

**Men to Men Ministry**  
**Lesson 25 in the Letter of James**

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## James 5:12 NASB

**BUT ABOVE ALL MY BRETHREN, DO NOT SWEAR, EITHER BY HEAVEN OR BY EARTH OR WITH ANY OTHER OATH; BUT LET YOUR YES BE YES AND YOUR NO BE NO; SO THAT YOU MAY NOT FALL UNDER JUDGEMENT.**

## Introduction

### Setting the Scene for James 5:12

The setting in James chapter 5 takes place in a modest meeting room of a first-century Christian community. The room is illuminated by oil lamps, providing a subtle light to the faces of those present. The air carries various scents, including incense, the aged smell of old scrolls, and a hint of bread baking nearby.

In the room, there are several members of the early Christian church, including James, the author of the letter, who is known for his wisdom and leadership within the community. Also present are elders, deacons, and ordinary believers who have come together to discuss matters of faith, prayer, and community life. They are seated on simple wooden benches or cushions on the floor, their faces reflecting a mix of weariness from persecution and joy in their shared faith.

The group has come together to address various issues affecting the community, including the importance of honesty and integrity in their speech and actions. James, with a look of earnestness in his eyes, speaks passionately about the need for their words to be truthful and consistent, emphasizing the value of keeping one's promises and letting their "yes" be yes, and their "no" be no. The atmosphere in the room is one of deep contemplation and reverence as they seek to live out their faith in a world that often challenges their beliefs.

## What is James 5:12 about?

This verse from the Book of James encourages us to be people of integrity and honesty in our words and actions. It reminds us of the importance of being truthful and reliable in our commitments. The verse is reminding us to speak straightforwardly and plainly by saying “let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ be no.” It challenges us to be people of our word, where our yes means yes and our no means no, without the need for elaborate explanations or justifications.

Imagine a world where everyone honored their promises and commitments without any ambiguity or deception. How would our relationships, both personal and professional, be impacted if we could always trust each other’s words to be true and reliable? We build a reputation of trustworthiness and credibility and contribute to a more honest and transparent society by embodying the principle of letting our yes be yes and our no be no. Let us strive to be people of integrity, reflecting our true intentions and values in our words, fostering deeper connections and stronger bonds with those around us.

James 5:12 serves as a poignant reminder about the importance of integrity in our speech. **It’s a call to be straightforward and honest, avoiding unnecessary oaths that might compromise our integrity. This verse centers on the principle that our words should be trustworthy on their own, without the need for additional assurances.**

## Key Phrases and Their Meanings

1. It is startling that James begins this verse with, “**Above all else.**” This has a number of possibilities as to what was to be put in a lower priority:

**Above all else** is connected the previous verses in context. Above all else is in context suffering, patience and endurance which was permeating the Christian church. That honesty should come with an understanding of the ultimate outcome of the Lord’s dealings. It is referring to the examples of the prophets and Job. So therefore the admonition of James 5:12 was about the comprehension of both the path and the ultimate judgement.

**Above all else** is connected to the entirety of the writing of James. It alone should stand in the highest priority over all else. The personal responsibility of being truthful is more important than all the other admonitions given previously.

James was setting a singular characteristic as the **premiere marker of Christian character**. Honesty must come before any other attitude, or action. It is a universal maxim. It makes little difference all the things you do, if you are not honest about your motives, aims, and purposes.

2. “**Do not swear**” There have been two inferences taken and often used to understand this DON’T.

**Profanity:** In English, the word “swear” can refer to profanity. While James here is not referring directly to profanity, it is important for our study to understand our Christian responsibility. The Bible strictly forbids using the

name of the Lord in any profane way. (Exodus 20:7) **“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”**

Because God is holy and fully aware of the use of our tongue, I believe this includes the use of euphemisms which are inoffensive expression that replaces an offensive one. Note what the Oxford Dictionary states about the following words: “golly” is a euphemism for God; “gosh” is used as a euphemism for God.

Though cursing is not using God’s name in vain, Christians ought not to curse either. Words like hell, bloody and ass if used for emphasis are curse words. These and the other foul curse words of our day should never come for the lips of a Christian. This includes other euphemisms like “darn” which is a euphemism for damn; “heck” which is a euphemistic alteration of hell.

The word “**swear**” can also refer to an **oath**. The Greek definition means, to affirm, promise, or threaten with an oath. This is how it is frequently used in the Bible. I believe this is the primary use that James had in mind. James was repeating what Jesus had stated in his Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5:34-37) **“But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne:” (35) “Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.” (36) “Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.” (37) “But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”**

3. **“Or any other oath”** - Jews of the first century frequently used various oaths to back up their statements. They were careful though not to use the name of God in their oaths, lest they blaspheme God. Jesus said that using things that God created (e.g., heaven, earth, your head) in an oath was no less an offence to Him than using His name.

The Jews claimed that swearing oaths were okay as long as they did not include God’s name. The Jews of James’ time made distinctions between “binding oaths” and ‘non-binding oaths. Oaths that did not include the name of God were considered non-binding, and to use such oaths was a way of ‘crossing your fingers’ behind your back when telling a lie. It is these kinds of oaths that James condemns.”

