

Life after Faith – James

James 5:12

“The Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing But the Truth”

1. RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR WORD

A. Who you represent with your word

B. What you reveal with your word

2. RETAIN THE INTEGRITY OF YOUR WORD

A. The practice James mentions

B. The point James makes

3. REMEMBER THE IMPLICATIONS OF YOUR WORD

A. What we say is eternal

B. What we say is evidential

1. I have never been called upon to testify in a court of law, but should I be, I have seen enough TV courtroom dramas to know exactly what I am supposed to say.

2. I will be asked to raise my right hand, and “solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.”

3. Some courtrooms are abandoning certain aspects of this oath, such as dropping the ‘so help me God’, and not requiring witnesses to put their hand on the Bible.

4. In James 5:12, Bro. James contends that followers of Christ should not have to swear by *anything* that they are telling the truth.

5. We should simply tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, without having to qualify it with some kind of supporting oath.

6. While this verse seems to stand alone in this chapter, it does not stand alone in the teaching of Scripture. It is very reminiscent of something Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount.

7. As one writer puts it, “...James gave them a piece of Jesus’ mind...” In this verse he echoes the teaching of Matthew 5:33-37, where Jesus taught, “*But I say unto you, Swear not at all...But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil (34a, 37).*”

8. What both James and his older brother, Jesus, are commanding is for Christians to practice an indiscriminate integrity, and to speak and live with a total truthfulness.

9. In a culture where spinning the facts, deflection and deception are all viewed as skills; where many feel that honesty is not always the best policy; we desperately need to be reminded of what God's Word says about our word.

10. The maxim use to be that a man's word is his bond. For a Christian, that should not be a forgotten principle. Our word should be crystal clear and constantly credible.

11. Notice what the Spirit of God teaches us through this verse in James 5. First of all, this verse calls you to:

I. RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR WORD

1. Look at verse 12, and notice the preface James puts on this principle. He says, *"But above all things, my brethren..."*

2. Apparently, James believed this teaching on the truthfulness of your word is uniquely important. He elevates it above the other truths he has been communicating.

3. James is not clear as to why he feels this particular precept to be of such importance, but I think we can understand why, if we think carefully about it.

4. Why is your word - the integrity of your speech - so important? I would suggest first of all, that it has to do with:

A. Who you represent with your word

1. In this verse we find again James' favorite title for his readers, *"my brethren"*. He is writing to those who have believed the gospel, and like him, have been born again into the family of God.

2. After their profession of faith, they have become, as Paul puts it *"ambassadors for Christ"* (II Corinthians 5:20).

3. When we announce to the world that we have been saved, we instantly become billboards and broadcasters, representatives and reporters for the kingdom of Christ.

4. It is true that we do this representative work through our actions, and the way we conduct ourselves day to day. However, that is *not* the primary way we communicate truths about Christ and His kingdom.

5. The primary way we reveal and represent the Lord Jesus is through the things we say. Speech and language are undeniably the principle forms of communication.

6. Consider the old advertising principle. What is the best form of advertising for a business? It has always been true, and is still so, that the number one channel of advertising is “word-of-mouth”.

7. The reason the integrity of your word is so important is because as you represent Christ to a lost world, you primarily do so through word-of-mouth.

8. The importance of your word is seen not only when you consider who you represent with your word, but also when you remember:

B. What you reveal with your word

1. I want to remind you of something Jesus said regarding speech and words. He said in Luke 6:45, *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.”*

2. In other words, Jesus taught that what comes out of our mouths - our word - is not just the product of what is going on in our heads. It is the revelation of what is going on in our hearts.

3. Have you ever thought to yourself, “Now why did I say that?” The answer is not so mysterious. It exited your mouth because it existed somewhere in your heart.

4. James says, *“But above all things, my brethren...let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay...”* Why is this kind of straightforward integrity important “above all things”?

5. It is because your word is a window into your soul. When you speak with clarity and honesty you disclose the doctrine of your heart.

