

“Brethren, Do Not Swear”

November 4, 2012

Text: James 5:12

God is a God of absolute truth, & absolute truthfulness.

When He makes a promise, He always fulfills it because it is true; as true as He Himself is true.

In fact, every promise He makes, partakes of His own truthful nature.

His truth is inseparably bound up in each of His promises, so even if 1000's of years pass between His making a promise & His fulfilling it, it will still come true, because it is still His promise, & still a part of Him.

He wouldn't be God, if He didn't fulfill His promises, because that would make Him untrue.

Being God, He must be true to His truth, & He always will be.

* If God's promises ever failed, we'd question His immutability (His unchangeableness).

It might mean that something w/i Him had changed, possibly a motive which once influenced Him, but no longer does.

His will (expressed in the promise) might have changed, as we sometimes change our minds.

But none of that is even remotely possible, since

I Sam 15:29 says of God=> ***“The Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that***

He should change His mind.”

- * If God’s promises failed, we might question His omnipotence (His being all-powerful), wondering if He was unable to accomplish His own purposes.

But Scripture insists that God is indeed omnipotent.

Abraham was confident that=> *“What He [God] had promised, He was **able** also to perform”* (Rom 4:21).

As it turned out, Abraham was right.

- * If God’s promises failed, we might question His love, because His promises are so wonderful/comforting to us, that no loving God would make them, unless He truly intended to fulfill them.

They include the promise of pardon to sinners seeking Him, justification to those who believe in Him, sanctification to those who are struggling w/ sin, peace/joy to those who are troubled, and hope for the hopeless.

Only an unloving trickster-god would make such wonderful promises to people w/o intending to fulfill them, or w/o the confidence that He was capable of fulfilling them.

Not only are God’s promises reliable because He is true, but also because X (the Son of God) is true.

II Cor 1:20=> *“For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him [X] they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen [True!] to the glory of God through us.”*

God's promises are true/reliable because they are "*in X Jesus.*"

If you have a personal relationship w/ Jesus X, you have, w/i that relationship, every one of those wonderful promises God has made to His elect.

We know this is true for a number of reasons=>

1st, because X is God's Witness.

If anyone were to ask Him, "Are you sure God has promised me what Scripture says He has?"

Jesus says, "Yes, I Myself heard Him say it."

2nd, because X is God's Representative.

When He came to earth, He came to say what God wanted to reveal to man, and to do always the things God wanted to do for fallen mankind—things that are pleasing to the Father (Jn 8:29).

3rd, because Jesus is the guarantee of a better covenant than the old covenant of the Law.

Those who place their faith in X have the blessings which that better covenant guarantees to them=> deliverance from the Law's condemnation.

So believers can take God's words in Scripture and place full, unhesitating confidence in them as completely true/reliable.

Though God is absolutely true/truthful, sinful/fallen man is not.

It's as natural for man to lie, as it is for God to tell the truth.

Children lie to their parents, husbands lie to their wives and
wives to their husbands, employees lie to employers,
politicians lie to the electorate, citizens lie to their
government about their taxes, & the media lie to
everyone.

We live in a world that is so used to lying/lies, that virtually
every sitcom story is based on somebody's lying;
And every advertisement that sponsors that sitcom is based
on lying—at least in the form of exaggeration.

But although it's natural for men to lie, believers are not to lie.

Through the prophet Zechariah, God said to Israel, & to all
believers=> “*These are the things which you should
do: **speak the truth** to one another; judge with **truth**
and judgment for peace in your gates. / Also let none
of you devise evil in your heart against another, and
do not love **perjury**; for all these are what I hate,*
declares the LORD” (Zech 8:16-17).

“Perjury” is lying after taking an oath, to tell the truth.

**In today's text, James will address this problem of perjury—
swearing an oath in God's name to tell the truth; &
then lying.**

He will also deal with swearing by something other than God's
name, in order to avoid such profanity while telling lies.

