

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, August 2, 2026

Yea Yea, Nay Nay

James 5:12 *"But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation."*

Today we will explore this emphatic command that we let our yea be yea, and our nay be nay. There is a context to these words from our brother James that gives sober and rich instruction which may not be readily apparent on the surface. Before we dive into James 4 and 5, let's look at the words that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke on this topic, in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:33-37 *"33 Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: 34 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."*

Ben preached a sermon series regarding the Sermon on the Mount back in 2019. Below is his exposition of these verses, which gives excellent clarity to the thrust of Jesus' words about oaths, and a requirement of truth in our heart, work and words.

Ben's sermon from 1/20/2019: *'There are several passages in the Old Testament that this refers to. For example, the 3rd of the ten commandments – "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." (Exodus 20:7, Deuteronomy 5:11); "And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD." (Leviticus 19:12); "If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth." (Numbers 30:2). The idea in the Old Testament is clear – you better not tell any lies in the name of God. If you swear by an oath, it should be on serious occasions, and it should be in the name of God. The Pharisees abused these laws by saying that you only had to be honest if you were swearing in the name of God. Otherwise, it was OK to lie. To make an end-run around the law of God, they would swear by a bunch of other things – heaven, earth, Jerusalem, their own heads. They thought if they could swear by something other than God, then it was alright if they weren't being truthful. It's as ridiculous as when you're a little kid, and you cross your fingers behind your back and pretend that that makes your lies and deception*

OK. Jesus disabuses them of their foolishness by saying, “You claim that you are telling the truth, but you’re all liars. Stop playing games with swearing by this and swearing by that, because God sovereignly owns and controls it all, so no matter what you do, you’re swearing by Him. Stop all that kind of swearing; instead, just always tell the truth. Live an honest life so that people can trust your word.” When He says, “swear not at all,” are we to take that absolutely? Is there never a time where it’s appropriate to invoke the name of God in an oath? I don’t think it’s an absolute statement, and the reason is because I see God Himself swearing by an oath (Acts 2:30, Hebrews 6:13-18), I see Jesus Himself speaking under oath (Matthew 26:63-64), and I see Paul calling upon God as a witness (2 Corinthians 1:23, Galatians 1:20, Romans 9:1). Making an oath to God on some solemn occasion can add to the gravity of what you’re saying. And an oath, by the way, is serious – it basically means, “if I’m lying, may God curse me.” But His point in this passage is to tell them to stop swearing in the way that they’ve been doing it. Don’t be frivolous and careless in swearing oaths in your common, everyday conversations. In that type of day-to-day communication, if you want to say “yes”, then say “yes” and mean “yes.” If you want to say “no”, then say “no” and mean “no.” And if you need to add some emphasis on it, say it twice: “yes, yes” or “no, no.” But don’t throw oaths around left and right to accommodate your deceit. If you feel the need to “swear to God” or “call God as your witness” in order to get someone to believe what you’re saying, it’s because you’ve created a situation where everything you say is suspect and nobody can trust you. And that originated in your evil, lying, deceitful heart. The situation that you should rather be in is that your word is sufficient, and you are known as one who tells the truth and is not full of guile. This whole world is full of lies, and energized by Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44). We’re born as liars (Psalm 58:3).’

Ben covers the oath concept well, I will just add these brief thoughts: “On God!”, “I swear to God!”, “On my mama!”, “On all that I love!” - You hear such things when pride is up and conflict is afoot; when men’s actions are driven by their flesh, and they will not be dissuaded from their folly. Words fill the air, but they are meaningless and devoid of logic and reason. When those words fail, violence follows. This is swearing an oath by, or upon, something other than God. My allegiance, and affections, are fixed upon something of the creation, rather than the Creator, and therefore I lie and deceive in order to prop up the standard that I desire. Deadly folly!

Indeed, the world is full of lies that well up in the heart, and then come bursting forth in corrupt deeds and words. We are not immune, beloved! Satan – the murderer, deceiver, adversary, accuser, slanderer – has a full-time industry of deceit with legion fallen angels at his employ. This is not a matter that we can gloss over and hope to overcome by our own wisdom and goodness. It is an ever-present war for us to prayerfully engage with clear eyes on the danger. The deceit industry has experienced a veritable industrial revolution with the internet, social media, and AI at the vanguard. These tools are

poisonous echo chambers that reflect back the prideful, envious, malicious, lust-filled desires of your heart. Beware, dear sheep!

