

Dt. 23:21-23 (LD 37) “Don’t Delay to Pay!”

For the Children: Have you ever made an oath or vow or pledge? Most likely you have: you made a vow (a promise to God) through your parents when you were baptized; maybe a pledge at Cadets or GEMS; or perhaps you have tried to convince someone you are telling the truth by stating that God is your Witness. If you called a brother, sister or friend to witness to a lie, they would probably be upset with you. Calling God as Witness to a lie, or to a promise you will never keep, is an insult to His Name. We all sin by breaking the promises we have made in His Name. But, thankfully, the Lord Jesus has died to cover even these sins against the 3rd commandment. We should also ask the Lord to help us to keep to our word – especially when we bring Him into it by Name. **Questions:** Think of some situations where you have broken your word, your promise; or a vow involving God’s Name; Is it better not to make oaths or vows if we know we will not keep them perfectly? What does it mean to make oaths or vows “reverently”?

Introduction:

First Point: The 3rd Commandment Does Not Forbid Oaths/Vows

- 1) Oaths Versus Vows: An “oath” is a declaration, calling God as Witness to the truth of what someone is saying. A “vow” is calling God as Witness to a promise that someone will do something in the future. Both involve the 3rd commandment, since in both cases God’s Name – God Himself – is invoked as Witness.
- 2) Oaths and Vows Are Permissible in Both OT and NT: Oaths and vows were clearly permitted in the OT. See Lev. 19:12, Num. 30:2 and Dt. 23:21-23. They were essential for members of the covenant, since God’s people had to respond to God’s covenant-oath by swearing to keep His covenant-law. The 3rd commandment warned against breaking these oaths and vows. Marriage was also a covenant – an “oath-bound promise. There were also Nazirite vows, pledges, and vows made when asking God for help or expressing thanks to Him. See 1 Sam. 1:1. The same is true in the NT, which is still a “covenant.” Baptism, profession of faith, ordination and marriage still involve vows. The NT has quite a few examples of the practice (Mt. 26:63-64; Acts 18:18, 21:23-24; Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23).
- 3) The Apparent Prohibition: Mt. 5:33-37 and Jam. 5:12 do not forbid oaths and vows. They forbid making them by calling something *creaturely* as witness. They argue that even our “yes” and “no” should be kept, let alone an oath or vow in God’s Name.
- 4) The Voluntary Nature: Dt. 23:21-23 makes it clear that it is not sinful to refrain from vowing – oaths and vows are voluntary; you “*may swear*” (Q 101). This is because all calling on God’s Name should be from the heart.

Second Point: The 3rd Commandment Does Imply Care with Oaths/Vows

- 1) Reverent Swearing: Oaths and vows are to be done carefully – since His Name is holy. That means they should be done in the fear and awe of the Lord. The opposite is to do so lightly, hastily or foolishly.
- 2) Performing What We Swear: We are commanded to be careful to perform what goes out from our lips. That includes simple promises as well as oaths and vows – even our “yes” and “no” should be adhered to. Even unnecessary *delaying* to perform is a sin.
- 3) Required by the Lord: The Lord “requires it of us” if we do not perform what we have sworn. This means He holds us accountable. The word has disciplinary undertones. However, our chief motive for keeping oaths and vows should be love of God rather than fear of punishment. If we love God, we will be characterized by keeping to what we have sworn, even if it hurts us to do so (Ps. 15:4).
- 4) Hope for Imperfect Promise-Keepers: Should we refrain from making oaths or vows, since we know we will never keep them perfectly? No, as with all God’s commandments, God’s imperfect people need to seek forgiveness in Christ, but also His help to keep striving to be obedient, while we continue to trust in His grace.

Conclusion: