

Truth Consistent With Christ

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[0 : 00] Christ is relentless. He chases us until he catches us.

And when he catches us, he changes us. He once was confined to a Sunday morning in our lives, but now he occupies our thoughts every day.

He was once confined to our ears, but now he's transforming everything about who we are. He was once confined to buildings like this, but now he's impacting every area of our lives.

Christ and his gospel are relentless, chasing us, catching us, changing us. When I say that he's relentless, I don't mean menacing.

The chasing, the catching, and the changing are welcome. The longer we go on in our Christian lives, the more we want him to chase us and catch us and change us.

[1 : 07] The more we want to know him, the more we want to be like him. This is faith at work, which is the theme of the book of James.

When a Christian is practically expressing the change Christ is making in them as a function of him chasing them and catching them. He's making their hearts more like his heart, resulting in a changing character and in a changing behavior.

And never is this more true than in the area of truth. The more Christ chases us, catches us, and changes us, the more truth becomes central to who we are.

The truth ceases to be a political handball, an inconvenient obstacle, or a mere acquaintance. Truth becomes who we are on the inside.

Our faith at work, this practical expression of the changes Christ is making within us, is our faithful speaking of the truth.

[2 : 21] Our society is inexorably moving away from the truth. In 1992, the conservative MP, Alan Clark, was giving evidence of the Old Bailey in London concerning the Arms to Iraq scandal.

One question, Clark refused to admit that he had lied, preferring rather to say that he had been economical with the truth.

The general populace, who at that time were probably more interested in absolute truth than we are today, took this phrase to mean a bare face lied. In the mid to late 1990s, a new breed of political beast came out to the scene, came out, came into the scene, of which Alistair Campbell was probably the most prominent example.

Spokesman for New Labour and for Tony Blair, Campbell's role was to mold public opinion through biased interpretations of events.

Truth became about what distorted web political spin doctors could weave. Campbell resigned in 2003.

[3 : 36] And just to show that I'm not using any political bias, in 2021, questioned about her involvement in the Alex Salmon scandal, our own First Minister responded at First Minister's questions with the answer, and I quote, and you will all remember this, I'll let the electorate decide the truth.

I'll let the electorate decide the truth. Again, perhaps more subtly, but no less dangerously, absolute truth was denied.

It became a social construct dictated by the opinions of many, educated or otherwise. Pilate's question, what is truth, has ceased to be a historical saying.

It has become today's battle cry. But the topic of tonight's study from James 5.12 is not the apologetic defence of the Christian virtue of truth.

Rather, it's in our practical expression of the truth. How we must, and why we must, at all times, in all places, in thought, in word, and deed, speak the truth.

[4 : 50] This is faith at work. The prioritisation of the truth. That we say what we mean, we mean what we say, and that we mean to do what we have said.

It is so important in our Christian lives that James begins verse 12, you can see this with the words, but above all, above poverty or wealth, above luxury or suffering, our prioritisation of speaking the truth is key.

Let me ask you, how important is the truth to you? Not just that you speak the truth, but you think the truth. And not just that you speak the truth now, but you can always be relied on to speak the truth.

For those who think that the end justifies the means, that one may be economical with the truth, that one may spin the truth, to achieve the higher purpose, listen carefully to James.

There is never sufficient cause for sinning against God by being economical with the truth, by spinning the truth, or by rendering the truth a matter of public opinion.

[6 : 18] The relentlessness of Christ in his gospel demands that we be truth tellers. Well, just for a short while this evening, let's unpack James' teaching on how to give practical expression to our faith by considering two topics.

First of all, this is why we must speak the truth. And secondly, this is how we can speak the truth. First of all, from James 5.12, this is why we must speak the truth.

James, following what his brother Jesus set out in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, verses 33 through 37, perhaps we should have read those words. This is Jesus' discussion of truth telling in the context of taking oaths.

When you read the word swear in verse 12, you are to understand it not as coarse language, but as swearing an oath. Someone asks you a question to which you do not merely provide an answer, but you add an oath.

