

James 5:12 The Sanctity of Truth

Let me begin by saying that we do not know the direct context of James' prohibition against oaths. The Bible allows for oaths in some circumstances. God himself says to disobedient Israel in the desert: **"As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest'"** (Heb. 3:11, 18). And then concerning Abraham we read in Heb. 6:13-14: **"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 in other places the people of God make oaths (Heb. 6:16; See also Lev. 19:12). Apparently during Jesus time, oath taking was very popular and they were making oaths using lesser grounds than God himself. In Matt. 23:16-18 Jesus says: **"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.'"** We've often heard the words, *"I swear to God."* Or, *"I swear on my mother's grave"* etc. And, at some level James readers were doing the same. So James merely repeats the words of Jesus who also says in the sermon on the mount: **"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' 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'; anything more than this comes from evil . . ."**

With all this said, the principle behind this verse is this: As Christians our speech should be truthful so that when we say, "yes," we mean "yes." And when we say, "no," we mean "no." **TELL THE TRUTH!** With this in mind, I would like to preach a short sermon on the sanctity of truth. Truth is sacred. And though it can be denied, it cannot be changed. What is true is true. Have you heard the story of George Washington (which may very well be a myth)? He was given a hatchet by his father and he injured a cherry tree and when his father asked him if he did it, he said, "I cannot tell a lie." True or not true, the principle is still the same. There is such a thing as truth, and we should not deny it. Today, when I hear the news and when I hear the talk shows, I am reminded of Prov. 18:2 that says, **"A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion."** If you've watched any political debates, you may wonder "who is concerned with truth." It seems to me that in our recent past in this country, we could disagree and then come together and discuss our differences based on values of truth. This doesn't appear to be the case at this particular time in our country. Nevertheless, truth is still It is sacred and unchangeable. This is why when I preach sermons, I usually say, **"Brothers and sisters, I have 3 truths from this text."** We believe in truth. We stand on the truth. And the truth will eventually win. With this in mind, I want to speak topically this morning on the sanctity of truth which will give us a foundation for our understanding of truth. I have two parts (truths) and some applications. (For this truth, see especially John Murray *Principles of Conduct*, cp. 6.)

1. God is true. We often hear the words, *"All truth is God's truth."* Why? Because God himself is true and all truth is derived from Him. God is the definition of truth. He cannot be otherwise. To say that "God is," is to say that "God is true." When we say God is holy, we also say God is true. It is who He is. The Apostle John speaks often about God being true. And his emphasis

isn't that God is true and everything else is false. When he says that "God is true" his emphasis is not on a comparison of right and wrong, true and false, so much as he is emphasizing that God, in his essence, is unique. He is altogether different than his creation. He says, "*We should bear in mind that 'the true' in the usage of John is not so much the true in contrast with the false, or the real in contrast with the fictitious. It is the absolute as contrasted with the relative, the ultimate as contrasted with the derived, the eternal as contrasted with the temporal, the permanent as contrasted with the temporary, the complete in contrast with the partial, the substantial in contrast with the shadowy.*" I believe this is what James means in 1:17 where he says, "**Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.**"

Please turn with me to John 17:3. In his high priestly prayer Jesus says, "**And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent . . .**" In these words, Jesus is giving the ultimate respect and recognition to his deity. We can say nothing higher than this: "*He is the only true God.*" Jesus is saying that the Father is ultimate. He is self-existent, self-subsistent, and eternal. God is truth in the ULTIMATE and HIGHEST sense.

Now, it is with the thought that I must ask, "*What does it mean when Jesus says in the 2nd part of 17:3 which says 'and Jesus Christ whom you have sent?'*" It is clear. What is true about God is true about Jesus. This is how we must understand John 1:1 which says, "**In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word was God . . .**" In 1 John 5:20 John says, "**And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.**" In this regard Jesus says, "**Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me . . .**"

We must also note that the Holy Spirit is also "true" in the same way. The Holy Spirit is often called the "Spirit of truth." He is not merely a "spirit" of a particular kind of truth, or a "spirit" that merely leads people to the truth. He also is TRUE in the same way the Father and the Son are TRUE. In John 16:13 Jesus says, "**When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.**" (See also John 14:17; 15:26; Eph. 1:13; 1 John 4:6).

Brothers and sisters, We are of this world, the triune God is not. We are created. God is not. Truth is in our vocabulary to describe something that God himself is. Therefore, this FACT gives rise to EVERYTHING we know to be true. This means we must begin all discussions of truth from this premise: "*He is the true God.*" And I must add . . . God is not one of many gods that also can be called true. He is not one way to the truth. God is not one of many options as a source of truth. He is True . . . Now, with this understanding, let me ask, "How do we know this?" which brings me to my second part.