**James will give us a negative command, a positive command,
& a warning about the consequence of deceptive
speech=>**

*** The Negative Command**

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

**James starts out by saying “*But above all*” to indicate that
this is a supremely important issue.**

Chapters 4 & 5 have described several forms of worldliness,
including quarrels, lust, speaking against fellow-believers,
arrogantly making plans w/o consulting God,
coveting wealth, and practicing injustice towards the
poor/weak.

Now, in closing his letter, James deals w/ 3 final issues of
worldliness=> taking oaths, prayerlessness, &
wandering away from the faith.

The section on oath-taking is just 1 isolated verse.

He begins that 1st topic with a direct command “*Do not swear.*”

This refers to taking oaths—not to swearing, as in the sense
of cursing.

James directs this command at “*my brethren,*” which, as we have
seen in the past, is a term of endearment for believers
(or, at least, people who call/consider themselves
believers).

**Though James says not to swear/take-oaths, that command
has to be explained, in order to really understand it.**

Taking oaths, and swearing vows, is not totally forbidden in
Scripture.

In fact, there were OT situations in which oaths were required.

E.g. Exod 22=> *“If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep for him, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking, / an oath before the LORD shall be made by the two of them, that he has not laid hands on his neighbor's property; and its owner shall accept it, and he shall not make restitution”* (22:10-11).

While a farmer was keeping an animal (e.g. a sheep) for his neighbor, a wolf might take/kill it.

The animal's owner, having returned, suspects his neighbor of selling the animal, & pocketing the money.

So the man in question was to take an oath before God, that he hadn't done what the owner suspected/accused him of.

It was as if he were calling upon omniscient God as a witness to confirm his innocence.

Similar oaths were (and still are) taken in God's name, as part of marriage vows, in courtroom settings, and on various other such solemn/significant occasions (though not in daily conversation).

It's important to realize that oaths are not to be spoken casually; They are binding statements to which we are to be held accountable, both by men and by God.

Vows were a form of oath, and God actually encouraged the Israelites in the OT to take vows, in which believers dedicated themselves, or something they owned, to God.

Psa 76:11 says=> “***Make vows to the LORD your God and fulfill them; Let all who are around Him bring gifts [sacrifices] to Him who is to be feared.***”

This was intended to encourage Jews to take oaths/vows in which they dedicated themselves to the Lord.

E.g. the Nazirite Vow, described in Numbers 6.

Other vows/oaths usually involved promising that if God answered a believer’s prayer, the believer would offer a sacrifice to Him.

When the prayer was answered, the vow would then be gratefully “*fulfilled*” by offering an animal sacrifice to the Lord, in worship/praise of His kindness.

I Sam 1:11 says of Hannah=> “*She made a **vow** and said, ‘O LORD of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy maidservant and remember me, and not forget Thy maidservant, but wilt give Thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head’*” (the sign of a Nazarite vow).

Hannah was vowing that, if God gave her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord, and that he would take a lifelong Nazirite vow of consecration upon himself.

God did give her a son (Samuel), & she did just as she had vowed, offering a sacrifice to the Lord, and leaving Samuel at the Temple to serve the Lord from then on.

So neither the OT, nor James, forbade oath-taking altogether.

What James does forbid in our text is insincere oath-taking based on something other than the name of God.

He specifically mentions heaven and earth.

What's this all about?

People who lie have little credibility, so others don't believe them.

They often feel the need to somehow bolster their promises/statements, to make them more convincing.

One way to do that, is to attach a vow to such statements.

E.g. when a criminal is being arrested, it's not unusual for him to tell the police "I swear to God, I didn't do it."

Usually, when the police hear that, they become more convinced than ever that he really did do it.

Invoking God's name as part of a false vow is a very serious issue.

In Lev 19, God says=> *"You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD" (19:12).*

Anyone who has ever sworn by God/God's-name, that he was telling the truth, when in reality he was lying, has profaned the name of the Lord.

It usually means that he doesn't really believe in the Lord, or that he believes God is ignorant of his own activities.

