

Blueprints for Belief

Laying the Theological Foundations for Constructing Your Faith

Westminster Confession of Faith 22.1-7 – Oaths and Vows

- When taking an oath, we are asking God to bear witness and judge us by what we say or promise.
 - *It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. (Deut. 6:13)*
- We must swear only by God's name. Do not take an oath carelessly.
 - *You shall not swear by my name falsely and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:12)*
- We should only speak the truth under oath. We should only swear to do things that are good and things we are capable of doing.
 - *Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few. (Ecc. 5:2)*
- We should use clear, plain language. We must keep the oath even if we suffer for it and even if it was made to a pagan.
 - *When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. (Ecc. 5:4-5)*
- A vow is similar to an oath, but is made to God directly. A vow should only be made to God.
 - *Make your vows to the LORD your God and perform them. (Ps. 76:11)*
- We should never vow to do anything forbidden by God's law or anything that would hinder us from keeping God's law.
 - *When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. (Acts 23:12-14)*
- We should not vow to do something that's beyond our ability, or beyond the ability God has promised us.
 - *For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words. (Ecc. 5:3)*
- Catholic vows of celibacy, poverty, and constant obedience are not good vows. They are superstitious and sinful traps.
 - *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. (1 Tim 4:1-5)*

Discussion Questions

1. How does this doctrine challenge our culture's view of personal freedom and convenience?
2. How does this shape the way we think of court oaths, church membership vows, and marriage vows?
3. What dangers arise when people make promises to God that go beyond what He has commanded or enabled them to do?

Westminster Confession of Faith – Chapter 22

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. 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. 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.

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.

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.

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.