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# ONE Newsletter

Volume 1, No. 1

[Oaths: American Idol and Swearing to God](#)

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## Welcome to the New Year and the [ONE](#) Newsletter!

Let me begin by welcoming you to the first [ONE](#) Newsletter. I received many requests for a newsletter after release of my book, [ONE](#), so I have committed to doing so. I really do appreciate your feedback, and, as you will see below, I have tried to respond as best I am able to do so. The [ONE](#) Newsletter is free.

Because this is the first newsletter, I will comment briefly on the my intention for this work:

**First**, there are many newsletters. I do not wish to add anything to this world, except with the intention—such as I have been taught—to do deeds that **give back something of value**. I pray I do so here.

**Second**, as to the format, I have attempted to keep it clean and easy to read. No matter how abstractly valuable information may be, it is useless unless it brings to the recipient the intended **understanding**.

In the context, the [ONE](#) Newsletter will be relatively brief. A **reflection** on a teaching will be presented first, and an update following; it is the **reflection that is the core purpose of this work**. I hope that the [ONE](#) Newsletter is as **thought-provoking** for you as it is for me.

\* \* \*

For those of you who know me personally, you know that I am an **attorney**. I do not come from the ranks of the clergy, and I am not a preacher. And, indeed, I do not strive to be so for many reasons. But, as an attorney, I have acquired some skill at the reconciliation of testimony, and [ONE](#) is a reconciliation of the testimonies of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

And, it is true, that I cannot testify that I, at least, have the capacity to fully and finally know things such as the nature of God or the Spirit. Nevertheless, as I have said before, **I think it enough that we be guided by the star, without necessarily having to touch it**.

So, let us begin our **journey** together and try to **learn** what we can together, as **students** of the Teacher.

In this Newsletter:

- Reflection: [Jesus' Teaches about Oaths](#)
- Update: [Update on ONE Book Options](#)

## Reflection: Jesus Teaches About Oaths

The subject of the first [ONE](#) Newsletter was especially important to me. After consideration, I determined that the New Year, and the common "**New Year's Resolution**" was a perfect time for reflection on Jesus' teachings about **oaths**. As an attorney, I deal in a world of testimony, and that testimony is often grounded in **traditional oaths** or **affirmations**.

Oaths are everywhere. Some express, and some implied. **It seems that we just tend to fail to think about oaths**, as we tend to fail to think about many things that are **everywhere**. And, even as an attorney—and completely Catholic school educated—I confess that I personally gave oaths relatively little consideration until my work on [ONE](#).

**American Idol?** My own previous lack of consideration for oaths may be true for many. **Yesterday, January 17, 2007, shown on national television, Simon Cowell, a judge on American Idol (FOX), made a contestant swear on the contestant's mother's life regarding the truthfulness of the contestant's statement.** We have the clip at <http://www.OUGPress.com/IdolAndOaths.mpg>. So many of us love the show American Idol. The point is not to debate whether that was all in fun—which it was—but to demonstrate the casual disregard that we tend to have regarding oaths (and to which I have confessed above).

**Oaths are a fascinating subject!** With intense debates about oaths occurring recently regarding the [United States Congressional Inauguration](#), and swearing on a contestant's mother's life on [American Idol](#), it is time to reflect on the nature of swearing oaths and the appropriateness of swearing them.

And, now that I have contemplated the history and nature of an oath, I shall never hear an oath again without contemplating it with some **attention**.

### Definition of Oath:

Socrates said, "**wisdom begins with a definition of terms**," so, let us start with the definition of "**oath**." There are good summaries online at [WikiPedia](#) or [LectLaw](#), part of which I paraphrase here:

**An oath is a declaration made according to law calling God to witness what the speaker says. It is a religious act by which the party invokes God not only to witness the truth and sincerity of the promise, but also to avenge any imposture or violated faith, or, in other words, to punish any perjury if the speaker should be guilty of it.**

**It is proper to distinguish two things in oaths: 1. The invocation by which the God of truth, who knows all things, is taken to witness. 2. The [imprecation](#) by which he is asked as a just and all-powerful being, to punish perjury.**

If you have access, the [Oxford English Dictionary](#) defines an "**oath**" as, "1. a. A solemn or formal declaration **invoking God** (or a god, or other object of reverence) as witness to the truth of a statement, or to the binding nature of a promise or undertaking; an act of making such a declaration."

