

James 5:12- Speak the Truth

Clarke, Robertson, TSK, Lexicon, Family, Geneva, Gill, JFB, Calvin, Rienecker, Stott, Gaebelein, Doriani, Trapp, Vincent, Poole, PNT, Barnes, Henry Brothers and Sisters in the Lord: Remember the context: There were many who were **envious** in the churches. That envy led to, among other things, the **abuse of workers** by **not paying them** or **paying them an unfair wage**. These enviers **made their sin worse because they swore to pay or pay fairly, but didn't.**

Today you will hear about this.

Our headings are:

Swear only for big matters

Speak the truth on small matters

Our goals are: **That you will show your faith by being a man of your word, and by doing this, you will bring honor to the name of Christ your Savior.**

Swear only for big matters

12 But above all, my brethren, **do not swear**, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.

1. Apostle James called Christians not to swear by useless things.

Christians are commanded to swear by God...and they were only to swear for serious matters. We know this by clear examples from the Bible.

Genesis 21:23 "Now therefore, **swear to me by God** that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt." 24 And Abraham said, "**I will swear.**"

2 Corinthians 1:23 Moreover **I call God as witness against my soul**, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.

Galatians 1:20 (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, **before God, I do not lie.**)

Psalms 15:4 In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD; **He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;**

Ecclesiastes 5: 4 **When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed** —

Even Jesus swore.

Matthew 26:63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "**I put You under oath by the living God**: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" 64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

So you must let the clear passages interpret the unclear passage. Swearing is permissible and commanded on proper occasions.

2. But let's get some definitions: Swearing is taking an oath, which is making a solemn public legal promise before God.

Oaths are used synonymously with "vows," which are solemn private promises before God.

Oaths and vows add weight to promises (makes them stronger) and give glory to God (calling God to witness).

Numbers 30:2 "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

The problem was the Pharisees created 2 classes of oaths, something God never commanded.

The first class of oaths was made using God's name. This kind of oath was for very serious matters and rarely used. In fact, the Jews **stopped using God's name** from a superstitious fear of offending him. There were times they didn't keep these proper oaths – which was a very serious sin.

The second class of oaths was less important as they were not made in the Lord's name, but in the name of lesser things. Men swore on the temple or the gold in the temple, for instance. Most of these oaths, according to the Pharisees, could be broken. All of these oaths were wrong and foolish!

Matthew 23:16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, '**Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing**; but **whoever swears by the gold of the**

temple, he is obliged to perform it. 17 "Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 18 "And, **'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing;** but whoever **swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.** 19 "Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?

The Pharisees created this second class of oaths (where God's name was missing) because they wanted to give the appearance of holiness without having the need to be holy.

3. So Apostle James had to correct this misuse of swearing and he followed Jesus' example to do so.

Matthew 5:34 "But I say to you, **do not swear at all:** neither by **heaven,** for it is God's throne; 35 "nor by the **earth,** for it is His footstool; nor by **Jerusalem,** for it is the city of the great King. 36 "Nor shall you swear by your **head,** because you cannot make one hair white or black.

Jesus rejected fake sincerity...swearing by **all** these fake things! "All" refers to things about which Jesus was talking: heaven, earth, gold, temple, altar, etc. So don't swear by these things.

The Christians of Apostle James' day wanted to look religious...and maybe even look like other religions around, but their hearts weren't right with God and their motives were corrupt.

John Calvin called these fake oaths "circuitous expressions."

The oaths looked good but were used to rob the poor.

They made vows by fake things and did not keep those vows.

4. To swear by a created thing and not by God was wrong since God was not only greater than all created things, he is also the owner of heaven and earth...and they were by-passing him.

Everything was dependent on God...Jerusalem...their mother...their heads...the sky...Everything has its life and breath in God. So swearing by these things and by-passing God was wrong.

Isaiah 66:1 Thus says the LORD: "**Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool.** Where *is* the house that you will build Me? And where *is* the place of My rest?

5. Apostle James then urged Christians to reserve their swearing for serious things!

Amos 4:2 The **Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness:** "Behold, the days shall come upon you When He will take you away with fishhooks, And your posterity with fishhooks.

Hebrews 6:16 For **men indeed swear by the greater,** and an oath for confirmation *is* for them an end of all dispute.

And by the way, "swearing" doesn't mean indecent words. Vulgarity, as bad as that is, is not on the same level as misusing swearing, which is only done in God's name. Vulgarities is an insult to women, for instance, but that sin is not the same as profaning God's holy name.

