

James 5:12-18  
Do Not Swear but Pray

**Introduction:**

**1) Be a person of your word—5:12**

- This seems to apply to private oaths but not official oaths in court, etc.
- a) Stated **negatively**: <sup>12</sup> *But above all, my brothers, **do not swear** [pres. act. impv. ovmnu,w], either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath [o[rkoj]],*
  - i) Remember God swore an oath (Deut. 7:8) and Paul (2 Cor. 1:23).
  - ii) It is easy to impatiently make an oath.
  - iii) As Moo states: he prohibits ... invoking God's name to guarantee the reliability of what a person says.
- b) Stated **positively**: *but **let** your "yes" **be** [pres. act. impv. eivmi,] yes and your "no" be no,*
  - i) *so that [i[na] you may not fall under condemnation [kri,sij].*
  - ii) Our English word "crisis" comes from this. It refers to that moment in time when you need to decide on some action.
  - iii) This is what Jesus taught in Matt. 5:34-37 and Matt. 23:16-22.
  - iv) Arnold Fruchtenbaum notes The *Mishnah* (the written record of the oral traditions of the rabbis) teaches that oaths mentioning God's Name, or a substitute, are binding, but oaths by heaven or earth are not binding since there was no direct mention of God.
- c) On the one hand, oaths themselves are not prohibited; on the other, a believer should not be forced to take an oath in order to tell the truth. (MBC)
- d) Jacob/James is helping guard against the needless and irreverent use of God's name. This is a matter of honesty and integrity of character rather than the mere use of certain words. As Alec Motyer states, We practice a devotion to the truth with our lips because the truth dwells in us.

**2) Faithfully fulfill your appropriate Godward duties—5:13-18**

- Motyer notes seven references of patience in 5:7-12 and notes seven references to prayer in 5:13-18.
- a) When life is hard: <sup>13</sup> *Is anyone among you **suffering** [kakopaqe,w]?—5:13a*
  - i) Trouble like the OT prophets faced (cf. 5:10).
    - (1) Opposition, grief, unfaithful spouse, illness, etc.
  - ii) **Let him pray** [pres. mid. impv. proseu,comai].
    - (1) Suffering should move us to pray, like Jesus (Luke 22:44).
    - (2) Prayer does not necessarily remove the suffer from our lives, but it is the means of grace needed to endure the suffering to the glory of God.
- b) When life is good: *Is anyone **cheerful** [euvqume,w]?—5:13b*
  - i) To be encouraged in the course of one's life.
  - ii) **Let him sing praise** [ya,llw].
    - (1) Sing a song of praise to the one true God

- c) When you are weary: <sup>14</sup> *Is anyone among you **sick**/weak, incapacitated [avsqene,w]?—5:14-18*
- In the Gospels it generally refers to **physical** weakness, while in Acts and the Epistles it is generally **spiritual** weakness.
  - Reference William MacDonald's article on Divine Healing.
- i) Two duties—5:14bc
- (1) *Let him call* [aor. mid impv. proskale,w] *for the elders of the church,*
- (a) The weak must take the initiative to contact them, if possible.
  - (b) James clearly has believers in mind when he uses “of the church.”
- (2) and *let them pray* [aor. mid. impv. proseu,comai] *over him,*
- (a) What accompanies the praying? *anointing* [aor. act. ptc. avlei,fw] *him with oil in the name of the Lord.*
    - (i) Probably medicinal (cf. Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34), but it is certainly not a magical ritual.
    - (ii) Seems to refer to a symbolic act of consecration/dedication that brings refreshment and encouragement.
  - (b) This is not a public healing meeting but rather a private gathering.
- (3) It is quite interesting that James/Jacob does not say, “Call for those who have the gift of healing.”
- ii) The importance of prayer—5:15-18
- (1) A possible three-fold result—5:15
- (a) <sup>15</sup> *And the prayer of faith* (of the elders) *will save* [sw,zw] *the one who is sick/weary, discouraged* [ka,mnw] (cf. Heb. 12:3),
  - (b) *and the Lord* (not the oil or the elders) *will raise him up.*
  - (c) *And if* (3<sup>rd</sup> class, probable) *he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*
    - (i) **Some** illness and discouragement is the result of sin, but not **every** illness or discouragement.
- (2) <sup>16</sup> *Therefore, ...*
- Do two things
- (a) *confess* [pres. mid. impv. evxomologe,w] *your sins to one another*
    - (i) This is not necessarily in public. The circle of confession should be as wide as the knowledge of the sin. Do NOT confess every sin to every person you know.
    - (ii) Confess to the person or persons against who we have sinned and from whom we need and desire forgiveness. (Motyer)
  - (b) and *pray* [pres. mid. impv. eucomai] *for one another, that you may be healed* [iva,omai].
    - (i) The healing may be physical or spiritual restoration.
    - (ii) The greatest assistance any believer can offer another is faithful prayer. (J. Ron Blue)
- (3) Why should you pray?
- (a) Generally: *The prayer* [de,hsij] *of a righteous person has great power* [ivscu,w] *as it is working* [evnerge,w].

- (b) Specific example: <sup>17</sup> *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed [proseu,comai] fervently [proseuch,] that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.*
  - (i) Cf. 1 Kings 17:1-19:10
  - (ii) <sup>18</sup> *Then he prayed [proseu,comai] again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.*
- (c) The point is that Elijah's prayer brought about much good, even benefiting those who were not deserving of such a demonstration of grace and mercy. (Matt. 5:43; Acts 14:17)
- d) There is the praying **individual** (5:13), the praying **elders** (5:14-15), praying **friends** (5:16a) and the praying **prophet** (5:16b-18). (A. Motyer)

**3) Things to remember:**

- a) Every area of our life should be lived with reference to God, whether we are healthy or sick.
- b) We should be both prayerfully patient and patiently prayerful.