

Authentic Christianity

**Truth**

James 5:12

March 7, 2021 am

HDBC

**In his commentary** on James, John MacArthur has written:

*Fallen men are basically habitual liars. Children lie to their parents and parents lie to their children. Husbands lie to their wives and wives lie to their husbands. People lie to their employers who in turn lie to them and often to the public.*

*Politicians lie to get elected and continue to lie once they are in office. People lie to the government—perhaps most notably on their income tax returns. Educators lie, scientist lie and members of the media lie. Our society is built on a framework of lies, leading one to wonder whether our social structure would survive if everyone were forced to speak the truth even for one day.*

*That we live in a world of lies should surprise no one familiar with the Scripture, which designate unregenerate humanity as children of the devil—the father of lies.*

**WOW!** That is a pretty cynical view of humanity. But I'm afraid he is right.

**Fred Holloman** once prayed this to open a session of the Kansas state Senate:

*Omniscient Father: Help us to know who is telling the truth. One side tells us one thing, and the other just the opposite. And if neither side is telling the truth, we would like to know that, too. And if each side is telling half the truth, give us the wisdom to put the right halves together. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

**Once again** we are looking into the letter written by James to believers who were seeking to know how to live authentic Christian lives in a very unchristian culture. We have already seen many of the marks that we expect to find in a true Christ-follower. In James 5:12 we see another mark . . . **TRUTH.**

I am amazed at how much the Bible has to say about words. I think the reason is summed up in Proverbs 18:21. ***Death and Life are in the power of the tongue.***

It is possible that James said more about our talk and our words than any other subject.

1. Unbridled tongue is sign of spiritual immaturity
2. To talk about faith with no evidence of faith is useless
3. Uncontrolled tongue like fire, wild animal, poison
4. Commanded not to speak against a brother
5. Here, we are commanded to simply, tell the truth

## Read the Text: James 5:12

**Words** are simple tools that enable us to convey thoughts. However, words can be used to twist the truth. They can also be used to cover or excuse untruth. This is what James addresses here. Consider four things in this one verse.

### 1. The Priority

#### *Above all*

**Both the words** themselves and their position in the text speak of priority. What does James mean when he writes **above all**.

**Some suggest** that he is declaring that the specific sin described here is worse than any other sin. This can hardly be the case. We cannot imagine James indicating that swearing is worse than adultery, murder or idolatry. **It is best** to understand that James is giving priority to a sinful practice that had become commonplace in their culture. They knew the severity of murder, adultery and other sins, but had considered the practice of swearing oaths to be acceptable. It was not! This was a common problem that had to be addressed.

**How believers** speak was of grave concern to James, as it was to Jesus, for it brings to light what is truly on the inside. Authentic Christians speak the truth and have no need for false swearing. James makes this a priority mark of authentic Christianity.

### 2. The Command

#### *Do not swear with an oath.*

**He is not** referring to illicit speech, dirty talk, filthy jokes or four-letter words. Those are sinful and are addressed in verses like Ephesians 4:29. *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth . . .*

**Swear** - To grasp or hold onto something sacred for the purpose of supporting what you saying. Two things to note from O.T.

**1) Swearing and making vows were allowed**

*You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name. Deut. 10:20*

Jeremiah even taught that the use of taking an oath in God's name was a sign of spiritual vitality and life. (Jer. 12:16)

**2) Breaking a vow or oath was sinful**

*If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. Num 30:2*

*When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you. Deut. 23:21*

**Remember the context** - suffering saints. It is not uncommon for people to **promise anything and everything** to God when in a pickle. Making a promise to God that is conditional upon God acting in a certain way. This is not what was encouraged in the O.T. Those vows were

**If that is the import** of James' words, then this is a condemnation of that kind of superficial vow. *God does not respond to casual bargains.*

**By the time of Jesus and James**, the Jews had developed an elaborate system of vows used to give validity to their lies. To swear by God, meant the integrity of the person's statement was comparable to the integrity of God. If you used God's name or even implied it, then your statement was trustworthy. If you did not use His name, then your statement might be untrue.

**However**, they would swear by things related to God in some way. Heaven, Jerusalem, earth, etc. The closer the thing was to God, or the more sacred it was, the more one could believe the statement.

