

I swear I didn't poke him in the eye!

What is an oath in your mind?

oath (n) (1) : a solemn usually formal calling upon God or a god to witness to the truth of what one says or to witness that one sincerely intends to do what one says

(2) : a solemn attestation of the truth or inviolability of one's words

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

In the Classical (Greek) concept, "The original meaning of the oath lay in the guaranteeing of a man's word. ... The formula of the oath originally had the character of conditionally cursing oneself, if the statement should prove not to correspond to the truth." – *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*

"It was the custom among the Romans for the one who took the oath to take a stone in his hand and ask that he might be hurled forth like this stone if he broke his word." – *Dictionary of NTT*

"A very ancient form of oath (in the Israelite world) is the practice of calling Yahweh to witness between two partners."

- 1 Samuel 20:3 (p. 451)
- 1 Samuel 20:12-13a (p. 452)
- Genesis 21:22-24 (p. 30)
- Numbers 5:11-22 (p. 212)

Runarounds? Swearing by other standards...

Matthew 5:33-37 (p. 1503)

So what does Jesus want us to do here?

- a. Refuse to take any oath whatsoever (even oaths of office, etc)
- b. Limit what we take oaths for
- c. Live uprightly so that an oath is not a necessity (absolute truthfulness)

"The aims of Jesus in forbidding oaths is not to substitute a secular form of words for a religious one, but to insist on absolute truthfulness in every word of man. [This passage], which opposes Jewish practice, but not the intention of the Old Testament, is to be understood not as a law of the letter, but a law to be obeyed in the spirit." – *Dictionary of NTT*

"The very existence of oaths is a proof that there are such things as lies. If lying were unknown, there would be no need for oaths." – *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

“This is not to say that the disciples are no longer answerable to the omniscient God for every word they utter, it means that every word they utter is spoken in his presence, and not only those words which are accompanied by an oath. Hence they are forbidden to swear at all. Since they always speak the whole truth and nothing but the truth, there is no need for an oath, which would only throw doubt on the veracity of all their other statements. That is why the oath is ‘of the evil one.’ But a disciple must be a light even in his words.” – *Bonhoeffer*

Discipleship requires complete truth. “There is no truth towards Jesus without truth towards man. Untruthfulness destroys fellowship, but truth cuts false fellowship to pieces and establishes genuine brotherhood. We cannot follow Christ unless we live in revealed truth before God and man.” – *Bonhoeffer*

Because of this Bible study today, I swear that I will _____.

Eye for an Eye

- Exodus 21:22-27 (p. 120)
- Leviticus 24:17-22 (p. 194)
- Deuteronomy 19:21 (p. 303)

Tevye in “Fiddler on the Roof”

Villager: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

Tevye: Very good. That way the whole world will be blind and toothless.

“I don’t get mad, I get even”

Matthew 5:38-42 (p. 1503)

Zealots in Jesus’ day

The original intent of the law was to set strict limits on rights to revenge (you can’t take two eyes for losing one)

“By Jesus’ day Jewish law further restricted vengefulness by substituting monetary compensation for the removal of the aggressor’s eye. Jesus’ substitution is far more radical: he challenges his followers to renounce their right to retaliation.” – *Douglas R. Hare*

“The followers of Jesus for his sake renounce every personal right. He calls them blessed because they are meek. If after giving up everything else for his sake they still wanted to cling to their own rights, they would then have ceased to follow him. This passage therefore is simply an elaboration of the beatitudes.” – *Bonhoeffer*