Jeremiah 17:7-10 “7 Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. 8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit. 9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? 10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

Matthew 12:34-37 “34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. 35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. 36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. 37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

The ‘yea’ and ‘nay’ that we owe must therefore NOT be based upon the flesh, which is deceitful, sinful, decaying, and untrustworthy. How can we swear upon, and direct our life upon any such thing? Our yea and nay – our communicated intentions and commitments - must be built upon sincere, truthful desire to obey and please our God. It starts in the heart, and becomes manifest in actions and words. Say what you mean, and mean what you say; then, follow through.

- Our yea and nay should reflect our earnest intent in light of current circumstances and understanding. We commit ourselves to work in faith, and with our might, however, our view and our path should be held loosely as the will of God unfolds before us, and we constantly compare our changing circumstances to His word. More succinctly: we mean what we say, but our plans are subject to change, because “Lord willing” is our continual, joyful reality. Our plans, like our lives, are not our own. We have no power to enforce our will, rather we ask Him to align our will to His in every situation.
 - Consider this interesting passage from 2Corinthians where Paul is responding to the complaints of people in Corinth accusing him of deceiving them because he hadn’t come back to visit them like he “promised”.
 - **2Corinthians 1:15-24** “15 And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit; 16 And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea. 17 When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay?

18 But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. 20 For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. 21 Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; 22 Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. 23 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth. 24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand."

- Our yea and nay – first and foremost - should affirm that which is True – Christ. He is the truth, the way, and the life. He is absolute truth.
 - At it's foundation, our 'yea' should be affirming that which is good and true. *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."* (**Philippians 4:8**) Jesus Christ alone truly fits that description. Our hearts have to be framed upon Him! His Gospel, His commands, His doctrines, His glory, His promises, His judgments and justice, the joy of His salvation – everything that we do and say should arise from that foundation, and should square to it. Does my mindset, desire, actions, and words around a particular topic agree with Christ? If so, then give your yea with simplicity and truth. If not, then look it in the eye and mortify it. Our nay should be denying self, and all of the satan-inspired, sin-corrupted doctrines and principles that arise from it: malice, strife, envy, contention, etc. Placing trust, faith, and promises on the strength and ability of the flesh, or any part of the creation – whether directly swearing by those things, or gradually establishing the course of our life and heart upon them – is deadly sin. This "swearing" is the antithesis of the foundation of Christ.
- Our yea and nay should affirm practical truth.
 - Certainly we should never intentionally lie, nor should we lie by omission of relevant information with an intention to manipulate and deceive.
 - **Proverbs 6:16-19** *"16 These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: 17 A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, 19 A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."*
 - Further, we should zealously guard against speaking rashly and foolishly about things we do not know or understand. The fact is this: for all of the "information" that permeates the literal airwaves around us, we are

incredibly ignorant and gullible. Sifting through all of the deception around us is vanity and vexation of spirit. Don't put stock in it. Don't dwell in the land of assumptions and speculation. Don't spend the strength of your life grinding in the mill of the various sides of the culture wars. We have to do the best we can, which is helped by not being overly invested in anything or anyone that doesn't have a direct interest in Christ. We don't want to take up positions and shill for the morality of wicked men. We have no allegiance to the causes of wicked men, such that we should risk speaking foolishly on their behalf, and bringing forth their arguments and bona-fides.

- **1Peter 2:9-12** *"9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. 11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."*

From here, I want to narrow our focus, because I think that the context of James 4 and 5 speaks to the way that our flesh tends to mistreat our co-elect, and how we are supposed to war against that. This theme is the context of our verse in James 5:12. But ... before we read those chapters, I want to look at one more concept: the scriptures frequently demonstrate that lying arises from a fleshly view of the body of Christ, which results in despising and mistreatment of her. If you are lying and deceiving – if your yea is not truly yea – then you despise and misuse the bride, which is offensive to the bridegroom. All such arises from evil, and puts you at risk of condemnation. Consider these scriptures:

- **Romans 13:13,14** *"13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. 14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."*
- **Ephesians 4:25-32** *"25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. 26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: 27 Neither give place to the devil. 28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. 29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. 30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye*

are sealed unto the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

- **Colossians 3:5-17** *"5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: 6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: 7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. 8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. 9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: 11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. 12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. 14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."*

