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Verba Christi in James: An Exegesis of James 4:11-12; 5:12

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INTRODUCTION

The twenty-seven documents in the New Testament fall into two distinct categories. One, the four Gospels include quotations from Jesus and stories about him. Two, the other twenty-three documents "essentially offer no concrete Jesus-tradition at all."[1] Although none of the latter writings aim to record what Jesus did or said during his earthly ministry, they do, on occasion, contain Verba Christi, i.e., "sayings of Christ." While in a few instances these come as citation, by in large the epistles allude to these sayings of Jesus.[2]

The purpose of the paper is to consider the role of sayings of Jesus in the NT epistles. In particular, this paper discusses Verba Christi in the letter of James. It also examines James 4:11-12 and 5:12, which parallel two sayings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels.

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[1]Birger Gerhardsson, "The Path of the Gospel Tradition," in The Gospel and the Gospels, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 76.

The form of this seminar paper follows Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, 6th ed., rev. John Grossman and Alice Bennett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). It was produced with Corel WordPerfect Ver. 7.0, Corel Corporation, Ontario, Canada, 1996, and printed on an HP LaserJet 5L Printer, Hewlett-Packard Company, Boise, ID, 1995.

[2]Peter H. Davids, "James and Jesus," in Gospel Perspectives, vol. 5, The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels, ed. David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 68, describes allusion as a "paraphrastic use of phrases or ideas from a logion, with the probable intent of reminding the reader of it."

CHAPTER 1ONE

VERBA CHRISTI IN JAMES

This chapter describes Verba Christi as found in the writings of three New Testament

authors: Paul, Peter, and James. While this paper focuses on the letter of James, a discussion of

the first two writers hopefully provides a general framework for analysis and comparison. After

a brief look at each author, the chapter evaluates a methodology for interpreting Verba Christi in

the epistles.

Verba Christi in Pauline Epistles

The epistles ascribed to Paul in the New Testament[3] contain six explicit references to

"words of the Lord": 1 Cor. 7:10-11; 9:14; 11:23-35; 14:37; 2 Cor. 12:9; 1 Thess. 4:15-17.

Beyond these six, the letters include many allusions (or echoes).[4] Dale C. Allison, Jr., lists eight

echoes: Rom. 12:14, 17; 13:7; 14:13, 14; 1 Cor. 13:2; 1 Thess. 5:2,4; 5:15. Seyoon Kim charts

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[3]While the author accepts the Pauline authorship of the twelve epistles which bear his name, the results of this analysis would not very substantially if one allows for only seven "genuine" letters. Cf. Nikolaus Walter, "Paul and the Early Christian Jesus-Tradition," in Paul and Jesus: Collected Essays, ed. A. J. M. Wedderburn, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, ed. David Hill, no. 37 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 51-80.

[4]Dale C. Allison, Jr., "The Pauline Epistles and the Synoptic Gospels: The Pattern of the Parallels," New Testament Studies 28 (1982): 10.

some thirty-one possible echoes of Jesus' sayings in Paul.[5] The disparity between the two relates

to the lack of an established criterion for determining what constitutes a substantial parallel.

Because Paul does not quote verbatim, Kim contends that "verbal parallelism cannot be made the

sole criterion for judging whether a Pauline statement reflects a dominical saying or not" but that

one must also consider "parallel content or meaning."[6]

In his analysis of these Pauline parallels, Allison has set forth two conclusions.[7] One,

most of the sayings of Jesus alluded to by Paul come within well-defined sections of his letters.

Two, most of the sayings alluded to by Paul also are present within certain sections of the

synoptic Gospels.   The sayings, then, do not appear in diverse parts of the Gospels, nor are they

placed randomly within the epistles. They recur mainly in the ethical (and eschatological)

contexts of Romans 12-14; 1 Corinthians 7-14; Colossians 3-4; and 1 Thessalonians 4-5. They

also appear in the Sermon on the Mount/Plain (Matthew 5-7; Luke 6:27-38), the missionary

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[5]Seyoon Kim, "Jesus, Sayings of," in Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 481.

[6]Ibid., 482. Allison, "Pauline Epistles," 5, suggests that the criteria should even include certain images and key words.

[7]Ibid., 10-16. See also David Wenham, "Paul's Use of the Jesus Tradition: Three Samples," in Gospel Perspectives, vol. 5, The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels, ed. David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 7-37.

discourses (Matt. 10:1-16; Mark 6:6-13; Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-12), and the teaching recorded in Mark 9:33-50.[8]

For the many times which Paul refers to the Old Testament, his use of the sayings of Jesus comes infrequently and indirectly. The reason for this may well be that the early church treated the Jesus tradition as a separate and sacred tradition. Paul took the Jesus traditions to the church as part of its formation; his letters addressed particular issues with churches already in existence. Paul delivered the tradition in his preaching but not again (only by way of reminder) in his letters.[9] Therefore, "in his correspondence Paul merely refers to the Jesus tradition; he never hands it down."[10]

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[8]According to Allison, "Pauline Epistles," 15, these three Gospel contexts account for fifty-percent of the implicit allusions of Paul to the Jesus tradition. It would appear, then, that Paul has some awareness of the Jesus traditions commonly labeled Q, Mark, L, and perhaps M. Ibid., 19-20; Wenham, "Paul's Use," 28.

