

Second London Baptist Confession Chapter 23: Lawful Oaths and Vows

WCF, SD Par. 3: “*Yet it is a sin to refuse an oath touching anything that is good and just, being (lawfully, SD) imposed by (lawful, WCF) authority.*” → “*...for that by rash, false, and vain oaths the Lord is provoked, and for them this land mourns.*” (BCF)

I. Lawful Oaths (Pars. 1-4)

-Precise Definition (Par. 1): “a solemn appeal to God to witness and judge the truth of one’s words and Intentions” (Deut. 10:20; 2 Chron. 6:22, 23; Jer. 4:2)

-Proper Rendering: Par. 2a: “*People should swear by the name of God alone and only with the utmost holy fear and reverence. Therefore to swear an empty or ill-advised oath by that glorious and awe-inspiring name, or to swear at all by anything else, is sinful and to be abhorred.*” (Ex. 20:7; Matthew 5:34-36)

-Biblical Warrant: Par. 2b: “*Yet in weighty and significant matters, an oath is authorized by the Word of God to confirm truth and end all conflict. So a lawful oath should be taken when it is required by legitimate authority in such circumstances.*”

→But what about Matt. 5:34, 37; James 5:12?

Eight Arguments in Support of Lawful Oaths (Waldron ‘Exposition’ pp. 329, 330):

- 1) The command not to swear vainly or falsely in God’s name assumes the lawfulness of oaths (Lev. 19:12).
- 2) The command to swear only in God’s name assumes the lawfulness of oaths (Deut. 6:13).
- 3) God’s own example indicates the lawfulness of oaths (Heb. 6:13-16).
- 4) The example of many OT saints indicates the lawfulness of oaths: Abraham (Gen. 24:3), Jacob (Gen. 47:30, 31), Joseph (Gen. 50:25), Elijah (1 Kings 17:1), Ezra (Ezra 10:5), Nehemiah (Neh. 5:12, 13:25).
- 5) The law of Moses required oaths in certain situations (Ex. 22:11; Num. 5:19, 21; 1 Kings 8:31).
- 6) The predictions of the prophets indicate the lawfulness of oaths (Is. 45:23; 65:16).
- 7) Christ’s example indicates the lawfulness of oaths (Matt. 26:62-64).
- 8) Paul’s example indicates the lawfulness of oaths (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23).

-Profound Solemnity (Par. 3) (Num. 30:2)

-Requisite Sincerity (Par. 4) (Num. 30:2)

II. Lawful Vows (Par. 5)

Oath: a solemn promise made to men before God

Vow: a solemn promise made to God

-Exclusive Recipient: Par. 5a: *“A vow must not be made to any creature but to God alone.”*

-Careful Performance: Par. 5b: *“Vows should be made and performed with the most conscientious care and faithfulness.”*(Ecc. 5:4, 5)

-Popish Perversion: Par. 5c: *“However, Roman Catholic monastical vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, and obedience to monastic rules, are by no means steps to higher perfection. Instead, they are superstitious and sinful snares in which Christians may not entangle themselves.”*