

Swear Words

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[0 : 00] If you're there in your Bible, James chapter 5, verse 12, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together.

! May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated?

When I was a kid, if you wanted someone to keep a secret or tell you a secret, you'd make an oath or a vow saying, I cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye.

That's pretty extreme language if you stop to think about it, isn't it? Listen, this secret of yours is so important to me that if I don't keep it, I will blind myself with a needle and hope for death.

Nobody took that oath that seriously. Lots of kids broke it. I broke it. None of us stuck needles in our eyes.

[1 : 36] There was another kind of oath that we would take as kids when we wanted someone to keep a promise, or when you wanted someone to trust that you would be true to your word.

And this involved putting your fist out, extending your pinky, inviting the other person who was part of this promise to take their pinky, wrap it around your pinky, and say, together, I pinky promise.

And back then, pinky promise was a big deal. You didn't want to be known as a pinky promise breaker.

But say, you were one of those people who had been known to break their pinky promise. Well, how could you ever be trusted again?

Again, what could you do to restore your integrity and credibility? Well, for us, that meant that you had to swear.

[2 : 45] And by swear, I don't mean use bad language. This was another form of making a vow or taking an oath. And so what you would do is you would invoke the name of someone or something greater than you, or something sacred to you.

For example, people would swear on their mother's graves, even though all of our mothers were alive. People would swear on their lives.

But the big one was when you swore to God. The Christians that James wrote to had a problem with swearing.

Most of them were Jewish converts who had grown accustomed to the practice of swearing falsely and deceptively for the purpose of appearing credible and pretending to be truthful, but having no intention of being faithful to keep their word.

And so here James reminds them and us that as Christians, we should be diligent to cultivate lives of integrity, which demonstrate a consistency of truthfulness that gains the trust of others without the need of taking a vow or making an oath.

[4 : 07] And so the main idea for this morning's sermon is this. Be careful with your words and faithful to keep them. Be careful with your words and faithful to keep them.

Now, why is this important? Well, truth has gradually eroded in every segment of our society. People lie.

Children lie to parents. Parents lie to their children. Marriages have ended or are ending in divorce and families are broken because of lies.

Politicians lie to get elected and then they continue to lie once they're in office. And people lie to the government. Many of you just finished doing your taxes and that's a time when many people lie.

The media, who are supposed to expose lies, lie to keep those things from being exposed. People lie to themselves and expect others to go along with that lie.

[5 : 19] Our culture vilify and attempts to silence or cancel those who actually tell the truth. I've said it before and I'll say it again.

Who could have ever imagined even 10 years ago that a time would come in our society when the statement, men are men and women are women, would be controversial.

That people would think that it takes a PhD in biology and psychology to be able to define something so simple and obvious.

Our society has exchanged the truth for a lie and is now being and has been built on a framework of lies and it will collapse.

And so as Christians, we see these things, we don't like these things. It grieves us, but it shouldn't come as a surprise to us.

[6 : 16] In John 8, 44, Jesus identifies Satan as the father of lies. As he accuses the religious leaders of the Jews of being his children, Satan's children, because they were seeking Jesus' death because he told the truth.

Jesus says in John 8, 44, You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him.

When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. And then in John 3, 10, we read, By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. You see, there's no greater work of Satan in the life of an individual, a society, or a church than to stir up falsehood and deceit.

And so it's imperative that if we are to be the light of the world that Jesus has commanded us to be and expose lies with the truth, you and I must be careful with our words and faithful to keep them.

[7 : 38] If you truly desire that people know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, then you must prove to be a reliable source of truth, being careful with your words and faithful to keep them.

In this verse, James gives a command that contains two principles that, if obeyed, will result in your being careful with your words and faithful to keep them.

And so I ask you, how do you want to be known? As someone who tells the truth and keeps their word, or as someone who can't be trusted?

Do you want to be known as someone with integrity or someone who is deceitful? We all need God's help in this. And he provides that help for us today through his word and the assistance of his spirit.

The first principle contained of this command that will help you be careful with your words and faithful to keep them is this. Christians say what they mean.

[8 : 44] Christians say what they mean. And so James begins verse 12 by saying, But above all my brothers... Now the Greek construction of this statement makes, or marks, I should say, a transition from the preceding passage.

James is nearing the end of his epistle, and this is the first of a series of commands that he concludes with as he begins to wrap things up. And once again, he spends time emphasizing the importance of our speech as he's done many times throughout this letter.

There are five chapters in this epistle, and in each chapter, James addresses the importance of being careful with your words and faithful to keep them.

Let's review. In chapter 1, verse 26, James says, If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

In chapter 2, verse 12, he gives this exhortation. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. In chapter 3, verses 2 through 11, there James warns about the great damage our words are capable of inflicting.

[9 : 56] And in chapter 3, verse 6, he says, And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.

The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

In James chapter 4, verse 11, James implores Christians to not slander one another, equating that with speaking against God's holy law.

There he says, Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. And so taking all of this into consideration, it's obvious that how Christians speak was of grave concern to James and should be

to us too.

Because the words you use reveal the true condition of your heart. They either confirm or contradict your confession that you are a follower of Jesus Christ.

[11:07] That you have genuinely been saved by him. Jesus made this clear in another interaction that he had with the Pharisees when they again attacked him for the truth he spoke in Matthew 12, 34 through 37.

He says to them, What this means is that with God, nothing is off the record.

And the words you use reveal the true spiritual condition of your heart. Your words matter.

They have eternal implications. And that's a pretty heavy thought. But I'm thankful that as James issues this command about the importance of being careful with your words and faithful to keep them, he begins by addressing these Christians that he's writing to once more as his brothers.

I think this is James' way of reminding himself that he is not above his brothers and sisters in Christ. That he likewise needs to guard his own mouth and make sure that he is speaking the truth and keeping his word.

[12:47] He's not wagging his finger at them, but coming alongside of them as a fellow traveler, a fellow sinner saved by grace. He's exercising compassion, not condescension.

And that's an attitude that we all need to work on having with one another. And so having done that, James gets to the point about the importance of Christians saying what they mean.

And so as we continue to read in verse 12, he says, Do not swear either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath. And again, in this context, swearing, the type of swearing that James has in mind isn't curse words or dirty jokes or illicit speech, though the Bible does forbid that.

James here, though, is talking about taking oaths. And as I mentioned before, the Jews of James' day had developed a complex system of swearing oaths.

Kind of like the system that I shared that went what we had as kids, but this system that they had was much more sophisticated. The Jewish system of swearing oaths had its roots in the Old Testament.

[14:03] Back then, written contracts didn't exist like they do today. And so oaths were commonly used to make an agreement binding. Oftentimes, the two parties entering agreement would call God to witness to the truth of their promise, thus invoking God's judgment if one of them defaulted on the agreement.

So what does this mean as Christians? Should we never take an oath? What if you are called to testify as a witness in court? Should you solemnly swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

What if you're called to serve in the military or law enforcement? Should you take the oath of honor? What if God calls you to be a medical doctor?

Should you take the Hippocratic oath? Maybe he'll call one of you to serve as president of the United States. Wouldn't that be nice?

To have a true Christian serving in that role. Should you take the oath of office? Well, we use Scripture to interpret Scripture.

[15:19] And James' command not to swear, to not make an oath, is not an all-encompassing command. As a matter of fact, because the world is so full of liars, there are times when an oath is necessary.

The Old Testament is full of examples of godly men who took oaths. In Numbers chapter 30, verses 1 through 2, Moses said to the Israelites, In Hebrews chapter 6, verses 13 through 18, there, the author recounts God's faithfulness to keep his covenant with Abraham, and how he swore God swore by himself to keep it.

And there we read, For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, Surely I will bless you and multiply you.

And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise, the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath.

So that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

[16 : 52] The Bible doesn't forbid taking oaths, but using them flippantly. And that's what the Jews during this time were guilty of doing.

They were strategically making oaths with loopholes, which Jesus called them out for in Matthew chapter 23, verses 16 through 22.

There again, speaking to the religious leaders of Israel, he said, Woe to you, blind guides, who say, If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing. But if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.

You blind fools, for which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing.

But if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath. You blind men, for which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?

[17 : 54] So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it.

And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. Do you see the loopholes they were creating in their oaths?

They thought that if they didn't specifically invoke the name of God in their oath, then they had wiggle room to break it. They were being deceptive.

They weren't saying what they meant. They wanted to appear honest and trustworthy, but they had no intention of being faithful to keep their word. And again, this reminds me of my childhood.

Promising to keep your word, but having your fingers crossed and hidden behind your back. And that action, for whatever reason, created a loophole.

[18 : 59] That's what the Jews in Jesus' day were guilty of doing. And that practice had continued in the churches that James was writing to.

And James here in chapter 5, verse 12, is reminding Christians of what Jesus said in Matthew 23, that swearing by anything in God's domain brings God into the transaction whether you invoke his name or not.

We are always in God's presence. And he desires truth in all of our words. He desires that we say what we mean.

Do you say what you mean? Do you make promises that you don't intend to keep? A person who continually swears that they are telling the truth is likely someone who isn't telling the truth or doesn't tell the truth.

