THE QUESTION

How does “let your yes be yes” keep us from hypocrisy, and is it only about oaths (James 5:12)?

Asked by a THF member on November 22, 2026 · published November 23, 2026 · 12 numbered quotations · the 34 early Christian passages and 83 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/how-does-let-your-yes-be-yes-keep-us-from-hypocrisy-and-is-it-only-about

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

It is not only about oaths. The early writers tie refusing oaths to telling the truth, and they also forbid a double tongue and ask that words be backed by deeds. Hypocrisy is loving God with the lips but not the heart, so plain, honest speech every day helps close that gap.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith’s library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 8

Refusing oaths goes with always speaking truth

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin joins the refusal to swear with a commitment to speak the truth. Clement calls “let your yes be yes” a summary of righteousness, which gives truthfulness throughout a person's whole life.

1 “Regarding our refusal to swear and our commitment to speaking the truth, He instructed us: “Do not swear at all; but let your yes mean yes, and your no mean no; for anything more than this comes from evil.””

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 6, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

2 “In the same way, righteousness gives him truthfulness throughout his whole life. For it was a summary of righteousness to say, "Let your yes be yes, and your no, no."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 7.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 19, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 8

Hypocrisy means lips and heart do not match

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian describes the Pharisees' hypocrisy as loving God with the lips but not the heart. Ignatius says it is not enough to be called Christian; one must truly be so, and he calls some who lack a good conscience dissemblers and hypocrites.

3 “It was right, therefore, that the hypocrisy of the Pharisees displeased Him. They loved God with their lips, but not with their heart.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 28 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 20, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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4 “It is fitting, then, not only to be called Christians, but to truly be so.”

later in the same passage

“For such people appear to me to lack a good conscience, and to be merely dissemblers and hypocrites.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Magnesians* (c. 98–117 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 5, page 7 Read it in the library ›

POINT 3 OF 8

One list covers oaths and everyday speech

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Didache puts the ban on false oaths right beside false witness and a double tongue, and it asks that our speech be neither false nor empty but fulfilled by deed.

5 “You shall not forswear yourself, Matthew 5:34. You shall not bear false witness”

later in the same passage

“You shall not be double-minded or double-tongued, for to be double-tongued is a snare of death.”

later in the same passage

“Your speech shall not be false or empty, but fulfilled by deed.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 2 (c. 50–120 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 1, page 6 Read it in the library ›

POINT 4 OF 8

Our words must be backed by deeds

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus says we must not only speak but also act, pointing to those who spoke but did not act. Clement of Rome says we are justified by our works and not our words.

6 “Next, we must not only speak but also act; for they spoke but did not act.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 9, page 7 Read it in the library ›

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7 “Let us clothe ourselves with concord and humility, ever exercising self-control, standing far off from all whispering and evil-speaking, being justified by our works, and not our words.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 34, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 8

A steady life works as a lasting oath

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Alexandria asks how someone already faithful could show himself unfaithful, as if he needed an oath. He says such a life should itself be a sure and final oath, and that one who lives justly swears truth by his actions.

8 “How can someone who is already faithful show himself unfaithful, as if he needed an oath?”

later in the same passage

“Should not his life itself be a sure and final oath? He lives, walks, and shows the trustworthiness of what he says by a steady and reliable life and speech.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 7.8 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 15, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

9 “But the one who lives justly and does not fail in any of his duties, when the judgment of truth is closely examined, swears truth by his actions.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 7.8 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 16, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 8

Leaning on oaths signals our word is weak

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Chrysostom says people could trust us more for our character than for our oath. He calls an oath more a sign of distrust than of confidence, and warns that a person quick to swear does not seem careful about honesty.

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10 “For if we wanted, people could trust us more because of our character than because of our oath.”

later in the same passage

“In fact, it is more a sign of distrust than of confidence. For when a man is too ready to swear an oath, he does not lead us to think highly of his careful honesty.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on Ephesians* 2 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 32, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 8

Guard the tongue against double talk

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Barnabas says to hate all hypocrisy, and he warns against double-talk and a hasty tongue, calling each a snare of death.

11 “You shall hate doing anything unpleasing to God; you shall hate all hypocrisy.”

later in the same passage

“You shall not be double-minded or use double-talk, for double-talk is a snare of death.”

later in the same passage

“Do not be hasty with your tongue, for the mouth is a snare of death.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Barnabas,** *Epistle of Barnabas* (c. 70–132 AD) **Source 2, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 8 OF 8

Swearing slips into speech by habit

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Chrysostom speaks against oaths, not only perjury but even oaths made in good faith. He calls custom grave and hard to uproot, and urges listeners to charge their wife, children, friends and neighbors to be cautious in these matters.