[9]Kim, "Sayings," 489. Birger Gerhardsson, Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity, trans. Eric J. Sharpe, Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis, no. 22 (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1961), 295, argues: Paul "does not pass on this focal tradition in his epistles. He presupposes it constantly, since it has already been delivered." Cf. 1 Cor. 11:23: "for I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you"; and 1 Thess. 5:2: "for you yourselves know very well." All scripture citations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted. The author has translated all citations from James using the text of Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., Novum Testamentum Graece, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

[10]Allison, "Pauline Epistles," 21. Walter, "Paul," 60, detects "no hint that Paul knew of the narrative tradition about Jesus." However, E. Earle Ellis, "Jesus' Use of the Old Testament and the Genesis of New Testament Theology," Bulletin for Biblical Research 3 (1993): 75, argues that Paul's use of the Jesus tradition is not limited to dominical sayings. See also Kim, "Sayings," 486-487. Cf. Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 11:23.

Verba Christi in 1 Peter

While Paul makes apparently infrequent use of the Jesus tradition, the writer of 1 Peter alludes to the sayings of Jesus more than fifteen times.[11] Two striking features about these parallels appear in Robert H. Gundry's analysis.[12] First, the allusions include references to traditions shared with Matthew, Luke, and even John![13] 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 2:2 intimate the language of spiritual birth found in John 3:3, 7. 1 Peter 1:22; 4:8 echo the love command found in John 13:34-35; 15:12. Second, several parallels refer to episodes which are associated with Peter himself.[14] 1 Peter 2:13-17 hints at the payment of taxes in Matt. 17:24-27; 22:15-21. 1 Peter 5:3-5 recalls the wording of Peter's restoration recorded in John 21:15-17.

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[11]Robert H. Gundry, "Verba Christi in 1 Peter: Their Implications concerning the Authorship of 1 Peter and the Authenticity of the Gospel Tradition," New Testament Studies 13 (1967): 337-344. In comparison, Gerhard Maier, "Jesustradition im 1. Petrusbrief?," in Gospel Perspectives, vol. 5, The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels, ed. David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 127-128, lists over twenty-five probable and possible parallels.

[12]Gundry, "Verba Christi," 337, 345.

[13]While Ernest Best, "1 Peter and the Gospel Tradition," New Testament Studies 16 (1970): 98-99, doubts that the author of 1 Peter knew the tradition of John, both Maier, "Jesustradition," 127-128, and Robert H. Gundry, "Further 'Verba' on Verba Christi in First Peter," Biblica 55 (1974): 211-232, demonstrate otherwise. Apparently, the reason why 1 Peter and Mark show little connection relates to the relatively small amount of teaching material recorded in Mark. Ibid., 230.

[14]Gundry, "Verba Christi," 348, insists that only two sayings do not relate to contexts associated with Peter: 1 Pet. 1:8 relates to Thomas; and 1 Pet. 1:3, 23 relates to Nicodemus.

Verba Christi in James

G. Kittel remarks about James: "Es gibt keine Schrift des NT ausser den Evangelien, die so mit Anklängen an Herrnworte gespickt ist wie er."[15] More than forty parallels exist between James and the Gospels![16] James does show a striking similarity to the words of Jesus in the Gospels, more so than in the Pauline epistles or 1 Peter. His allusions focus on the paraenetic material collected in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:20-49. Roughly, sixty-five percent of the allusions appear also in these passages!

Moreover, the writer has dispersed these allusions throughout the letter; he has placed them in every paragraph to support the main point.[17] Both James and his community apparently know the Jesus tradition. Through allusion to the tradition, he extends or amplifies it to new situations showing "its applicability by argument or by coupling it with Old Testament texts."[18] In the admonition against favoritism in James 2:1-13, he argues against discrimination within the Christian community by alluding to two beatitudes and by citing two Old Testament texts.[19]

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[15]G. Kittel, "Der geschichtliche Ort des Jakobusbriefes," <u>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</u> 41 (1942): 84.

[16]See "Appendix 4: James and the Gospel Tradition."

[17]Davids, "James and Jesus," 69-71.

[18]Ibid., 75.

[19]Matt. 5:3=Luke 6:20; Matt. 5:7=Luke 6:36; Exod. 20:13-14; Lev. 19:18.

Although James does not distinguish between his own words and the sayings of Jesus, the latter "indirectly form the very basis and authority" for his ethical instructions.[20]

Verba Christi in Exegesis

Unfortunately, none of the authors consulted for this project (except one) articulate a methodology for interpreting Verba Christi in the epistles. Lorin Cranford's Exegeting the New Testament offers three guidelines in "Appendix E: Guidelines for Exegeting Kleine Gattungen."[21] This seminar member recommends only an addition of an initial guideline. It has been included here with the other three to aid the seminar in evaluating this suggestion.

a. Identify a saying of Jesus in the epistles using the following criteria: parallels in wording, content, meaning, or images.

b. Compare the form of the saying in the epistolary context with the form in the Gospel(s) if such exists. Look for interpretive alterations that may have been added to the saying in the epistle.

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[20]Patrick J. Hartin, James and the Q Sayings of Jesus, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, ed. David Hill, no. 47 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 243.

E. Earle Ellis, "Gospel Criticism: A Perspective on the State of the Art," in The Gospel and the Gospels, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 44-45, offers two reasons for this lack of distinction between the words of James and the sayings of Jesus: "The letters reveal that Paul (and his congregations) and Peter and James know a number of synoptic traditions. They rarely cite them as such, apparently because (1) they know their recipients have already received Jesus-traditions that were deliberately transmitted separately as a special kind of tradition and because (2) as prophets who 'have the mind of Christ' and apostles who are conscious of being his authorized representatives (שלוחי) and whose teaching is thus his teaching, they have no need to do so." Cf. 1 Cor. 2:16; 14:37.

