

JAMES

CHAPTER FIVE

CONDEMNATION OF THE RICH

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you” James 5:1

- **James mentioned the rich a number of times in this book (either overtly or indirectly)**
 - “Let the rich glory in his humiliation (Jam 1:10)
 - “If there should come into your assembly” a rich man... “Do not the rich oppress you...” (Jam 2:2, 6)
 - Those who lust for pleasure (Jam 4:1-6)
 - The business man who is presumptuous about his life (Jam 4:13-16)
- **And in today’s lesson, he condemns those who are rich and are wicked (Jam 5:1-6)**

CONDEMNATION OF THE RICH

Riches are not, in and of themselves, a sin. They are a blessing from God to be enjoyed and are to be used to help others. “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. ¹⁸Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, ¹⁹storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1Tim 6:17-18)



CONDEMNATION OF THE RICH

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you” James 5:1

- **They can become a major distraction** – “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:14)
- **They can lead to a false confidence** – Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ --and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich...” (Rev 3:17-18; also 1Tim 6:17-18).
- **They can pose a strong temptation to sin:**
 - In the way they are obtained – “Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out” (James 5:4).
 - In the way they are used (or not used) – “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matt 6:19-20; also 1Tim 6:17-18).

THE CHRISTIANS' 402K



- To invest for your families' current and future physical needs is a wise and godly thing to do (1Tim 5:8).
- Surely those of James 5:5-6 did this.
- But there is a need beyond this life – one that occurs after even the richest 401K runs out of funds – This investment pays out for all eternity beginning at the judgment day with a pay-out that is generous and everlasting.
- **And the rich of chapter 5 had invested nothing in this account!**

WHERE CAN CHRISTIANS INVEST THEIR MONEY FOR THE BEST RETURN?

- “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but **lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Mt 6:19-20).
- “So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”’ ²⁰But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’²¹ **“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”** (Luke 12: 13-21; esp. v20-21).
- “...So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, **make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home** ... “Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust **the true riches?**” (Luke 16:1-13; esp. v9).
- “So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and **you will have treasure in heaven**; and come, follow Me” (Luke 18:22).
- “... **storing up for themselves a good foundation** for the time to come” (1Tim 6:18).

WHERE CAN CHRISTIANS INVEST THEIR MONEY FOR THE BEST RETURN?

So how do we make this high-payback investment?

- By divesting yourself of all worldly possessions like a monk?
- By refusing to seek any opportunity to prosper in this world?

No!

- Instead, use whatever you have, whether little or much, as God has commanded. For example ...
 - Provide for our families (1Tim 5:8)
 - Contribute to the church (1Cor 16:1)
 - Pay taxes (Rom 13:6)
 - Help others (1Tim 6:17-18)

WHERE CAN CHRISTIANS INVEST THEIR MONEY FOR THE BEST RETURN?

- The rich men invested in “treasures in the last days” although they did not know it (v3). This investment was to pay out in a burning fire.
- The riches in this life witnessed against them:
 - They were “heaped up” and not used to do good (v3, 5)
 - They were gained through cheating laborers and murdering the just (v4, 6)



THE BOTTOM LINE

- All men have some material goods. Some have a lot!
- Whether they have little or much, if they are smart, they will invest it so as to get the very best return.
 - An investment in the stock market, an luxury car, exotic vacations, etc. may give a pleasant return – but the payback period will be short.
 - An investment in spiritual things can result in a glorious and everlasting payback.

NT PASSAGES ON SWEARING

- “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,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.” (Jam 5:12).
- “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ ³⁴But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matt 6:33-37).
- “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.’ ¹⁷Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? ¹⁸And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.’ ¹⁹Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? ²⁰Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. ²¹He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. ²²And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it” (Matt 23:16-22).

DEFINITION OF SWEARING

- Swearing can mean to use profane oaths or language: (1) as an exclamation, (2) to curse, blaspheme, or using abusive, violent, or blasphemous language. **But this is not the meaning in James 5:22**
- It is a verbal tool used by men to make themselves more believable:
 - To affirm, assert, say, or promise with great emphasis or earnestness – often while invoking some sacred being or object as a witness or guarantee.
 - To make a solemn declaration or affirmation using an oath in order to add force, validity, or solemnity to the statement or affirmation: “I really did get two holes in one in a row; I swear it – hand on the Bible!”
 - To bind oneself by oath to accomplish some that that has been promised: “I swear on my mother’s grave that I will pay you back by January.”