Does that describe you? As Christians, we claim to have the truth. We have the truth. We say that we follow he who is the truth.

[20 : 14] And so the words that you speak should matter to you. Being careful with what you say and proving you meant it by being faithful to keep the words that you speak.

Now the second principle contained in this command that will help you be careful with your words and faithful to keep them is this. It's the reverse. Christians mean what they say. Christians mean what they say.

They say what they mean. They mean what they say. Continuing in verse 12, James says, but let your yes be yes and your no be no. And so James here is calling for simple, straightforward, honest speech.

Christians should be people whose yes and no means yes and no. Christians should be people who don't have to call God as their witness to swear by anything because as witnesses for God, being saved by the truth and being sanctified by the truth, they are faithful to be true and to keep their word.

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus said in Matthew 5, 33 through 37, again that you've heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.

[21 : 40] But I say to you, do not take an oath at all either by heaven for it is the throne of God or by the earth for it is his footstool or by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great king.

And do not take an oath by your head for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply yes or no. But anything more than this comes from evil.

And so what Jesus does here is he lifts all conversation, especially conversation in his church, to the level of sacredness. Believers are to be known as people who keep their word.

Christians are to be people who have integrity so much so that when they tell someone yes or no, that person knows they will be faithful to keep their yes or their no. Because they have observed that Christian's pattern of life as someone who means what they say. I'll never forget an important lesson I learned while I was serving as an associate pastor in church in Leavenworth where I was at to our senior pastor, Blaine Fye.

[22 : 58] It was a lesson that he taught me about earning trust with others, especially people in the church. And he compared it to a bank account.

He said, each time you keep your word, each time you show up, each time you practice what you preach, each time you demonstrate that you care, you are investing. You are making deposits into other people's accounting of your trustworthiness. And he said, that's important because there will come times when you will have to make withdrawals out of that account.

There will be times when you have to make decisions that not everybody is going to agree with. There will be times when you can't fully disclose what you know or information that you're privy to for the well-being and protection of others.

And he told me, people won't always understand why you did something or why you're doing something and you'll make mistakes. But you will not bankrupt your relationship with them if you have demonstrated a consistent Christ-like character of being trustworthy and faithful.

[24 : 13] And this is what Jesus did in John chapter 14. As he meets with his disciples before his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, which culminated in his crucifixion, as he prepares them for his death and his later resurrection, and what that will mean for them, Jesus sees his disciples' faces and that they're troubled.

And so he says to them in chapter 14, verses 1 through 2, Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms.

If it were not so, would I have told you? In other words, when I say something, I mean it. And I say what I mean and I mean what I say. That I go to prepare a place for you. Jesus is reminding his disciples in that moment that he is someone they can trust.

Because he's repeatedly demonstrated that he is someone who says what he means and means what he says. Jesus is someone who can be trusted. And so should his people be.

So it should be in his church. Ephesians 4.25 tells us, Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are all members of one another.

[25 : 34] God is the source of truth. His word, his work, is based on truth. And to be instruments that display his truth and that spread his truth, his people, his church, must care about the truth and proclaim the truth.

And so it should grieve us when people question if we mean what we say. It should grieve us if people question the genuineness of our faith because our actions reveal that we don't truly mean what we say.

It should grieve us if a simple yes or no is not sufficient to gain people's trust in us. So here's where I'm landing.

Unless legally required to do so, unless it's marriage vows or one of those situations that I had mentioned earlier, we shouldn't take oaths or swear by anything because oaths indicate that we don't say what we mean or mean what we say.

Swearing or taking an oath in my mind and I believe based on what scripture says is a pathetic acknowledgement of our own dishonesty. It is better to cultivate a life of integrity and consistency and truthfulness so that we sufficiently gain the trust of others without needing to say anything other than yes or no.

[27 : 11] And this should be a big deal to you because it's a big deal to God because the consequence of violating this command is severe.

Look at the very end of verse 12 with me. so that you may not fall under condemnation. Now back up with me to James 3, 2.

I think we need to see this before we continue on. There he said, for we all stumble in many ways and if anyone does not stumble in what he says he's a perfect man able to bridle his whole body. As Christians we stumble in many ways. we put our foot in our mouth. I know I've done that many times. We are at times careless with our speech.

We make mistakes with our words and God is gracious and compassionate to forgive us when we do.

[28 : 17] So this I think is yet another test that James presents about the genuineness of a person's salvation. A person who says they are saved but whose pattern of life is full of broken promises deceptive speech swearing to gain others' trust.

What does that say about that person's confession to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? contradicts it.

