

SERMON TAKE HOME- James 5:12-Let your “Yes” be yes and your “no” be no

12But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Remember (James 3:2) James has already shown us that we all stumble in many ways (including with our tongues). No one is perfected here-

It is important (as always) when we are trying to understand a verse that we understand the context of what is being taught. If you are here for our study on the Sermon on the Mount, our text today sounds very familiar to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:34-37. In fact, see the parallel below to see the similarities.

James 5:12	Matthew 5:34-37
<i>But above all</i>	<i>But I say to you</i>
<i>do not swear</i>	<i>do not take an oath at all</i>
<i>Either by heaven</i>	<i>Either by heaven for it is the throne of God</i>
<i>Or by earth</i>	<i>Or by earth for it is His footstool</i>
	<i>Or by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great King</i>
<i>Or by any other oath</i>	<i>And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black</i>
<i>But let your yes be yes</i>	<i>Let what you say be simply yes</i>
<i>And your no be no</i>	<i>Or no</i>
<i>So that you may not fall under condemnation</i>	<i>Anything more than this comes from evil.</i>

Remember, Jesus is talking with Jewish people who have been under the teaching of the Pharisees. James is writing to Jewish believers (James 1:1), and just like Jesus, James is trying to show where the Pharisees were wrong in their teachings on oaths and swearing. What were the Pharisees teaching regarding oaths? Read Matthew 23:16-22 and look how the Pharisees were not truly concerned with truth but with technicalities and extra biblical traditions. This is what Jesus is addressing (and James in our text James 5:12)

12But above all, my brothers

The tongue has been a big point of focus for James, this is the 5th time he is addressing this topic. Even though he only uses one verse to address this issue in his closing statements, do not make the mistake of belittling his points here. The issue of the tongue is important because the tongue reveals the heart (Matt 12:34)

do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath

Remember contextually, this is an attempt to get these Jewish believers to forsake what they have been taught by the Pharisees. So this is a call to not do what the Pharisees were doing.

Oaths are seen in scripture (Gen 24:2-4), commands concerning oaths were given by Moses (Num 30:1-2) and even God has given oaths to encourage His people regarding His word (Heb 6:13-17).

The call here is not to use oaths the way the Pharisees were, and to not use them loosely without concern for truth.

How can we today go down the same path the Pharisees were? If you feel the need to say “I promise” or “I swear” after saying something, what you are really saying is “Since you can’t trust my yes or no alone, I will add the words “I promise” or “I swear”, so you can trust me. If our words alone can’t be trusted, there is a problem.

Instead of loosely swearing or making an oath, what should our lives look like? *but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no,*

In all areas of our lives, we must be set apart from the lost world and this includes the reliability of our words. We need to say what we mean, mean what we say and do what we say. Our words need to be reliable and trustworthy. Just like Christ, there should be no deceit found in our mouth (1 Peter 2:2).

In the right heart and in the right way it is good to take an oath before the Lord. Think about our marriage ceremonies. We take an oath before God and the witnesses. In doing so, we acknowledge that God is the author of marriage, that we are before and longing to glorify Him in marriage. We need to be people of our word and be careful not to loosely or haphazardly take oaths.

so that you may not fall under condemnation.

The consequence of being like the Pharisees and being defined by lying and false oath taking are serious. It reveals a heart that is full of deceit. Consider Rev 21:9 regarding the end of a deceitful heart

We need to let our words be few (Prov 10:19) and as James already reminded us, we need to be quick to listen and slow to speak.

Through the strength and power of the Holy Spirit, we can be people of our word and glorify God in heaven.