

The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth

Epistle of James

By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: James 5:12
Preached on: Sunday, December 2, 2018

Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of James, James 5. What a wonderful blessing to hear the Lord being praised out of the mouth of our children. We're going to be looking at James 5:12 this morning. Verse 12, that will be the subject of our message. The title of the message is "The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth," and we see that James is concerned to deal with the issue of our speech again, and he wants believers to live out their faith. Remember, that's the whole purpose of his book, his epistle, his letter that he's writing to those who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ, most of whom are Jews. He's writing to basically a Jewish audience, those who have now placed their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and his theme is to call them to live out their faith; to be not merely hearers of the word, to be doers of the word and to put into practice and the faith that they proclaim to live out their Christian life. And it's interesting, one of the just preliminary observation before we read the text, it's one of the things that James has that we've seen as we've worked through this letter, through the exposition of the book of James we've seen how he continually comes back to the tongue, the importance of the tongue. In a sense, he seems to come back continually to, "Watch your tongue. Watch what you say." Why is that? Well, the tongue is an indication of the heart. Luke 6:45, "the mouth speaks from that which fills the heart." The words of Jesus, "the mouth speaks from that which fills the heart," so that when someone speaks, what you see is an indication of what's in the heart. The tongue is a wonderful window to what's going on in the heart of someone.

So the tongue is a window to our hearts. What comes out of our mouths is a reflection of what's in our hearts and James has made this point in every chapter of his epistle. In chapter 1, verse 26, he says, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, the man's religion is worthless." If you can't bridle your tongue, your religion is worthless, James says in chapter 1. He also talks about the tongue in chapter 2, verse 12, "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty." Speak in such a way as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty, he says in chapter 2. In chapter 3, verses 2 to 11, he goes off into an extended discourse on the tongue when he begins in verse 2 by saying, "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." Then he talks about the dangers of the tongue.

Chapter 4, verse 11, "Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law." Here again in chapter 5, verse 12, he does the same thing, he comes back to the tongue because the tongue is a window to the heart and what he wants to do is to challenge us today with this passage, he's challenging us to look at our speech patterns and he's saying if we have patterns of deceitfulness in our regular everyday lives, this is something we must repent of and turn from; that a true believer will not continue in that ongoing pattern and when we're confronted with that, we will repent.

So James 5:12, "The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth." We read there in verse 12,

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.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask now that your word might search our hearts as you promised that it is able to do in Hebrews 4:12, that this word that we have read is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierces to dividing joint and marrow, soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Lord, search us. Show us where we come short and then grant us repentance, grant us deep faith and trust in a glorious Savior who delivered us from the curse of sin, from the power of sin. We pray this in his name and for his glory. Amen.

So the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. I want us to consider this text under three points this morning, the first point is the importance, observe the importance of truthfulness. It's actually way beyond what, I think, just we naturally think. The word is always correcting us and it's interesting, and I want you to note the words "but above all," the emphasis James puts upon this as he transitions from the previous section where he was talking about, remember the Christian's response to injustice, we looked at verses 7 to 11 over three weeks. He now transitions to other issues he wants to address in their lives. He's continuing to say, "Live out your faith," and he says, "But above all." He's been talking about some very important stuff through the whole book, this "above all" doesn't mean it's supremely above everything but he's saying, "Look, I'm coming back to that one thing that I've been driving home all along. Above all if you will watch your tongue, you will have a good indicator of where you are spiritually with the Lord."

But above all, the importance of truthfulness. Literally in the Greek it says, "Before all. Before everything, my brethren, don't swear." The great importance of being truthful in our lives, it's of great importance to God. He cares about our words. You know, we're told that we will be judged for every idle word, that men will be judged for every idle word they speak. How many words come out of our mouths each day? I remember reading some time back and you see different numbers on this, I guess somebody is sitting around calculating that, it's really interesting. Can you imagine having to follow

someone and watch how many words they spoke each day? Some people would be easy to do, you know, some guys that just don't say much, right? "Hey, I want to count that guy's words. 200? Amazing." No, but it's like 11,000, I remember seeing one time a number, 11,000 is the average number of words a man speaks and it was like 22,000 is the average words a woman speaks in a day. I've seen different numbers but it's always with that pattern. Men speak this average, women speak this average, okay? So it's one of the reasons guys have such a hard time when they come home because they've already used all their words at work. We have nothing left to say. "Honey, how was your day?" Okay. "Really? Tell me how you feel." Okay. That's it. I've already spent everything.

