

do not swear

extract from Proposition XV § x, xii

§ x. The fifth affirmation deals with swearing, which is so common among almost all Christians; not only the profane oaths which profane people use in their everyday speech, in which the most HOLY NAME of GOD is horribly blasphemed every day, but also solemn oaths used by people who appear pious. Most of those people defend swearing before the magistrate, and defend it with such zeal that they are ready to do it themselves on any occasion, and moreover they incite the magistrates to persecute people who consider it unlawful to swear, out of obedience to Christ their Lord and Master. For this reason many have suffered imprisonment and confiscation of their goods.

Consider these clear words of our Savior (Matthew 5:33-34), “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, DO NOT SWEAR AT ALL, neither by heaven, etc. . . . But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.” There are also the words of the apostle James (5:12), “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, neither by heaven or by earth, or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ ‘No’ lest you fall into judgment.” Considering these clear words, it is surprising how anyone who professes the Name of Christ can pronounce any oath with a quiet conscience; and far less how they can persecute other Christians who do not dare swear because they obey the authority of their Master Christ. If anyone seriously decided to forbid anything at all, in the most rigid manner, could they make a more full and general prohibition without any exceptions? I do not think so.

First Christ states it negatively, "Do not swear at all, neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by Jerusalem, nor by thy head," etc. And again, "Do not swear by heaven, nor by earth, nor by any other oath." Secondly, he emphasizes it affirmatively, "But let your communication be yes, yes, and no, no; for anything that is more than this comes from evil." And James says, "lest you fall into condemnation."

All these words make such a full prohibition, so free from any exception, that it is strange that people who boast that the Scripture is the rule of their faith and life can dare to counterfeit any exception. . . .

It must be remembered that the most learned theologians of every sect recognize that the Fathers of the church from the first three hundred years after Christ understood these words to be a prohibition of all sorts of oaths.

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§xii . . . *Objection:* They say that they admit that there is no need of oaths among true Christians, but how can we be certain who is a true Christian? It would follow then that at present oaths are necessary, and that it is lawful for a Christian to swear in order to satisfy people who will not acknowledge that one person or another is a Christian.

Answer: I answer that it is not at all lawful for a Christian to swear; Christ has called the Christian to Christ's essential Truth which existed before all oaths, and forbade him to swear. On the contrary, Christ commanded the Christian to speak the Truth in all things, to the honor of Christ who called him, so that it would be apparent that the words of Christ's disciples may be believed as truly as the oaths of all worldly people. It is not lawful for Christians to be unfaithful in this in order to please other people and avoid being hurt by them. The primitive Christians remained faithful for several centuries,* and when they were required to swear they all answered, "I am a Christian; I do not swear."

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XV § x, xii (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 454-456, 463 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiæ verè Christianæ apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 352-354, 359.