[21]Lorin L. Cranford, Exegeting the New Testament: A Seminar Working Model with Expanded Research Bibliography, 2nd rev. ed. (Ft. Worth: Scripta, 1991), 68-69.

c. Compare the context between the gospel pericope and the <u>Verbum Christi</u>. If the saying of Jesus is used in a different context, it may carry a slightly different meaning.

d. Compare this example of the <u>Verbum Christi</u> with any other examples of the same saying in other epistles. The same considerations of wording and context apply here as with the gospel comparison.

CHAPTER 1

VERBA CHRISTI IN JAMES 4:11-12; 5:12

[4:11]Do not speak against one another, brothers and sisters. The one who speaks
against a brother or judges a sister speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you
judge the law, you are not obeying the law but judging it. [12]There is one lawgiver and
judge; he alone is able to save and destroy. But you, who are you to judge your neighbor?

[5:12]But above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, neither by heaven nor by the
earth nor by any other oath. But let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, otherwise you
may fall under condemnation.

Genre of James

Because of the letter's unique composition, David E. Aune has described James as a

"general letter or homily."[22] In this type of written communication, the sender and addressees

have a distant and indirect connection. The letter deals with matters more directly determined by

the situation of the author. Since the letter does not precisely reveal the recipient's situation, it

possesses the character of a monologue, and it abandons typical epistolary forms for other types

of discourse.[23]

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[22]David E. Aune, The New Testament in Its Literary Environment, Library of
Early Christianity, ed. Wayne A. Meeks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 217-218.
Other examples cited by Aune include Romans, Ephesians, the Pastorals, 1 & 2 Peter,
and Jude.

[23]The letter of James contains only the opening form of sender, addressee, and
greetings. For a description of the epistolary form, see William Doty, Letters in Primitive

The letter of James takes up at least two epistolary styles of discourse. First, it applies

Greco-Roman rhetoric. The deliberative rhetorical style "focused on persuading the assembly

about a <u>future</u> course of action."[24] In order to persuade or dissuade, the style appeals to "honor

and advantage, or self-interest."[25] Second, the letter uses the Greco-Roman diatribe. It "makes

frequent use of imaginary opponents, hypothetical objections, and false conclusions."[26]

More specifically, the letter of James contains paraenesis, a style of ethical exhortation

which instructs on how to live (or how not to live).[27] Two paraenetic forms appear in the letter

of James.[28] One, admonitions contain a series of loosely connected exhortations, such as James

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<u>Christianity</u>, New Testament Series, ed. Dan O. Via, Jr. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 1-48.

[24]Aune, <u>New Testament in Its Literary Environment</u>, 198. Deliberative rhetoric follows four elements of speech: (1) the exordium (introduction); (2) the narratio (statement of facts); (3) the probatio (argument); and the peroratio (conclusion). Ibid., 199. Aune adds that deliberative rhetoric often shortens the first two elements.

[25]Ibid. For example, the letter frequently admonishes certain behaviors so as to avoid future condemnation. See James 1:13-15; 2:12-13; 3:1; 4:11-12; 5:9, 12.

[26]Ibid., 200. For example, the diatribe often begins with an expression similar to James 4:13: "Come now, you who say."

[27]James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, <u>Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook</u>. (Lousiville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 62.

[28]Three other forms do not appear in James: vice and virtue lists (cf. 1 Peter 2:1); codes of household ethics (cf. 1 Peter 3:1-7); and the two-ways tradition (cf. Didache 1-6).

5:7-20. Two, topoi involve "extended paraenetical statements on particular themes or topics."[29]

The topoi also use a threefold structure: injunction (desired action), reason (rationale for such

action), and discussion (persuasion by showing consequences).[30]

Considering the preceding discussion, one may see James 4:11-12 as a "small" topoi[31]

and James 5:12 as an admonition. In James 4:11-12, the injunction concerns speaking against

one another; the reason relates the offense to disobeying the law; and the discussion recognizes

one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and destroy. In James 5:12, the deliberative

admonition prohibits (dissuades) the Christian community from swearing and exhorts

(persuades) them to speak direct truth. The argument alludes to a saying of Jesus and appeals to

potential punishment for those who do swear by an oath.

Exegesis of James 4:11-12

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[29]Ibid. Bailey, Literary Forms, 196, identifies James 2:1-13; 2:14-26; 3:1-12 as
topoi. Cf. 1 Thess. 5:1-12 and 5:13-22 for the distinction between topoi and admonition.

[30]Ibid., 63. Sometimes the topoi also include an analogous situation and
refutation. Cf. Rom. 13:1-7: injunction (13:1a); reason (13:1b); refutation (13:2); and
discussion (13:3-7).

[31]Abraham J. Malherbe, Moral Exhortation, A Greco-Roman Sourcebook, Library
of Early Christianity, ed. Wayne A. Meeks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 144-161,
offers several examples on various subjects from Greco-Roman literature. Each example
is significantly longer than James 4:11-12 as are the topoi in James 2-3.

James 4:11-12 contains five main statements. Christians should not speak against one another (1).[32] One who judges another judges the law (2). Christians obey the law but do not judge it (3). Only God makes and judges the law (4). Christians do not judge their neighbor (5).

The passage consists of three parts; each one corresponds with an element in the topoi: injunction, reason, discussion.[33] Christians should not speak against one another (1). Christians should obey the law, since speaking against another judges the law (2-3). Christians should not judge their neighbor, since God is the only judge (4-5).

