

James 5:12

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[0 : 00] Good morning, open up your Bibles and join me in the book of James. We're getting close to finishing up James. It's been a wonderful book to walk through, challenging to us all.

! While you're turning there, I just want to say thank you to our musicians and our sound people, even the people who just bring up the glass of water, which I actually really need right now. No applause, but just if you see them later, just thank them for how they served the Lord this morning. All right, we're going to be in James 5, and we're going to look at one verse. So, James 5, verse 12. But above all, my brothers, 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 on your condemnation.

Let's pray on me, Lord. We come to this reading of your inspired, holy, inerrant word. I pray that it would fall on ears that are receptive today, so that you would work your word into our hearts and our souls through your spirit, that we would apply it rightly when we go from this place.

[1 : 25] In Jesus' name, amen. So, we know that James is a book that's not necessarily about how one becomes a genuine believer in Christ, not how one becomes a born-again Christian, but it really is focused so much on the primary theme, which is living out one's genuine faith.

Like, what does real Christianity, what does real Christ-following look like in every day? What does authentic faith look like? His audience is a primarily Jewish audience who have been converted, and it's just a series of related loose homilies going throughout the book focused on just faithful, obedient Christian living before God and in the context of the gospel community.

I don't have this with me, I just didn't want to necessarily waste time, but I read in Josephus, a Jewish historian, first century, he spoke of the martyrdom of James, the brother of Jesus being stoned.

And so, if you have any doubt that this guy was devoted to the Lord, who happened to be like in the flesh, his older brother, he was devoted to the very end and was eventually stoned to death for being a witness to Christ.

Today's section, verse 12, seems to kind of almost feel misplaced, right? This sort of falls right there. But however, there's three possibilities.

[2 : 59] There could be sort of a combination of one of these or all of these, but where does this verse fit in our context so far? It could be that he's sort of beginning his conclusion to the letter.

He says, you know, above all. So he's kind of wrapping it up. He's trying to land the plane. Secondly, he could also just be referring to the sins of the tongue because that's been a constant theme throughout this letter.

How we use our language, what words we say matter. How we communicate to other people matters. And he just addressed grumbling in verse 9 since it had been this ongoing theme throughout his letter.

But thirdly, it could be that James is connecting this verse to the previous verses, which have to do with patience through suffering.

Why do men and women so often take oaths and make big promises to God and to others? They do it when they're suffering. You ever seen someone do that?

[4 : 04] Like when there's something serious going on, they're like, oh, I just, I promise, Lord, if you just deliver me from whatever this is, I swear that I will fill in the blank. And we do it to friends and spouses alike.

We make big promises when the heat's on. We just want God to rescue us. So not perfectly clear this verse falls, but it could be a mixture of a lot of those.

But we're going to have it chopped up into three parts, three points, ABC of this verse. But point number one is do not swear.

Do not swear. Verse 12. Above all, my brothers, do not swear either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath.

So he says, above all, especially this. That's one of those hermeneutical phrases you need to like zone in on. He's like trying to say this is important.

[5 : 00] So listen up. Our words and our communication matter because it involves our heart, which is of the greatest importance to God. James repeatedly has stressed throughout this letter that our tongues, our speech, are often what gives others the most revealing glimpses.

of where our hearts are. What a person talks about, their words, their language, their tone that he or she uses, exposes in a lot of ways our spiritual condition.

And so our Lord Jesus taught that over and over. What's in comes out, not vice versa. In Matthew 12, verse 34, he says, For out of the abundance or the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.

The good person out of the good treasure brings forth good. The evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. So what's in comes out. And it most often comes out in our words, in our languages.

So he exposes our hearts because it's ruled by our hearts. So Jesus also said, But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart.

[6 : 15] And that defiles a person. So again, just that distressing that what's in does come out. But that presents a reasonable question. Why do people in our world feel the need to, like, make oaths?

To swear? To give their word in some other way? Why is there a need to do that? You ever thought about that? Because, whether you realize it or not, both believers and unbelievers are aware of this. But there's an awareness of the effects of sin in this world. And we know that if less we put pressure on people to keep their word, they might not keep it naturally.

They may bend it. So we put pressure on people to speak the truth. Because we know that they naturally may not do that. Think of some obscene ways, right?

Maybe even silly ways that we are quick to make oaths with people. You see it more with kids and teenagers. But cross my heart, hope to die. We grew up in the 80s, the pinky swear.

[7 : 23] Shake my hand on it. I swear on a stack of Bibles, which is silly, because doesn't one Bible say what the other Bibles say. I swear on me sainted mother.

We make all kinds of, like, swears by heaven or by earth, right? And we've even said, I swear to God. I have not done that since I've been saved, but I used to quite a bit.

