

Being Sure

In the Scripture we are told that no doctrine is of any private interpretation, which means that all valid doctrines are established by several different passages and verses that are all contextually addressing the same issue in the same way. Now, unlike other books, the Bible does not address its doctrines one after another in a list or subject fashion. Rather, the doctrines of Scripture are scattered throughout the Book of books and are found by patient study and being led of the Holy Ghost to a right understanding. Of course, this does require that one come to the Scripture without seeking to prove their own doctrine, but willing to be instructed of the LORD concerning His doctrines. When we come with certain preconceived ideas (Don't we all have those?), we must be willing to change them when the evidence of Scripture disproves those ideas.

So when it comes to the concept that we are capable of guaranteeing our future behavior, or that we will "tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," the vast majority of "Christendom" holds to the idea that it is okay to declare that one can fulfill a future commitment, or swear that they will tell the truth, upon pain of condemnation by God. However, I never see Scripture supporting this position. What I do see from a lot of folks is an excusing away of the passage from the sermon on the mount, and no real explanation as to why the words do not say what they plainly state.

Perhaps if we examine what the Scripture does state about guaranteeing future behavior, and guaranteeing our words, we might have a better understanding of what our real condition is. Moreover, we might get a little more humble about how wonderful we think we are as individuals. We also might gain a better understanding of why it is the LORD made certain it was declared in His word:

Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. (*Jeremiah 17:5*)

Now this is certainly one of those statements that nobody wants to hear. Moreover, when it is brought up, everybody runs the other way. Nonetheless, the LORD stated it, and we must deal with it, understand why He stated it, and what it has to do with guaranteeing our future behavior. Of course, we could begin anywhere in Scripture, but since the LORD gave us a book that is from man's perspective, it would be good to begin there.

In Ecclesiastes everything is examined from the view of "under the sun," which is man's view of things. In this book, we are informed that running one's mouth without choosing words carefully will net one trouble – particularly in the house of God:

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God. (*Ecclesiastes 5:1-7*)

If we note, the passage speaks to three things of consequence to us:

1. *Being rash, or hasty with one's words in the house of God.*
2. *The multitude of dreams and words will net trouble, and are vanity.*
3. *If you vow, pay; otherwise do not vow. It is actually wiser to not vow at all, than vow and not carry through with the promise.*

The first two items shouldn't be a problem for anyone to understand, and generally aren't. However, the last one generates considerable controversy in certain Christian circles. In understanding why this is, we should note that a vow is the same as swearing that one will fulfill a promise, either in word or deed. Which means that people are going to look at you funny if you refuse to swear in court, or upon entrance in government service. (*By the way, just how many government officials have broken their oaths of office?*) Whether people consider one odd or not, is not the issue here. What is the issue is why we should, or should not swear, and what God does in response to someone swearing an oath – whether they are His child or not. However, to confirm or deny this doctrine, we need to go further, which brings us to the Gospel of Matthew and the words of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. (*Matthew 5:33-37*)

Plainly, the Lord stated here that one should not swear at all – period. He gives a couple of examples of things we have no power to control, and tells us that if we have no power to control these things, we certainly ought not swear concerning

future words and deeds. This is briefly confirmed in James, chapter five:

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. (*James 5:12*)

Here, in a nutshell is the very same thing the Lord Jesus Christ stated, and is also a further confirmation of what is stated in Ecclesiastes. However, he adds a reminder of something that we ought to be doing anyway, as it should be our wont to do so: when we speak – let it be the truth and stand by it.

Now, despite all that is addressed in the books of Moses concerning vows and oaths, it is plain that the Lord Jesus Christ set that aside and confirmed the statement in Ecclesiastes which reads:

Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? (*Ecclesiastes 5:5-6*)

Why is this, and what does this have to do with Jeremiah 17:5?

The “why” of this is bound up in who we are as individuals of the race of man. Simply put, we are fallen, sinful, wicked creatures who cannot determine what will happen five minutes from now, let alone tomorrow. Moreover, since we are in a fallen state, our minds, and thus our memories work perfectly, right?

No?

Why not?

Regardless of whether it is physical or spiritual limitation,

it is entirely true that every last one of us has a faulty memory. We forget details, sequences of events, names, etc. Moreover, we have no power to control the events of the future. All we can do is determine what we want to do, and set about to accomplish that. Nevertheless, all our plans can be swept away by unforeseen events over which we have no control.

Hence, to declare that we are sure and certain to the point of swearing we will say or do something in the future, even five minutes into the future, is to say that we have a measure of control that we do not have. It is to depend upon ourselves, instead of upon the LORD. We are reminded of this in James as well:

Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. (*James 4:13-14*)

Since these things are the case, we are reminded that our attitude is to be:

For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. (*James 4:15*)

So what does this have to do with “trusting in man?”

Everything. To clarify, a couple of questions are in order:

- 1. Are you certain that you want to depend upon yourself for the events of the future?*
- 2. Are you certain you want to depend upon your memory to the extent of “so help me God?”*

I don't know about anyone else, but I have seen too many things never get finished because something happened to the person who set about to accomplish the task. Events beyond our control happen all the time, and to one extent or another,

they hinder or stop the things we wish to do. As pertaining to swearing to tell the truth; men may not catch the factual errors of your recall, but the LORD God does. To swear that one can tell “ . . .*the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me God.*” is to declare that one actually knows the whole truth in the first place, and that one’s memory is perfect. Are you that sure of yourself?

If you are that sure and certain, then bring about your own salvation by your own efforts. If you are that good, you don’t need Christ.