James 4:11-12 does not easily follow from the preceding verses. Franz Mußner contends that James 4:10 "bildet mit seiner eschatologischen Verheißung einen deutlichen Abschluß der vorausgehenden Imperativreihe."[34] Although the imperative mood continues from 4:7 to 4:11, 4:11 introduces a new theme and a new tone.[35] The form of address changes from

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[32]Numbers in parentheses refer to the main clause statements as indicated in "Appendix 1: Block Diagram of James 4:11-12; 5:12."

[33]The second and third elements in the topoi are introduced by δέ. Cf. Franz Schnider, Der Jakobusbrief, Regensburger Neues Testament, ed. Jost Eckert and Otto Knoch (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1987), 106, who says that the passage consists of two parts: "the warning not to slander one another" (4:11a); and "a detailed reason for the warning" (4:11b-12).

[34]Franz Mußner, Der Jakobusbrief, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, ed. Alfred Wikenhauser and Anton Vögtle, no. 13 (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1964), 187.

[35]Eugen Ruckstuhl, Jakobusbrief, 1.-3. Johannesbrief (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1985), 26.

μοιχαλίδες, ἁμαρτωλοί, and δίψυχοι to ἀδελφοί.[36] The general warnings yield to a specific

prohibition (μὴ καταλαλεῖτε).[37] It receives amplification through reason and discussion, unlike

the preceding series of admonitions.[38]

In a general way, however, James 4:11-12 continues issues addressed earlier in the

letter. The author has emphasized personal speech-ethics throughout.[39] This passage continues

the larger discussion of speech and the use of the tongue.[40] It also returns to the issue of

(verbal?) wars and fights in 4:1. It anticipates other elements of personal speech-ethics which

follow: boasting, grumbling, and swearing.[41]

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[36]James 4:4, 8, 11.

[37]This imperative with vocative construction often begins new sections: James
1:2, 16, 19; 2:1; 3:1; 4:11; 5:7, 12. In 2:5; 3:12; 4:4, 8; 5:9, 10, it appears within sections.
Information on word usage was obtained using GRAMCORD Greek New Testament for
Windows with Bible Companion, ver. 1.2m (Vancouver, WA: GRAMCORD Institute,
1996).

[38]However, Martin Dibelius, James, rev. Heinrich Greeven, trans. Michael A.
Williams, Hermeneia, ed. Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 228, argues that
James 4:11-12 belongs with the preceding context based on associations with other vices
in early Christian paraenetic material. Cf. 1 Clem. 30:1-3; Herm. Sim. 73.2. References
to the Apostolic Fathers are from Michael W. Holmes, ed., The Apostolic Fathers, trans.
J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: 1989).

[39]See William R. Baker, Personal Speech-Ethics in the Epistle of James,
Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, ed. Martin Hengel and Otfried
Hofius, series 2, no. 68 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995).

[40]See especially James 1:13, 19, 26; 2:3, 12, 16; 3:1-12.

[41]James 4:13-16; 5:9, 12.

Christians Should Not Speak Against One Another (1)

The command not to speak against another appears frequently in the Jewish-Christian tradition. It has a clear Old Testament background.[42] In the LXX, καταλαλέω "expresses hostility of speech" against God, Moses, or other people.[43] In the NT, it means "to speak against, often involving speaking evil of."[44] Only twice does the verb occur outside James 4:11-12; in 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:16, it describes how pagans speak against a Christian's good behavior. It also appears in several vice lists in the Apostolic Fathers.[45]

James 4:11 commands Christians[46] not[47] to speak against one another.[48] When listed with other sins, καταλαλέω can mean to slander or to speak false or damaging remarks.[49] In the

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[42]See Num. 12:8; 21:5, 7; Ps. 44:16; 50:20; 78:19; 101:5; 119:23; Hos. 7:13; Mic. 3:7; Mal. 3:13. The vice appears also in the Qumran literature: 1QS 4:9, 11; 5:25-26; 6:26; 7:2-9. Reference to the Qumran writings is from Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1975).

[43]Wilhelm Mundle, "καταλαλέω," in The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:345-346.

[44]Johannes Louw and Eugene A. Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:433. Cf. καταλαλιά in 2 Cor. 12:20; 2 Pet. 2:1; κατάλαλος in Rom. 1:30; and related words ὀνειδίζω in Matt. 5:11; James 1:5; 1 Pet. 4:14; λοιδορέω in 1 Pet. 2:23; λοιδορία in 1 Pet. 3:9.

[45]1 Clem. 30:1-3; 35:5; Barn. 20:2; Herm. Man. 27:2-3; 38:3; Herm. Sim. 65:5; 73:2.

[46]James uses the vocative ἀδελφοί fifteen times. Eight times it appears with the possessive pronoun μου, and three times, with the adjective ἀγαπητοί. It refers to "a

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present context, it rather means to criticize, find fault with, or condemn.[50] In speaking against

another person, ὁ καταλαλῶν becomes a κριτής. This meaning finds support with the third

occurrence of the word in the verse, where it is directed toward νόμου not ἀλλήλων or ἀδελφοῦ.

Also, its parallel with κρίνω in Matt. 7:1; Luke 6:37; Rom. 2:1 corroborates this understanding.

Christians Should Obey the Law, Since Speaking Against Another Judges the Law (2-3)

Main statements two and three give the reason for the prohibition. One who judges another
judges the law (2). Christians obey the law but do not judge it (3).

close associate of a group of persons having a well-defined membership (in the NT
ἀδελφός refers specifically to fellow believers in Christ)”; it includes both men and
women. Louw, Greek-English Lexicon, 1:125.

