



Oaths--James 5:12

Background Information

- The word *oath* in Hebrew is the word *shebua* (to swear). The Greeks used the word *horkos* (to bind or strengthen). In other words, you strengthen your word by swearing by some higher authority. There were three parts to an oath: testifying to the truth, calling for God to witness, and invoking God's punishment if you violated your word—i.e.: I want you to know I'm telling the truth; I want God to witness I'm telling the truth; and I want God to punish me if I'm not telling the truth. *[John MacArthur]*
- For the initial audience, this addressed a cultural pattern of frivolous oaths mingled in with everyday language. This behavior brought a trivialization of and a devaluation of integrity. Oaths became the present day equivalent of promising one thing and crossing your fingers behind your back. *[R. Kent Hughes]*
- Oaths had become a façade for lying. Swearing by some lesser thing than God did not bind you to keeping the oath. *[Steven J. Cole]*
- This verse does not refer to swearing as in foul language or profane use of the Lord's Name. *[R. Kent Hughes]*

Takeaway Points

- James reiterates Christ's requirement for radical truthfulness which supersedes the requirements of the Law by echoing Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:33-37). *[R. Kent Hughes]*
- This verse serves as a summation of the other teachings about the use and abuse of the tongue. James highlights this prohibition probably because he sees it as getting at the ultimate issues—the personal integrity of a Christian. *[Douglas Moo]*
- On the one hand, oaths themselves are not prohibited; on the other, a believer should not need to take an oath in order to tell the truth. *[Moody Bible Commentary]*
- Since God is truth, any contempt for truth is equally contempt for God. This verse warns us not to be in contempt of God by working at being a person whose yes means yes and no means no. *[Gordon Clark]*