6. I read about an actress who was known for her skinny figure and lying tongue. Someone once said of her, “She is such a liar, she may even be fat.” That would be quite a liar!

7. The integrity and honesty of your word is so important because it can reveal on the outside the truth of what resides on the inside.

8. James opens this verse by pointing us to the priority of honesty in the things we say. Notice a further truth the Spirit communicates through this verse.

9. Notice not only that you must *recognize the importance of your word*, but notice also that you should:

II. RETAIN THE INTEGRITY OF YOUR WORD

1. Some have taken this particular teaching by Jesus and James as a prohibition against *ever* taking any kind of oath, or ever swearing to anything under any circumstances.

2. That does not seem to be the point of this principle, especially when you consider the fact that in the Old and New Testaments, we find different kinds of oaths being used by God's people, and even by God Himself, who the writer of Hebrews says "swore by Himself" (Heb. 6:13).

3. No, the lesson we should draw from this verse of Scripture is that we are to guard our integrity and maintain our testimony so that we do not *have* to swear that we are being truthful.

4. Let me show you what I mean. Consider with me:

A. The practice James mentions

1. Look at verse 12. James says, "*But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath...*"

2. As I said, in the Old Testament we find numerous occasions of men swearing to the truth, and taking oaths in certain circumstances.

3. In Deuteronomy 10:20, the practice even seems to be encouraged. It says, "*Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, **and swear by his name.***"

4. The practice James was addressing in this text was a perversion and misuse of this correct, biblical type of swearing.

5. By the New Testament era, the Jews had developed this elaborate system of oaths and swearing that essentially allowed them to lie without penalty, so long as they did not swear by God's name.

6. The old, Bible commentator, Adam Clarke, quotes an ancient Rabbi who taught that: "...a man might swear by his lips, and annul it in his heart; and then

the oath was not binding.”

7. In other words, the religious Jews of Jesus and James’ day used swearing and oaths much as a child would say, “Ha! Got you! I didn’t really mean it. I had my fingers crossed behind my back.”

8. Using swearing and oaths as a sort of loophole is the practice James mentions in this passage. He is prohibiting the constant use of statements such as, “I swear to you,” or “I promise on my mother’s grave...”

9. That is the practice James mentions, but notice also, as James encourages us to guard and keep up our integrity, consider:

B. The point James makes

1. The big point James is making in this text, and it is a perfectly logical one, is that if you and I will always be honest and forthright, we will not have to make special oaths and swear to this or that.

2. Having to swear to something, or make some kind of oath is like saying, “I usually don’t tell the truth, but this time, I really mean it, and to guarantee it, I will swear on my coon dog’s life, and solemnly promise.”

3. Do you see this simple point? If we will always be honest, we will never have to swear.

4. That is why James says, “...*let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay...*” Let your “yes” and your “no” be enough. Let your word stand for itself. Don’t prop it up on the crutches of an oath.

5. The problem for most of us is that deceit and misrepresentation are so much a part of our culture that we use them without even thinking about it.

6. We give false impressions without actually stating a lie. We exaggerate or understate, and thereby deceive. We lie in a multitude of little ways every day of our lives.

7. What the Scripture is calling for is a kind of truthfulness and frankness, honesty and transparency that never has to defend itself or assert its sincerity. If anyone ought to live this way, it is the people of God.

8. A pastor announced to his congregation that the following Sunday he would be preaching from Joshua 25, and that he wanted them all to read it that week.

9. The next Sunday, the pastor asked the church how many of them had read Joshua 25. Some hands went up, and the preacher said, "Today, I am preaching on honesty, and you that raised your hands are the ones that really need to listen. Joshua only has 24 chapters."

10. James urges us in this passage to take care of our integrity, and be consistently honest, so that we will not have to constantly swear to our honesty.