[47]“The present imperative with μή is used to stop an action already in progress.”
James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, Syntax of New Testament Greek (Lanthan,
MD: University Press of America, 1979), 116.

[48]James uses ἀλλήλων only in 4:11; 5:9, 16. He prohibits his readers from
speaking or grumbling against one another, but instructs them to confess their sins to one
another.

[49]Cf. Rom.1:30; 1 Pet. 2:1; 1 Clem. 35:5; Barn. 20:2.

[50]Baker, Personal Speech-Ethics, 177-178, comments about καταλαλέω: “It
certainly accents slander as one amongst a number of types of harmful speech which
were also associated with φονεύετε in 4:2a, such as mockery, cursing, angry speech, and
perjury. It is able to envelop a wider scope of speech sins, though, including other
familiar types. like partiality, gossip, flattery, and deceit.”

One Who Judges Another Judges the Law (2)

The second main statement clearly identifies καταλαλέω with κρίνω.[51] The two words are connected twice by coordinating conjunctions: first with ἤ, and then with καὶ. They also share common objects: first ἀδελφὸν, and then νόμον.[52] Therefore, to speak against another Christian is also to judge them and the law!

While νόμος usually refers to the Old Testament (or more precisely, the Pentateuch),[53] James seems to use the word differently. In James 2:8, it clearly refers to the love command of Lev. 19:18: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." Several adjectives describe νόμος: τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας, Βασιλικὸν, and ἐλευθερίας.[54] Also, the letter seems to distinguish ὁ νόμος from νόμος. Twice it appears with the article, when the context connects it

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[51]Κρίνω means to "pass an unfavorable judgment upon, criticize, find fault with, condemn." Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, <u>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</u>, 2nd ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 452. It appears six times in James: 2:12; 4:11 (3 times), 12; 5:9. Baker, <u>Personal Speech-Ethics</u>, 178, proposes this slight distinction between the words: "The first emphazises the speech; the second emphasises the thought process behind the speech."

[52]These objects appear in genitive case after καταλαλέω because of the κατα prefix.

[53]Cf. Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 22:40; etc.

[54]James 1:25; 2:8, 12.

with OT Law.[55] The other eight times it lacks the article, where the contexts suggest this specific

connotation.[56] Furthermore, the shift from ἀδελφόν to πλησίον in James 4:12 serves to remind

the reader of the love command, even in this context.[57]

Christians Obey the Law But Do Not Judge It (3)

The third main statement more precisely clarifies the reason for the prohibition.

Judging this law keeps one from obeying the command to love. If one judges the law,[58] then that

person becomes a judge of the law rather than a doer of the law.[59] The word ποιητὴς occurs

only six times in the NT--four of which are in James![60] With its cognate ποιέω,[61] it carries the

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[55]James 2:9-10.

[56]James 1:25; 2:8, 11, 12; 4:11 (4 times).

[57]Mußner, Jakobusbrief, 187; Schnider, Jakobusbrief, 106.

[58]The first class condition and the present imperative with μή suggest that some in the Christian community were in fact guilty of this speech sin.

[59]Sophie Laws, A Commentary on the Epistle of James, Harper's New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 187, says that ποιητὴς could mean "maker" in anticipation of νομοθέτης in 4:12.

[60]James 1:22, 23, 25; 4:11. It occurs in Acts 17:28 with the meaning "poet" and in Rom. 2:13 with ἀκροατής: "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified."

[61]See James 2:8, 12, 13, 19; 3:18; 4:17; 5:15.

sense of ethical obligation. Simply put, speaking against another sets aside the command to love

them!

Christians Should not Judge Their Neighbor, Since God Is the Only Judge (4-5)

Main statements four and five offer decisive discussion concerning the prohibition.

Only God makes and judges the law (4). Christians do not judge their neighbor (5).

Only God Makes and Judges the Law (4)

The fourth main statement stresses the gravity of violating the prohibition. In speaking

against one another (and thereby judging the law), the Christian not only sins against God,[62] but

usurps God and assumes his place[63] as the only lawmaker[64] and judge. Both the OT and NT

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[62]Cf. TGad. 4:1-2: "Beware, my children, of those who hate, because it leads to lawlessness against the Lord himself. Hatred does not want to hear repeated his commands concerning love of neighbor, and thus it sins against God." The Testament of Gad dates from the 2nd cen. B.C.E. The citation is from James H. Charlesworth, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 1, Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983).

[63]Mußner, Jakobusbrief, 188.

[64]Νομοθέτης is a hapax legomenon in the NT; it appears in the LXX in Ps. 9:21[20]. Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 613, comments on the variant in this verse: ."Because manuscript evidence for and against the inclusion of ὁ before νομοθέτης is rather evenly balanced, with no compelling considerations arising from either palaeography or syntax, the Committee retained the article but enclosed it within square brackets."

clearly present God as judge.[65] Only[66] God has the right to judge, since he can carry out his

verdict. He alone can save and destroy![67]

Christians Do Not Judge Their Neighbor (5)

The fifth main statement finishes the discussion with a rhetorical question. "But you,

who are you to judge[68] your neighbor?" To judge law and neighbor disobeys the command to

love and arrogantly assumes the rights of God himself.[69] Another Christian writer would later

ask a similar question with the same certainty: "If our God and Lord, who rules over all things

and has authority over all his creation, holds no grudge against those who confess their sins and

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[65]See Gen. 18:25; Judg. 11:27; Job 9:15; Ps. 7:11; 94:2; Rom. 3:6; Heb. 12:23: James 5:9.

