

**Emmaus Essentials**  
**The London Baptist Confession of 1689**  
**Chapter 23: Of Lawful Oaths and Vows**  
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Chapter Outline taken from *ST 535 Baptist Symbolics Chapter Outlines* by Dr. Renihan

**Introduction**

Why a chapter on oaths and vows?

A major issue in the 17th century

The political authority would force many to take an exoficio oath (forced to answer every question and thus incriminate yourself - no 5th amendment)

This was used to harm the further movement of the reformation.

For us, this is probably the least important chapters of the confession.

Oaths and Vows

An oath is sworn before God but made to men.

A vow is made to God alone and serves the purpose of commitment. (See David Dickson)

**I. Paragraph 1 - An Oath Defined (in response to the exoficio oath)**

A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein the person swearing in truth, righteousness, and judgement, solemnly calleth God to witness what he sweareth, and to judge him according to the truth or falseness thereof.

(Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 10:20; Jeremiah 4:2; 2 Chronicles 6:22, 23)

A. A part of religious worship

1. Not public worship

2. Not daily personal worship

3. The point - When we take an oath we do it as an act of worship before God because we take it before God and unto God

a) 22.6 - Neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship, is now under the gospel, tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed; **but God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth**; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself; so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly nor wilfully to be neglected or forsaken, when God by his word or providence calleth thereunto.

4. Taking an oath requires a proper demeanor

B. Consists of:

1. A person swearing in truth, righteousness and judgment

2. Calling God as a witness

3. Calling God as a judge

**Key Texts:**

"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, ESV)

"You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear." (Deuteronomy 10:20, ESV)

"and if you swear, 'As the Lord lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory." (Jeremiah 4:2, ESV)

"If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath and comes and swears his oath before your altar in this house... then hear from heaven and act and judge your servants,

repaying the guilty by bringing his conduct on his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness." (2 Chronicles 6:23, ESV)

## II. Paragraph 2 - The Sanctity of an Oath

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 matter of weight and moment, for confirmation of truth, and ending all strife, an oath is warranted by the word of God; so a lawful oath being imposed by lawful authority in such matters, ought to be taken. (Matthew 5:34, 37; James 5:12; Hebrews 6:16; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Nehemiah 13:25)

- A. The Name of God is the only righteous object of an oath (Dickson - counters the Pope who required swearing before relics and saints departed)
  - 1. It is to be used with fear and reverence (3rd commandment)
  - 2. To swear vainly or rashly or
    - a) People say, "I swear to God...", but to cover their lie.
  - 3. to swear by any other thing is sinful
- B. Righteous oaths are warranted by the Word of God
  - 1. In weighty matters of truth
    - a) Matthew 5, James 5
    - b) Against Quakers and Anabaptists (see Dickson)
      - (1) They forbid taking an oath at all
        - (a) "So that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes." (Isaiah 65:16, ESV)
        - (b) "and if you swear, 'As the Lord lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory.'" (Jeremiah 4:2, ESV)
        - (c) "(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!)" (Galatians 1:20, ESV)
        - (d) "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you" (Romans 1:9, ESV)
        - (e) "As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No." (2 Corinthians 1:18, ESV)
        - (f) "And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay," (Revelation 10:5-6, ESV)
        - (g) "For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation." (Hebrews 6:16, ESV)
      - c) Matthew and James are speaking against the multiplication of oath taking especially with things that are improper - temple, etc. The religious leaders were using the multiplication of oaths to be dishonest.
      - d) The taking of oaths ought to be rare
    - 2. When imposed by a lawful authority

### Key Texts:

"But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God... Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil." (Matthew 5:37, ESV)

“But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.” (James 5:12, ESV)

“For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.” (Hebrews 6:16, ESV)

“But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth.” (2 Corinthians 1:23, ESV)

“And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.” (Nehemiah 13:25, ESV)

### **III. Paragraph 3 - The Solemnity of an Oath**

Whosoever taketh an oath warranted by the Word of God, ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he knoweth to be truth; for that by rash, false, and vain oaths, the Lord is provoked, and for them this land mourns. (Leviticus 19:12; Jeremiah 23:10)

#### **A. Paragraph 3 - The Solemnity of an Oath**

1. Intro
  - a) The Baptists follow the Savoy in limiting oaths to that which are warranted by the Word of God
2. The one who takes the oath must do so solemnly
3. He must speak only truth - only that which we know - no speculation
4. All other oaths provoke the Lord - putting oath taking in a God centered context
5. The confession puts oath taking into a God centered context

#### **Key Texts:**

“You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:12, ESV)

“For the land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course is evil, and their might is not right.” (Jeremiah 23:10, ESV)

### **IV. Paragraph 4 - The Sincerity of an oath**

An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation.

(Psalms 24:4)

- A. In the plain sense of the words (no mental gymnastics)
- B. Without equivocation or mental reservation.

#### **Key Texts:**

“He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.” (Psalm 24:4, ESV)

### **V. Paragraph 5 - The Nature of Vows**

A vow, which is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone, is to be made and performed with all religious care and faithfulness; but 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.

(Psalms 76:11; Genesis 28:20-22; 1 Corinthians 7:2, 9; Ephesians 4:28; Matthew 19:11)

- A. Made only to God
  - 1. Side note: Marriage vows are really oaths according to the language of the confession because we make them to one another *before* God.
- B. Made and performed with religious care
  - 1. devotion, sincerity, before God
- C. Popish vows of whatever kind are (regular obedience - rules or requirements of a particular monastical order)
  - 1. Not what they claim
  - 2. Superstitious and
  - 3. Sinful snares
- D. Christians should not entangle themselves with them
- E. The Confession does not address the question, what about those who had made these vows?
  - 1. The reformers had already dealt with this issue and decided that the vows were empty and not binding
  - 2. Think of Luther and his wife

### **Key Texts:**

"Make your vows to the Lord your God and perform them; let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared," (Psalm 76:11, ESV)

"Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you." (Genesis 28:20–22, ESV)

(Think of the vows of celibacy that some had made in the 17th century to understand this proof text) "But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion." (1 Corinthians 7:2, 9, ESV)

(Think of the vows of poverty that some had made in the 17th century to understand this proof text) "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need." (Ephesians 4:28, ESV)

(Again, think of the vow of a single life) "But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given." (Matthew 19:11, ESV)

### **Conclusion**

Worship extends to the public life!  
Your word matters. Don't make oaths are vows flippantly.