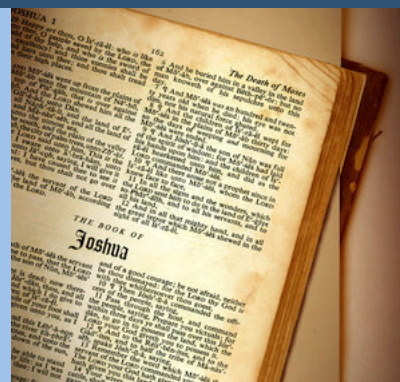
Bible Definition – “For men indeed **swear by the greater**, and an **oath for confirmation** is for them an **end of all dispute**.¹⁷ Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, **confirmed it by an oath**” (Heb 6:13-20, esp. v16-17).

THE ‘POWER’ OF SWEARING

Keener's commentary on Matthew explains the historical context of Bible passages on swearing. “All ancient societies viewed oath-taking as dangerous, since they essentially called upon a deity to execute vengeance if the oath was not fulfilled.”

So the power of swearing and oaths was in the assumption that the swearer would be afraid to break his oath and thus would be more likely to be truthful.

Bible Example. – “¹⁸But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers. ¹⁹Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, “We have sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them.”²⁰This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them.” (Jos 9:18-20).



SWEARING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Godly people of the OT swore with no indication of rebuke by God:

- Abraham (Gen 21:23-24)
- Abraham's servant (Gen 24:3)
- Jacob (Ge 31:53)
- Moses (Jos 14:9)
- Rahab and the spies (Jos 2:12)
- David (Psm 132:1)
- Ezra (Ezr 10:5)
- Angels (Da 12:7)

The Lord Himself swore on many occasions (Ge 22:16; Ex 6:8; Num 32:10, Jer 12:16)

Swearing (oaths) were regulated in the OT (Lev 5:4, 6:5;

- "And you shall not swear by My name falsely" (Lev 19:12)
- He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully" (Ps 24:4).
- "How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken Me And sworn by those that are not gods" (Jer 5:7).
- "If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word" (Num 30:2).

Conclusion: Swearing was permitted in the Old Testament

SWEARING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Old Testament scriptures record that God and a host of godly men swore and made oaths. It is clear that, at least in this dispensation, swearing was not prohibited.

But what about in the Christian dispensation?

- We know that some things permitted then are prohibited now (e.g., instrumental music).
- And the words of Jesus in Matt 23:16 and James in Jam 5:12 seem to prohibit any swearing.

DISAPPROVED SWEARING IN OT AND NT

- **Swearing By Idols** – “How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by those that are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, Then they committed adultery And assembled themselves by troops in the harlots’ houses” (Jer 5:7).
- **Stupid or Thoughtless Oaths** – (a) “And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, “If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, ³¹then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’S, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”(Jud 11:29-30) (b) “Now the men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, “None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife” (Jud 21:1). (c) “Or if a person thoughtlessly takes an oath to do anything, whether good or evil—in any matter one might carelessly swear about—even though he is unaware of it, in any case when he learns of it he will be guilty” (Leviticus 5:4).
- **Lying or Deceiving Oaths** – (a) “Then he [Peter] began to curse and swear, saying, “I do not know the Man!” Immediately a rooster crowed” (Matt 26:74). (b) “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it’ ... (Matt 23:16-22).
- **Oaths to Do Sin** – (a) The Jews swore to eat nothing until they killed Paul (Acts 23:14). (b) Herod swore to give Herodias’ daughter anything she wanted – including John’s head (Mark 6:22-23).
- **Broken Oaths** – “If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word” (Num 30:2).

SWEARING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- **Jesus** was asked to swear – “⁶³But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, “I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God! ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, “It is as you said” (Matt 26:63-64).
- **The angel** of Rev 10:5 and 26 swore by the name of God.
- **Paul** may have sworn in these passages: (a) “I assure you before God that what I am writing to you is no lie” (Gal 1:20). (b) “Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth” (2Cor 1:23). (c) For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers” (Rom 1:9).
- **Regulation (or prohibition) of swearing** – Matt 5:33, 23:16-22 and James 5:12

“DO NOT SWEAR AT ALL” (Matt 5:33-37)

But what about NT passages on swearing? Is their purpose to control swearing by defining unacceptable swearing? Or is it to prohibit swearing all together?

