

## CONFESSION OF FAITH.

### CHAPTER 22.-Of lawfull Oathes and Vowes.

IV. An Oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation, or mental reservation<sup>1</sup>. It cannot oblige to sin: but, in any thing not sinfull, being taken, it bindes to performance, although to a mans own hurt<sup>2</sup>. Nor is it to be violated, although made to Hereticks, or Infidels<sup>3</sup>.

---

Question 1.—*Is an oath to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation, or mental reservation?*

*Answer.*—Yes. Ex. 20:7; Lev. 19:12. Therefore the Anabaptists err, maintaining, that it is lawful in swearing to use words of equivocation. Likewise, the Papists err, maintaining mental reservation, to be lawful in swearing. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Because the Scripture requires from all men in their common dealing one with another, in their discourse and conferences; verity and simplicity, Matt. 5:37; Eph. 4:25. Much more are these things required in swearing, wherein God is called to be witness of the truth of these things which are asserted. 2.) Because the Lord threatens such as use guile and deceit in their words, Ps. 15:4; 24:4; Gal. 2:11-13. 3.) Because the Lord requires in every oath, truth, righteousness and judgment, Jer. 4:2. 4.) Because equivocations and mental reservations, are against the very end of an approven oath; which is to put an end to all debate and controversy, Heb. 6:16. 5.) Because if equivocations and mental reservations were lawful, in vain should the Lord have made laws against lying, Zech. 5:4; Eccl. 5:1,2; for a lie may be excused by mental reservation. 6.) If equivocation and mental reservations were allowed, they would take away all commerce among men, and would make bonds, contracts, and charter parties, of none effect, Gen. 26:28; Num. 30:2.

Question 2.—*May an oath oblige one to do that which is sin?*

*Answer.*—No. 1 Pet. 3:10. An oath cannot bind to that which is in itself unlawful, because the obligation of the law is imposed upon us by the will of God, and therefore takes precedence of all obligations imposed upon us by the will of men or by ourselves; and the lesser obligation cannot relieve from the greater, Lev. 5:4. The sin is in taking the oath to do the unlawful thing, not in breaking it, 1 Sam. 25:22,32-34; Acts 23:21; Matt. 14:7.

Question 3.—*Does an oath, in any thing not sinful, being taken, bind to performance, though to a man's hurt?*

*Answer.*—Yes. Ps. 15:4; Deut. 23:23. Nor is the obligation impaired when the oath is extorted either by violence or fraud. Thus the oaths imposed by conquerors upon the vanquished bind, because they are voluntarily assumed in preference to the alternatives presented, 2 Chron. 36:13. And thus Joshua kept the oath which the Gibeonites had induced him through deceit to swear in their behalf, Josh. 9:3-27.

---

<sup>1</sup>Jer. 4:2; Ps. 24:4.

<sup>2</sup>1 Sam. 25:22,32-34; Ps. 15:4.

<sup>3</sup>Ezek. 17:16,18,19; Jos. 9:18,19 with 2 Sam. 21:1.

Question 4.—*May an oath be violated, if made with heretics or infidels?*

*Answer.*—No. Jos. 9:18,19 *with* 2 Sam. 21:1. Thus do the Papists err, maintaining that oaths made to heretics and infidels are null. This obligation evidently does not depend upon the goodness or badness of the persons imposing the oath, Ezek. 17:16,18,19. An oath to an infidel or a heretic binds as much as an oath to a saint, Mal. 3:5. The Romanists excuse the practice of their Church of releasing persons from the obligation of oaths to infidels or heretics, and of breaking faith generally with all with whom she has controversy, on the plea that an oath cannot bind to that which is unlawful or release from a prior obligation, and that the highest of all obligations is to subserve at all cost the interest of the Church, *contra* Josh. 9:20. But they deliberately make the oath in order to break it, and therefore both lie and profane God's holy name in the making and the breaking, Prov. 20:25; Eccl. 5:6. Besides, the interest of the Church is not the superior law which takes precedence of all oaths, but the *clearly revealed* will of God only, Eccl. 9:2.