Finally, let's read through the 4th and 5th chapters of James, through the lens of all that we just discussed:

James 4

"1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? 2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. 3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. 4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. 5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? 6 But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. 9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and

your joy to heaviness. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. 11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another? 13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: 14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. 15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. 16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. 17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

James 5

"1 Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. 3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. 4 Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. 5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. 6 Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you. 7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. 8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. 9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. 10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. 11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. 12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. 13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. 14 Is any sick among you? 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: 15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. 16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. 17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her

fruit. 19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; 20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

- Again, the continuous thread running through these two chapters is the way that we are supposed to treat our co-elect. The way of the flesh is wars and fightings, the pursuit of lustful desires, puffery and pride, evil speaking, rash and hypocritical judging, boasting in the flesh, impatience, and holding grudges. This is the way of ALL flesh. None of us is immune.
- The instruction to let our yea be yea and nay be nay is at a hinge point in the passage: here's the way you are NOT supposed to behave, now let's pivot to the way you ARE supposed to behave. If you are doing any of the fleshly things listed above, then you are grudging and despising your brothers and sisters, which infects everything that you think, do, and say toward them. From that posture, you are unable to speak simplicity and truth in sincerity. You are unable to weep with them, rejoice with them, encourage them, run to their aid, pray for them - your prayer is not effectual.
 - Be present in the circumstance of the moment, emptying yourself of everything but the love that you have for your brother or sister because you are children of the same Father – members of the household of faith. Put your pride away. Rejoice with those that rejoice. Weep with those that weep. Sing and pray together – teach and admonish each other – taking refuge in our God, and seeking His comfort, peace, and guidance in every circumstance. Don't look down upon your co-elect, and don't hold grudges.

I propose to you that there are 3 primary mechanisms that make a person unable to bring forth to their brethren a simple and sincere yea and nay from the heart and the lips.

- **Pride** – When we set up our own standard, over and above God's, then we are bent upon enforcing that standard on the people around us. Therefore, our interactions often filter through a lens of either forcing or manipulating a person that we judge deficient into line with our own human standard. This is pride. We must take great care to recognize that there is God's standard, and everything beyond that is the vanity of our flesh. When something has got you worked up about someone else's behavior, you had better pause and do a careful inspection: is this afoul of God's standard, or my standard? If the latter, then say your piece plainly and in love, then close your mouth, settle your heart in love toward that person, and move on. Anything more than that leads us to hypocrisy and condemnation. In addition, don't work around people to achieve the outcome that you want. That is deception. It's hollow to do that, and then say "I'm just trying to be helpful". Use plainness of speech and honesty in everything you do, even if the outcome doesn't go your way.

- **Poole:** *“let your words be in truth and sincerity, your speech seconded by your actions; accustom yourselves to truth and plainness in speaking, and that will take away the occasion of swearing.”*
- **Lust** – When we desire to have things our way, and we see our brothers and sisters as a challenge to our delusional, self-righteous, don’t-tread-on-me, self-sufficiency, then we filter others through that lens, and manage them, by guarding what we are willing to say to them, lest they know enough information to ever challenge our thinking or our path. If you find yourself struggling to be an open book with your co-elect, then you have a real problem that needs your full attention. This is not yea and nay, this is deception. A person who does this is damaging themselves, their family, and the body, and the Lord will only allow it for so long.
- **Malice / Envy / Grudging** – When we get ourselves twisted into a state with someone(s), whether because of our general fleshly cruelty, discontentment with our lot (which leads to envy), or grudging over past offenses, then we pass everything about a person through a wicked, uncharitable lens. When this is the case, yea and nay have left the building. When we get ourselves in a twist, we create narratives for ourselves that justify our [insert emotion], and we then proceed to do everything we can to avoid forthrightly addressing the matter and seeking peace. Even if we put on a friendly costume and smile while we talk, the Lord knows the heart, and we are condemned where we stand. Obfuscating with a torrent of words doesn’t change the spirit of the matter. God isn’t lost in your words. Culpable deniability is meaningless to He who searches the heart and tries the reins.
 - *Proverbs 10:18,19 “18 He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool. 19 In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.”*

I will leave you with this sober warning, and comforting promise:

Zechariah 8:14-17 *“14 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not: 15 So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not. 16 These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: 17 And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.”*

I love you all. Amen.