But seriously, we speak so many words. Think about that. If that's accurate, 11,000 words in a day and God is concerned about every single one of them. That's overwhelming to stop and think about every word matters to God, but that's really the reality, that for the Christian God wants to show the transformation that he's brought about in our lives in even the smallest words that we speak; that they would be different; that they would be seasoned with salt, as it were, and show the distinctness of what God has done in our life.

Above all, brethren. God is concerned about how our words reflect our character and ought to reflect our character. You say you belong to Jesus, well then, if you really belong to Jesus, if you have come to understand the Gospel and have placed your faith in him, you've repented of your sins, then you're making a claim to a changed life, you're making a claim to having been born again, having been born again from heaven, having been born of God, then it ought to be reflected in our character in an increasing way. It's not perfect, of course not. It's a process but there needs to be growth in holiness and God has a way of addressing every area of our life and that's a wonderful thing about the word is he addresses things that really in reality he tends to always address things we're not concerned about. He says, "I'm concerned about this." And when you become a believer, when you place your faith in Christ, you turn from sins, your turn to Christ, you trust in the sufficiency of his death, his resurrection, his payment for your sins, you surrender to him. It's not just a momentary decision, it's a decision to keep on repenting and keep on following Jesus.

So he has the authority in our lives every day to say, "I want to talk about this and I want you to change this by My power and by My grace." You say, "Lord, I don't want to deal with that." That's not an option for a slave of Jesus Christ. It's his will and so he says, "I want to deal with this issue." Even the smallest words, the smallest conversations, inconsequential in our minds, he says, "I want those things to reflect My holiness in your life."

This is an area where the change of the Christian life can be so dramatic. It's an opportunity. It seems like something inconsequential but you think about it, if it's 11,000 words or 20,000 words or whatever it is and those are transformed by the power of grace, what a continual testimony to the transforming power of God because the world in unbelief, before we're saved we're dead in trespasses and sins and one of the things we're going to see, this passage is not talking about swearing in the way that we think of sometimes when we say swearing like swear words, curse words. That's not what he's

talking about. He's talking about the tendency of the Jews in general and the Jewish Christians to maintain the practice, the Jewish practice of regularly in conversation saying things like, you know, "I swear this is true by the gold in the temple." Kind of like, remember children, we would say things like, "Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye. I swear." That really meant you were serious, right? And why is there a need of that? That's the issue.

Why is there a need to swear like that? Listen to what John MacArthur writes in his commentary on this passage. He says, "Fallen men are basically inveterate liars. Children lie to their parents and parents lie to their children. Husbands lie to their wives and wives lie to their husbands. People lie to their employers who, in turn, lie to them and often to the public. Politicians lie to get elected and continue to lie once they are in office. People lie to the government, perhaps most notably on their Income Tax returns. Educators lie. Scientists lie. Members of the media lie. Our society is built on a framework of lies leading one to wonder whether our social structure would survive if everyone were forced to speak the truth for even one day. That we live in a world of lies should surprise no one familiar with the Scriptures which designate unregenerate humanity as children of the devil who is the father of lies, John 8:44. That basic dishonesty has led men to impose oaths on others in an often a futile attempt to force them to be truthful and keep their promises. Both the simple oaths of children, the sophisticated oaths often required by cults and other organizations in everything from legal contracts to peace treaties, are necessitated by the recognition of man's basic fundamental dishonesty."

That really sums it up, doesn't it? The reason that we have to say things like that is because there is a fundamental tendency among fallen men to lie. We lie in big ways, we lie in small ways. Our white lies, our exaggerations, misrepresentations. It's amazing how creative we can be in lying, how we can frame a question or reinterpret a question when someone has asked us something and turn it around so that we could answer something and really misrepresent what they ask us but we can then say, well, we were telling the truth. That's dishonesty. That's a lie. When you say something that you know they aren't interpreting that way and you say it to mislead their interpretation. God says you are lying whether you think you're telling the truth or not.

