

LESSON 13

CHAPTER 23. “Of Lawful Oaths and Vows”

Oaths: Solemn promises made to men before the Lord

Vows: Solemn promise made to the Lord

The 1689 language is softer than the Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration. The 1689 is more sympathetic to the Anabaptist position. Those confessions state: “It is a sin to refuse an oath touching anything that is good and just, being imposed by lawful authority.”

I. Paragraph 1: Lawful oaths

- A. Oaths are part of worshipping God and are a serious matter.
- B. God is the witness and the judge of the oath.

II. Paragraph 2: Only in God’s Name

- A. Oaths should only be taken in God’s name, and none other.
- B. Oaths should never be uttered vainly or rashly.
- C. Oaths before God should be uttered for very important reasons.
 - 1. Oaths in God’s name can be appropriate in a civil proceeding.

III. Paragraph 3: Only in Truth

- A. Be careful that your oath is true and conforms to God’s revealed will.
- B. Vain oaths bring judgment.

IV. Paragraph 4: Only the Plain Truth

- A. Oaths should not incorporate clever language intending to equivocate or confuse.
- B. Do not swear to that which you do not understand or to that which could be understood in multiple ways.

V. Paragraph 5: Legal Vows

- A. Vows should only be made to God.
- B. Ecclesiastical vows should not be taken.
- C. Vows taken for the purpose of earning merit (righteousness) with God are sinful.

Questions for discussion:

Are marriage vows appropriate?

Is it proper to “swear in” a witness?