yes and no, no at the same time? But as God is faithful, our word to you is not yes and no. For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him (2 Cor. 1:15-19).

AUTHORIZED EXCEPTIONS?

WEDDING VOWS

Does this prohibition forbid wedding vows? No. Wedding vows are solemn promises, rightly called “vows,” made in the presence of witnesses and before Jehovah God, who ultimately joins a man and a woman in the bonds of holy matrimony (Mal. 2:13-16; Matt. 19:3-6).

This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. “But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. “For I hate divorce,” says the Lord, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the Lord of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously” (Mal. 2:13-16).

“Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”” (Matt. 19:3-6).

BINDING LEGAL COVENANTS

What about legal covenants and agreements? Covenants are more than mere promises, but binding legal contracts involving two parties, with stated obligations and privileges. Consider the blessings and curses associated with the covenant that God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai. Consider the rights and responsibilities involved in a mortgage agreement between a “homeowner” and a financial lending institution. Such are solemn agreements. They could rightly be called vows, or oaths. Certainly, they are akin to such, in that they contain blessings and benefits if such are kept, along with corresponding penalties and peril if such are broken.

In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt and does not change; He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken (Ps. 15:4-5).

PAUL'S VOW

What about the example of Paul who had cut his hair in Cenchrea because he was keeping a vow (Acts 18:18). As a matter of personal practice, Paul continued to show regard for the Mosaic Law, attending the Jewish feast of Passover, having Timothy circumcised, and also in cutting his hair in connection w/ a vow. Two possibilities exist: either Paul sinned in taking this vow (and there is nothing in the context to suggest such) or else his actions fell within the parameters of what was allowed. In other words, this is a Romans 14 issue, akin to the keeping of days, and the eating of meats. In such matters, personal convictions must be respected, but our judgments/opinions/scruples must not be bound upon others.

Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow (Acts 18:18).

PAUL'S COMMAND

What about the apostolic command given at the conclusion of the first epistle to the church at Thessalonica, where the inspired apostle said, "I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren." (1 Thess. 5:27)?

As noted in the definitions given earlier, the Greek word that occurs in this context, ἐνορκίζω (*enorkizō*), which is a compound of *en* (prep. in) and *horkizō* (to make one swear, to adjure), means "to adjure" (Thomas 1775a). BDAG say it means "to put someone under oath, adjure, cause someone to swear by something."

*I *adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren (1 Thess. 5:27).*

Louw and Nida say that ὀρκίζω, ἐνορκίζω, and ἐξορκίζω all share the following common definition: "to demand that a person take an oath as to the truth of what is said or as to the certainty that one will carry out the request or command—'to put under oath, to insist that one take an oath, to require that one swear'" (33.467).

Why would Paul ask the brethren to swear that they will have this letter read to all the brethren? Because as an inspired apostolic epistle, it was vitally and eternally important. I may throw away "junk mail," but I must respect, preserve and propagate the inspired message of truth. This is a solemn duty of all believers.

Conclusion

So in conclusion, when we read all that God has taught in the Bible, and focus especially upon New Testament teaching about our speech, we can reach certain conclusions: Our word must

be our bond. The general rule of discipleship is, “Yes” and “No” is sufficient. However, there are authorized exceptions, such as those given in the aforementioned examples.

One area of application would also be, “What about oaths in a courts of law?” Some Christians conscientiously object to giving such oaths, and in such cases, should obviously follow their conscience (Rom. 14:22-23).

The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin (Rom. 14:22-23).

The following information comes from the Wikipedia article on “Sworn testimony.” Types of commitment vary by country. For example, in the United Kingdom, the particular “commitment can come in different forms depending on the situation of the witness.” These include:

- Oath: A commitment made to the witness's deity, or on their holy book.
- Affirmation: A secular variant of the oath where the witness does not have to mention a deity or holy book.
- Promise: A commitment made by a witness under the age of 17, or of all witnesses if none of the accused are over the age of 17.

In the United States, an oath, is typically expressed as follows: “Do you solemnly (swear/affirm) that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, (so help you God/under pains and penalties of perjury)?”

Swear may be replaced with “affirm”, and either “so help you God” or “under pains and penalties of perjury” may be used; all oaths and affirmations are considered to be equivalent before the law. These modifications to the oath were originally introduced in order to accommodate those who feel uncomfortable swearing religious oaths, such as Quakers, as well as to accommodate the irreligious. In *United States v. Ward*, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that certain other modifications of the oath were acceptable so long as they demonstrated “a moral or ethical sense of right and wrong.”

Like other matters of personal conviction, this is an area where brethren come to different conclusions regarding what they can (and cannot) do. In my judgment, it properly falls within the context of Romans 14.

Sources

BDAG = William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Louw & Nida = Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

Thomas = Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries : Updated Edition* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998).

“Sworn testimony.” *Wikipedia*. March 20, 2017. Accessed March 21, 2017.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sworn_testimony.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).