So he's addressing in this passage how important it is to God that we not look like our former father, the devil, but we look like our true father, God, because our character is to reflect God's character. If you've been born again, you've been born from above, you've been born now as a child of God, and think about what the Scripture says, the Bible says that God is the God of truth, Psalm 31:5, Isaiah 65:16, that the God that we have come to know is the God of truth. In fact, look at a couple of passages, just turn to the book right immediately before James, Hebrews 6:18. We'll read verse 17 too. "In the same way God," this is talking about how God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 22 after he offered Isaac and he swore an oath to Abraham, "In the same way God desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath." This is the character of God we're looking at. Look what he says, "so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us." The important

thing I was bring that verse up for in this instance was it's impossible for God to lie. Titus 1:2 says the same thing, the God who cannot lie has revealed himself to us in the Gospel. God cannot lie. It's impossible for him to lie. Now you say you've been born of God, why are you lying? That's what he's saying to us in James 5:12.

I mean, think about it, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth. I am the truth," John 14:6. And in fact, he says in that same chapter when the Spirit comes, the Spirit of truth comes to dwell in you. So for Christians, we have the Spirit of truth dwelling in us. We used to be of our father, the devil, but now we're of our Father, God, and we have the Spirit of truth dwelling in us. It ought to make a difference. That's James's basic thrust and that's why it's so important and he says, "above all." The importance of truthfulness.

The second point this morning is the practice of truthfulness. He gives us some clear practical instruction. There are two imperatives in the verse and I think it's going to be Point A and Point B under the practice of truthfulness, our second point, the practice of truthfulness. We're going to look at two imperatives as helping us to put into practice this calling to truthfulness.

When you look at the verse, he says, "But above all, my brethren, do not swear." That's the first imperative. "do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath." Do not swear. In the Greek, it is the command, "do not swear," is in the present tense which in Greek doesn't mean time as much as it means the kind of action, and it means ongoing, present tense means ongoing continuous action. So he's basically saying, "Do not go on swearing. You're already doing this continually, do not do it." In fact, a better way to translate it, I think, would be to say, "Stop swearing."

He says, "Listen, I understand," James is a Jew, he's writing to a basically Jewish audience and he knows that one thing that was especially characteristic of the first century Jewish culture was that they were people who were constantly swearing like this. I was reading a historian and he was saying it's hard to imagine how the, he called it the Oriental culture speaking of the Jewish culture in the first century in that general area, how they resorted to continual oath after oath after oath after oath all because they were so incredibly dishonest and that's exactly what James is saying. "You come out of this culture where it's common for you to say things." You know how people say and we have the same kind of thing, not quite maybe as intricately as they did, but the disease is the same, how about I said that I had my fingers crossed? When I said that, I had my fingers crossed. What does having your fingers crossed have to do with anything? And that's what James is saying, you have this pattern of doing this, you learned this growing up in this culture and you've got to stop it now that you've come to Christ. You must not go on swearing.

They would swear by heaven sometimes, by earth sometimes, or by any other thing. In fact, it's interesting to note in Matthew 23:16-22, turn over there for a moment. You'll see how Jesus confronted this same issue in the lives of the Pharisees and scribes who were the most righteous apparently. They weren't the most righteous truly, they were the most righteous outwardly looking people in Israel and they had this intricate system of oaths

that Jesus confronts and shows how ridiculous it is. In verse 16 he says, "Woe to you, blind guides," he's talking to the scribes and Pharisees. Now these are people who translated the law. The Pharisees were those who were set apart from the people who seemed to be striving after holiness to the nth degree. These are the people that were fasting regularly, they were giving regularly, zealously tithing to even tithing their spices. They were people who were outwardly righteous but Jesus condemns them in this chapter and says, "You guys are like whited sepulchres. You are painted tombs." Someone whitewashing a tomb, dead men's bones are inside but you make it look pretty on the outside and that's what your life is like. It's all about external righteousness, not true internal righteousness. Then he starts giving them evidences of it and one of the evidences he says is there in verse 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.'" This is the kind of thing that these guys, these foolish teachers of the law were saying. "Hey, when he swore he only swore by the temple and had he sworn by the gold in the temple, it would have been binding."

He goes on, "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?" You've got it completely opposite. If you were going to try to make a difference you would say the temple is more important than the gold in the temple.

He says, "You blind men! Which is more important," actually verse 18, "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar,' this is something you say, 'that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it." You see all of these intricate system of swearing was really just an attempt to cloak dishonesty. They were really fundamentally dishonest people who wanted to act like they were righteous and so they say, "Well, if I swore this way, it would be more binding." No, if you were really honest, your yes would be yes always, and your no would be no.