[66]The statement's most emphatic word comes first. Ralph P. Martin, James, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, no. 48 (Waco: Word, 1988), 164, states: "The use of εἷς ('one') eliminates any ground for pretense or excuse that those mentioned in 4:11 have for judging others; this right is reserved solely for God, because he is the one who can save and destroy."

[67]Σώζω appears in James 1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:15, 20. It consists of deliverance from sin and judgement and holds as its hope eternal life. Ceslas Spicq, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, trans. and ed. by James D. Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 3:350. Ἀπόλλυμι occurs in James 1:11; 4:12. It means "to destroy or to cause the destruction of persons, objects, or institutions." Louw, Greek-English Lexicon, 1:232. Together these verbs echo phrases from both OT and NT texts: Deut. 23:39; 1 Sam. 2:6-7; 2 Kings 5:7; Matt. 10:28. Cf. Herm. Man. 49:3.

[68]In the NT, as in classical Greek, the articular participle may depend on a personal pronoun. James H. Moulton, ed., A Grammar of New Testament Greek, 3rd ed., 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908-1976), 3:153. Cf. Rom. 9:20; 14:4.

[69]Douglas J. Moo, The Letter of James,The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris, no. 16 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 152.

is merciful, can a human being, who is mortal and full of sin, hold a grudge against someone, as though he could destroy or save him?"[70]

Exegesis of James 5:12

James 5:12 consists of two main statements. Christians should not speak with an oath (1). Christians should speak direct truth (2). The admonition fits well with the style of ethical paraenesis where "the prohibition is based upon a general concept, and then impressed upon the audience by means of an eschatological threat."[71]

The passage's connection with the preceding verses depends on the introductory phrase πρὸ πάντων.[72] The phrase appears three times in the NT.[73] In Col. 1:17, it has a more temporal sense. In 1 Pet. 4:8, it has a similar context. At least three options exist regarding its function within in James 5:12.[74] First, it could indicate that the command it introduces is the most

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[70]Herm. Sim. 100:4.

[71] Dibelius, James, 251.

[72]Brooks, Syntax, 26, classifies the form as ablative of rank, which "expresses the idea of separation in terms of rank, order, or precedence." See also F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 114. Louw, Greek-English Lexicon, 1:627, calls the phrase a "marker of primary importance." Cf. Did. 10:4.

[73]Information obtained using GRAMCORD.

[74]Laws, James, 219-220. Dibelius, James, 248, however, remarks with skepticism: "Since this verse has no relationship with what precedes or follows, nothing can be determined about the significance of the phrase."

important in the series of commands from 4:1-5:20.[75] Second, it could intensify the command in

its own right without comparison to the other commands.[76] Third, it could introduce the final

section of the letter rather than conclude the preceding section. The adversative conjunction δέ

and ἀδελφοί μου, which separate the prohibitions from the preceding context, favor the third

option.[77] As Schnider observes, "Die Einleitungsformel »vor allem aber« weist nicht nur auf

etwas Wichtiges hin, sondern ist eine Formel des Briefstils, die gegen Ende des Briefes die

Schlußermahnungen einleitet."[78]

Christians Should Not Speak with an Oath (1)

The swearing of oaths appears frequently in the Jewish and Greek traditions.[79] The OT

illustrates the practice of calling upon Yahweh as witness.[80] The OT does not prohibit oaths, but

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[75]See William R. Baker, "'Above All Else': Contexts of the Call for Verbal Integrity in James 5:12," Journal for the Study of the New Testament, no. 54 (June 1994): 57-71. The admonition does summarize the letter's teaching on speech within the context of personal conflicts. See also Martin, James, 203.

[76]Adolf Schlatter, Der Brief des Jakobus, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1985), sees the command as most important because oaths are made with reference to God.

[77]The writer has not used δέ since 4:16 and ἀδελφοί μου since 3:12. They appear together in James only in this verse. Information was obtained using GRAMCORD.

[78]Schnider, Jakobusbrief, 130. Mußner, Jakobusbrief, 211, slightly subdues the emphasis when he suggests the sense: "Vor allem darf ich nicht vergessen . . ."

[79]For parallels in the literature of Near Eastern wisdom traditions, Qumran, and Philo, see Baker, Personal Speech-Ethics, 249-250, 262, 273-274.

it speaks against swearing falsely.[81] The later Jewish writings attempt to limit their excessive

use.[82] The Greeks had used oaths in many areas of life: religion, politics, law, and medicine.

Because of their frequency and declining effect, the Greeks show some tendency to limit or

avoid the practice of oaths.[83] Epictetus (55-135 C.E.) counsels against oaths: "Refuse, if you

can, to take an oath at all, but if that is impossible, refuse as far as circumstances allow."[84]

In contrast, two NT texts prohibit oaths entirely.[85] Both Matt. 5:34-37 and James 5:12[86]

make the oath unnecessary.[87] Both use the word ὀμνύω, which means "to affirm the truth of a

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[80]See Gen. 31:50; Ruth 1:17; Judg. 8:19; 1 Sam. 3:17; 20:12-13. Certain treaties even required oaths. See Gen. 21:23; 31:50; 47:31. Hans-Georg Link, "ὀμνύω," in The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:739 adds: "The oath had its original promissory function: the partners placed themselves under the power and judgment of Yahweh" and by implication confessed faith in him. See Deut. 6:13; 10:20.

[81]See Lev. 19:12; Jer. 5:2; 7:9; Mal. 3:5.

[82]Ecclus. 23:9-11.

[83]Link, "ὀμνύω," 3:738-739.

[84]Epictetus, "Encheiridion," 33. Cited from Eugene M. Boring, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe, eds., Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 527. For other references from Greek literature, see Baker, "'Above All Else,'" 69-70.