God adds, *"I am the Lord,"* throwing all His divine weight behind His prohibition of doing that, implying that anyone who does so, will be severely punished.

Actually, Jesus went even farther, explaining that=>

“Every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account [answer to God] for it, in the day of judgment. / For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned” (Mt 12:36-37).

Only a fool says=> “I don’t think X will really ever demand that I account for my having used His name, or the name of God, to swear to things that weren’t true.”

The Jews took such misuse of God’s name very seriously, and some of them sought tricky ways of getting around it, even though they fully intended to keep on telling lies.

They taught that there were binding oaths, and non-binding oaths.

When you really think about it, that’s ridiculous, even on the face of it=>

An oath, by its very nature, is supposed to be binding.

That’s the whole point of it.

Psalm 15 asks what sort of person is allowed to have the privilege of ongoing communion with God.

Among the necessary qualification list, it says=>

“He swears to his own hurt, and does not change” (15:4).

Taking an “oath” while trying to evade the binding nature of oath-taking itself, is nothing more than an evasive attempt to deceive other people, & to deceive them badly.

The Jews of Jesus/James' day said that swearing by God's name was binding, and that whatever was said in that case, if it wasn't true, profaned God's name.

However, they added that if a person swore by something other than God's name, it was not a binding oath.

So it became a game to lie, & confirm the lie w/ an oath that appealed to something as closely associated w/ God as possible, w/o actually referring to God Himself directly.

James mentions 2 such supposedly non-binding oath formulas—swearing by heaven, & swearing by earth.

E.g. “I swear by heaven (or “by earth”) that such/such a thing is true”—when in reality, it's not.

In Mt 5, X condemned both, then forbad all such insincere oaths=>

*“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” (Mt 5:34-36).*

In our own text James added an “all-others” category: “*by heaven or by earth or with **any other oath** [of that kind].*”

I.e., don't try to get around the binding nature of oaths by appealing to something other than God's name, something God created—e.g. heaven/earth.

That is just trickery, to make others believe your lies.

If a person has a saving relationship w/ Jesus X, his integrity should be so impeccable, that he doesn't need to do anything to strengthen the reliability/believability of his words.

Worldly wisdom tells man to lie whenever doing so is to his advantage, but to cover up his lie, in order to maximize its power to deceive.

Godly/heavenly wisdom says, You are no longer among such "people of the lie," but have been regenerated through Jesus, who is the way, and the "*truth*," and the life.

Lying/deception should have no place in your life now.

Oath-taking is too serious a matter to be given a place in casual everyday conversations, whether we say "I swear to God," "I swear on a stack of Bibles," "I swear by heaven," or simply "I swear."

We do swear in official situations when called upon to do so, in a world that expects people to lie.

But to do so in casual conversations just trivializes the solemn practice of oath-taking.

Xns are to be truthful people whose word can be trusted, because our Heavenly Father is truthful/trustworthy.

Oaths intended to restrain fallen man's deceptive nature,
shouldn't be necessary for us in most circumstances,
because godly character does not allow us to deceive,
if we're truly born again.

*** The Positive Command**

[Verse 12b]=> *"but let your yes be yes, and your no, no;"*

James calls for honest/straightforward speech.

He calls us to say what we mean, & to mean what we say.
Frivolous use of oaths is part of an evil world-system that makes
truth so shaky/tentative, it always needs to be propped-up.
Xns are to be honest people whose integrity alone is enough to
guarantee the truth of their words (people who don't need
oaths, to sound believable).

Eph 4 tells us to put on the new self, created in the
righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Then it adds=> *"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK
TRUTH, EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR"*
(Eph 4:24-25).

Jesus went even further.

He not only said that Xns don't need oaths to convince
others of their truthfulness;

But that it's actually wrong for us to use them that way.

In Mt 5, Jesus said=> *"Let your statement be, 'Yes,
yes' or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of
evil"* (5:37).

Keep it short, true, and accurate.