So, for example, I swear to my father's grave that I'm telling you the truth. In the Jewish world of James' day, adding an oath to what you said was designed to reinforce its truthfulness.

[7 : 41] So, any figure of speech we use to reinforce the truthfulness of what we say may come into this category. For example, in recent years, it's become very popular in Glasgow.

I've noticed this. In Glasgow, to begin a sentence with, I'm not going to lie, but, I'm not going to lie, but, but not merely figures of speech or the earnestness with which something is said.

There are some people who are so gifted at being economical with the truth that they have trained their body language to differ from their words. so that even if they're telling us a bare-faced lie, their body language suggests that they're telling us the truth.

It may not be immediately obvious that you can't trust this person, but over time, you learn to distrust everything that comes out of the guy's mouth. Contrast what James says, as does his brother Jesus back there in Matthew 5, In other words, just tell the truth.

Don't let your words and intentions be different. Don't let your words and your body language be different. Tell the truth. Don't be economical with the truth. Don't treat the truth as a social construct to be determined by the masses, educated or otherwise.

[9 : 08] Don't spin the truth. Be plain in your speech and tell the truth. Let's consider very briefly in the context of James 5, 12, the three areas in which we must speak the truth.

First of all, truth betrays. Truth betrays. James begins in this verse, you can see this from the words, above all my brothers. James speaks as one brother to other brothers.

Truth must first exist within the family of the church. Normal members of a family do not lie to one another. It's a sign of dysfunction when you can't trust what your parents tell you or what your siblings tell you.

Truth must first exist within the church of Christ. Sadly, I've experienced more economizing of the truth, spinning, and social construct truth in the church than I would ever have liked.

We are all sinners in heart and in church, but surely by virtue of us being a family in Christ, we must at least aspire to tell one another the truth. Anything less is a betrayal of one another and the Holy Spirit who makes us one in Christ.

[10 : 30] But not only as members of the church should we speak the truth to one another, the church must be known as a place where truth is told, where there are no cover-ups, where there are no politburo backroom deals, where there are no secretive manipulations behind the scenes.

The media are quite right for exposing the church for hypocrisy and hiding the truth behind an ecclesiastical mask. But on a more personal level, we all, every one of us, are ambassadors for the

truth whatever we are and whoever we are with.

We may speak the truth at home, we may speak the truth at church, but it's for nothing unless we are honest at work. By wriggling away from the truth in the workplace, the witness you're setting forth is a betrayal, not just of the church, but more seriously of the Christ who has redeemed you. And so if in anything, in any situation we're using our words, our oaths, or our expressions to bend the truth or distort the truth, we're engaging in the betrayal of our kin and our king. We are to be truth tellers. Anything less is less than the Holy Spirit is sanctifying us toward and Christ has given himself for.

[12:04] Truth betrayed. Truth hidden, secondly, in this point. Truth hidden. There is, of course, one obvious reason why James prohibits his readers from making oaths, namely that oaths hide as much as the reveal.

They hide as much as the reveal. Imagine, in a society which requires you to take an oath in order for other people to believe that you are telling the truth, the genuine telling of the truth must be at an extremely low level.

Let me say that again. In a society where it's necessary for you to take an oath in order for others to believe that you are telling the truth, the genuine telling of the truth must be at a very low level. Oaths of whatever type hide as much as obscure the truth. For example, truth telling is at such a low level today that the oath of truth a witness takes at a criminal trial is, let's face it, worth next to nothing.

Perjury has become a matter of opinion and perspective rather than the absolute it must be in any fair society. Tell me, have you ever hidden the truth behind a plausible oath?

[13:34] Have you ever hidden a lie behind a truthful expression? Honest? You know, everyone in prison, so they claim, is an innocent man.

Even when convicted by a jury of their peers in the face of the overwhelming evidence of their guilt. don't hide a lie behind the truth or the truth behind a lie. If you do, you might get away with it the first time.

Soon after, the people who really mattered in your life, people who know you the best, will realize you cannot be trusted. It will backfire and you'll end up the loser.