[85]Dibelius, James, 248, asserts: "In Jewish paraenesis, the way for this absolute prohibition of swearing is at least prepared by the prohibition of frivolous swearing."

[86]Laws, James, 222, comments about this text: "James's unqualified prohibition still finds its closest parallel in the teaching of Matt. v.33-37, the closest point of contact,

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statement by calling on a divine being to execute sanctions against a person if the statement in

question is not true."[88] Both use illustrative phrases to emphasize the absolute prohibition.

Matthew lists four with explanations, while James lists two.[89] Both passages also exclude

exceptions: Matthew with ὅλως; James with μήτε ἄλλον τινὰ ὅρκον.

Christians Should Speak Direct Truth (2)

While the first main statement in James 5:12 parallels Matt. 5:34-36, the second main statement
compares with Matt. 5:37. Both texts call for absolute truthfulness. Both use a present
imperative with double emphatic and negative particles.[90] However, each author offers a

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indeed, between the epistle and any other part of the NT." For a comparison of the
wording in both texts, see "Appendix 5."

[87]Matthew uses an aorist infinitive to express the prohibition, while James uses μή
with a present imperative. Moulton, Grammar, 3:74-75, distinguishes between the two:
"The aorist imperative is more or less restricted to precepts concerning conduct in
specific cases"; "present imperatives give a command to do something constantly, to
continue to do it; or else a prohibition against its continuance, an interruption of an action
already begun."

[88]Louw, Greek-English Lexicon, 1:441. Cf. ὀμνύω in Matt. 5:24, 26; 23:16, 18,
20, 21, 22; 26:74; Heb. 3:11, 18; 4:3; 6:13, 16; 7:21. Cf. also ὁρκίζω in Mark 5:7; Acts
19:13 and ἐπιορκέω in Matt. 5:33.

[89]Matthew's listing uses the more Semitic ἐν with the dative, while James's
reflects a more classical expression — the accusative with oaths. See Daniel B. Wallace,
Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (Grand
Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 205; and Blass, Greek Grammar, 83. Cf. similar expressions
in Matt. 23:16-22; Shebuoth 4:13; Sanhedrin 3:2. Tractates from the Mishnah may be
found in Herbert Danby, The Mishnah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933).

[90]Matthew's ἔστω is more classical, while James's ἤτω is more colloquial. Both
are 3rd singular active forms of εἰμί. Laws, James, 223. In James 5:12, the article τό
makes the first particle the subject, while the second one is the predicate. Schlatter, Brief
des Jakobus, 278. See Wallace, Greek Grammar, 231. Cf. Rev. 3:14; 11:14. Dibelius,
James, 249, suggests that the phrase should read: "Let your 'yes' be true and your 'no' be

different reason for the prohibition of oaths. As in 5:9, James warns of judgment,[91] whereas Matthew offers a theological rationale — oaths have a demonic origin! James fixes this eschatological constraint to the words in an oath, since "Gott ist der Beschirmer der Wahrheit."[92]

true." Cf. similar expressions in Justin Martyr, First Apology, 1.16.5; Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, 7.67.5; 2 Enoch 49:1; and numbers 1087, 1088 in C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, A Rabbinic Anthology (New York: Schocken Books, 1974).

The notion that Matthew may permit a "substitute" oath, i.e. one may say a double yes or double no instead of swearing, (see Dibelius, James, 251; Martin, James, 204) fails to account for ὅλως.

[91]The idiom ὑπὸ κρίσιν πίπτω means "to be condemned for acting contrary to laws and regulations"; "in this context the condemnation refers to God's judgment." Louw, Greek-English Lexicon, 1:557. Cf. similar expressions in Prov. 12:13; Ecclus. 9:2; 2 Macc. 3:6; 1 Tim. 3:6-7; James 1:2. Cf. rabbinic parallels which also relate the breaking of an oath with punishment from God in 1078, 1088, 1092 in Montefiore, Rabbinic Anthology. 1097 reads: "God said to Israel, 'Be careful what you vow, and do not become addicted to making vows, for whoever is so addicted, will, in the end, sin by breaking his oath, and he who breaks his oath denies me without hope of pardon.'"

[92]Schlatter, Brief des Jakobus, 279. As she connects this verse to what follows, Laws, James, 224, adds: "But if oaths are unacceptable, there are other forms of address to God that are, in different circumstances, right and proper." Cf. James 5:13-18.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented an introduction to the role of Verba Christi in the letter of James. It has also offered an exegesis of James 4:11-12 and 5:12, which parallel two sayings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels.

The letter of James, in particular, censures the sins of speech. It forbids Christians to speak against one another. Such evil speaking not only expresses "arrogance and disregard" for another believer, but it also slights "God's law and God himself as the <u>one</u> Lawgiver and Judge of all."[93] In addition, James forbids oaths as a means of ensuring truth, for "Das Schwören gefährdet die Wahrhaftigkeit."[94] May the Lord tame the tongue of those who hear and do his word!

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[93]Mundle, "καταλαλέω," 3:346.

[94]Schlatter, <u>Brief des Jakobus</u>, 278.

BLOCK DIAGRAM OF JAMES 4:11-12; 5:12

Μὴ καταλαλεῖτε ἀλλήλων.

ὁ καταλαλῶν ἀδελφοῦ
      ἢ
  κρίνων τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ καταλαλεῖ νόμου
                  καὶ
                  κρίνει νόμον.

οὐκ εἶ ποιητὴς νόμου
        ἀλλὰ
    κριτής.