But think about this. Many others, like, we attempt to guarantee the truth of our words, but we employ oaths. It implies that a person may not speak the complete truth unless they are under oath. So even just the very practice of that is flawed, right? Because it implies there's a lack of truthfulness in everyday speech. So let's maybe go through what this verse doesn't mean, and then go through what it means.

So James isn't saying, believe it or not, that taking any oath is prohibited. Official oaths were allowed in Israel, but a person was required to fulfill them, especially those that involved invoking God's name.

[8 : 33] That's Numbers 30, verse 2. And men of God throughout the Old Testament gave oaths because it just emphasized that they were men of truth. Right? There were covenants made.

David and Jonathan was a very, you know, well-known one out of the Old Testament. The Nazarite vow. Israelites who took that vow. Numbers 6, verse 21.

It involved abstinence from wine drinking, not cutting your hair, throughout the period of that vow, and didn't have no contact with the dead. And actually, John the Baptist was sort of a result of some of that.

Paul often called God to bear witness of the truth he was writing to different people in the New Testament. He called to the Romans saying that he was loving and praying for them and saying, God is my witness of that.

To the Corinthians, he explained to them why he chose to write them versus visiting them in person. And he says, but I call God to witness against me.

[9 : 40] It was to spare you that I refrain from coming again to Corinth. So swearing in court to tell the truth isn't a bad thing, because remember, you're in a civil context where a lot of people don't know your character.

So that's all right. One of my favorites from history, the vow a knight would make before he entered into knighthood. Be without fear in the face of your enemies.

Be brave and upright that God may love thee. Speak the truth always, even if it leads to your death. Safeguard the helpless and do no wrong.

That's your vow. And usually we slap him in the face after that and say him that so you'll remember it. So, so we, any of the most important one, a lot of them that many of us have taken are marital vows, rich or poor, the sickness and our health, the death do us part.

So taking an oath or vow when you're telling the truth is okay. Right? So then if that's true, then what, what is James after? Like, what is he actually attacking?

[10:45] What does he actually mean? What prohibition is he trying to place on this? So for help, turn to Matthew 5. There's only two other places for you to look today outside of this one verse.

So Matthew 5, verse 33. He really is echoing what Jesus taught. He's echoing our Savior. So Matthew 5, verse 33.

This gives us a lot more insight. Matthew 5, verse 33. He says, again, You have heard it. It was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.

So he's citing the old covenant. But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by earth, for it is his footstool, or Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king.

And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply yes or no.

[11:54] Anything more than this comes from evil. So James and Jesus, they were condemning a particular practice of oath-taking.

It was really well known in contemporary Jewish culture at this time. There was a false, deceptive, evasive oath-taking, using everything but the Lord's name, which alone was considered binding.

Their oaths were deceptive, because it misled those that they were making it to. So, example, someone would say, hey, you deceived me. I believed you when you gave me your word.

And now you're backing out. It's like you planned on doing this all along. And they would just say, well, I swore by Jerusalem. So I didn't swear by God's name.

So let it go. And the oaths were also evasive because they would play with words and language that allowed them to wiggle out of that vow they made.

[12:58] So someone may come to them and say, I know something serious. A widow may come to someone and say, hey, you swore to my husband that if he died in battle, that you would take care of us.

He would take care of me, his wife, and his children. But, you know, again, you're backing out on this. And he would say, well, that depends on what you mean by provide. Because I didn't necessarily say that I was going to do this, this, and this.

You know people who do that? Or have seen that in our world? They would swear upon things that were connected to God or related to God, but just not the name of God himself.

They wrongly thought that it would provide them a way out if they wanted it later. And that it also was spared them the judgment of God, which we think is ridiculous.

But it's kind of like children on the playground. Y'all remember? Those of you who ever played on a playground? You would say, hey, I swear. And you would go. And then later on you would say, well, I have my fingers crossed behind my back.

[14:06] So it's really what they're doing. It's just a childish practice to manipulate people. We see it a lot in our government, unfortunately. In trials and hearings, like a question is asked, which isn't obscure, very objective.

Yes or no? Well, it just depends. I don't know if I can answer that, Senator. I don't, you know, like just what we do. Like we just have to put pressure on people.

So, therefore, James and Jesus are attacking a certain manner in which people would swear falsely. However, Jesus shows on what we just read in Matthew 5, that no matter what they swear by, it ultimately is sin because it is connected to God.

If they break their word, it is against God. All things are connected to Him. And we live our lives before Him. That's why He said anything more from this comes from evil.

So, He also gives woes to the Pharisees. If you're in Matthew, just flip over to Matthew 23. He gives the woes against the Pharisees and the religious leaders.

[15 : 15] A woe is kind of like the opposite of a blessing, I guess you could say. But Matthew 23, verse 16, same thing. He's talking the way they practice this and calling it out.

He says, Woe to you blind guides who say, if anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing. But if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath. You blind fools.

For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, if anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing.