11. Notice a third truth we draw from this verse. You must *recognize the importance of your word*. Therefore, you should *retain the integrity of your word*. Lastly, the Word of God calls you to:

III. REMEMBER THE IMPLICATIONS OF YOUR WORD

1. Look again at verse 12, and take note of the last thing James says in it. "*But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.*"

2. James is not just making a statement about the practice of swearing. He is trying to help us to avoid something painful in the future.

3. We should strive to be totally truthful and completely candid whenever we speak because our words have great implications upon how we will be judged by God.

4. There is a passage of scripture that James could have had in mind when he warned us about the condemnation that can come when we are not careful with our word.

5. In Matthew 12:36-37, Jesus said, "*But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*"

6. That is a frightening and sobering warning. What are the implications of it for us in light of what James has said in verse 12? Well, first of all, we are warned that:

A. What we say is eternal

1. I think sometimes we feel as if what we say just sort of evaporates out into history, never to be remembered again.

2. We may say something we regret, but after a while, we forget we said it, and

we assume it is gone.

3. Both James and Jesus warn us that there is coming a day when our words are going to be recalled, and we are going to answer for them.

4. In 1877, Thomas Edison was experimenting with a talking machine he called the phonograph. He turned a crank, and spoke the words: "Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow, and everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go."

5. After playing it back, that little nursery rhyme became the first recording of a human voice. The truth is, however, long before men started making audio records, God was recording their words.

6. We will hear our words again. I don't know how it will happen, but somewhere in eternity, God will replay for us the things we have said.

7. We must be careful with our words, striving to be honest in all we say, because our words are eternal.

8. What we say is not only eternal, but both James and our Lord indicate that:

B. What we say is evidential

1. James warns us against swearing and using oaths to prop up our word. He challenges us to be consistently honest, so that we will not, as he says, "*fall into condemnation.*"

2. Again, in Matthew 12:37, Jesus said, "*For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*"

3. What does that mean for us? We know that the Bible teaches that the only hope anyone has at the judgment is to believe the gospel, and to accept Christ's righteousness in the stead of their sinfulness.

4. This passage is therefore *not* teaching that you can be saved so long as you say all the right things during this life. No, that is not what Jesus or James means.

5. What they *are* teaching is that what you say is an evidence of what you truly believe. That is, the integrity or inconsistency of your word, whichever is the case, will serve as evidence of whether or not you have been truly born again.

6. In other words, a man whose word is honest is a good indication of a man

whose heart is holy. When you tell the truth with consistency, it points to the fact that you have believed the truth with conviction.

7. Likewise, a person who tells lies, and therefore feels the need to constantly swear and prop up their speech, testifies to the fact that they have not really been born again by the grace of God.

8. When Revelation 21:8 says that *“all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire,”* it is not a misprint or hyperbole.

9. Those who live in perpetual dishonesty have never truly repented, and one day their own words will condemn them before God.

10. In 1997, Creation scientist and author, Henry Morris, published an interesting and useful tool. It is a collection of quotes from secular scientists and evolutionists that serve to undermine and contradict their own theories. The title of the book is: *“That Their Words May Be Used Against Them.”*²

11. You could say that in James 5:12, Bro. James is urging us to be sincere and straightforward in all that we say so that one day our words may not be used against us.

1. Dr. Helmut Theilicke was a German scholar and pastor who stood against Hitler and the Nazi movement in Germany.

2. Theilicke understood the importance of pure and undiluted honesty among the people of God. He said, *“The avoidance of one small fib...may be a stronger confession of faith than a whole ‘Christian philosophy’ championed in lengthy, forceful discussion.”*³

3. In a world so filled with deceit and guile, imagine how effective and attractive God’s people would be if they lived with a simple sincerity, indiscriminate integrity, and a total truthfulness.

4. My prayer is that God would create in you and me the kind of unbroken honesty that never feels the need to swear by anything, but always tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

¹ Hughes, R. Kent, James: Faith that Works, (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 1991), p. 247

² Morris, Henry, That Their Words May Be Used Against Them, (Institute for Creation Research, El Cajon, CA, 1997)

³ Hughes, R. Kent, p. 251