2. God reveals truth to us. God did not merely create the world and then step back allowing us to figure things out for ourselves. No! He is a God who reveals himself to his people. Here, I must distinguish between two kinds of revelation: general and special.

i. The first is general revelation. This kind of revelation is most directly related to creation. ***“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*** Creation reveals great truths about God. Even if God had not spoken to Adam and Eve, they could have seen the beauty of this world and all God’s creative power and said to themselves, *“Wow! God is great! God is powerful! God is good to make such a place for us to live in. God cares as he provides for us.”* So many truths are revealed in creation. Ps. 19:1 says, **“The heavens declare the glory of God.”** As Paul considers the world he speaks of this kind of revelation. In Rom. 1:19-20 he says: **“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”**

i. The second way God reveals truth is with special revelation. Creation reveals certain things about God, his power, his creativity, his righteousness (Ps. 50:6), his care, his goodness, etc. But, in God’s special revelation we learn more truth. Particularly we learn what God requires of us. How do we know? Well, he speaks. God speaks to us in his word. With Adam and Eve, he came to them and spoke. He gave them specific instructions. And the most important was the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ***“For in the day they eat of it, they would surely die”*** (Gen. 2).

(Let me stop for a second and speak about something very important. Here, we see a test of man’s faithfulness to truth. Would they trust the veracity, the truth of God’s character, given in his words? It is here that the tempter focuses his attention. The serpent says to Eve, ***“Did God really say?”*** (Gen. 3:1). Here he accuses God of clear falsehood. And he is doing the same today as the great deceiver of this world. As God is the God of truth. Satan is the “Father of lies.” In John 8:44 as Jesus speaks to the religious leaders he says, **“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.”**)

Now, back to the Word. God reveals himself through his word. In the word we learn about God and what he requires of us. Ps. 119:160 says, **“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”** 2 Tim. 3:16 says, **“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for re proof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”**

As sinners, we learn from God’s word what it means to be saved, what is required for us to be delivered from our sins. This is the Gospel! Eph. 1:13: **“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit . . .”** It is also the word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit that salvation comes to us. This is what James says, **“Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth . . .”** Brothers and sisters, how beautiful is the word of God to reveal what is true and to bring salvation. To reject the Word of God is to reject the truth! To believe the Word of God is to believe the truth.

Now, also concerning special revelation, God reveals Himself in his Son. Do you remember our first truth about God? To say that God is true is to say that He is unique, different than his

creation. In this way He is transcendent. He is set apart from his creation. But, He is also imminent; He is close. How? He comes down to us so that we may know Him in truth. This is the incarnation. The Son takes on flesh and lives among us. Yet, He does not give up his deity. He is still . . . in essence . . . God. And as concerns our topic of truth, Jesus says, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life . . .”** Jesus does not say, *“I am a truth.”* Or, *“I am a truth among many truths.”* No! He is what he claims to be; the TRUTH, and in the SAME WAY AS GOD. This is how we understand John 1:1 **“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** Jesus says, **“If you’ve seen me you’ve seen the Father”** (John 14:9). Also, John 1:14: **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”** And back to John 17:3: **“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”**

Do you remember Jesus’ trial when Pilate stood before Jesus? **“Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?”** Jesus answered, **“You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”** Pilate said to him, **“What is truth?”** Think about it! The true God was standing before him! God . . . in the flesh . . . the true and faithful witness. And Pilate turned him over to be crucified and allowed a criminal to go free. As Rom. 1 says, He **“exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator . . .”** Brothers and sisters, this is what the world does, they exchange the truth for a lie and instead of loving and worshiping and believing the Son of God, they worship the gifts and the things of this world take priority. They suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18). Beloved, the truth of God is revealed in the Son. This means that ONLY those who look unto the Son possess the truth. 1 John 5:20 says, **“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”** John 3:36: **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”**

It is very simple. To know the Son is to know the Father who is true. So, look unto Him. If you are not a Christian, turn to Christ. Believe in him. Pursue him. Make every effort to be found in him. **“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”** In him ALL the wisdom of God rests and can be found. And without him you will never be satisfied with the lesser truths of this world.

4 Applications:

Application: Do not look unto the things of this world to discover truth. Yes, All truth is God’s truth. And we discover truth in his creation, whether it be science or philosophy or mathematics. But, if we do not begin with God as he has revealed himself in Christ, we will fall short and miss the mark of truth altogether. Miriam Webster contains truth. But she is not THE source of truth. The world can change the meaning of words, but cannot change what is true.

Application: Tell the truth. We read the words, **“Be holy as I am holy.”** In the same way, we must be truthful because God is true. This includes the way we think and the way we live our

lives. And we find an application of how we do this in our speech as we let our yes be yes and our no be no. James 5:17 says: **“But 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.”** We cannot be “holy” as God is holy in the absolute sense. We cannot be true as God is true in the absolute sense. We are creatures. However, in the atonement of Christ, we have everything we need for life and godliness. We are vessels of truth. But, in our actions, we are to be “godly” and we are to be “truthful.”

Application: Speak the truth in love. This is the most loving thing to do. Whether it is to speak to a brother or sister in Christ who is sinning or give a non-Christian the Words of Life and Truth, we must speak the truth in love. James 5:17 says, **“My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”** The truth is the best thing for our world. To know God and his Son is first and foremost. The truth is liberating. It will set us free. It is good for our society.

Application: Know that when you stand up for the truth you will be persecuted. What did the world do to the Lord of Truth? They put him on a cross. And if we will stand for the truth, we also will be persecuted and even killed.