The *New American Bible* footnote indicates, "The **purpose** of an oath was to **guarantee** truthfulness by one's calling on **God as witness**."

#### **Governmental Use of Oath:**

Because there has been some recent **debate** in the United States regarding the recent Congressional inauguration of certain public officials, I will additionally partially quote the Act of (United States) Congress of 1789:

Be it enacted, etc., That the oath or affirmation required by the sixth article of the constitution of the United States, shall be administered in the form following, to wit, "I, A B, do solemnly **swear** or **affirm**, (**as the case may be**,) that I will support the constitution of the United States.

So, the United States forefathers contemplated a distinction between **swearing an oath**, and an **affirmation**. The United States forefathers apparently recognized that either an "**affirmation**" or swearing an "**oath**" is proper for public officials in governmental offices, and—as careful drafters—they considered an "**oath**" as distinct from an "**affirmation**" by use of two separate words. (As an attorney, I restrain myself from presenting the **constitutional** analysis here...another day.)

It is quite interesting to me that various religious groups have taken the historical position that oaths should not be taken at all. See [WikiPedia](#) for additional information of interest. **Why?** The reason may be more clear as we proceed below.

Apparently, two US Presidents, **Franklin Pierce** and **Herbert Hoover**, chose to affirm rather than swear an oath at their inaugurations.

Although it might surprise or even offend some persons, in the United States, **swearing an oath** and an **affirmation** have equal legal significance. **As an attorney, I will ask you to think about something:**

If you were the **juror** in a trial charged to **judge** a person, and an accused witness approached the stand to testify, and chose to affirm, rather than swear an oath, would you thereby think, "**That person must be guilty or insincere if that person cannot swear to God?**" **So Interesting.**

#### **Distinction of "Oath" Versus "Affirmation":**

So allow me to clarify the distinction in summary: An **affirmation** is generally a purely civil issue: you "**affirm**" the spoken fact, usually in the context of the penalty of perjury. **Swearing an oath**, on the other hand, **invokes God**, as we have determined from the definitions above.

#### **Jesus' Teaching:**

With that said as a foundation, now let us reflect on the teaching by Jesus:

**Teaching about Oaths.** <sup>520</sup> "Again you have heard that it was said by your ancestors, 'You shall not forswear an oath in God's name, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.'

<sup>521</sup> **“But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God’s throne; <sup>522</sup> nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.**

<sup>523</sup> **Neither shall you swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. <sup>524</sup> Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more comes from the evil one.”**

**ONE:** 520-524 [T5:33-37] As we see from the [ONE Unification Index](#), this particular text and teaching is derived exclusively from the **Gospel of Matthew 5:33-37** (“T” in the [Unification Index](#) represents Gospel of Matthew, the remaining unused columns represent references to the other source Gospels which are blank because the text and teaching is not derived from those Gospels.)

Ref	T	K	L	J	Ref
<b>520</b>	<b>T5:33</b>				<b>520</b>
<b>521</b>	<b>T5:34</b>				<b>521</b>
<b>522</b>	<b>T5:35</b>				<b>522</b>
<b>523</b>	<b>T5:36</b>				<b>523</b>
<b>524</b>	<b>T5:37</b>				<b>524</b>