Jesus said, “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’³⁴ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne;³⁵ nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.³⁶ Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.³⁷ But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matt 5:33-37).

- Some thought that an oath in God’s name was binding but the crafty use of language could result in an oath that sounded binding but was not. Jesus had this deceptive practice in mind in this passage (see Matt 23:16-22).
- Jesus is not rewriting the OT rules about oaths. Instead, He is calling for the honesty that God wants and not just a flawed commitment to what they thought was the letter of the Law (Matt 5:17-18).
 - “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord’– and have interpreted this to mean that an oath not specifically mentioning the Lord is not binding allowing you to lie and break your promises...’
 - “But I say to you, do not swear at all ...” in this deceptive manner. Be people of honesty whose statements and promises can be accepted as true without such gimmicks. [This is one interpretation. Some think all swearing is prohibited]

“ABOVE ALL, DO NOT SWEAR” (Jam 5:12)

James said, “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,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.” (Matt 5:33-37).

- James words seem to refer back to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5 and 23. Perhaps the underlying concern about honesty is the same. If so, perhaps the prohibition is against deceptive oaths rather than all oaths.
- The unanimous opinion of all commentaries consulted was in favor of the above interpretation.
- These “perhaps” are harder stretches for me in view of James’s language: “do not swear ... with any ... oath”

Sorry but I must leave it there for your further study – Remember Paul’s admonition to “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Tim 2:15 JKV).

What do you think?

SWEARING IN WITNESSES

"In general, the oath by a witness attempts to fulfill validity through three means: including God as a witness, placing psychological stress on the individual's conscience, and most importantly, instilling harsh punishments for lying under oath."

In California:

"You do solemnly state that the testimony you may give in the cause now pending before this court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God." Or ...

"You do solemnly state, under penalty of perjury, that the testimony you may give in the cause now pending before this court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

In Delaware:

Before testifying, all witnesses are required by some solemn act as an oath or affirmation to evidence an intention to speak the truth. The oath impresses upon the witness the obligation to tell the truth and the danger of a perjury penalty. The statutory form of oath in Delaware has the witness place his or her right hand upon a Bible and swear upon the "Holy Evangelists Of Almighty God. A person may also be permitted to swear by raising up his or her right hand and swearing "by the ever-living God, the searcher of all hearts, that etc.," and stating at the end of the oath "as I shall answer to God at the Great Day." A person conscientiously scrupulous of taking an oath may be permitted, instead of swearing solemnly, sincerely and truly, to declare and affirm to the truth of the matters to be testified...

IN THE FACE OF SUFFERING ...

"⁸ You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ... ¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. ¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. ¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months" (Jam 5:13-17)

WAIT

PRAY

SHARE

“YOU ALSO BE PATIENT”

“Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart: wait, I say, on the LORD” (PSA 27:14).

Patient – to be of a long spirit, not to lose heart; to persevere patiently and bravely in enduring misfortunes and troubles

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. ⁸You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

⁹Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. ¹¹Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” (Jam 5:7-11).

PRAY, PRAY, PRAY!

¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.

¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

¹⁵And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

¹⁶Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

¹⁸And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Whether afflicted by suffering, sickness, or sin, pray, pray, pray!

“God ... gives to all liberally and without reproach” (Jam 1:5)

Not just prophets or ‘super Christians’

Not a miracle

SHARE WITH OTHERS

¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.

¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

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Whether afflicted by suffering, sickness, or sin, association with other Christian can provide relief.

⁹Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. ¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. ¹¹Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone?

¹²Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecc 4:9-12).

“RESCUE THE PERISHING”

“¹⁹Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, ²⁰let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” (Jam 5:19, 20).

- Such “wandering” is all too frequent – especially in the face of suffering.
- We are to try to prevent such failures (Heb 2:13) and to correct them when they occur (Gal 6:1-2).
- What a wonderful work!
 - “Save[s] a soul from death!”
 - Causes his sins to be hidden and forgiven