To use "swearing" as a euphemism for vulgarity can be an insult to God.

6. Lessons:

a. It is common to swear frivolously in order to look like you are really serious, but God wants you to stop it. Italians like to swear (take an oath) on their mothers' grave. That is wrong. **Roman Catholics** say they can break a vow they made if they had mental reservation or they didn't intend to keep the vow when they made it. That is wrong. **To swear by anything else, and to use oaths to try to pretend holiness is an act of evil spirits.**

b. If you make an oath in God's name, don't be like people of another religion who say if they swear to a Christian or a Jew they don't have to keep their word. Keep an oath you have made to anyone.

c. Watch the intent in your heart when you make an oath. Don't "Roman Catholicize" and say: I didn't intend to keep a promise! Even if you fool yourself, you can't fool God.

d. Reflect on all the oaths and vows you've made. How well have you kept your marriage vows? Have you gone back on your membership and baptismal vows? Children, how you taken seriously the vows your parents made on your behalf? Have you misrepresented truth on legal documents you now need to correct?

e. Take oaths for serious matters and keep those oaths so that you will bring glory to the Lord Jesus. How can God's name be a "strong tower" if it is not raised

up properly? Don't be like many Baptists who think that taking vows is sinful! **Those who say you should not take oaths are refusing to honor the name of the Lord.**

Speak the truth for small matters

1. Christians, instead of swearing by frivolous things to look spiritual, were to simply speak the truth.

2. That is what the Lord Jesus himself said: Speak the truth on small matters without invoking God's name.

Matthew 5:37 "But **let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'**
For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Frivolous oaths and vows were unnecessary. Jesus really wanted people to love to speak the truth. So they should be satisfied with saying "yes" or "no."

The double 'yes yes, no no' (a Semitism) can best be translated, "let your 'yes' always be 'yes,' etc."

2 Corinthians 1:18 But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No.

Look at V7 for context. He didn't change!

3. This is what the Catechism teaches us.

Q101 - But may we swear reverently by the name of God?

A101- Yes, when the **magistrate requires it**, or when it may be **needful otherwise**, to maintain and promote fidelity and truth to the glory of God and our neighbor's good; for **such an oath is grounded in God's Word**, and therefore was rightly **used by the saints** in the Old and New Testaments.

4. To make false oaths, either by making oaths and not keeping them, or making oaths for insignificant things, or by faking seriousness (as it is here), the judgment of God is certain.

This type of sin is more serious than murder as this sin is directly against the person and holiness of God.

5. Lessons:

a. Speak the truth. Speak it clearly. Speak it with seriousness. Let truth flow naturally from your lips. In doing this God will be glorified.

b. To speak the truth means you must know the truth...whether from the Bible or about any fact to which you are testifying.

c. You must practice speaking the truth – let it become second nature. If you do, it would become easy to do. So you have to instill this in children from infancy! Make sure they keep their word. When they promise to do something, follow-through and make sure they do it.

d. Perjury is a serious sin against God and his people. Technical writing designed to fool others is sin. Mr. Cecil Rhodes, the son of an English preacher, deceived many, including the illiterate king of the African nation, taking away his land (and other people's), to form Rhodesia, which was later renamed, Zimbabwe. That was a serious misuse of oaths. That deception continues to be a symbol of shame to the name of Christ in Rhodesia and Zambia.

Conclusion:

Apostle James warned Christians to not make frivolous oaths and to keep serious oaths they made in the Lord's name. When there were insignificant issues, they simply had to speak the truth! That's what God wanted.

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. You are faced with an increasing misuse of God's name today. Perjury is one of the major troubles of our modern justice system—by the police and witnesses. Many don't take their marriage vows seriously, even demanding pre-nuptials (which aren't always wrong if there are previous marriage obligations). Many employers misuse contracts and trick others with fine print – or change the terms mid-stream – as schools and employers who now demand you get vaccinated to keep your job when that was not part of the original contract. Promises mean little. You can also see that in abundance of OMGs everywhere!

2. But make your oaths without pretense in God's name and make them with the clear intent of the heart to keep them. And surely **avoid frivolous oaths.** Just speak the truth and keep your promises.

3. And realize you need Christ's righteousness as your own, for though you must make and keep good oaths, you cannot. Ask God (you are his son through Jesus) to help you to make oaths so you can honor your Savior and help you to speak the truth.

Finally, if you are not a Christian, you will die for your sins. But if you beg Christ for forgiveness, God the Father would count Christ's punishment as your punishment, so you could go free and become a child of God.