You are hypocrites and blind guides. Think about what it's like to follow a blind guide. Ted used the illustration about trying to find the silver dollars in one foot or two feet of silver dollars all over the state of Texas. That's pretty amazing, but the blind man has no hope of that, of course, nobody does, but would you want a blind man lead you off of even this stairwell if you couldn't see? No.

He says that's what the scribes and Pharisees were. They had this intricate system. Now what I want to say, the practice of truthfulness, we have to stop swearing but is he saying in this passage that all oaths are forbidden? Some people maintain that and they would say, for instance, that you should not if you're called upon to testify in a court, it would be sin for you to put your hand on the Bible and say, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me, God." There are some people who, I think, misinterpret this passage to say something like that. They would say that you shouldn't

make a vow of allegiance to the United States, you shouldn't pledge allegiance, you shouldn't even have a wedding vow. This is taking it to the nth degree but, listen, one of the things we have to always remember when we come to the Bible is we must be careful to let Scripture interpret Scripture which is to basically take everything that happens in context of what God says in other places, and what we see when we let Scripture interpret Scripture is that God clearly understands the necessity of vows and oaths in a fallen world where people are habitual liars. It's entirely appropriate and, in fact, the Old Testament is filled with examples of just that, that you have even godly men taking oaths because they understand in the culture we live in, people tell you one thing and mean another so I'm going to let you know I'm really serious. Now I hope over time you'll know that you don't even need to ask me for an oath because I'm going to be godly anyway. But you have example after example in the Bible of oaths being taken.

So God is not contradicting the Old Testament. David swore oaths with Jonathan. Israel swore Joshua an oath. We see in the New Testament the Apostle Paul saying things that are oath-like a number of times. You'll read him and he'll be saying, "I tell you, I am not lying." Galatians 1:20. Romans 9:1. 2 Corinthians 1:23. He says, "I am not lying. I'm telling you something and I'm not lying." Now if we knew Paul, we would know he didn't really need to say that but why does he say that? Because the people to whom he's writing don't know Paul and he's saying something that is so marvelous and so hard to believe that he needs to interpose with an oath.

Do you remember the passage I read you a moment ago from Hebrews 6:18? When you go back, the author of Hebrews is saying God who cannot lie promised on oath to Abraham. You go back to Genesis 22:17, the Lord swore an oath to Abraham. Now did God need to swear an oath? Strictly speaking, of course not. He cannot lie. If he just said it, I tell you it's what it's going to be, would that be enough? Yes. Why does he stoop to do an oath? Because he knows how hard what he's saying is to believe. "I'm going to make you a great nation. You who were 100 years old before you had your first son and this son is going to be the seed through whom all the families of the earth are going to be blessed. That's hard to believe and I'm accommodating your weakness because you are a liar among a bunch of other liars and you need to know that I am truthful." So saying oaths is appropriate in the culture and in places like that. Marriage vows are important. It's not that we say, you know, "I hope I'm going to be faithful," when you get married. No, you make a vow to keep you only unto your spouse as long as you both shall live and that's appropriate.

Now that said, what is it forbidding? It's forbidding a lifestyle of bringing oaths into everyday life and interactions; that you live in such a way that you have to promise people continually, "I'm really going to be there when I say I'm going to be there. I mean it this time." You see, that's an indication, when we find ourselves saying things like that and we can find ourselves saying things like that, don't we? "I'm really serious now." Have you had those words come off your lips? How many times? "No, I mean it. What I just said, I said it but now I mean it."

He's saying, "Look, what we need to do is learn how to speak in such a way that we always mean it and people know that we mean it. Now that could only happen by grace because you and I still have an old nature. If you're born again, you have a new nature inside of you and you want to follow Christ but you have to learn on a daily basis how to repent, to put aside the old man, to put off the old man and put on the new man, and that's what James is saying.

He said, "Stop swearing," that was the first imperative under the practice of truth, and the second imperative is, "let your yes be yes." Let it be that your yes is yes. That means that we stop and reflect before we answer. How often we rush ahead, how often I find myself rushing ahead not even carefully understanding maybe what I'm saying yes to, thinking I sort of have it figured out and just go ahead and lay it out there, just move on, get past this. God says we need to stop and really be men and women of our word and there should be no need for anybody to ever think they need to hear, I mean people that know us, it should be like if you were having to go to trial and testify in court and they say, "Put your hand on the Bible," I don't know how much longer they'll have a Bible in court. I hope they continue to do that. I think that's good. But anyway, "Put your hand on the Bible, raise your right hand and repeat after me. I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me, God." That when you say that, there are people in the courtroom who know you who think that was entirely unnecessary for that person. It was appropriate because the court doesn't know who you are and now you're under penalty of perjury and you can go to jail if you lie to the court and that's all perfectly right because God has put the government there to punish evildoers, and if you go into court and you lie, you're an evildoer and you get the punishment that you deserve. But for the Christian it ought, we ought to be seeing each other as it's unnecessary for that brother or that sister. In our hearts we know that.