εἷς ἐστιν ὁ νομοθέτης
             καὶ
         κριτής.

σὺ τίς εἶ.

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μὴ ὀμνύετε

ἤτω ὑμῶν τὸ Ναὶ Ναὶ
καὶ
τὸ Οὒ Οὒ

APPENDIX 1

SEMANTIC DIAGRAM OF JAMES 4:11-12; 5:12

James 4:11-12

Clause	Connective	Sentence Function	Verb Analysis	Subject	Other Links
1		Imperative	Present 2nd Pl	[ὑμεῖς]	ἀδελφοί
2		Declarative	Present 3rd Sg Present 3rd Sg	ὁ καταλαλῶν ἢ κρίνων	καταλαλέω ἀδελφός κρίνω νόμος
3	δὲ	Declarative	Present 2nd Sg	[σύ]	κρίνω νόμος
4		Declarative	Present 3rd Sg	[αὐτός]	νομοθέτης κριτής
5	δέ	Interrogative	Present 2nd Sg	τίς	ὁ κρίνων

James 5:12

Clause	Connective	Sentence Function	Verb Analysis	Subject	Other Links
1	πρὸ πάντων	Imperative	Present 2nd Pl	[ὑμεῖς]	ἀδελφοί
2	δὲ	Imperative	Present 3rd Sg	τὸ Ναὶ	ὑμῶν

James 4:11-12

1   Christians should not speak against one another.

2   One who judges another judges the law.

3   Christian obey the law but do not judge it.

4   Only God makes and judges the law.

5   Christians do not judge their neighbor.

James 5:12

1   Christians should not speak with an oath.

2   Christians should speak direct truth.

APPENDIX 1

EXEGETICAL OUTLINE OF JAMES 4:11-12; 5:12[95]

James 4:11-12

A. Christians should not speak against one another. (1)

B. Christians should obey the law, since speaking against another judges the law. (2-3)
1.   One who judges another judges the law. (2)
   2. Christian obey the law but do not judge it. (3)

C.   Christians should not judge their neighbor, since God is the only judge. (4-5)
1.   Only God makes and judges the law. (4)
   2. Christians do not judge their neighbor. (5)

James 5:12

A.   Christians should not speak with an oath. (1)

B.   Christians should speak direct truth. (2)

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[95]The two passages in James are phrased with imperatives and express principles for Christian behavior which are not limited to the setting of the letter. Therefore, the exegetical outline is presented in present tense and also serves as the expository outline.

APPENDIX 1

JAMES AND THE GOSPEL TRADITION[96]

James	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
1:2	5:11-12		6:22-23	
1:4	5:48			
1:5	7:7		11:9	
1:6	21:21	11:23-24		
1:12	10:22			
1:17	7:11		11:13	
1:20	5:22			
1:21	13:8	4:8	8:8	
1:22-23	7:24-26		6:46-49	
1:25				13:17
2:5	5:3; 11:5		6:20; 7:22	
2:6			18:3	
2:8	22:39-40	12:28-34	10:27	
2:10	5:19		16:17	
2:11	5:21-28			

[96]This chart draws on the following sources: Aland, <u>Novum Testamentum</u>; Peter H. Davids, <u>The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text</u>, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 47-48; idem, "James and Jesus," 66-67; Hartin, <u>James and the Q Sayings</u>, 141-142; Kittel, "Der geschichtliche Ort des Jakobusbreifes," 84-94; Mußner, <u>Jakobusbrief</u>, 48-50.

James	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
2:13	5:7		6:36	
2:14-15	6:25; 25:35			
2:19	8:29	1:24	4:34	
3:1		12:40		
3:12	7:16-18		6:44-45	
3:18	5:9			
4:2	7:7			
4:3	7:7-8; 12:39			
4:4	6:24		16:13	
4:8	5:8; 6:22			
4:9			6:25	
4:10	23:12		14:11; 18:14	
4:11-12	7:1-2; 10:28		6:37-38	
4:13-14	6:34			
4:17			12:47	
5:1			6:24-25	
5:2	6:19-21		6:37; 12:33-34	
5:6			6:37	
5:8	24:3,27,39			
5:9	5:22; 7:1; 24:33	13:29		
5:10	5:11-12		6:23	
5:12	5:34-37			
5:14		6:13	10:34	
5:17			4:25	
5:19-20	18:15		17:3	

APPENDIX 1

JAMES 5:12 AND MATT. 5:34-37

James 5:12	Matt. 5:34-37
Πρὸ πάντων δέ, ἀδελφοί μου,	ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν
μὴ ὀμνύετε	μὴ ὀμόσαι ὅλως·
μήτε τὸν οὐρανὸν	μήτε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὅτι θρόνος ἐστὶν τοῦ θεοῦ,
μήτε τὴν γῆν	μήτε ἐν τῇ γῇ, ὅτι ὑποπόδιόν ἐστιν τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ,
	μήτε εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα, ὅτι πόλις ἐστιν τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως,
μήτε ἄλλον τινὰ ὅρκον·	

	μήτε ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ σου ὀμόσῃς,
	  ὅτι οὐ δύνασαι μίαν τρίχα λευκὴν
	  ποιῆσαι ἢ μέλαιναν.

ἤτω δέ ὑμῶν τὸ Ναὶ Ναὶ καὶ τὸ Οὒ Οὒ,	ἔστω δὲ ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν ναὶ ναί, οὒ οὒ·
ἵνα μὴ ὑπὸ κρίσιν πέσητε.	τὸ δὲ περισσὸν τούτων ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἐστιν.

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