

Date: 3/28/21 FBC Sunday Morning

Text: James 5:12

Title: Integrity Matters

Theme: Our speech reveals our heart, so integrity Matters.

Proposition: Integrity Matters.

Introduction: April 1st is Thursday which is often known as April Fools...so interestingly enough, we are at James 5:12...talking about integrity...

A preacher, out for a walk, noticed a group of boys standing around a small puppy. “What are you boys doing?” he asked. “Telling lies!” one young boy explained. “The one who tells the biggest lie gets the dog.” The minister was shocked and said, “Why boys, when I was your age I NEVER even *thought* about telling a lie.” The boys looked at each other and their faces fell in disappointment. Finally, one young man shrugged and said, “I guess he wins the dog.”

Imagine someone saying, “I’m a Christ-follower, but I’m not very trustworthy.” That makes no sense!

Why is the failure of a pastor or church leader so egregious? Because we trusted them... Lifeway summarized a Gallup poll with an article titled: “Americans’ Trust of Pastors Hovers Near All-Time Low”. He says, “Gallup’s annual ratings of the honesty and ethical standards of professions find nurses continue to be the most trusted, followed by medical doctors, grade-school teachers, and pharmacists. Americans’ opinion of clergy’s honesty falls between *judges and nursing home operators*. Around 2 in 5 (39%) say pastors have at least high ethical standards, including 10% who say their honesty is very high.”¹ Sadly, reading the news about Christian celebrity leaders or pastors doesn’t help this ...side note, no man is infallible, only Jesus. Celebrity pastors and leaders are not either, and they should be followed with serious caution.

If we remember the rest of the book of James, we remember that James talks about our speech...a lot!

Multiple times throughout each chapter! A great study would be to read through James and underline/highlight every time he says something about our speech, our tongue, or says the words “you say.”

James writes about our speech so often because he knows that what Christ said in Matthew 12:34–37 is so true. Our speech is evidence of our heart.

Matthew 12:34–37 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

If you can’t get your speech under control, then it’s not simply a talking problem, but it is a serious heart problem. So we come to the concluding section of the book. Today, we’ll just focus on James 5:12:

James 5:12 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 under condemnation.

1. What it Means:

a. **But above all**

Bible scholars debate where this verse should fit- Does it belong with the previous section with the warning to the rich about the coming judgment and the encouragement for believers to be

¹ <https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/01/22/americans-trust-of-pastors-hovers-near-all-time-low/>

patient despite their suffering OR does it belong with the prayer of faith section following. YES...the words, *“But above all,”* show a connection to the past, but also point forward. They could be thought of as “finally” or “Most important”.

I believe it begins the end section of the book, but it is a bridge from the last section to the next. He began in 4:1 on worldliness, and this is the end of that section: *by showing us that a person that must swear by God to establish his credibility is a worldly, dishonest person. A dishonest and double-tongued person should not go to God in the prayers of faith and expect God to respond if they are constantly using God as just as a foundation for their swearing.*

b. My Brothers

Once again, James uses affectionate language to his brothers and sisters in Christ. He wants them to know that despite the stern exhortation coming, he loves them and cares for their soul.

c. Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath.

The “do not swear” is directly connected to the next phrase- either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath...We know from other places that “Swearing” or “cursing” is sin.

James 3:9–10 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

Exodus 20:7 “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain...”

Colossians 3:8 put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Rabbit Trail...And although we could take time to speak about the rampant cursing and using the Lord’s name in vain, that is not what James is talking about here. *But I will encourage you to consider how you use the Lord’s name and even consider that our language sometimes shows that we have “cheapened” the Lord’s name. “Oh My God”, “OMG”, “Jesus”, or “Geez” comes out of our mouth with the least bit of respect for God, so we should consider that.*

Actual Interpretation: However, *the passage here is talking about how we “swear” and make “oaths” or promises.* This swearing and making oaths was a serious part of Jewish law and extra-biblical Jewish tradition. Here is a summary of what was happening according to the Bible scholars, D.A. Carson and William Barclay:

“The Jews divided oaths into two classes, those which were absolutely binding and those which were not. Any oath which contained the name of God was absolutely binding; any oath which succeeded in evading the name of God was held not to be binding. The result was that if a man swore by the name of God in any form, he would rigidly keep that oath; but if he swore by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or by his head, he felt quite free to break that oath. The result was that evasion had been brought to a fine art.”²

“Once Yahweh’s name was invoked, the vow to which it was attached became a debt that had to be paid to the Lord. Swearing by heaven and earth was not binding, nor was swearing by Jerusalem, though swearing toward Jerusalem was.”³

So, someone could say in a business transaction, “I swear by heaven, that this is the correct amount of money I owe you.” However, because they didn’t swear on the Lord’s name or God

² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Third Ed., The New Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), 183–184.

³ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 153.

himself, they might be able to weasel out of the deal. However, we see that God says in Matthew 5:33-37, all those things are under God's reign and part of HIS kingdom, so it shouldn't be used to swear on.

Matthew 5:33–37 “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

Heaven is God's throne, the earth his footstool, Jerusalem his city, our head is his creation...all are under HIS authority!

Illustration: One might swear by saying, “I swear on everything that is holy,” or “I swear on my life that this is true”, “I swear on...” anything other than God, but they *THINK* that since they didn't swear on God they don't have to tell the truth. Wrong thinking.

Common Misinterpretation: I can't swear on the Bible or take an oath before Court. The anabaptist and others interpreted this verse and others this way. They believed that you could NEVER make an oath. However, we see in Scripture some clarification for oath-taking.

Lev. 19:12 You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

Swearing on the name of God Falsely is the problem here. We see that Abraham made an oath:

Genesis 14:22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth,

In fact, God himself even swore upon himself since there is nothing higher to swear upon!

Hebrews 6:13–18 For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

Throughout the Bible, people took oaths and were not condemned for their oaths. Paul, Jesus, and others took oaths or swore upon God. *So this verse cannot be saying that it is wrong in all circumstances. It is a rebuke to the evil oathtaking that was taking place in their culture.*

d. but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no,

Here is the heart of the matter! Swearing on heaven, God, or anything as an attempt to make yourself seem more truthful is never going to buy you integrity! “Our truthfulness should be so consistent and dependable that we need no oath to support it: a simple “yes” or “no” should suffice. ‘Our mere word should be as utterly trustworthy as a signed document, legally correct and complete’.”⁴ -Douglas Moo

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, [The Letter of James](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2000), 233.

James is just saying we can't be deceitful and dishonest in our speech. We should not say, "Yes" to someone, but find a way to creatively change it to a "no".

e. *so that you may not fall under condemnation.*

Serious motivation for speaking the truth concludes the verse. Those that are dishonest and deceitful may fall under judgment. Because of the Greek word James uses, it is probably talking about judgment towards an unbeliever and not the judgment of Christ. Those that are constantly deceitful, dishonest, and using God for their gain are not people that would be a child of the king. People whose lives are characterized by lying are showing evidence of an unregenerate heart.

Christians will indeed give an account for their actions before Christ, so we too will give an account of our words. Every idle word will be taken into account.

Gospel Connection: Every person must stand before God. We will never be good enough on our own merit to meet his righteous demands. You will never be holy enough, good enough, perfect enough to stand before God. The BIGGEST LIE you could EVER tell is to lie to yourself about your goodness. If you at all think you are good enough or that God won't judge sin, then you are completely fooling yourself! The truth is critically important.

Even though we live in a world that wants to make truth out to be "relative" - meaning that you can just "find your truth" or that "we can all just believe what we want," in our hearts, we know there is absolute truth. We know that there is a God and we will give an account before him. When it comes to truth, we know that words have meaning. When a doctor says, scalpel, we don't expect the nurse to hand him a hammer because truth is relative. We know that words have meaning and truth.

The Bible says that the penalty for sin is death. Don't fool yourself about this truth! Acts 4 says this:

Acts 4:11–12 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Repent of your sins, trust in Jesus to forgive you and save you from the penalty of sin. His grace and mercy is your only hope. The only way to peace with God and eternal life is through Jesus Christ our Lord!

2. How does it apply to me? Integrity Matters

So now that we know that James is not prohibiting official oaths, such as in courts, but the use of oaths in everyday conversation to prove integrity. We should not use oaths, for his yes or no should be honest. Making a frivolous oath is unnecessary; integrity is the issue.⁵ Integrity Matters...in every area of our lives, integrity matters!

a. Integrity Matters: In a world full of lies

John 8:42-47 makes clear that the devil is a liar and this world is captivated by the father of lies. It shouldn't be surprising to us that dishonesty abounds all over. Almost everyone in the world would admit that the world is full of liars, but none of us think that WE are the biggest culprit of lying. James already said that people are double-minded and unstable. He even said in:

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

⁵ Peter H. Davids, [The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 190.