Slightly changing the great Winston Churchill's quote, you can fool some of the people some of the time, you can fool some of the people all of the time. You can fool all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.

The truth will always out. However, this is missing the fundamental problem that James is warning about in this verse. Namely, words found at the very end of the verse.

[14:44] Don't hide the truth so that you may not fall under condemnation. thing is, you can never hide the truth from a God who knows all things and to whom we are ultimately accountable.

Next time we hide a lie behind the great Glasgow expression, I'm not going to lie, but, or massaging the truth, remember that all you're doing is hiding truth.

truth. And then third, on this point, truth betrayed, truth hidden, truth committed, truth committed. We need to understand the context of this verse.

The Jewish world into which James was writing was deeply divided. There were at least two extremes. The first extreme was a Jewish cult called the Essenes.

Now the Essenes had withdrawn from society, they lived out of the desert in their own communities. There were ascetics who starved themselves and made themselves suffer because they thought the more they made themselves suffer, the more likely the Messiah was to come.

[15:59] On the other extreme, you had a group called the Sicari, literally men of the dagger. These men were devoted to the overthrow of the Roman government of Judea.

they used daggers to assassinate and they were political terrorists. There were many other cults within Judaism, but the Essenes and the Sicari were the most extreme.

But both were also very attractive to Jewish Christians. The Essenes, because they withdrew from society and were waiting for the coming of the Messiah. Judea, the Sicari, because they promised the liberation of Judea from under the domination of the Romans.

But both the Essenes and the Sicari required their initiates to take an oath of allegiance. Similar, perhaps, although I don't know this for sure because I'm not a Freemason, to the oath that men take when they become Freemasons.

Once you've taken that oath, you're committed to the cause for life. There's no get-out clause. So by saying to his readers, don't take an oath, James is warning them against divided loyalties.

[17 : 23] If they're going to commit to a group, whether it's the Essenes or the Sicari, you'd better know what you're letting yourself in for. Because the cost of your oath to them will be more than you are able to pay.

In a sense, he's going back to a point he previously made in James 4.4, you adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity of God? For these Christians to take an oath brings them into too close a commitment with the world.

It renders their loyalties divided and double-minded. Now, there are no Essenes today and there are no Sicarii things as Christians to which we can sign up, which represent spiritual adultery, friendship with the world, divided loyalties.

It may not require you to take a verbal oath. It may be something different altogether. but whatever it is, it simply doesn't tell the truth about who we are as Christians, nor does it tell the truth about how Jesus is changing us from the inside out.

Well, the point is this, just tell the truth. Don't be economical with the truth. Don't spin the truth. Don't treat it like a social construct. Don't learn that nasty habit of disassociating your words from your body language.

[19 : 03] Don't add layers to the truth so that finally your listeners kind of work out whether you're telling the truth or you're lying. Any of these distortions of the truth aren't faithful to the gospel changes the Holy Spirit is making in your heart.

James says, just let your yes be yes and let your no be no. This is why we must speak the truth. Well then secondly and more briefly this is how we can speak the truth.

This is how we can speak the truth because it's all very well for me to give moral guidance. It's very well for me to lay down laws for Christian character and behavior. The gospel is not just about standards. It's about strength.

It's not just about guidance. More important, it's about grace. Yes, of course, as those being changed by the Christ who by his grace chased us down and caught us in his net of salvation, we want to live in a way that pleases him and brings glory to his name.

But ultimately, gospel law with no gospel grace condemns us to a powerless, fruitless, and unsatisfying legalism where there is no victory over sin and there is no transformation of the heart.

[20 : 24] So how then from this passage can we avoid the triple hazard of betraying the truth, hiding the truth, and committing against the truth?

It is by soberly but joyfully reflecting upon two things. Who we are and who God is.

Who we are and who God is. Who we are first of all. I want to go back to an earlier point that I made. Namely that James is speaking here not to colleagues, not to workmates, not to an audience or to fellow club members.