**33** Πάλιν ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις, Οὐκ ἐπιορκήσεις, ἀποδώσεις δὲ τῷ κυρίῳ τοὺς ὄρκους σου. **34** ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν μὴ ὁμόσαι ὅλως μήτε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὅτι θρόνος ἐστὶν τοῦ θεοῦ, **35** μήτε ἐν τῇ γῇ, ὅτι ὑποπόδιόν ἐστιν τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ, μήτε εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα, ὅτι πόλις ἐστὶν τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως, **36** μήτε ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ σου ὁμόσης, ὅτι οὐ δύνασαι μίαν τρίχα λευκὴν ποιῆσαι ἢ μέλαιναν. **37** ἔστω δὲ ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν ναὶ ναί, οὐ οὐ· τὸ δὲ περισσὸν τούτων ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἐστίν. Friberg, B., Friberg, T., Aland, K., & Institute for New Testament Textual Research (U.S.). (2001). Vol. 1: Analytical Greek New Testament : Greek text analysis. Baker's Greek New Testament library (Mt 5:33). ἐπιορκήσεις also to commit perjury or to break an oath. Friberg, T., Friberg, B., & Miller, N. F. (2000). Vol. 4: Analytical lexicon of the Greek New Testament. Baker's Greek New Testament library (166). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

This teaching is within a sequence of short teachings following the Beatitudes. (See [ONE](#): 471, and following text.) More precisely, Jesus' resultant teaching is as follows:

<sup>524</sup> **"Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more comes from the evil one."**

### **Some Interpretations:**

Having now set the foundation with definitions, usage and the teaching, let us now try to interpret the meaning of Jesus' words.

The teaching is explained in one scholarly work as follows, "**Jesus’ followers should be people whose words are so characterized by integrity that others need no formal assurance of their truthfulness in order to trust them.** Blomberg, C. (2001, c1992). Vol. 22: Matthew (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (112). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The *New American Bible*, the footnote to Matthew 5:33 provides:

"Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No': literally, "let your speech be 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no.' Some have understood this as a milder form of oath, permitted by Jesus. In view of Matthew 5:34, **'Do not swear at all,'** that is unlikely. From the evil one: *i.e.*, from the devil. **Oath-taking presupposes a sinful weakness of the human race, namely, the tendency to lie. Jesus demands of his disciples a truthfulness that makes oaths unnecessary.**" Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Board of Trustees, Catholic Church. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, & United States Catholic Conference. Administrative Board. (1996, c1986). *The New American Bible* : Translated from the original

### **Breaking It Down:**

Although I cannot dispute the above interpretations, I will nevertheless **dissect the issue a bit**. Those interpretations seem to simply say that, "**human beings are weak, and good Christians should be truthful.**"

That statement may be true, but it does not resonate with me. I am **not satisfied** that those statements reconcile, "**Anything more** comes from **the evil one.**" Those definitions would be true with or without Jesus' important statement. So, I will see if I can find some meaning in Jesus' closing words, as well.

If we accept the definitions above, there are **two parts** to an oath: 1) the **act** or predicate of the oath; and 2) the **penalty**. What appears to be within the universal definition of an "**oath**" is the call upon **God as a witness**. What is less clear in authoritative definitions is the **penalty**, which could be for lying at the time of the oath or for breaking the oath at a later time, or both.

It seems that there is no reason to call upon God to be a witness unless the oath-taker intends to call into the ceremony some **negative divine consequence**. In other words, calling God as a witness would be inconsequential without some **penalty** for violation of **predicate act**.

Now, it may be the purpose of swearing an oath, that, if God is called as the witness, and God is the judge on the Judgment Day, then there is a perfect connection between the evidence and the judge because it is thereby (if not otherwise) first-hand knowledge to the judge. Usually a judge only receives evidence by testimony second-hand, since the judge is not typically also the witness of the event at issue.

**It is so interesting to me, that, in any United States court, a judge would be disqualified in any trial in which the judge is to be called as a witness.**

**Moreover, calling God as a witness would seem to be superfluous and unnecessary, since God would know all and would witness all anyway.** So, it seems to be that the speaker's formal act of pulling God into the ceremony is what creates the implied **negative divine consequence**, the **penalty**, or "**imprecation**" in the definition above.