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12

“I speak not only of perjury, but even of oaths made in good faith.”

later in the same passage

“Custom is a grave thing, terrible to uproot, and hard to guard against. And it often attacks us when we are unwilling and unaware.”

later in the same passage

“Do you have a wife, a servant, children, friends, acquaintances, neighbors? On all these lay this charge, that they be cautious in these matters.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Instructions to Catechumens* 1 (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 33, page 8 **Read it in the library ›**

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages comments directly on James 5:12 or uses its exact words about hypocrisy.
- These passages do not settle what to do when a court or form requires an oath.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 34 early Christian passages and 83 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–34, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 35–83, in Bible order), then 34 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *34 passages from 14 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · source 1*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 2 **Quote 5, page 3** “shall not hate any man. But some you shall reprove, and concerning some you shall pray, and some you shall love more than your own life… [continues online] **read ›**

Barnabas, *c. 70–132 AD · sources 2–3*

2 *Epistle of Barnabas* (1885 English) **Quote 11, page 5** “shalt hate doing what is unpleasing to God: thou shalt hate all hypocrisy… [continues online] **read ›**

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3 *Epistle of Barnabas* (1885 English; on point 7) "faithful counsellors of one another; take away from among you all hypocrisy… [continues online] **read ›**

Hermas, *c. 90–150 AD · source 4*

4 *Shepherd* (1885 English; on point 2) "are the sons of iniquity, and they believed in hypocrisy, and wickedness did not depart from them… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · source 5*

5 *Epistle to the Magnesians* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "those who indeed talk of the bishop, but do all things without him, will He who is the true and first Bishop, and the only High Priest by nature, declare… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 6*

6 *First Apology* (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** "let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay… [continues online] **read ›**

Tatian, *c. 150–180 AD · sources 7–8*

7 *Diatessaron* 28 (1885 English; on point 2) "7:24 Judge not with hypocrisy, but judge righteous judgement… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Diatessaron* 9 (1885 English; on point 1) "5:37 But your word shall be either Yea or Nay, and what is in excess of this is of the evil one… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 9–12*

9 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 3** "let your conversation be, Yea, yea, and Nay, nay." And other statements of a like nature… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (on point 2) has conceived internally will. This is to prevent sin from making him his own destroyer through hypocrisy. The Lord declared: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Against Heresies: Book II* (1885 English) "not only not to speak evil of their neighbours, but not even to style any one "Raca" and "fool;" [declaring] that otherwise they were in danger of hell-fire… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English) "therefore the Lord says, "As to every idle word that men have spoken, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment." And, "he who has looked… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 13–19*

13 *Stromata* 1.10 (on point 4) way, and so that, by knowing the Scriptures, we might walk in obedience. And just as people whose speech is evil are no better than those whose actions are evil… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Stromata* 7.8 (on point 5) "because he is always convinced that God is everywhere, is not afraid to speak the truth, and knows that it is unworthy of him to lie, he is content with… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Stromata* 7.8 **Quote 8, page 4** "character has been proved in this kind of godliness is far from being ready to lie or to swear an oath. For an oath is a final statement made by… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Stromata* 7.8 **Quote 9, page 4** Gnostic speaks truthfully under oath, but he is not inclined to swear, and he rarely uses an oath, as we have said. When he speaks truth under oath, it comes… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Stromata* 5.14 (1885 English; on point 1) "with the Lord's saying, Let your yea be yea, and your nay nay, may be compared the following: But to admit a falsehood, and destroy a truth, is in… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Stromata* 7.8 (1885 English; on point 5) "he does not even swear, preferring to make averment, in affirmation by yea, and in denial by nay… [continues online] **read ›**

19 *Stromata* 7.11 (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** "it was a compendium of righteousness to say, Let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 20–23*

20 *Against Marcion* 28 **Quote 3, page 2** Pharisees displeased Him. They loved God with their lips, but not with their heart. "Beware," He says to the disciples, "of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy," not… [continues online] **read ›**

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21 *De Corona* 11 (1885 English) "we believe it lawful for a human oath to be superadded to one divine, for a man to come under promise to another master after Christ, and to abjure father… [continues online] **read ›**

22 *On Prescription Against Heretics* 26 (1885 English) "they remembered (the words): Let your communication be yea, yea… [continues online] **read ›**