We are so inclined to deceive ourselves that WE are not the ones with an integrity problem, but all others. This is true of all people! Our hearts are deceitfully wicked and inclined to think the best of ourselves.

b. Integrity Matters: in our workplace

Illustration: Have you watched NCAA march madness online on CBS? I have, that how I know about this. You can watch almost all the games online, but whenever you want, you can click the “Boss Button” which goes to a spreadsheet or some fake video chat! It’s there so you can “fool” your boss!

We struggle with integrity at work with our “yes” and “no” not meaning what it should. People lie while clocking in, deceive on your expense report, when we are dishonest with our employees about how much they will be paid. Do you have integrity at work? Are you the same person at work Monday that you claim to be at church on Sunday? Integrity matters!!!!

c. Integrity Matters: in our Marriage

Do you have complete honesty and integrity with your spouse? Can they believe your “yes” and “No’s” or do you manipulate with your speech? Do you ever have to make promises, oaths, or swear on something just so your spouse will believe you? If you’re having trust issues with your spouse, then you’re probably in serious trouble with your marriage. Marriage is built on truth!

Can your spouse check your phone history? Your internet search history? Your call history? Or do you have to hide and conceal those things? Do you talk about your spouse behind their back? Integrity is critical in a healthy marriage!

d. Integrity Matters: in our Parenting

You might think, I’m doing great because my kids realize that Santa Clause, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy are not real...sorry to disappoint you, kids. However, that is not the only or even the most critical area of integrity with your children! *Are you honest with them about their sin? Your sin? Do you tell them the truth about God or do you just let them figure out things on their own?* If you know the truth of Scripture, then you had better be teaching it to them!

Illustration/Application: I remember hearing a mom say something like this more once, “If you do this, it could kill mommy! You don’t want mommy to die do you?” They were talking to their toddler about throwing their sippy cup or something along those lines. Don’t build your parenting on fear and lies! Let your “YES” and “NO” mean something!

As parents, do your kids trust you? Do you change the rules and expectations all the time? Are you consistent with what you do or are you consistently changing everything depending on your emotional state?

Illustration: Our kids are constantly watching what we do. A huge temptation for a parent with lots of kids is to try to get better deals or discounts because of their age. For instance, if you go to the theme park or water park and they have a discount for kids 10 and under, and you know that your 11-year-old looks young and they’ll never ask you about their age, do you lie just to get the discount or free admission? Were you willing to sell your integrity for 25% off? You saved a couple of dollars but lost your integrity in front of your kids.

Proverbs 20:7 The righteous who walks in his integrity— blessed are his children after him!

e. Integrity Matters: in our Church

I look good on Sunday so I can deceive my church members about my life. I want to look the best in front of them so they don't ask hard questions. When they do ask hard questions, I'll deceive, or sugarcoat the truth.

Do you manipulate your words so you sound better and look better to protect your image?

f. Integrity Matters: in our relationships in all of Life

James 5:12 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 under condemnation.

Do you hold other people to an extremely high expectation of honesty and integrity, but you're willing to yell, lie, or manipulate to get your way? Do you exaggerate your problems to get your way and minimize everyone's problems to get your way? Integrity matters!!!!

Our words have meaning! We shouldn't have to say, "I promise you", "I swear", or "I'm serious" or any other sort of oath just so people trust you!

Conclusion:

So what do we do when we realize we struggle with integrity and honesty? Ask for forgiveness and look at Jesus. Jesus is the source of all truth. He is the way the truth and the life, he had no lies found in his life. He the one to run to when we struggle with sin.

1 Pet 2:21–22 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life..."

John 18:37 Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

***NIV Matthew 22:15–22** Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. **"Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are.** 17 Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?" 18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? 19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, 20 and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" 21 "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." 22 When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.*

Jesus was true. He was truthful. He was genuine. He was reliable. He was faithful. He was valid. He was trustworthy. He was believable. He is still ALL these characteristics. If you struggle with integrity, honesty, truthfulness, genuineness, reliability, or trustworthiness, then run to Jesus to show you how to do this in your life! Follow the Savior that is full of truth and integrity! **Our speech reveals our heart! Integrity Matters.**