Does it not? And so I ask you as James is doing here as God is doing through James through his word to us today examine yourself examine yourself and think does this or does the pattern of your life reveal that you say what you mean and mean what you say?

If not then what does that say about your claim to have been born again? You know you can have everyone fooled and take Judas for example had everyone fooled but Jesus you can have everyone fooled but you'll never fool God and what James says here what the Bible says here is that if you don't know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior if you've not put your faith and trust in him then the wrath of God for your sins remains on you and you will be condemned and you will spend your eternity in hell the good news is that Jesus is the way he is the truth and the life and if he's graciously revealed to you today that your pattern of life is marked by broken promises and words that you did not keep revealing the evil that still lives in your heart he calls you now to repent to turn to him to receive his grace his mercy his spirit to be changed to be transformed by his truth that you'll be able to forever walk in it as

Christians we should hear this command in James 5 12 and evaluate how careful we've been with our words again we'll stumble we'll make mistakes but we need to examine our words and I think that's what we need to do today maybe an apology is in order for you to make for something you said or something that you didn't mean to say but you said it anyways right and moving forward we need to be much more careful about the words that leave these lips and these days the words that leave these fingertips too right as Christians we should also hear this command in James chapter 5 verse 12 and decide to fight for integrity strive to be faithful to not only be careful with your words but faithful to keep your words maybe it's God calling you today and I think it is for all of us to strive for integrity start making it a priority to say what you mean and mean what you say and maybe you need to do that by correcting some things that you've said in the past maybe you are withholding something that you need to share with someone right now maybe you need to be someone who stops exaggerating maybe you need to stop being so vague with your speech maybe you just need to take some time with God today later today sometime soon because there are things that you know that

[32 : 49] God has called you to do and you said yes but to this point your actions have indicated that that yes was really a no and so maybe you need to spend time with God today and just confess I said yes and I haven't followed through forgive me I will do it whatever the case may be we all need to fight and strive to be a person to be people who have integrity especially in this world that we live in we live in a society that has exchanged the truth of God for a lie and we can't follow along with that how will people ever know the hope that we have in Jesus Christ if we follow!

with! if you're truly saved how could you ever follow along with that people are in deep darkness and they need the light of Christ and as Christians we are called we are commanded to be torch bearers of that light to go to them in the hopes that by God's work we will lead them out and so the main point of application I know many of you like to guess what the villains are this morning so hopefully that means you won't forget it say what you mean and mean what you say say what you mean and mean what you say you will say what you mean and you will mean what you say if you are careful with your words and you're faithful to keep them for application questions for you all to discuss at community groups tonight

I encourage you to again as pastor Tyler said if you're not in a community group it's not too late we'd love to have you plugged into one but still I hope that these are questions that you'll come back to later throughout this week question number one in what situations are you most susceptible!

this sin what situations are you most susceptible to lying question number two read Ephesians chapter four verses 15 through 16 what do these verses say about how we should speak the truth to one another and then what are the consequences if we don't speak the truth to one another in this way what are the consequences if we don't speak the truth to one another in this way question

three read Matthew 5 33 through 37 again that passage about your yes being yes in the sermon on the mount what did Jesus mean in verse 37 when he said anything more than this comes from evil what did Jesus mean in verse 37 when he said anything more than this comes from evil and then finally read Matthew 12 36 through 37 how should these verses combine with what James says elevate your desire to be careful with your words and faithful to keep them and again my hope and prayer for myself and for you is that we be known as a people who are of the word who speak the truth in love whose yes means yes whose no means no

I'm going to pray in a moment we'll have our praise team come up and lead us in an invitation song and the invitation that I have for you today is that you invite the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and your mind and your speech and again we make mistakes we all have stumbled in many ways but I pray for you and for me that today if we haven't already we leave this place deciding I'm going to have integrity I'm going to be careful with my words I'm going through deception

[37 : 30] Lord as we've read Satan is the father of lies he spreads lies he destroys with lies and so Lord I pray that each one of us would take the command that we've read from your words seriously that we would be more careful with our words and that we would be faithful to keep them God we're thankful that you are a God who is merciful and gracious to his children that when we mess up with our speech Lord that you are there to forgive us and to help us do better and so God I pray that for each of us now as we live in this society that exchange the truth of who you are for a lie that we would be more determined than we've been in our past to be people of the truth to speak the truth to declare the truth to spread the truth Lord in our society everybody wants to debate about what is most needed and what is most needed is for your church to be the kind of people that you've commanded us to be and that begins with each one of us deciding that we are going to have integrity and we are going to be known as a source of truth in the hopes that you give us the opportunity to spread it and to share it that others would know the light of

Jesus Christ in whose name we pray Amen.