Let your yes be yes. In fact, you see this, I think, even more clearly when you look back at Matthew 5. Turn back with me to Matthew 5:33-36. It's amazing the parallel between what James says in James 5:12 and what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in verses 33 to 36. Look what he says there, Matthew 5:33, "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.'" Quoting some Old Testament passages and the tradition associated with that and he says, "The ancients, we're told, you have heard this," verse 34, "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil." So he's saying that it should be so that this is the way it is and I think it would be best in the church, we shouldn't make each other take vows but in the culture, we have to accommodate the wickedness of evil men, but in our hearts it should be so that we don't ever need to take a vow. We don't need to swear by anything because we speak truth.

Now it's interesting to note the context of this passage. Jesus is describing in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, he's describing the character of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven that is coming to the earth now with his coming, that he's

inaugurating, and he's describing citizens of the kingdom. What does a person who really has the kingdom of God in their life look like? He starts off with the Beatitudes in verses 3 to 12 of chapter 5. They are poor in spirit. They mourn over their sin. They're meek. They hunger and thirst after righteousness. Then he talks about they're the salt of the earth. Then in verses 17 to 48 he says you can look at their life and it's evident that they're a citizen of the kingdom by their righteousness that flows from the inside out, not the outside in. They have righteousness that starts in the heart and then comes out into the light.

That's essentially what he's saying in Matthew 5:17-48. It's actually really clear when you look at Matthew 5:20. He says to them, he's basically said in verses 17 to 19, "Listen, I didn't come to abolish the law, I came to save people who don't trust in the law, who trust in Me only, but because they're now saved, begin to walk in righteousness so that they fulfill the law by the power of the Spirit, and so that they actually, I didn't come to abolish the law, I didn't come to save a community of people who are going to continue to be law-breakers, I came to save law-breakers by My Spirit and My word to make them into law-keepers for My glory." And he says something that would have been astonishing to the hearers in verse 20 when he says, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." To the Jews who heard that, those words coming off Jesus' lips, this was nothing less than shocking. The spiritual heroes of the day, the most righteous people they knew were the scribes and the Pharisees. It wasn't like we know now, the negative focus of the Scriptures on the scribes and Pharisees has colored the way we see it, but in that day they saw these guys as the spiritual champions. You're saying the most godly people, you've got to be more godly than them to get into heaven. In fact, if you're not more godly than them, you will not see the kingdom of heaven. That was astounding.

Then he begins to explain what I mean by that and he does that in verses 21 to verse 48 and what he does is he says, "I want you to," he has this formula, "You have heard that it was said," and he quotes Old Testament Scripture or sometimes tradition that the Pharisees and scribes taught. "You have heard this but I say to you." In fact, that's one of the claims of deity that you see of Jesus Christ. He claims to be able to speak Scripture. This would be something the prophets never said. What did the prophets say? "Thus saith the Lord." What separates Jesus from all the prophets? "But I say to you. I am the Lord and I say to you it's this way."

So six times he does that and he takes a different example. First of all in verses 21 to 26 he talks about murder. "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder,'" that's one of the commandments, "and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." He says, "Listen, I want to show you the root of murder is not the actual act, the external act, the root of murder goes into the very heart of the man when he despises his brother and sees him as value-less," and he said, "Who is not guilty of that?" Have you called someone a fool? Stupid? Ignorant? Have you despised them in

your heart? Jesus says you are guilty of murder. He says, "I have not come to abolish the law, I've come to lift the law up to what it truly is, to be lived out from the inside out."

He next in verses 27 to 30 says, "Hey, you've heard it said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." If you fantasize, if you imagine, if you look at pornography, you are guilty of adultery. You see, it's the heart is the root. The outward deed is the fruit of that root and God says, "I am concerned about your hearts."