DO NOT USE

- ABOVE ALL, DO NOT SWEAR**
- But I say unto you, swear not at all,.... Which must not be understood in the strictest sense, as though it was not lawful to take an oath upon any occasion, in an affair of moment, in a solemn serious manner, and in the name of God; which may be safely done: but of rash swearing, about trivial matters, and by the creatures; as appears by what follows, Gill
 - But I say unto you, Swear not at all - That is, in the manner which he proceeds to specify. Swear not in any of the common and profane ways customary at that time. (Barnes)
 - The apostle here particularly forbids these oaths, as well as all swearing in common conversation. But he does not forbid the taking a solemn oath before a magistrate. (Wesley)
 - but how many make light of common profane swearing! Such swearing expressly throws contempt upon God's name and authority.
 - 3660 -to swear; to affirm, promise, threaten, with an oath; in swearing to call a person or thing as witness, to invoke, swear by
 - Craig Keener said, "Human cultures developed oaths because people could not trust their neighbors without calling an avenging deity to witness; but those who recognize that God witnesses every word must speak and act from integrity of heart that transcends such formalities."
 - Oaths normally invoked God as the guarantor of the person's word, and it was this which made it so serious a matter to break them: it was a misuse of God's name (Exod. 20:7), a profanation (Lev. 19:12). In response some Jews had already developed the habit, which underlies much of our "social swearing" today, of finding more innocuous substitutes for the actual name of God; here Jesus lists oaths by heaven, earth, Jerusalem, and one's own head, while in 23:16-22 he will add a further list (the temple, the gold of the temple, the altar, and the gift on the altar). Such casuistry . . . receives very short shrift since heaven, earth, and Jerusalem are inseparably linked with God as his dwelling and possession.
- Just as we do today, the people in Jesus' times didn't take oaths seriously but rather offered them casually, much like our common saying, "I swear on my mother's grave." This attitude provokes Jesus' words, "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" ([Matthew 5:34-36](#)).
- Jesus attacks lame attempts at avoiding a solemn promise to God. Therefore, in this context, Jesus' purpose seems to be more about correcting false ideas about oaths than it is about rewriting the Old Testament and changing the law. As with all of his "You have heard it said, but I say to you" sayings, Jesus points us to the true intent of the law through the mountain of misconceptions.
- Oaths were basically a necessary evil before Christ due to the sinfulness of humanity. But in the new order, in the kingdom of God, there is no need for oaths. There is no darkness in the children of light—they speak the truth.
- "Much of oath-taking in Jesus' day [had become a tool](#) which, in the hands of the clever and manipulative, fostered the diametrical opposite of the divine intention of the oath."
- Jesus, then, uses hyperbole to make his point. The intention of the law was not that humans would create ways around it but rather that they would be truthful in their speech.
- The basic idea is that oaths, ["should not be needed"](#), but in practice they serve a remedial purpose in a world where the ethics of the kingdom of heaven are not always followed."
- I was a kid, we used to say, "cross my heart, hope to die, if I tell a lie," and if you were really serious you'd add to that, "stick a needle in my eye." But there was a way out of it. Provided you had your fingers crossed when you were talking, then that would mean your oath didn't count and you could tell a lie without having to die or get a needle stuck in your eye. Of course, the other kids might see you crossing your fingers, so you'd cross them behind your back, or under the table or somewhere they couldn't be seen. The whole thing was that even for us kids, there were two standards of truth. The normal one, which was pretty low, and then if you said something after saying this "cross my heart" business, then you really had to tell the truth. And the implication is that if you didn't say "cross my heart" and so on, then it didn't really matter if you told a lie - or well, didn't tell a bad lie anyway, maybe just a little white lie, then it was okay.
- And it's not just kids who do that. We adults do it too. We don't say "cross my heart" and so on, but we say other things like "honest to God." We know that if someone says "honest to God," they must really be telling the truth. And it somehow means that if you don't say "honest to God," well perhaps you don't have to quite as

"ABOVE ALL, DO NOT SWEAR"

Just as we do today, the people in Jesus' times didn't take oaths seriously but rather offered them casually, much like our common saying, "I swear on my mother's grave." This attitude provokes Jesus' words, "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" ([Matthew 5:34-36](#)).

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I was a kid, we used to say, "cross my heart, hope to die, if I tell a lie," and if you were really serious you'd add to that, "stick a needle in my eye." But there was a way out of it. Provided you had your fingers crossed when you were talking, then that would mean your oath didn't count and you could tell a lie without having to die or get a needle stuck in your eye. Of course, the other kids might see you crossing your fingers, so you'd cross them behind your back, or under the table or somewhere they couldn't be seen. The whole thing was that even for us kids, there were two standards of truth. The normal one, which was pretty low, and then if you said something after saying this "cross my heart" business, then you really had to tell the truth. And the implication is that if you didn't say "cross my heart" and so on, then it didn't really matter if you told a lie - or well, didn't tell a bad lie anyway, maybe just a little white lie, then it was okay.