**It was** a way to put truth on a sliding scale and see it not as true or false but as some kind of amalgamation of truth and falsehood. It created a **moral schizophrenia**: *I am not lying but I'm not telling the truth either.*

In **Sermon on the Mount** Jesus said that offering a vow or oath was unnecessary and irreverent.

**Unnecessary** because believers ought to speak truthfully.

**Irreverent** because the things they were swearing by were sacred in their connection with God. Everything is connected to God because He is the creator of everything. Bringing the sacred down to the non-sacred. Swearing by anything in God's dominion brings Him into the equation.

**This has** nothing to do with the kind of oath-taking that happens in a court of law. James writes of frivolous swearing in everyday speech.

### 3. The Plan

*Your yes is to be yes, and your no, no.*

**Just** tell the truth. Period. **Our words** should be so **riveted to the truth** that they are never questioned. Are you believable? When you speak, do people believe you? When you speak, is there a suspicion in minds of the listeners?

**Most of us** would not consider ourselves to be liars or deceivers. But we may have allowed our credibility to be eroded in subtle ways.

#### A. Purposeful lie

Deliberate misrepresentation of truth. Almost always get you in trouble. *Three kids late to school claimed they had flat tire. Teacher separated them, told them to take piece of paper and right down which tire.*

#### B. Exaggeration of the truth

Taking truth and stretching it. *Telling stories. Sharing problems with others we always make ourselves look better than the others.*

#### C. Carelessness with facts

Giving information that you are not really sure about, but telling it as if it were fact. If it turns out to be untrue your credibility has been lost.

Advertisers are good at this. Hotel only 10 minutes away, but that is only if you are driving 110 mph.

#### D. Manipulation of words

The words may be literally true, but the intent was to mislead.

When in junior high some of my friends would skip football practice and go swimming. Tell coach they were out of town. True because the swimming pool was outside the city limits.

Man skips work, drives by doctors office, then tells boss I went by the doctor's office.

#### 4. The Motivation

*So that you may not fall under judgment.*

**To follow** any other course is to run the risk of falling under judgment. To misuse the name of God or anything that is sacred because of its association with God in an act of deception is to bring judgment.

**James picks** up on the words of Jesus. *But I tell you that every careless word that people speak they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.* **Strong words.**

**Jesus was** the great example of speaking the truth. He never lied nor twisted the truth in any way. In fact he was the embodiment of truth. He spoke it and lived it. Remember what He said.

I came to seek and to save those who were lost.

Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest.

For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

He said he would be killed, buried and resurrected on the third day. And He did. He will do what he said he would do. You can trust Him!

**Like it or not**, we live in a post-truth world.

**The concept** of truth has been dying a slow death for many years and has become more noticeable in the last few decades. In the early 2000s, **Stephen Colbert** picked up on this cultural trend by coining the term "truthiness," which went on to become Merriam-Webster's word of the year in 2006.

**In 2016** in the wake of our presidential election, Brexit, and accusations across the political spectrum about **fake news**, Oxford Dictionaries named "post-truth" its word of the year. Commenting on the presidential inauguration, Kellyanne Conway famously spoke of **alternative facts**. In response, *Time* blazoned the question ***Is Truth Dead?*** on its April 3, 2017 cover.

**Then in 2018**, former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani claimed ***truth isn't truth*** during an interview with Chuck Todd on NBC. Let's not forget Bill Clinton splitting hairs over the definition of **sexual relations** and pondering what an attorney's definition of ***is*** is back in 1998. Recent political leaders have given us no reason to think we are trending back toward honoring truth. It seems we are living in a post-truth age.

**This one verse** is a radical call to truthfulness! This will set us apart from the rest of the culture. It will bring clarity not only within the body of believers but also to a disbelieving world. It is a call for us to offer our complete allegiance to Jesus, is the embodiment of the truth.

Some of you remember the western series ***Lonesome Dove***.

In the story, **Captain McCall** agrees to the deathbed wish of his lifelong friend, **Gus**, to bury him in Texas. While in route from Montana to Texas with his body, he is confronted by the curious along the way about why he was doing this crazy thing. In one such encounter, the Captain, being a man of few words, simply looked his questioner in the eyes and slowly drawled, ***I gave him my word.***

A long pause follows as the two men's eyes examine one another when finally the stranger says, ***Yes, I can see that you did.*** The Captain nods contentedly and turns away.