23 *Against Praxeas* 9 (on point 1) "is yes, and no is no; for what is more than these comes of evil. Matthew 5:37… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 24–25*

24 *Commentary on John* 6 (on point 2) at once for baptism, as Matthew records, and then they hear words suited to their quackery and hypocrisy. But the words spoken to them were very much like those spoken… [continues online] **read ›**

25 *Against Celsus* 64 (on point 2) "lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 26–29*

26 *Treatises* (1885 English) "would swear not only rashly, but even more, would swear falsely… [continues online] **read ›**

27 *Epistles* (1885 English; on point 1) "is it fitting for the dignity of priests to be blamed for the levity of a changeable and inconstant mind, when the Lord teaches and says, Let your communication be… [continues online] **read ›**

28 *Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews* (on point 6) Solomon: "A man who swears often will be filled with iniquity, and the plague will not leave his house. If he swears vainly, he will not be justified." On this… [continues online] **read ›**

29 *Treatises* "are compelled to swear, which is not lawful… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 30–31*

30 *Apostolic Constitutions* gave us commands against idols, but also warned us about the heavenly lights, telling us not to swear by them or serve them. For they say, "Lest, when you see… [continues online] **read ›**

31 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 3) "prohibition of evil speaking and passion, of deceitful conduct, or idle words, lies, covetousness, and hypocrisy… [continues online] **read ›**

John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · sources 32–33*

32 *Homilies on Ephesians* 2 **Quote 10, page 5** "For if we wanted, people could trust us more because of our character than because of our oath." **read ›**

33 *Instructions to Catechumens* 1 **Quote 12, page 6** "I speak not only of perjury, but even of oaths made in good faith." **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *source 34*

34 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 7, page 4** "does he that is ready in speech deem himself righteous… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *49 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

35 **Genesis 21:24** Abraham said, "I will swear." **read ›**

36 **Exodus 20:7** You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord your God will by no means acquit the one who takes his name in vain. **read ›**

37 **Exodus 22:10** And if anyone gives his neighbor a beast of burden, or a calf, or a sheep, or any beast to keep, and it is injured or dies or is carried off, and no one knows, (Septuagint Exodus 22:9 (Exodus 22:10 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

38 **Exodus 23:1** You shall not accept an empty report; you shall not join with the unjust man to become an unjust witness. **read ›**

39 **Leviticus 19:11** You shall not steal; you shall not lie; nor shall anyone falsely accuse his neighbor. **read ›**

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40 **Leviticus 19:12** You shall not swear unjustly by my name, and you shall not profane the holy name of your God. I am the Lord your God. **read ›**

41 **Numbers 30:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

42 **Deuteronomy 23:24** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

43 **Joshua 2:20** But if anyone harms us, or reveals these words of ours, we shall be guiltless of this oath of yours.” **read ›**

44 **Joshua 8:8** You shall do according to this word. Behold, I have commanded you.” **read ›**

45 **Song of Solomon 2:11** For behold, the winter is past, the rain is over, it has gone its way. **read ›**

46 **Isaiah 5:24** Therefore, as stubble shall be burned by a coal of fire and be consumed by a flame let loose, their root shall be like chaff, and their blossom shall go up like dust; for they did not desire the law of the Lord of hosts, but provoked the oracle of the Holy One of Israel. **read ›**

47 **Jeremiah 11:3** and you shall say to them: Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Cursed is the man who will not listen to the words of this covenant, **read ›**

48 **Ezekiel 13:7** Have you not seen a false vision and told empty fortunes? **read ›**

49 **Ezekiel 37:19** you shall say to them, Thus says the Lord: Behold, I will take the tribe of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel that are joined to him, and I will put them with the tribe of Judah, and they shall become one rod in the hand of Judah. **read ›**

50 **Daniel 4:25** they will drive you away from men, and your dwelling will be with the wild beasts, and they will feed you with grass like an ox, and you will stay in the dew of heaven; and seven times will pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he pleases. **read ›**

51 **Hosea 5:4** They have not set their plans on returning to their God, for a spirit of prostitution is in them, and they have not known the Lord. **read ›**

52 **1 Esdras 8:82** And now, O Lord, what shall we say, having these things? For we have transgressed your statutes, which you gave by the hand of your servants the prophets, **read ›**

53 **Judith 8:30** But the people were very thirsty, and they compelled us to do as we had spoken to them, and to bring an oath upon ourselves, which we will not transgress. **read ›**