But if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath. You blind men. For which is greater, the gift of the altar that makes the gift sacred?

So whoever swears by the altar swears by and by everything on it. This kind of connects back to chapter 5. Whoever swears by the temple swears by it, by him who dwells in it.

[16 : 21] And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. So Jesus is saying, you fools, quit lying.

Don't you realize that everything is connected to God? Keep your word. Stop this frivolous swearing around, right? If you give your word before God, you are required to keep it.

End of story. That's like what he's saying. So stop this, you know, deceptive, obscure, evasive oath. Just say yes or no. Say what you mean and mean what you say.

That's what he's trying to expose here. So as we look at this in our own lives, I mean, do we make false promises and oaths by swearing on stupid things?

Are we really quick to swear to others that you will do such and such and then wiggle out of it? Do you flippantly just say things and promise things that you just don't mean?

[17 : 23] I think in the church, the one that we're probably most guilty of is, hey, I'll pray for you. According to 1 Samuel, to say you're going to pray for someone and not do that, it's a sin against God.

I'm really slow now to be like, hey, I'll pray for you. Or I try to do it in the next 10 minutes. It's serious. And those of us who are members of this church, you made a covenant with fellow believers that are here.

Some of you might have been around so long, you just sort of forgotten about that covenant. And to faithfully keep your word that you made to your fellow brothers and sisters here.

We just don't show up to regular gatherings. We don't show up to members meetings if it's just convenient or whatever. But you made a covenant with us. Keep your word. Number two.

Verse 12b, I guess you could say. Number two. Only speak the truth. So we have do not swear. We have only speak the truth. He says, but let your yes be yes and your no be no.

[18 : 30] So it's important to hear this. So the message isn't just simply don't lie. Don't swear. The main issue is that the believer should always be completely truthful in their speech.

Genuine believers as new creations born again of the Holy Spirit. We ought to have a desire to tell the truth and to not lie.

In fact, one of the fruits, fruit, excuse me, fruit of the spirit is the word faithfulness. And that's actually the conviction of truth when you look up that word.

So we are being marked by that. Those who claim to be born again, saved ought to develop a good reputation as honest, true speakers and promise keepers.

So James and Jesus, their prohibition of oaths. They're basically saying one's given word ought to be enough. Jesus and his disciples are not to swear by those things, but rather their character should be of such integrity that a simple yes or no is enough to make a promise to someone.

[19 : 39] No oaths required. So speak the truth and keep your word. That's like the very simple interpretation of this. But why is this important? Because God is true.

God's truthfulness means that he means that he is the true God, that all his knowledge and all his words are true and that he alone is the standard of truth. Titus 1, 2, God cannot lie.

Hebrews 6, 18, it is impossible for God to lie. Proverbs 30, verse 5, every word of God proves true. And Jesus prayed to the father, your word is truth in John 17.

So those who know God, who recognize like our constant accountability before his presence, we need only give a simple yes or no as a binding oath.

We are to not lie, but always tell the truth because our father who is in heaven is true and only speaks the truth. So we are to be blameless witnesses.

[20 : 45] You know, honesty in our speech is important to our witness in the world because if we prove untruthful and we portray God as untruthful, if we break our word that reflects upon God,

right, the God we're claiming to speak for.

One might say, you know, right, you lied to me. You did not tell the truth. You say you believe in God. Is God a liar? You say that like your whole life is wrapped up in following God.

God is he untrue. So we ought to be really praying that as Paul wrote in Philippians 2, he said, be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.

So we have the opportunity to stand out in a world that's full of lies, full of deception, full of sin. We know that Satan is called the father of all lies and that people who belong to him are also liars.

Scary. It's a big contrast. And so we ought to have such verbal integrity to be people of irreproachable honesty and develop a good reputation for keeping our word.

[22 : 10] If someone was talking to you about, if someone was talking to you about one of your good friends, just an example. And they said, oh gosh, I'm nervous. I just made a serious deal with Jake.

I just picked on Jake. Sorry. But this is true about him. I just made a serious deal with him and I could be in serious trouble. But all he did was give me his word.

And that's all. Like, I don't know. Your friend should be able to say to that person, well, if Jake gave you his word, then that's all the assurance you need.

He's a godly man who always keeps his word. So rest easy. Like, people should be able to take rest and take comfort when we make a promise to someone.

It shouldn't be just uneasy about whether we're going to break our word or not. So when we give that word, others should be able to rest in that. Our consciences ought to be clean and sincere before God.

[23 : 12] Paul writes in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, for our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience. That we have behaved or we have lived in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity.

Not by earthly wisdom, but by the grace of God and supremely so toward you. So, as a believer gathered here today, would people characterize you as dodgy and unreliable or committed and trustworthy?

Would your family and fellow believers characterize you as a man or woman of truth? Would your unbelieving friends say that you're a person who would keep your word? Is your integrity such that a yes or no is enough for other people?