So every one of these indicators is trying to get to the heart, you see. He said, "You need a heart change," and the wonder of the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who have new hearts. It doesn't belong to those who have outward profession and religious zeal even, it belongs to those who have new hearts and those new hearts will be evidenced over time in changed lives.

He's doing that in every area. The sixth and final one that he does in verses 43 and following, he says, "You've heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." Look like your Father in heaven. What does he do? He loves his enemies. He loves all people in that he sends rain and he gives good things to those who hate him. Be like him if you have a new heart.

Now that only happens by grace, so on a daily basis, what has to happen? We have to die. We have murder in our hearts still, don't we, because of our sin nature. Even if you've been born again, you still have these things that you have to die to daily. This is why repentance for the Christian is not a one-time event. It's one of the great misunderstandings in our culture today. Evangelicalism basically looks at salvation like this: you were saved, this is how the misunderstanding of salvation, you can know that you were saved if you had an experience where you felt remorse over sin and you did something active that the pastor told you to do. You had real remorse over sin, you were sorry, and you came forward and you prayed a prayer, therefore you're saved. Then to add to our heresy, that's not biblical at all, but to add to the common heresy, and never let anyone question the reality of your salvation. Write it down. Underline it. On this date you did it, you repented and you placed your faith in Christ. At that point, never doubt it. The Bible doesn't see that as the way. The Bible says examine yourself today to see if you're in the household of faith. It doesn't mean that you can get saved and lose your salvation. No, it doesn't, but it means that if you've really really repented and truly expressed faith in Jesus, then these are the beginning of a lifestyle of repenting and believing. You keep turning from sin and you keep trusting in Christ.

Interestingly, Martin Luther's first thesis in his 95 Theses, remember that started the Reformation? The first one basically says that the Lord Jesus Christ when he commanded repentance was not calling merely for penance as the Catholic Church saw it, he was calling his people to a lifestyle of repentance. That's essentially rewording it in my own words but that's what Luther was saying.

This is exactly what the Christian life is, it means that you've been changed in direction so that you were going in one direction and now you're going in a different direction and you're learning each day to keep turning and going in that direction. You have this resistance in you, sin nature, but you turn from that, you die to that and you trust in Christ and you continue to walk in holiness more and more and more. Sometimes it looks like you have ups and you have downs, you have two steps forward, one step back, three steps forward, two steps back, but that there is a genuine progression in growth in godliness.

James is saying this must be evident in your speech. The Scripture then addresses all these different areas of our lives and says how are you doing here, and that's what the focus of the law for the believer is, it says this is what I'm supposed to look like. Remember he used the illustration in the first chapter to be a doer of the word, you need to be someone who hears and does it, not like someone who looks at himself in a mirror and then walks away and forgets what he saw? That's the function of the law. You pull the law up, you see what's wrong with yourself and you change.

I think I used the illustration, if someone told you you had something in your teeth and you go to the bathroom and you just merely confirm that you have something in your teeth and you come back and you still have it in your teeth. That's what it's like for a Christian to be confronted with the truth and not repent. It's insane. It's inconsistent with the nature of a true believer. It doesn't mean that you do it perfectly. No, there are areas that you are struggling in, but that the general disposition of the heart is to be repenting and trusting more and more and more in Christ.

So when he says, "let your yes be yes," he says you want to actively put off this practice of trying to cloak your deceptiveness and deceptive patterns in your life, if you're a person prone to exaggeration, then you want to put that off and speak accurately. Stop and slow yourself down. Don't overstate for effect. If you're a person that's prone to white lies, don't continue in that practice. Ask the Spirit to help you recognize it when you see it and when you see it, what do you do? You repent from it. In fact, and repentance is a lifestyle as seen in what it looks like, is seen in Ephesians 4:22-24.

Turn over to Ephesians 4. In fact, we're going to see that Paul tells us to deal with exactly the same issue. Ephesians 4:22. This is the basic model for the everyday, moment-by-moment Christian life. This is what we're called to. This is what repentance looks like on a daily basis, "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, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." The daily basis, what you do is you turn from the sinful practices and the former manner of life that still you're tempted with, the world, the flesh, the devil are tempting us, enticing us that way, and you stop doing that. That's what James is saying. Stop doing that. Take off. Put off the old man. Put on the new man. Speak truthfully so that your yes is yes.

Look what Paul does, he says, "Listen, I want you to learn this is the way you're supposed to live the Christian life." Look at his first example of how to do that, verse 25, "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." Then he says anger, "Be angry, and yet do not sin." So he starts dealing with different ways of putting off and putting on but the first one is stop lying, start speaking truth.

