

May 18, 2014

To Tell the Truth

James 5:12

All Stand and Read Scripture

James 5:12

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹² But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.

Prayer

INTRODUCTION:

The command he gives to us here is “do not swear”. The examples of swearing here is “either by heaven or by earth, or with any other oath”.

At first glance, one might think that James is telling us not to curse or take any oaths, but as you examine the scripture more closely, you will find that he is actually referring to truthfulness here.

Although, the scriptures make it perfectly clear in other verses that cursing is wrong, James is **NOT** saying do not curse, or do not “use the Lord’s name in vain”, or do not utter bad words in this verse.

I do not believe that he is condemning taking an oath in a court of law either.

We have examples in the scripture where even God gave an oath.

Acts 2:29-31

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

²⁹ “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT *one* OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, ³¹ he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY.

It is the nature of man to lie. When we do not have Christ in our life, it seems wise by earthly standards to stretch the truth in order to try to avoid punishment for some law we have broken. Since the law of the land governs over everyone, sinners and Christians, the attempt of the courts was to make them take an oath. I am not sure how affective it is for the non-Christian, but it should be effective for those who try to have a clear conscience. The goal was to try to encourage everyone **TO TELL THE TRUTH!**

That is the title to my message this morning. Let's take a look at what James is trying to tell the Christian.

BODY:

1. What Does James Mean by "Swearing"?

James is talking about making oaths or promises.

As children, we used to cross our fingers behind our back when we made a promise to someone and felt that was sufficient to invalidate the promise made. When someone had a pattern of not telling the truth, he sometimes would go an extra step and say "cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye", or "I swear upon my mother's Bible" just to try to convince you that he was really making a promise that he intended to keep.

This verse actually gets to the issue of **truthfulness**. We are to be above reproach, as Christians, when it comes to telling the truth and making promises and living up to our commitments. Once we lose our credibility, it is very hard to get it back.

Jesus dealt with this same issue in more detail in Matthew 5:33-37. James, being the half-brother of Jesus, had no doubt heard Jesus talk about oaths and truthfulness several times during his life. He was not summarizing Matt. 5:33-37, because it appears that James is the earliest book written in the New Testament.

Matthew 5:33-37

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³³ "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' ³⁴ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. ³⁶ Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

Jesus is saying that when a Christian makes a promise or commitment, that your “yes” or “no” should be sufficient. You should have a pattern of consistency in your life that would make the person who knows you to have confidence that our “yes” or “no” can be taken to the bank. He should not have any doubt that you are telling the truth and that you will follow through with that promise or commitment, as long as it is humanly possible, because it is your consistent witness that you can be trusted to tell the truth.

Jesus is confronting the Pharisees and Sadducees with some of His strongest language when calling them hypocrites and “blind guides” referencing the inconsistency of their lives.

Matthew 23:16-22

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁶ “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, *that is nothing*; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.’ ¹⁷ You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? ¹⁸ And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, *that is nothing*, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.’ ¹⁹ You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? ²⁰ Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears *both* by the altar and by everything on it. ²¹ And whoever swears by the temple, swears *both* by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. ²² And whoever swears by heaven, swears *both* by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

The Jews in the first century apparently were making distinctions between whether they had to keep their commitments or promises based upon which oath they took. They took seriously the command in the Ten Commandments not to take “the Name of your God in vain”. So any oath taken in the “name of the Lord” was considered “**binding**”, but they came up with a system that said that if they swore by certain oaths, they were not bound to the commitment. It became a very deceptive way to get around their promise. That is what Jesus and James are both confronting here, and that is **truthfulness**.

The issue is “can you be trusted to keep your promise?”. James tells us to let our “**yes be yes and our no, no**”. You are to let your word be your bond. That what you say is what you mean. It is as “**good as gold**”.

We have all seen examples in our society where we see that truthfulness is not really exalted.

ILLUSTRATION:

We have seen politicians make promises that he knew we would want to hear, but had no intention to keep, just to be elected. We see politicians on TV who “spin” an event to make it seem to fit his agenda.

We see lawyers tell only the part of the story that they want us to hear and “conveniently” leave out or twist the part that would convict his client. You have trouble determining what the truth is because they don’t fully tell the whole story.

We see videos of people caught in an incriminating act, and even though they are on video for everyone to see, they will still deny that they did it.

How many times have we gone out of the way to tweak the truth a little bit, so that, in our minds, we are not giving a blatant lie, but we are kind of adjusting it a little bit so that other people can have the focus that we want them to have and hide the clear picture of the truth?

How many times have you called in sick to work and miraculously became cured immediately after the call?

How many times have you fudged on your income tax in order to keep a little more money for yourself?

That is exactly what James is dealing with here. Truthfulness of our word! Let your “yes be yes and your no, no”.

2. How Important is it to Be Truthful?

James starts off this verse with “**But above all, my brethren**”. What is he saying here? Is this saying that what he is about to say is more important than anything he has talked about thus far?