So, this brings us thirdly and lastly, avoid God's judgment. Verse 12c, he says, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

So those are heavy words. James says, tell the truth so that you may not fall under condemnation. So there's gravity to that. This isn't a light-hearted, fickle thing he's sort of throwing on at the end of his letter.

[24 : 33] He means it. And like Jesus, he calls for truthful, clear, straightforward, honest speech. And to not speak in a way that's lying, obscure, evasive, or dishonest.

Because if you do, you could be inviting God's judgment. So, you ever thought about why this matters? But for one, lying tongues hurt people.

Lying tongues hurt people. When we give our word to someone, then we break it, proving us a liar. It hurts and damages people. When your friend can turn around and lie to you, it hurts.

Parents break, if parents break promises they made to their children, and they do it often, and do it a lot, that can affect that child throughout the course of their life.

Like, my parents have never told the truth. I never even know what they meant a lot of the time. They were just sort of obscure. They just wouldn't tell me yes or no on certain things.

[25 : 35] Men and women who have been lied to in relationships and marriage, they can develop serious trust issues in anybody. Right? So, one of the greatest, most hurtful things you can do is to break your word to another.

So, and how many of us have suffered, genuinely suffered, and hurt because someone broke their word to us? So, that's lying tongues hurt people, but most importantly, lying tongues dishonor God. God, again, by His very nature, is truth. So, He takes liars very seriously. Proverbs 12, verse 22.

Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.

Proverbs 6, 16. So, there are six things that the Lord hates that are abomination to Him. Haughty eyes and a lying tongue.

Very heavy words. Right? So, the word condemnation. It just sort of flies out right here. It does mean just a judgment.

[26 : 45] It means to face justice for a particular thing, especially under divine law. But what does it mean? So, we know that James is writing to Christians. And in one sense, if we really are in the faith, we will be spared the judgment day.

No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. But on the other hand, Christians can still lie, break their word to others, and misrepresent Christ.

So, if that has happened to you as a believer, you could invite the discipline of God unless you repent and make right the wrong, right, that you have made.

On the other hand, throughout this letter, James has an awareness that there might be somebody in his audience that might not be genuine. Might not actually be in the faith.

A goat among the sheep. That's what a lot of this letter does. It prides with that. And so, he's basically saying that that's how you are. This is a stark warning to repent.

[27 : 51] Stop lying and tell the truth or you invite God's judgment. Some of the most heavy words I could, I think, I would say, come out of Matthew 12, verse 36.

Jesus says, I tell you, on the day of judgment, people will give an account for every careless word they speak. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. And, man, judgment awaits those who misrepresent Christ through careless words. And so, in summary, so just kind of wrapping this up, the whole thing, James and Christ, they're saying one's given word should be enough.

We need to develop reputations as truth keepers. We shouldn't have to swear on anything, right? And not so, right?

So that people can praise us. There's a cultural undertone, I know it is in the South, of like, he's a man of his word. She's a woman of her word. And we're like, yes, I am.

[29 : 04] But if we think that way, we are stealing glory from God. But rather, we should speak truthfully because you belong to God who always keeps his word.

So here's some really quick helps. Man, you could talk about these forever. Really practical helps. Now, I'm guilty, all right?

So this first one is me. You need to slow down. Be slower to give your yes or no to people. Don't give your word until you are sure.

I'm really quick to say yes to things I don't really understand a lot of the time. And I've hurt people before. And they've been just so gracious and forgiving towards me.

So slow down. Proverbs 21, 23. Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble. So it's just better to not say things sometimes.

[29 : 59] Others of you are too quick to say yes because you are afraid of the responses of others if you tell them no. You fear man's response and not living righteously before God.

Others say yes too quickly because maybe deep down they believe that they're indispensable. Like this won't happen apart from me.

I have to do this. And then they eventually burn out. Right? And maybe if they burn out, they do it like a murder. Be slow to give your yes to people.

Then ultimately just pray. Ask God by his grace that he would make you a man or woman of truth. In Psalm 51, God says that he delights in truth in our inward being.

So what's in comes out. So two responses. How can we respond to this? The first wrong response is to just merely have moral resolve.

[30 : 59] Okay? I'm going to be a better person. I'm going to stop lying and always tell the truth. I want people to know that I'm someone who keeps my word. Again, that's man-centered. And you're still in sin.

But the right response, if you confess your sin to God. God, I've lied. I've been untruthful. Forgive me. Change me. Help me to live for you. Make me a person of truth.

Go to Jesus and ask him to save you and make you new. Right? Jesus, in his work, he frees us from the need to tell lies to people. And to break our word.

Because he told the truth always. We can always rely on him to deliver us. Right? So, in summary, let's be people who are known by the truth.

Let's all pray together. Let's pray together.