And it's not just kids who do that. We adults do it too. We don't say "cross my heart" and so on, but we say other things like "honest to God." We know that if someone says "honest to God," they must really be telling the truth. And it somehow means that if you don't say "honest to God," well perhaps you don't have to quite as truthful. A little exaggeration, a little white lie, that's okay. But you only have to tell the whole truth if you say "honest to God" or something like that.

It's even legalised. If you are in court giving evidence, they make you swear on the Bible, as though swearing on the Bible is a truth machine and will make you tell the truth more than if you didn't swear on the Bible. And if you do witness in court and lie, then that's called perjury and that's much worse than lying outside of court. You can go to jail for perjury. You can say a lie out of court in normal everyday life and nothing will happen to you, but the same lie in court in the witness box - and it's jail for you.

Jesus goes beyond the letter of the law. He goes to the thoughts and intents and the deepest recesses of who we really are, and He calls us to purity of mind, as well as action. And now He does the same with oaths and lying. Jesus goes beyond the letter of the law. He goes to the thoughts and intents and the deepest recesses of who we really are, and He calls us to purity of mind, as well as action. And now He does the same with oaths and lying.

Leviticus 19:12 You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

In this verse the Israelites were told not to swear falsely. Now to swear falsely meant that you made an oath, a promise in God's name, and then you didn't keep it. That's what a false oath is.

"ABOVE ALL, DO NOT SWEAR"

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Yep, they said, the Law tells us that when we swear by God's name then we must keep our vows. But then they thought that meant that if you didn't swear by God's name, well then, the standard of truth wasn't quite so high. So what they did was that instead of swearing by God's name, they'd swear by other things that weren't quite as important as God.

Many of the people back then thought they could get off the hook from having to tell the complete truth by taking an oath by heaven rather than by God. But Jesus says, well you want to swear by heaven, well heaven is God's throne, so it's as good as swearing by God's name.

In other words, don't use oaths. Don't swear by anything, because you shouldn't need to. It doesn't say only tell the truth when you are under oath, but tell the truth all the time. You shall not lie to one another.

As Christians we must be people of the truth, people whose word can be counted on, relied on all the time. That applies when we fill out our tax return. When we fill in our time sheets at work. When we tell the wife where we were when we were late home.

Well, my personal take on that is, that we have not chosen ourselves to swear on the Bible in court, or to fill in a stat dec. That is a requirement that others put on us, and so I personally don't think there's a problem with swearing on the Bible in court or filling in a stat dec, because it's not us who is making that requirement. Provided we have the same attitude that what I say in court after I've sworn on the Bible, and what I write in a stat dec, is no more truthful than anything else I say or write. Because whenever I speak, wherever it is, whatever promise I make, my "yes" is "yes" and my "no" is "no," and I can't make it any more truthful than that.

Christ, therefore, meant nothing more than this, that all oaths are unlawful, which in any way abuse and profane the sacred name of God, for which they ought to have had the effect of producing a deeper reverence.

“ABOVE ALL, DO NOT SWEAR”

The theme of this verse is not dirty language but swearing an oath, calling on the name of God - or a substitute for God - to endorse that one is saying the truth, or that one will keep one's word.

Today we don't make oaths placing our hands under the thigh of another or raising our hand to heaven. Now people raise their right hands in some countries, or put their hands upon the Bible, or on a cross. A Jew will often take an oath with his head covered. Men will say, "I swear to tell the truth" or they will utter the words, "I do, so help me God." Whatever the exact language of the oath the essence of such solemn swearing is the same as the Bible.

"The oath is swearing with appeal to the name of God, who serves as witness that a person is speaking the truth or intends to fulfill a vow"

So swearing an oath should be done very very seldom. If the judge, or the law of the land, or the nation asks us to swear an oath that is acceptable, but it is hideous to lace our speech with oaths, dragging God's name in for the purpose making us the great raconteurs and centers of attention. Phrases like "God help us", "As God is my witness", "So help me God" - we can do without because all they do is cheapen God's holy name.