John Calvin said it this way, "The experience of repentance is the experience of the Christian life in the mortification of the flesh and the revivification of life by the Spirit." What does that mean? Repentance, the experience of repentance is the experience of everyday Christian living in the fact that daily you put to death the deeds of the body and daily you walk in the power of the Spirit through the word. That's the Christian life.

James is calling us to that same thing in this area of truthfulness. Put aside every manner of untruthfulness and by God's grace turning to Christ, being renewed in the Spirit of my mind. "Lord, I'm supposed to speak truth." I look to Jesus and I realize, "Lord, here I am still struggling with this. I die to my desire to do this. I trust in Your righteousness. You have forgiven me for my sins and not only have forgiven me, You have given me through Your cross and resurrection, I'm no longer a slave to this. You've set me free through the power of the resurrection to walk in truth and so I'm going to speak truth in this moment by Your power." So it's prayerful dependence. It's not just putting off and putting on our own strength. No, not at all. It's repenting and believing. It's trusting in the finished work of Christ to apply to this moment. In this moment, I can die to myself and I can trust in Christ. It's the Gospel lived out.

Now that's the practice of truthfulness and finally in closing, the danger of untruthfulness. James ends up by warning us of the danger of untruthfulness. We saw the importance of truthfulness, the practice of truthfulness and now the danger of untruthfulness. He says, "so that you may not fall under judgment." But above all, brethren, do this, look at your words as a window to your heart and be allowing God to transform in the continuing ongoing transformation of your heart so that you may not fall under judgment for the purpose of keeping you from falling under judgment.

There are two possibilities to what this means and commentators have different positions. Some believe it means that he's talking about the discipline of believers, that you may fall under judgment means that believers may be judged by the Lord, disciplined. Well, the word is not really discipline but it's a possibility because he says, "But above all, my brethren, do not go on swearing but let your yes be yes so that you may not fall under judgment."

Others point out that the word, this phrase "falling under judgment" seems to speak more of eternal judgment, eternal damnation. It's used that way in Hebrews 9:27, the same word, "It's appointed to a man once to die and after that comes the judgment." Hebrews 10:27 uses the same word where he says, "the terrifying expectation of judgment and fire."

So it could mean that he's talking about although he's addressed believers, he's saying this, "Though you, brethren, I'm assuming that you are true believers but you must put off this practice of deceptiveness and deceitfulness and if you don't put it off, you will find that you were not truly a brother and you will experience the judgment of God in hell." That the true Christian will put these things off so, in a sense, it may be that he's saying both. If you're a Christian and you're going to persist in this practice, if you really belong to him he will discipline you, and if he doesn't discipline you, then you're not legitimate according to Hebrews 12:5-11. But if you profess to be a Christian and you continue to walk in unrepentant sin and unrepentant sin and you don't listen to the correction of the Lord, then you are evidencing, we don't know for sure, but you're evidencing the fruit of an unbeliever and you should be wary of the judgment that will fall upon everyone who does not trust in Christ.

So James ends on a serious note that we should examine ourselves. You see in our lives this tendency to shade the truth, to not be truthful. We need to repent. We need to look to Christ. Praise God we have a Lord who is, as we said earlier, he is, himself, the God of truth. He's given us the Spirit of truth and his death and resurrection delivers us from every sin. The power of every sin. We can walk in truth by his grace and for his glory.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for your word which addresses all the issues of our lives in principle, showing us how to walk in a manner that's worthy of the calling which we've received. We pray that you would help us to do just that. We pray that the things that you've put your finger on in our hearts, that you would help us be diligent to deal with. For those here, Lord, who have not yet truly come to faith in Christ and recognize in themselves this morning just the deceitfulness of their lives, tendency to lie and misrepresent and deceive, you show them those things are not the character of a believer and they need to run to Jesus who has paid for every sin for everyone who would ever believe and he's taken the wrath and he offers forgiveness and righteousness. But Lord, we have to turn away. We have to repent, leave that way of life and choose to follow Jesus Christ. Father, for the believers here that have been convicted, may you grant grace to follow through in really being doers of the word. May we develop a practice more and more serious of putting off on a daily basis speaking of falsehood and putting on the speaking of truth to one another so that our character would evidence that we are children of the God of truth. We pray this in your name and for your glory. Amen.