



Of Lawful Oaths and Vows | 1/29/22 1689 Confession, Chapter 23, Part 1

Why does this matter today?

23:1 Defining a Lawful Oath

A lawful oath is an element of religious worship in which a person swearing in truth, righteousness, and judgment solemnly calls God to witness what is sworn and to judge the one swearing according to the truth or falsity of it.

- Historical Context: Anabaptists
- Scriptural Context: A recognized religious institution.
 - **Deuteronomy 10:20, Jeremiah 4:2** Cf. 2 Chronicles 6:22–23
- Why is an oath viewed as an act of religious worship?
 - Cf. Nehemiah 5:12-13; Josh 7:19; John 9:24
- Did Jesus forbid oath taking?
 - **Matthew 5:33–37**
 - NT Examples of oaths: Jesus in Matt 26:64; Paul in Rom 1:9; God in Heb 6:17.
 - Jesus is engaging with insincere oaths

23:2 Swearing in God's Name

People should swear by the name of God alone and only with the utmost holy fear and reverence. Therefore to swear an empty or ill-advised oath by that glorious and awe-inspiring name, or to swear at all by anything else, is sinful and to be abhorred.

- People should swear by the name of God alone (not by “anything else”)
- Swear with the utmost holy fear and reverence

- Don't swear empty or ill-advised oaths by God's name
- Summary: Sinful oaths to be abhorred

Yet in weighty and significant matters, an oath is authorized by the Word of God to confirm truth and end all conflict. So a lawful oath should be taken when it is required by legitimate authority in such circumstances.

- Oaths are authorized by the Word to confirm truth and end conflict
 - **Hebrews 6:16**
- Oaths should be taken when required by lawful, legitimate authority

Next Steps

1. Why is an oath viewed as an act of religious worship?
2. Why might Christians think we cannot swear an oath? Why is this not the case? See Matthew 5:33-37
3. Why should we swear by the name of God alone?
4. What helpful role can an oath play? See Hebrews 6:16.