

BOOK OF JAMES
SPEAKING THE TRUTH-PT 1
JAMES 5:12; MATTHEW 5:33-37

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Introduction

When someone is called on to testify in court as a witness, they are asked to put their hand on the Bible and answer this question, *“Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?”*

Here is a valid question: *Is a Believer violating Scripture to put himself or herself under such an oath?*

Our President and other elected officials are also **“sworn into office”** and doing so must place their hand on a Bible and take the oath of their office swearing that they will uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America and faithfully carry out the duties of their office.

(Let me just interject this without getting on a rabbit trail: recently I saw where some elected Muslim politician in our country was allowed to use the Koran instead of the Bible which is a sad day for our country, because the Koran says that it is OK to lie to infidels, so their oath sworn on the Koran basically doesn't mean anything, but neither would their oath sworn on the Bible mean anything!)

So, the politicians that are Believers, and there are some, are they disobeying the very Bible that they swear upon in taking their oath of office?

While some might answer, **“yes.”** I would be among those who say, **“no”** (and I will explain why later). But however we answer, we need to be clear on the meaning of James' command in our text, which pretty much repeats Jesus' words in **Matthew 5:33-37**.

The words spoken by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount go beyond the taking of oaths or vows and deal with the matter of being truthful in our speech.

No matter what your views on taking oaths might be, I think we all can agree that there is a crisis of truth in our culture! There was a time such as with God's people Judah back in the days of Jeremiah. (**Jeremiah 5:1-4**)

Many in our day do not even believe that there is such a thing as absolute truth because that is what they are being taught in our public schools!

There are many that say, whatever is true for you is true for you but it may not be true for me. They hold to their version of truth, even if it contradicts the facts! **Any supposed “truth” that is contradicted by the facts is a lie!**

Politicians especially are notorious for **promising things that they know they can never deliver. With every broken promise, distrust increases and the fabric of our society unravels a bit more.** But listen, that's not only the case with politicians! It is becoming increasingly the case with your average Joe!

If somebody tells you they are going to do something in our day and time, you had better get it in writing with it being witnessed and notarized if you truly expect them to do what they say they are going to do!

And even then it may wind up in a court of law where you have to deal with and rely on both lawyers and judges, many who are dishonest themselves! We know that to be the case from what we see happening!

In our everyday communication, we as believers, should be people of truth who speak the truth without shading it by deception to hide the truth! All of these things are implicit in **James 5:12**, which is saying: **As believers we must be truthful in our communication to others or with others so that we do not fall under judgment.**

To understand James' words here, **we must understand how the Jews of that day were using oaths. Oaths ought to foster truthful communication, but in reality they had become a facade for lying.** The Jews said that if you swore using God's name in your oath, you had to keep your word, but if you swore by some lesser thing—Jerusalem, the temple, or whatever—you were not bound. That is what Jesus was confronting in **Matthew 23:16-22**.

This was also the situation behind Jesus' command in the Sermon on the Mount that we read earlier, not to make any oaths, but to **“let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, Nay...” (Matthew 5:37).**

In other words, **the real issue was speaking the truth at all times.** We will see later why neither Jesus nor James were prohibiting all oaths.

But let's consider four things that James is teaching here:

I. AS BELIEVERS, WE MUST WORK AT BEING TRUTHFUL IN OUR COMMUNICATION!

Immediately we may wonder, why does James say, *“But above all things, my brethren...”*?

Is refraining from swearing or taking an oath really more important than anything else James has said thus far?

Some believe this relates to the preceding context, especially to what James has said throughout the letter about the control of the tongue! (1:19, 26; 3:1-12; 4:11, 13)

They view it as summing up his line of thought on that subject, emphasizing that **truthful speech undergirds everything else** while **untruthful speech undermines everything else!** (And, by the way that is true!)

By saying *“above all”* he is **emphasizing the ultimate issue of personal integrity. Our personal integrity matters now because of Whose we are—Who we belong to!**

John 8:44-45 (Lying is associated with whose we were!)

Ephesians 4:20-25 (Truth is associated with Whose we are!)

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”

Remember James has been dealing with both worldliness and a spirit of pride, which result in relational conflicts.

From 4:1—5:18, he makes the point that **true faith resists arrogance by humbling oneself before God. This includes humility in our relationships with others that stems from our humility before God!**

Now, from a human standpoint, **oaths are necessary because bending the truth for personal advantage comes naturally to us as sinners.**

In speaking of the depravity that is common to the human race, Paul says in *Romans 3:13*—*“Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit...”*

We didn't have to teach our children to lie? They didn't need any help when it came to lying! It was part of their nature! We had to teach them to tell the truth, especially when it was seemingly not to their advantage to do so!

James is not speaking here to those outside of the Church, but rather to believers (*“my brethren”*). Unfortunately, **becoming a Christian does not automatically produce truthful communication!**

The Bible is filled with exhortations to God's people to be truthful in word and deed. For example, in *Ephesians 4:15*, Paul says that we should be *“speaking the truth in love”*. And we've already seen what he wrote a few verses later in *Ephesians 4:25* *“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.”*

The apostle Peter wrote in *1 Peter 3:10*—*“For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:”*

So don't assume that because you're a Christian, you won't struggle with the sin of being deceptive. We all need to work at this matter of truthful communication.

But, what does the Bible say about taking oaths or making vows? That brings us to our second point...that we will take up next time!

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Conclusion

Are you a believer? If so, **are you constantly working to be truthful in your communication with others?**

That's the real issue that James is addressing here!

Remember, **LYING** is associated with the devil and **TRUTH** is associated with Christ! If we are His, we need to be people of **TRUTH!**