

History and Survey of the Westminster Confession of Faith

Leadership College: Module 2
Part 2: The Doctrine of the Confession
Of Lawful Oaths and Vows (ch. 22)



Ch. 22 – Of Lawful Oaths and Vows

1. A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein, upon just occasion, the person swearing solemnly calleth God to witness what he asserteth, or promiseth, and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he sweareth.
2. The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear, and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence.

Biblical Examples of Oaths

- Mt. 18 – ecclesiastical jurisdiction/accountability
- Acts 5 – Ananias/Sapphira – “lie to the Holy Spirit”
- Heb. 6 – God guarantees his promise with an oath
- Rom. 14:11 – “As I live, says the Lord, ... ”
- Mt. 26:63 – Jesus is called upon to testify before the High Priest
- Rom. 1:9 – “For God is my witness, ... ”
- Rom. 9:1-2 – “my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit –”
- Rom. 10:9 – “if you confess with your mouth ... ”
- Gal. 1:20 – “before God, I do not lie!”

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2. The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear, and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence. Therefore, to swear vainly, or rashly, by that glorious and dreadful Name; or, to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful, and to be abhorred.

Mt. 5:33-37 – to violate the 3rd Commandment

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

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Yet, as in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the Word of God, under the new testament as well as under the old;

Nehemiah 9 & 10

- A renewal of faith and obedience upon returning to the land after being exiled.
- Specifically,
 - To observe all God's commandments
 - To not give daughters/sons to the peoples of the land
 - To honor the Sabbath day
 - To tithe appropriately



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Yet, as in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the Word of God, under the new testament as well as under the old; so a lawful oath, being imposed by lawful authority, in such matters, ought to be taken.



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3. Whosoever taketh an oath ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth: neither may any man bind himself by oath to anything but what is good and just, and what he believeth so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform.

4. An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation, or mental reservation.

It cannot oblige to sin; but in anything not sinful, being taken, it binds to performance, although to a man's own hurt.

Nor is it to be violated, although made to heretics, or infidels.

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5. A vow is of the like nature with a promissory oath, and ought to be made with the like religious care, and to be performed with the like faithfulness.

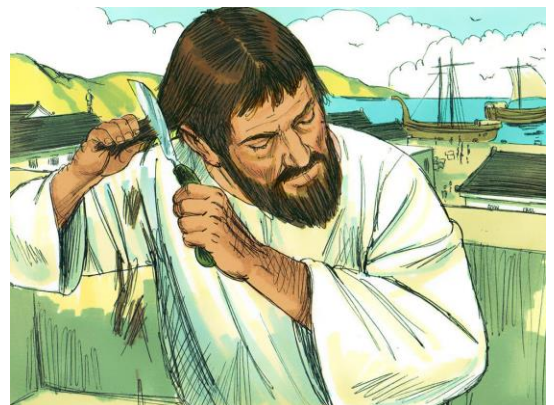
6. It is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone: and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made voluntarily, out of faith, and conscience of duty, in way of thankfulness for mercy received, or for the obtaining of what we want, whereby we more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties; or, to other things, so far and so long as they may fitly conduce thereunto.

Biblical Examples of Vows

Vows unto the Lord in the Psalms - 22:25; 50:14; 56:12; 61:5, 8; 65:1; 66:13; 76:11; 116:14, 18; 132:2

Prov. 20:25: *It is a snare to say rashly, "It is holy," and to reflect only after making vows.*

Acts 18:18 – Paul's vow



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7. No man may vow to do anything forbidden in the Word of God, or what would hinder any duty therein commanded, or which is not in his own power, and for the performance whereof he hath no promise of ability from God. In which respects, popish monastical vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, and regular obedience, are so far from being degrees of higher perfection, that they are superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself.

