

James 5:12 – Above All, Brothers

Passage: “*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.*” (James 5:12)

I. Above All, Brothers: A Weighty Issue

- James says this is important: “Above all”. This is a preeminent command. Don’t skip over this verse.
- This passage is very similar to Jesus’ words (Matt. 5:33-37). Jesus and James teach the same thing.
- The truth is important.

II. Do Not Swear

- The command: Do Not Swear
- Definition of an Oath:
 - *A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein, upon just occasion, the person swearing solemnly calleth God to witness what he asserteth, or promiseth, and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he sweareth. (Westminster Confession of Faith 22.1)*
- Definition of a Vow:
 - *A vow is of the like nature with a promissory oath, and ought to be made with the like religious care, and to be performed with the like faithfulness. (Westminster Confession of Faith 22.5)*
 - *6. It is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone: and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made voluntarily, out of faith, and conscience of duty, in way of thankfulness for mercy received, or for the obtaining of what we want, whereby we more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties; or, to other things, so far and so long as they may fitly conduce thereunto. (Westminster Confession of Faith 22.6)*
- There are lawful oaths and vows:
 - Reason #1 – The Old Testament required lawful oaths and vows (Lev. 19:12, Deut. 6:13, 10:20)
 - Reason #2 – Jesus is correcting false interpretations of the law (Matt. 5:33-37)
 - Reason #3 – Jesus and the Apostles made lawful oaths and vows (Matt. 26:63-64, 2 Cor. 1:23, Gal. 1:20)
 - Reason #3 – God binds Himself by oath (Heb. 6:13-14, 7:20-21)

III. Do Not Swear By...

- Jesus and James make the same basic point: Our truthfulness should be so consistent and dependable that we need no oath to support it: a simple “yes” or “no” should suffice (Matt. 23:16-22).

- You cannot swear by anything or anyone. You can swear lawfully only by the name of God.
- When should we make oaths and vows?
 - #1 – When an appeal to God to resolve a serious matter is needed (court)
 - #2 – When we need to bind ourselves to serious, important obligations

IV. Yes and No

- Our Yes's and No's should always be consistent with the truth
- Remember the gospel and what it teaches us:
 - God is a God of absolute truth (1 John 1:5)
 - Jesus is truth incarnate (John 14:12)
 - Jesus came to save us from lives of deception (Tit. 3:3)
 - Truth brings freedom (John 8:32)
 - How can we, who died to lies and unfaithfulness, live any longer therein (Rom. 6:2)?

V. Application: Speaking the Truth to Our Neighbor

- Speak the truth because we are members of one another.

“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.” (Eph. 4:25)

- Be faithful to your word, first to God, then to others. This is an application of the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40)

“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.” (Eccl. 5:4-5)