54 **Wisdom of Solomon 14:30** But just penalties will overtake them on both counts: because they thought wrongly about God, paying attention to idols, and because they swore unrighteously in deceit, despising holiness. **read ›**

55 **Wisdom of Sirach 5:10** Be firmly fixed in your understanding, and let your word be one and the same. **read ›**

56 **Wisdom of Sirach 5:11** Be quick to listen, and give your answer with patience. **read ›**

57 **Wisdom of Sirach 5:13** Glory and dishonor are in speaking, and a man’s tongue is his downfall. **read ›**

58 **Wisdom of Sirach 18:22** Let nothing hinder you from paying a vow in due time, and do not wait until death to be justified. **read ›**

59 **Wisdom of Sirach 23:9** Do not accustom your mouth to oaths, and do not make a habit of naming the Holy One. **read ›**

60 **Wisdom of Sirach 23:10** For as a household slave who is constantly examined under torture will not be without bruises, so he who swears and names the Name continually will never be cleansed from sin. **read ›**

61 **Wisdom of Sirach 23:11** A man of many oaths will be filled with lawlessness, and the lash will not depart from his house. If he trespasses, his sin is upon him; and if he disregards it, he has sinned twice; and if he has sworn in vain, he will not be justified, for his house will be filled with calamities. **read ›**

62 **Wisdom of Sirach 23:13** Do not accustom your mouth to coarse vulgarity, for in it is the word of sin. **read ›**

63 **Wisdom of Sirach 29:3** Confirm your word and keep faith with him, and at every time you will find what you need. **read ›**

64 **Wisdom of Sirach 43:27** We will say much and never reach the end, and the sum of our words is: He is all. **read ›**

65 **2 Maccabees 6:17** But let this be said by us as a reminder; now we must come back to the story in a few words. **read ›**

66 **2 Maccabees 6:25** and through my pretense, for the sake of a short and fleeting life, they would be led astray because of me, while I bring defilement and disgrace on my old age. **read ›**

67 **2 Maccabees 14:33** he stretched out his right hand toward the temple and swore this oath: “If you do not hand Judas over to me as a prisoner, I will level this sacred enclosure of God to the ground, tear down the altar, and raise up here a splendid temple to Dionysus.” **read ›**

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68 **2 Maccabees 15:10** And when he had roused their spirits, he gave his orders, at the same time pointing out the faithlessness of the nations and their breaking of oaths. **read ›**

69 **3 Maccabees 2:11** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

70 **4 Maccabees 5:24** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

71 **Matthew 5:33** “Again you have heard that it was said to the people of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord your oaths,’ **read ›**

72 **Matthew 5:34** but I tell you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; **read ›**

73 **Matthew 5:36** Neither shall you swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. **read ›**

74 **Matthew 5:37** But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No.’ Whatever is more than these is of the evil one. **read ›**

75 **Matthew 23:28** So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. **read ›**

76 **Romans 3:4** May it never be! Let God be true, but every man a liar. As it is written: that you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged. **read ›**

77 **Romans 5:2** through whom we also have our access by faith into this grace in which we stand. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **read ›**

78 **2 Corinthians 1:18** But as God is faithful, our word toward you was not “Yes and no.” **read ›**

79 **James 1:8** He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. **read ›**

80 **James 1:26** If anyone among you thinks himself to be religious while he does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this man’s religion is worthless. **read ›**

81 **James 3:2** For we all stumble in many things. Anyone who does not stumble in word is a perfect person, able to bridle the whole body also. **read ›**

82 **James 3:10** Out of the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. **read ›**

83 **James 5:12** But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by the earth or by any other oath; but let your yes be yes and your no be no, so that you do not fall into hypocrisy. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *34 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Numbers 23:5

Job 11:2

Proverbs 3:34 · 27:2

Isaiah 39:1

Malachi 4:5

Matthew 5:42 · 7:21 · 12:37 · 19:17

Mark 12:30

Luke 1:52 · 6:30 · 12:1 · 12:2 · 12:4 · 12:5 · 12:8 · 12:9 · 12:10 · 12:11 · 12:13 · 12:16 · 13:26 · 21:14

John 14:16 · 14:28

Acts 8:30

Romans 8:29

Ephesians 6:9

2 Timothy 3:2

James 4:6 · 4:11

1 Peter 5:5

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “How does “let your yes be yes” keep us from hypocrisy, and is it only about oaths (James 5:12)?” on November 22, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 23, 2026.

Library only. This study was written only from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed above, with a link to read it.

How it was made. Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY