

"DO NOT SWEAR AT ALL"

MAT. 5:34

By Mike Burnham

Perjury is forbidden in the third commandment: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). To swear an oath falsely in the name of God was a sin not only against the name but against the very person of God. Later the scope of the commandment was broadened to include any light or thoughtless use of the divine name, to the point where it was judged safest not to use it at all. Summing up the sense of those injunctions, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn" (Matt. 5:33); also see (Eccles. 5:4,5).

Realizing the seriousness of swearing by God if the truth of the statement was not absolutely sure, people tended to replace the name of God by something else--by heaven, for example--with the idea that a slight deviation from the truth would then be less unpardonable, (Matt. 23:16-22).

Jesus has a higher standard for His disciples, (Matt. 5:37). An echo of these words is heard from James, (Jas. 5:12). If Christ's disciples are known to have a scrupulous regard for truth, then what they say will be accepted without the support of any oath. Jesus said, "Anything more than this comes from **evil**"; that is, the idea that a man or woman can be trusted to speak the truth only when under oath (if then) springs from dishonesty and suspicion.