He has talked about:

- Faithful Prayer without Doubting
- Bridling the Tongue
- Being a Doer, not only a Hearer
- Faith and Works
- Quarrels and Conflicts
- Misused Riches
- And many other Issues

How important do you think telling the truth is? Is it really that important?

I cannot say that James is telling us that this is the most important issue, or if he is saying something like “in conclusion”, but I know for sure that it is extremely important that we live a **truthful** life!

Solomon tells us that there are seven things that God hates...

Proverbs 6:16-19

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁶ There are six things which the LORD hates,
Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:
¹⁷ Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
And hands that shed innocent blood,
¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans,
Feet that run rapidly to evil,
¹⁹ A false witness *who* utters lies,
And one who spreads strife among brothers.

Notice that of the seven abominations of the Lord that two and in some ways three deal with lying.

1. A lying tongue.
2. A false witness who utters lies.
3. One who spreads strife among brothers.

This is important for many reasons, but one of them is because **HONESTY** determines our ability to receive and apply God's Word **TRUTHFULLY** in our own lives.

Those who consistently practice lying, not only lie to others, but also lie to themselves. Practiced lying causes us to twist and distort the Bible to justify our beliefs and actions. It makes it difficult for us to honestly apply God's Word to our own life.

- God's Word is what we need for salvation.
- God's Word is what we need to change our lives for Christ.
- God's Word is what we need to have our minds renewed.
- God's Word is what we need to make progress and sanctification.
- God's Word is the source by which we must live our life.

If we are dishonest, we are left without the resource of the Word of God, which is the source of everything that is good.

So what James is telling us in verse 12 is that we **MUST cultivate HONESTY**

- in our speech
- in our dealings with others
- and in our own heart

By doing that, we can then

- be honest with ourselves,
- be honest with the Lord
- be honest with our understanding of the Bible.

Only then can we claim that we live a life of HONESTY. It is INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT that we do that.

James is exhorting us to only make promises that we intend to keep. When we do make a promise, do everything possible to keep it.

There will be times that we will make promises with every intention to keep them, but for some reason, we may be unable to keep it. We may be in the hospital due to a heart attack. That is the nature of human frailty.

Remember what James told us earlier...we should say **“If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that”**.

It is one thing to make a promise and be unable to complete it, and it is another to make a promise that you have no intention of keeping. Some people do that all the time! THAT IS SERIOUS!

Let your **“yes be yes and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.”**

Jesus told Thomas,

John 14:6

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

6 ... “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

Why is HONESTY important?

We proclaim to know the truth. We have the gospel and we proclaim that it is the absolute truth. We want people to believe the testimony of the truth that we give to them.

If their observation of our life has compromised our integrity, how can they believe the truth, if they cannot believe our word?

That is not an excuse for not believing the gospel, but we can be a hindrance to their belief, if we ourselves are not credible.

For James, the whole issue of making oaths as a Christian is something that should not even be considered. Let your **“yes be yes and your no, no”** so that people will KNOW that they can count on you to keep that promise.

3. What is the Motive for Being Truthful?

James tells us that motive is **“so that you may not fall under judgment.”**

Jesus told the Pharisees

Matthew 12:36-37

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³⁶ But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the Day of Judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

If you are condemned on the Day of Judgment, John even describes a liar’s eternal existence in more vivid terms!

Revelation 21:8

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁸ But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

God takes this very seriously, if we are wise, we should not take it lightly.

When James tells us “But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment”, he is giving us very timely, very practical, very sober warnings.

God’s severe judgment falls upon those who practice and have a pattern of lying.

CONCLUSION:

Let’s be honest in the promises we make.

Ephesians 4:20-25

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, **just as truth is in Jesus**, ²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the **new self**, which in *the likeness of* God has been **created in righteousness and holiness of the truth**.

²⁵ Therefore, laying aside **falsehood**, **SPEAK TRUTH** EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.

If you have not put your faith and trust in Christ, DO IT TODAY!

Paul tells us that the goal for our life is contentment. We must be trusting God and learn to be content with what He provides for us. When we do this, we will grow in patience and become more like Christ.

We are told in Eph. 3:9 that God is **not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**

Christ died on the cross for ALL of our sins, but if you have not turned your life over to Christ, that promise will not apply to you.

If you do not know Christ as your personal Savior, the window of opportunity is open for you now. God wants to come into your life. Won't you come forward this morning and let God know that you are ready to turn your life around for Him and start living your life for Him?

Your destiny is determined by how you live. Will it be for yourself or by serving God?

If you have wandered away from the Lord and the Holy Spirit is convicting you this morning to come back home, this invitation is open to you to rededicate your life to Christ by stepping forward.

We are also here with open arms, if you would like to identify yourself as part of this family of God in the Greenwood Christian church.

The Family of God

I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God.
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood!
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I'm part of the family, the family of God.