

Heidelberg Catechism LORD'S DAY 37

Q101. But may we swear an oath in God's name if we do it reverently?

A. Yes, when the government demands it, or when necessity requires it, in order to maintain and promote truth and trustworthiness for God's glory and our neighbor's good. Such oaths are grounded in God's Word¹ and were rightly used by the people of God in the Old and New Testaments.²

1. Deut. 6:13 – “The Lord your God you shall fear, him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear.”

Deut. 10:20 – “You shall fear the Lord your God; him you shall serve; to him you shall hold fast; and by his name you shall swear.”

Isa. 48:1 – “Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel and who came forth from the loins of Judah, who swear by the name of the Lord and invoke the God of Israel but not in truth or right.”

Heb. 6:16 – “Humans, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute among them.”

2. Gen. 21:24 – “And Abraham said, ‘I swear it.’”

Gen. 31:53 – “‘May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor judge between us.’ So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac,”

Josh. 9:15 – “And Joshua made peace with them, guaranteeing their lives by a treaty, and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them.”

Josh. 9:19 – “But all the leaders said to all the congregation, “We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we must not touch them.”

1 Sam.24:[21–22] – “‘Swear to me, therefore, by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not wipe out my name from my father's house.’ So David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.”

2 Sam. 3:35 – “Then all the people came to persuade David to eat something while it was still day, but David swore, saying, ‘So may God do to me and more, if I taste bread or anything else before the sun goes down!’”

1 Kings 1:29 – “The king swore, saying, “As the Lord lives, who has saved my life from every adversity,”

Rom. 1:9 – “For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers,”

2 Cor. 1:23 – “But I call on God as witness against me: it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth.”

Q102. May we also swear by saints or other creatures?

A. No. A legitimate oath means calling upon God as the only one who knows my heart to witness to my truthfulness and to punish me if I swear falsely.¹ No creature is worthy of such honor.²

1. 2 Cor. 1:23 – “But I call on God as witness against me: it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth.”

2. Matt. 5:34–36 – “But I say to you: Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.”

James 5:12 – “Above all, brothers and sisters, 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.”