

James 5:12 (NKJV)

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.

Do not Swear **James 1:12**

INTRO:

Why are we spending a whole sermon on just this one verse? Good question, I wanted to just pass this by but the first phrase got me, ***“And (or but) first of all brethren.”*** This is a very strong statement so we best not just ignore this verse. In our Study we will try to ask and answer two questions.

I. What they were not to do (v. 12a)

II. What they were to do (v. 12b)

I. What they were not to do (v. 12a)

James 5:12a ***“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath.”***

A. This first phrase could be translated two ways. It can be translated ***“before all”*** or as it is here ***“above all.”*** It is a stop sign that says before you rush off to the next paragraph this little note is vitally important.

B. What is so important?

“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath”

Why is this so important? We need to get some background material from the day in which James lived. In the *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus talked about this problem also. He said,

Matthew 5:33-37 ***“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord. But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”***

1. Jesus took on a practice the Rabbi's taught. We read in the Mishnah how the Rabbis split hairs over what kind of oath was binding and which ones sounded impressive, but in the end meant nothing.

2. Jesus added to this statement in **Chapter 23** when he confronted the Scribes and the Pharisees.

“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. Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 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. Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.’”

In attempting to clarify what swearing or taking an oath was, the spiritual leaders failed to grasp what they were doing. They were finding a way to get around the absolute command of the living God.

Exodus 20:7 ***“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.”***

C. This language, instead of showing great reverence for God, became a means to defraud people. It appears from this admonition in James this was prevalent in Israel.

II. What they were to do (v. 12b)

James 5:12 ***“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.”***

A. It may seem the first thing we should do is not involve ourselves in oaths at all. Some groups of Christians do this. Before we blindly follow suit we need to consider there may be a time when using an oath is advisable. For example when Paul was defending himself against the false apostles in Corinth, ***“Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.”*** (2 Corinthians 1:23).

1. Paul did not fall into the pattern both James and Jesus condemned. He did not use a formulaic oath in order to impress the Corinthians and pass off a lie. Rather, the Apostle Paul wanted them to understand how serious he was about what he was saying. In the context of this statement Paul answered the charge that he spoke out of both sides of his mouth when he talked about his plans to visit Corinth.

2. Paul insisted his plans were not vacillating but locked into the will of God. While the false apostles indicated that Paul's preaching was like his planning, changeable, Paul strongly pointed out it was not changeable.

2 Corinthians 1:17–23 *“Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No? But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.”*

B. The important thing is that we have integrity of speech. Our word needs to be our bond. Our yes needs to be yes and our no, no. If we have to add an oath, we imply there is a reason why our truthfulness should be doubted.

C. Let us finish with a blessed part of Scripture. Did you realize God Himself swore an oath?

Hebrews 6:13-18 *“For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.’ And so, after [Abraham] had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.”*

God did not swear His oath because He desired to deceive us, but because He wanted to encourage us to believe His promises.

Two questions for Application.

1. Are we aware the Lord hears all of our conversations? He also hears the internal conversation in our heads.

2. Are we careful not to defraud?

Hymn #437 Pure and Holy