**For an inveterate liar, using oaths to deceive other people is
just one of his tools, in a whole lifestyle of deception.**

He is a child of the devil—the father of lies (Jn 8:44).

Satan has no use for the truth—he hates it.

His children have no value for the truth.

He even learns to deceive himself in this game of appearing
to be truthful, when in reality, his whole life is a lie.

One classic example of such a person is the adulteress in Prov 7.

Her lover comes to her at night, while her husband is away.

Prov 7:13=> “*She seizes him & kisses him, And with a
brazen face she says to him: / I was due to offer
peace offerings; Today I have **paid my vow**” (13-14).*

Here she is, committing adultery, feeling she’s OK w/ God,
because she has just done something religious,
fulfilling a vow as required by Scripture.

She is living a lie w/i her marriage, and she has mastered
the art of lying to herself.

Sadly, there are many such self-deceived religious people.

James tells us to make sure that our “Yes” really means “Yes,”
and our “No” means “No”;

That we not have a secret life of sin, hidden away w/i us.

That we, like our Heavenly Father, and like our Savior, be
people of the Truth.

*** The Consequence of Deceptive Oaths**

[Verse 12c]=> “*so that you may not fall under judgment.*”

James closes, by warning habitual liars, who even cover up their lies, w/ false oaths/vows, that God will judge them on the great Day of Judgment.

This is certainly true of those who profane His name by using it as part of their false/deceptive oaths.

But it's also true of those who try to skirt around that sin, by swearing false oaths w/o actually involving God's name, habitually deceiving others with their lies.

God's judgment falls squarely on anyone who takes an oath and then violates it.

As Jesus said, by their own words they will be condemned.

James is concerned for his readers, and he seeks to protect them from condemnation, by giving them this solemn warning.

Specifically, those whose false oath-taking, and habitual lying, give compelling evidence that they have never really become born again.

The word for “*judgment*” that James uses here is never applied in Scripture to born again believers.

It describes the penal sentencing of sinners to eternal hell, on God's great Day of Judgment.

* E.g. II Pet 2=> “*The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of **judgment***” (2:9).

* Jude 6=> “*Angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the **judgment** of the great day.*”

* Heb 10=> *“For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, / but a certain terrifying expectation of **judgment**, and **THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES**”*
(Heb 10:27).

It's not true (and James isn't saying) that a real believer in Jesus
X will face the judgment.

Nor that Xns will never lie, or even that they will never lie under
oath.

In fact, James wrote back in Jms 3:2=>

*“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.”*

But what both James/Jesus are saying, is that those whose
lives are riddled w/ lies, and characterized by a
constant pattern of lying are liars, and liars will be
judged/condemned by God.

Not simply because they are liars, but because their
habitual lying is proof that they are not saved.

So Rev 21 says=> *“For the cowardly & **unbelieving**
& abominable & murderers & immoral
persons & sorcerers & idolaters & **all liars**,
their part will be in the **lake that burns w/ fire**
& brimstone which is the second death”* (21:8).

Xns are not liars, but have become born again thru/unto the truth.

God is their spiritual Father; He is truthful, so they are
truthful too.

By the power of the H.S., they have come to believe in His
absolute truthfulness, & to trust in all His promises.

Someone: If I stop lying, will God save my soul?

** No, God saves a sinner as a free gift by His grace, based on
his faith in Jesus' death, as the sacrifice that paid for all his
sins—incl. lying.

When the H.S. regenerates a person, He washes/renews,
and indwells him, giving him a new love for truth.

Truthfulness is the result of our salvation, not its cause.

Jesus X is "*The Amen, the faithful and **true** Witness*" (Rev 3:14).

All the promises of God pertaining to our salvation are true,
because they have been accomplished "in X."

* He is the One whose death paid the penalty for our sins.

* He is the One who is carrying out God's redemptive plan
on earth, and in our own lives.

* He is the One who is interceding for His people before
the throne of God in heaven.