What then does this command forbid when he uses the words **“Do Not”**?

As stated above when James uses the words “above all things”. By this, he gives this command a place of importance. The emphasis is that both James and Jesus was adamant that you were not to do something. It was forbidding making oaths in daily conversation which used things God created to emphasize one’s truthfulness. But is there a place any place of exception?

However, does this forbid taking an oath in a court of law? I don’t believe so. Here is why. Abraham made such oaths (Ge 21:24). Jacob swore oaths (Ge 50:5). The O.T. Law prescribed such swearing. (Deuteronomy 6:13) **“Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.”**

Other examples: (Leviticus 19:12) **“And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.”** (Deuteronomy 10:20) **“Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name.”**

Using an oath in conversation overlooks God’s demand for honesty. We should not need to add oaths to our statements. That brings us to our fourth point.

4. The phrase **“let your ‘Yes’ be yes, and your ‘No,’ no”** emphasizes simplicity and honesty. It suggests that our words should be reliable and straightforward. The instruction to avoid “swearing” by anything indicates a caution against making promises we might not keep, thus maintaining a clear and honest communication.

How can we let our ‘yes’ be ‘yes’? James is emphasizing the importance of being people of our word in the verse. When we commit to something and say “yes,” our word should hold weight and be reliable. It means that our agreements and promises should be sincere and trustworthy. We are called to live with integrity and honesty in all that we do by letting our “yes” be “yes.” To let our “yes” be “yes” means that we should strive to carry out our commitments and promises faithfully. It requires us to communicate clearly and truthfully, so that others can trust in our word. This verse serves as a reminder to be people of our word and to honor our commitments with integrity. We demonstrate our integrity and sincerity in our communication by letting our “yes” be “yes.” It is a call to be consistent in our words and actions, reflecting the truthfulness and trustworthiness of our character. This verse challenges us to be people who speak truthfully and act with honesty, showing respect for others through the reliability of our word.

## Application

Think about James 5:12—commit to truth and integrity in every word you speak. In a world like ours, overwhelmed with deceit—at work, with family—let your yes be a solid yes, and your no a firm no. Act as the beacon of honesty and reliability we so desperately need. Will you step up and be that shining example of truth?

In a truthful culture we have an expectation of honest honesty. At issue is our culture has become so dishonest and has become like the Jews of James’ day by hedging the truth. Lying had become so common place that every word spoken was viewed with suspect. There was no expectation of honesty. A more current example was stated by President Bill Clinton when he was trying to justify his words of innocence with a young intern said, “It depends upon your definition of is, is.” Oaths were often commonplace and there was no expectation of truth. The frequent oaths that were being made at this time were proof of the prevalence of lying in that society. Having to make an oath as proof that you can’t be trusted.

It seems to be difficult for me to understand. If I am a Christian, if I am living up to the standards of my Lord, if I am living the life God is expecting of me, WHY would I need to preface my remarks with “This is the truth”?

It seems unusual to hear people in a Christian circles to preference their remarks with, “let me tell you the truth here” or “honestly” or “in reality.”

John Calvin said many years ago, “there seems to be a lessening of honesty in our society not a lie. He further stated “the habit of some, while not being outright liars, but to hedging the truth to personal advantage.

A white lie is still a lie. A fib is still a lie, stretching the truth is still a lie. False news in the name of a personal point of view is still a lie. You may well justify them in your own mind, but every time you are breaking the **above all else**.

The admonishment here is we are to tell the truth all the time and anytime you find yourself constantly swearing that what you're saying is the truth it creates a suspicion the rest of the time. Above all do this first then move on to all the other things the

We often talk about marriage vows and even a when we have baby dedications in the church, we make a vow that we will do our duty as the child is being raised. and how and why do we break that vow?

The very nature of a Christian is one of honesty. Honesty to God. Honesty to self. Honesty to other Christians. And further honesty to those who can do you no good.

## Concluding thought

It is impossible for others to fully comprehend the intricacies of your life. They cannot discern between your truth, embellishments, or outright falsehoods. People are unaware of whether you are successful or struggling financially, nor do they know about your personal challenges and anxieties. They may claim to have an understanding of you, but this perception is often inaccurate. Their assumptions about you are flawed and filled with uncertainty.

Although people might doubt you or perceive you in a better light than themselves, they do not possess the complete picture of your reality. The truth is known only to you and perhaps to a higher power. If someone wished to truly understand your perspective, they would need to experience life as you do, which is impossible. Regardless of how close one becomes to another, there will always be a gap in understanding.

The greatest deception is not what we convey to others, but the lies we tell ourselves. These self-deceptions eventually catch up with us. We convince ourselves that there are minimal consequences, that we will never be held accountable, and that our secrets can be taken to the grave. This false sense of security haunts us, disturbs our peace, and affects our interactions with those we have deceived.

We justify withholding the truth by believing it would cause too much pain, primarily to ourselves. We downplay the significance of our lies and rationalize that

there is no need to address past falsehoods. However, deep down, we know that despite our attempts at self-deception, the ultimate truth remains beyond our manipulation.