Think of the words of Jesus, "Verily verily I say unto you" or "I tell you the truth" (cp. Matt 5:26) and how often did the Lord use the word 'amen'. Then the apostle will summon God as his witness and will place himself before the face of God: "I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie" (Gals. 1:20), and, "I call God as my witness" (2 Cors. 1:23). We even read of an angel in Revelation 10 verses 5 to 7 who with uplifted hand, swore an oath to God. So we take those references and we conclude that whatever James is saying he is not teaching that every swearing of an oath is prohibited.

These religious men in Jesus' day knew that if they swore an oath invoking the name of the Lord then they were bound by it, so in order to avoid that they would swear "by heaven" or "by the earth" or "by Jerusalem" or "by my head." They could say words like that and then they need not be so careful about the truth. So oaths had become a means of deception, and Jesus says to them, "Do not swear at all ... Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Matt. 5:36). So it is also with James, writing to the same group of Jewish people to whom such niceties of distinction were second nature. He is rejecting every kind of swearing that uses an oath for pulling a trick on someone.

"Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No,' be no, or you will be condemned" (v.12). This is a demand for plain speaking. You could not believe many of the people of James's day even when they swore oaths on the graves of their parents or that they might drop dead if what they said was not true. It was a civilization in which everybody told lies. The reputation of the inhabitants of the island of Crete was so bad that a proverb about them was quoted by the apostle Paul in the New Testament - "Cretans are always liars" (Titus 1:12), and Paul comments, "This testimony is true." What James is condemning is irreverent swearing, needless swearing, disguised swearing and surreptitious swearing. Men were calling upon the name of God to secure credit for their speech. Their simple word was not enough: their word was suspect. Our Lord and James in our text are pleading for simplicity, honesty, forthrightness of expression in the interest of truth and truthfulness. A simple 'yes' or 'no' should be enough for credit.

“ABOVE ALL, DO NOT SWEAR”

Freedom: From having to go to an extreme to prove that what we say is indeed true.

Defined: Swear-- "Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument." (Heb. 6:16). "The original meaning of the oath lay in the guaranteeing of one's word" (New Int'l Dict. of New Testament Theol. 3:738). Swearing produces an oath. "Swearing" as used in Matt. 5 by Jesus is not profanity or filthy language, as swearing generally means.

What is wrong is the tendency to pervert oaths—twisting them to give the appearance of honesty, in order to deceive.

Woe to you, blind guides! You say, "If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath." You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?

In the USA we can either swear to or "affirm" the truth of our statements. The very fact that we put people "under oath" before God testifies to our sinfulness. There shouldn't be two standards of veracity—what we say normally and what we say in court. Affirming that we'll be truthful is not making an oath by something. It is the writer's judgment that to affirm that we are going to tell the truth is not essentially different from what the apostle Paul said when he affirmed that he was telling the truth (Rom. 1:9; 1 Tim. 2:7). The law of the United States permits affirmation, that is, saying "Yes" or "No"—without raising the hand to swear.

This scriptural instruction is not meant to imply that oaths by themselves are sin. To emphasize that we mortal human beings are often powerless to fulfill even our strongest intentions, God commands us not to swear by His name in any oath. Failing to fulfill an oath would be taking God's name in vain, breaking the third commandment (Exodus 20:7 - "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.").

What is being condemned in the NT verses is not oath-taking per se, but flippant, casual oaths. The words "at all" in Matthew come from holos, which can mean simply, "not at all," but can also mean "commonly." The NT is condemning people who treat oaths with contempt by making them thoughtlessly.

Keener's commentary on Matthew (192ff) explains the historical context of these passages. All ancient societies viewed oath-taking as dangerous, since they essentially called upon a deity to execute vengeance if the oath was not fulfilled. A flippant or false oath was in a real sense a blasphemy, a casual misuse of the name of God.

The Greek philosopher Pythagoras and others similarly taught, "let one's word carry such conviction that one need not call deities to witness." In the context of Jesus' own day, there existed a "popular abuse" of oath-taking in which surrogate objects were introduced to swear by, so as not to profane the divine name-- things like the right hand, Jerusalem, God's throne, and the head. Jesus also addresses this practice in his directive not to swear on such objects, as some thought it easier to break an oath if they swore on something inanimate rather than God. What we therefore have here is an example of Jesus not disagreeing with the OT about oaths, but rather moving beyond the OT into an even more demanding standard that focuses on motivation rather than action (in the same manner as the "adultery in the heart" directive).