He is speaking to my brothers. He's reinforcing this biblical truth that truth is always relational. That to speak the truth is an act of faithfulness within a relationship.

A relationship which is based upon lies is no relationship at all for there to be any kind of love within relationship. It must be based upon truth.

[21 : 33] It is the very fact that God has made us a family, brothers and sisters in Christ which establishes the context in which we are to speak, tell, and live out the truth.

You and I are not strangers. We are siblings. And God is our father. We are one family.

Every family is marked by behavioral characteristics. God's family is marked out by believing, speaking, and living the truth. What I'm saying is that as Christians, Christians, we are governed by who we are.

What we say as Christians is governed by who we are as Christians. We are the children of God. We are brothers and sisters together in Christ.

Listen to what our elder brother Jesus says in Matthew 12, 34. He says, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

[22 : 44] The man who hides truth from his speech demonstrates that he has no truth in his heart. But we as sons and daughters of the living God in whom is all truth, we as brothers and sisters of the living Christ who himself said, I am the truth, have hearts which the Holy Spirit is progressively changing from being a heart of falseness to a heart of truth.

James seems to be saying here, as does Paul in his epistles, be who you are. Be who Christ by his gracious transforming power is making you into.

Believe the truth and speak the truth. This is who we are, brothers and sisters in Christ, children of the loving heavenly Father being transformed by the Holy Spirit, be who you are.

Believe and speak the truth. For us to take oaths in order to hide the truth, to commit against the truth, or to betray the truth, is to act out of character.

Reflect on that as Christians this evening. You are no longer children of deception and darkness. us. You are children of light and truth.

[24 : 14] And the Holy Spirit is changing you. So by his grace, live out that change in your speaking and living the truth. Who we are, and then second and lastly, who God is.

Who God is. If it's true that we are children of God, and it is, then we are children of the God who is the truth.

The Father who is the truth. The Son who is the truth. The Spirit who is the truth. The Christ who chases us and catches us and changes us, changes who we are on the inside, is making us into people who believe and speak the truth.

the gospel isn't a fluffy thing. Putting our faith to work in the matter of our speech is not an option for the Christian. We must be who we are, but ask any teenager, and they'll tell you that sometimes it's far harder to be who you really are than it is to be who and what people tell you they think you are or who they want you to be.

It takes real effort to put to death the sins of the tongue. Effort which, fair enough, is empowered by the grace of Christ, but effort nonetheless.

[25 : 47] Effort to be who you are. The gospel isn't fluffy. Anyone who thinks that they can, with impunity, ignore God's call to speak the truth without hiding it, without betraying it, without committing against it, is in for a very rude awakening.

Truth is so important to the essence of who God is that we read in verse 12 that we are to let our yes be yes and our no be no so that you will not fall under condemnation.

Wouldn't I love to tone down James' harsh words here, but there's no apologies required for any passage in the word of God. Matthew 12, 36-37, Jesus, James' brother, warns us saying, I tell you on the day of judgment, people will give an account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you're justified, and by your words you're condemned.

Let's be absolutely clear here. God takes our sins of speech very seriously. God He pours grace into our lives to sanctify us, to cleanse our lips even as He cleaned the lips of Isaiah all those years ago with a burning coal taken from the altar.

But don't play games with the gospel. Don't be double-minded about your loyalties. Be all in with Christ in your thought world, in your action world, and in your speech world.

[27 : 31] If faith at work is going to mean anything to you at all, it has to be reflected in your speech. A few months ago, during the transitions between presidencies in the United States, one of the commentators said, the words of a president matter.

The words of a president matter. Indeed, they do. But it's equally as true that the words of a Christian matter. The words of a Christian matter.

Can people trust what you say? Is what you say the truth? Can you trust yourself to tell the truth? Your words matter.

No more spin. No more hiding of the truth. No more betraying our kin and king. from now on, by the grace of the gospel and as God's beloved children, we shall let our yes be yes and our no be no.

We'll speak plain and we'll be known as men and women whose words can be trusted, just like Jesus were. Yah. Thank you.

[28 : 49] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.