Numbers 30 **Vows are not to be broken** 6th March 2025

The sixteen verses of this shorter chapter concerning the taking of vows either to the LORD Himself or when an individual binds his soul. There is only one verse which deals with how a man is to be held to whatever he says.

"*If a man vow a vow unto the LORD or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth*". There are no qualifications or exceptions which the Holy Spirit mentions here. The man is bound by his word, just as God is when He speaks. This should engender deliberation first as the consequences of making a vow need to be considered beforehand as the man is otherwise bound without thought! This requirement to only take a vow in full knowledge of the ramifications of our words underlines the importance of what is involved.

The most famous Biblical example of this is the vow of Jephthah, who vowed to sacrifice to God if victory over Israel's enemies was achieved. He lost his daughter to this commitment as she was dedicated to the LORD. Judges 11v30-40. He had no way out of escaping from the consequences to which he had put his hand. Our word should be our bond, we should mean what we say. The Law enshrined the final responsibility in this only after making a vow, so everyday speech was exempt.

However, with the female who is supported by a male, either father or husband, then she is granted the latitude of having her vow withdrawn. This reflects the physical reality of her position, as the responsibility for her is taken by the male, then he can rescind her words. This is interesting because it gives the importance of who will pay for any commitment the final decision in any matter. Vowing a vow and then having the consequences covered by another is not the same for both sexes. The male is more exposed than the female who has a backstop to rein in any mistakes she might make in her naivety. Some argue that women talk more and need to be protected from themselves, but as everyday speech is not the issue here but rather the making of vows.

A woman who is self-sustaining, such as a widow or a divorced woman, does not have this shield, she remains bound by her specific word in the same way as a man. This then, is not because a woman is unable to make a binding vow but because God is merciful to those who are under the responsibility of another. The wording of this law is clear, the opportunity to make her vows void is only in the day that it is heard. "*But if he shall any ways make them void after that he hath heard them, then he shall bear her iniquity*" verse 15.

This has far-reaching implications. Marriage vows are one of the aspects that are covered here as the woman cannot bind herself on her own. This means that a father can prevent a younger daughter from binding herself in marriage to what he regards as an unsuitable match. This would then require permission being sought by the prospective groom from the father of his intended, a practise seen in Biblical societies down through the centuries.

It also impacts in forgiveness. God is our responsible for His children, if they bind themselves with an oath in a state of ignorance to the consequences then He can annul them from this in His mercy. Thus, a sinner who has bound himself to a false religion is

excused from such a foolish commitment by the presiding influence of their concerned Father. He will excuse them from being irrevocably attached to such an unacceptable relationship of blasphemy and error. This aspect provides protection from certain of our vows but is not a blanket excuse to avoid all the consequences of everything we have ever done whilst we were yet sinners. All our vows are not automatically annulled when we come under the protective shield of Christ, else we would have to remarry our spouse upon baptism. Marriage is not a sin. Marrying an illegal person is wrong. If we find out that we have tried to marry someone who is ineligible, then this would be annulled upon realisation not upon baptism. If this were not so, and all our vows are abandoned upon making a commitment to Christ, then we would need to research everything to which we had set our hand to, in order to review whether we needed to repeat our vows or not. This is never addressed by Jesus, so clearly it is not a consequence of baptismal forgiveness.

Jesus talks about vows in the New Testament. He goes beyond the binding nature of a vow under the law and expands the impact to all our speech. Matthew 5v33-37. Jesus warns his disciples that "*whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil*". However, he is not saying that you should never take vows, because they are evil else no one would get married as a disciple, as when you marry you take marriage vows. The issue which Christ is addressing is the idea of swearing "on" something. "*Swear not at all, neither by heaven for it is God's throne: nor by the earth for it is His footstool*". This is not the same as saying that "I vow to marry this woman before witnesses".

For this reason, we should refrain from swearing "on" the Bible when asked to do so by the authorities, instead it is better to affirm by promising without using a sacred object in the process. The issue is not that we do not vow to speak the truth, but that we do not involve something else, but that our word should be good enough on its own. Some pledge on the lives of their children or their mother, but this is not in keeping with Christ's commandments. We have encapsulated this in no 79 of our list of the commandments. James 5v12 is also cited in this. *"But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven neither by earth, neither by any other oath, but let your nay be nay and let your yea be yea, lest ye fall into condemnation*".

If all speech is sacrosanct why would God swear by an oath? "*The oath which He sware to our father*" Luke 1v73. Acts 2v30 "*Therefore being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne*". God uses oaths when the importance of what He said is even higher than normal. Thus, these oaths to Abraham and David are escalated higher than other declarations, God has chosen to emphasise these statements. These are the major promises with which God will reward the faithful and bring about the fruition of His plan for mankind upon earth.