Stated more simply, when an oath is taken in some scenarios, a statement of fact is stated, and then an expressed or implied statement of a penalty. For example, "I will tell the truth, or be condemned." "I will do it, I swear it on my family." In many cases, the **penalty** is silently implied, such as, "I swear to God, it is true. [**If I lie, God will know and condemn my soul at the Judgment.**]"

Here is the quotation from the **American Idol** show on January 17, 2007:

**Simon:** Is this serious?

**Contestant:** It is.

**Contestant:** Look me in the eyes and tell me that is serious.

**Contestant:** That is definitely serious.

**Simon:** Swear on your mother's life.

**Contestant:** I swear.

**Simon:** Go on.  
**Contestant:** I swear.  
**Simon:** Go on.  
**Contestant:** I swear on my mother's life.  
**Simon:** Swear on your mother's life what.  
**Contestant:** I swear on my mother's life that this is real.

In the above example, the first is a simple affirmation of truth, the second part is the swearing of an oath placing into the function a mother's life in God's hands. So, again, an **affirmation** is a purely **civil** issue. An **oath** calls upon **God**. **How fascinating!**

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### **Conclusion:**

**So, again, why did Jesus teach not to swear oaths?** Why did Jesus say that swearing an oath is "from the evil one"? The answer, to me, is so **sweetly perfect**.

To me, Jesus stated it quite clearly, and, yet, we just do not think about it. Or, at least, **I did not think about it**.

Jesus concluded, "**You cannot make a single hair white or black.**"

In other words, no matter what oath we swear, we cannot cause the **negative divine consequence**, the **penalty**, or the **imprecation**. **No matter what oath we take, we cannot make God appear as a witness, and we cannot make God apply a penalty at our judgment.**

An "**imprecation**" is a curse. I can understand that any curse is from the "evil one" since it is a **presumptuous command upon God regarding the judgment of a soul**. The command or request made in a curse is fundamentally **presumptuous**. We do not know all, and what can we, as human beings, really fully and finally know about the soul?

We have no power **to command God** to witness **worldly acts**, and we have no power **to command God to condemn souls**. Whatever we do, right or wrong, good or bad, we are completely powerless to command judgment upon God, just as we are powerless to "make a single hair white or black."

**God's prerogative to judge a soul is God's alone. God already knows our heart.**

Jesus taught that it is, quite simply, enough to **do what you say**. Every word we say is thereby an implied promise to which we are bound—our word is our bond. **To make a promise is not to swear an oath**. To Jesus, it seems there is no distinction between a promise and a legally-binding promise, although there may be **civil** implications in worldly courts. In the Court of Heaven, God already knows our heart, and whether or not we perjure ourselves or unnecessarily fail to fulfill the meaning of our words.

So, if the predicate words are satisfied—as they should be—the penalty is immaterial and unnecessary. But, again, no one has power to command God to do anything, including, to perform any penalty on the speaker's soul or another's.

**God would already witness all. God need not be—and cannot be—made to do anything by our presumptuous and self-serving command.** And, I think the "evil one" would enjoy seeing our presumptuous commands to God regarding worldly things, when **Jesus taught that judgment is alone for God, and God's will alone be done.**

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If that is Jesus' meaning and teaching, then I would understand it. And, if not, I am still the better for having been provoked to contemplate his words. **But, either way, I do know that I will never hear or give an oath again without deeply considering it.**

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**It is a new year. Regardless of how we personally interpret Jesus' words, and whatever our respective belief is regarding oaths and affirmations—whatever our religion or belief system—it seems to be a good thing for a New Year to resolve to do as we say and not to say that which we cannot or will not do.**

**That is, to let our 'yes' mean 'yes' and our "no" mean "no."**

Yours truly,  
Gregg Zegarelli

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## Update: ONE Book Options

We received many requests for a [LARGE PRINT edition of ONE](#) and we have **responded!** We now have [LARGE PRINT edition](#) available online. The LARGE PRINT version is spiral bound for easy reference in 8.5" by 11" format. This is an excellent option for anyone with any difficulty reading the smaller print in the standard handbook format. At this time, it is only available at [www.OUGPress.com](http://www.OUGPress.com).

We are in the process of finalizing the [Universal version](#) of the book, as well as the [audio book](#) of the [Divine version](#). Both versions have anticipated release dates in September, 2007.

Thank you so much for your referrals and [testimonials!](#)

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