* He is also the One whose death proves to us beyond a
shadow of doubt, that God will keep all His promises
to us.

Rom 8=> "*He who did not spare His own Son, but
delivered Him up for us all, how will He not
also with Him freely give us all things?*" (8:32).

If Jesus is yours because you have placed your life/soul in
His hands, asking Him to forgive your sin, and to

save your soul, then all things are yours, because all
God's promises are yours, in X.

You'll never need to fear that God will condemn you—ever—
because He promises that there is no condemnation for
those who are in X Jesus.

Isa 53 prophesied of Jesus=> *“As a result of the anguish of
His soul, He will see it & be satisfied; By His
knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will
justify the many, As He will **bear their iniquities.** /
Therefore, I [God] will allot Him a portion with the
great, And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He **poured** out Himself to **death**, And was
numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself
bore the sin of many, And **interceded** for the
transgressors” (53:11-12).*

If you believe in Jesus unto the salvation of your soul, He
bears all your sins, and takes the penalty for your sins
upon Himself.

If you have need of God's mercy due to your failure to live up
to God's standard of integrity/truth—His own perfect
truthfulness—just look to Jesus, seek His forgiveness, and
seek His Spirit to do His cleansing/transforming work, in
your heart.

He seeks to be gracious, and all He needs is someone to
be gracious to—e.g. a liar.

You can be that person, if you're willing to simply reach
out to Him by faith, asking Him to save you from

lying, and from every other type of sin you've ever sinned.

May the H.S. draw you to Him, right now.

If you have already received God's saving grace, because of your faith in the atoning death of Jesus X, you should rejoice, and praise God for His goodness.

Every vow, every covenant, every promise of God which the sinner so desperately needs, is already yours, in X.

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November 4, 2012

Text: James 5:12

1. God is a God of absolute [12 truth] and absolute truthfulness.
I Sam 15:29; Rom 4:21
2. Not only are God’s promises reliable because He is true, but also because Christ, the [8 Son] of God, is true.
II Cor 1:20
3. Though God is absolutely true and truthful, fallen man is not; it is as natural for man to [8 lie] as it is for God to tell the truth.
Zech 8:16-17

In today’s text James will give us a negative command, a positive command, and a warning about the consequence of deceptive speech...

*** The Negative Command**

[James 5:12a]

4. Taking oaths and swearing vows is not forbidden in Scripture; in fact, there were OT situations in which [12 oaths] were required.
Exod 22:10-11; Psa 76:11; I Sam 1:11
5. What James does forbid in our text is insincere oath-taking based on something [12 other] than the name of God.
Lev 19:12; Mt 12:36-37
6. The Jews took such misuse of God’s name very seriously, and some of them sought tricky ways of getting around it even though they intended to [10 keep] on telling lies.
Mt 5:34-36
7. If a person has a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, his integrity should be so impeccable that he doesn’t need to do anything to strengthen the believability of his [12 words].

*** The Positive Command**

[Verse 12b]

8. Christians are to be honest people whose integrity alone is enough to guarantee the [12 truth] of their words.
Eph 4:24-25; Mt 5:37; Jn 8:44; Prov 7:13-14

9. James tells us to make sure that we don't have a secret life of sin [14 hidden] away within us.

*** The Consequence of Deceptive Oaths**
[Verse 12c]

10. James is concerned for his readers, and he seeks to protect them from condemnation by giving them this [14 solemn] warning.
II Pet 2:9; Jude 6; Heb 10:27; Jms 3:2; Rev 21:8
11. Christians are not liars but have become born again; God is their spiritual Father, and He is truthful so [10 they] are too.
Rev 3:14; Rom 8:32
12. If Jesus is yours because you have placed your life and soul in His hands asking Him to forgive your sin and to save your soul, then all things are yours because all God's [18 promises] are yours in Christ.
Isa 53:11-12
13. If you have received God's saving grace, every vow, every covenant, every promise of God which the sinner so desperately needs, is already [12 yours] in Christ.