

Finding Fault and Planning Ahead Without the Lord

James 4:11-17

James 4:11-17 - *“Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*

¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

Background Notes

In our studies of James thus far we've seen that the epistle of James is a very practical book. Would you agree? In fact, the theme of James is “Practical Christian Living.” In his epistle, James pointed out a number of areas in which Christians have problems--Christians of the 1st century, and Christians today.

However, after James points out the particular area of struggle - the particular problem – he doesn't leave us stranded. He gives us the solution to the problem. But the solution is not automatic-- we have to do something. In fact, we are **commanded** to do something!

The epistle of James is filled with commands. In five chapters there are 54 commands! That's a lot of commands in a short space, but these commands are the solutions to the problems.

Remember, these commands are not just the commands of James to the scattered Jewish believers in the Roman Empire in the 1st century. These commands are the Word of God to us today. This is Scripture. So if you have a problem in the area of temptation, or in the control of your tongue, or in making right decisions, or you have a problem because you are causing strife in the family, in the church, in the fellowship, read the book of James and **obey the commands** in each chapter. You may be thinking, “That's easier said than done”! That's true, but with God's help – which is always available – you can do it!

In the second half of James 4, we have two common sins that we've probably all committed: finding fault or speaking evil about fellow believers, and making plans without consulting the Lord.

Doctrinal Points

1. It is a sin to speak evil of a fellow believer.

Verse 11: *“Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.”*

Speaking evil of a fellow believer means to find fault with a fellow believer and publicizing it. This can range from exaggerating little faults of a brother or sister to actual slander of a fellow believer.

Let me ask you: Are you a faultfinder? It's a sin! You knew that slander was a sin, but you probably didn't think that talking about a person's "little" faults was a sin, right? Faultfinding is a sin, and it leads to contempt--which is even worse!

Now before we go further, we should add that there is a proper place for pointing out a fellow believer's problem or fault. Some of you may be smiling here: "Oh good, that gets me off the hook!" But wait a minute! There is a proper place for pointing out a fellow believer's fault (if it really is a fault), but we must do it with **love**. In addition, we must do it **privately**, and after we have **examined our own faults!** Remember that the Lord said, "Don't look for specks in your brother's eye unless you take the telephone pole out of your own eye first!"

In addition, we must use **tact** when pointing out a fault. Another important point: If you know the Word (and you should know the Word!), you use **the Word**, too. So there is a place to carefully point out a fault, but first we should be sure it really is a fault! Then we should point out the fault with love, privately, after we've examined our own lives, tactfully, and using the Word.

Verse 11 says that when we find fault with fellow believers we not only judge our fellow believers, but **we judge God's law of love**. And if we judge God's law of love we are putting ourselves above the law, and above the Law-Giver - the Lord Himself (v12)! Do you follow the argument there? We're essentially saying that we don't agree with God -- that God didn't know what he was doing when he made faultfinding a sin! So when we find fault with people, we're disagreeing with God, and saying God didn't know what he was doing when he said faultfinding was a sin. This is a serious matter, because we're essentially finding fault with God. And remember, verse 12 warns that He is able to save and destroy! How dare we judge one another? It is a sin to speak evil of a fellow believer.

2. It is a sin to plan ahead without the Lord.

Verses 13-17 teach us that it is a sin to plan ahead without consulting the Lord! Who would have thought that to plan ahead without consulting the Lord was a **sin**? We might have thought that it's lacking common sense to plan ahead without the Lord, but it's more than just bad judgment -- it's a sin! It's a form of arrogance and boasting, which is evil.

Verse 16: *“but now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”*

Now let's not get the Scripture wrong here -- **it's not wrong to plan ahead**. In fact, setting goals and "counting the cost" are Biblical principles. But planning ahead becomes sin when the Lord is not consulted.

Many of you have heard older Christians say "Lord willing" or add the letters "D.V." when they tell you of their plans. "D.V.? What's that?" "D.V." is an abbreviation for two Latin words, "Deo Volente," meaning "God willing." We don't have to say "D.V." all the time, but all our plans should be D.V. – that is, if the Lord is willing, or if the plan is in the will of the Lord.

Why is it wrong to plan ahead without consulting the Lord? To make plans apart from the Lord is to presume upon God and assume that we know the future -- and we do not. We do not know what will happen tomorrow. We do not even know if we will be alive tomorrow! Verse 14, "*whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.*"

The people who died in the recent tragedy had no idea, when they got up that morning, that it would be the last day of their earthly lives. It could have been you. It could have been me. That's why it's so important to become a Christian **now**, if you're not a believer. 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, "*...now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.*" Proverbs 27:1 says, "*Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.*" Let me ask you, do you know for sure that if you were to die tomorrow, you would go to heaven? The good news is that **you can know!** Receive Jesus as your Savior now. He loves you, and He died for your sins. He will forgive and He will save you now, before it is too late.

As believers, we must bring the Lord into all our plans. He will guide us. Notice in verse 13 that it is not wrong to plan ahead, as to how to make a profit in business, as long as you are putting the Lord's will first. Put the Lord's will first -- then it's not wrong to make plans. But it is a sin to plan ahead without the Lord.

Practical Application

Remember, there are also sins of omission.

Verse 17: "*Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.*" There are not only **sins of commission** there are also **sins of omission**. Sins of commission are definite acts of wrongdoing, like using your tongue to take revenge or yielding to temptation. Sins of omission take place when we don't do what we know we should do.

When we don't help someone in need, a person that we know about and have the means to help, but we excuse ourselves for whatever reason -- that is a sin of omission. Not looking to the Lord for guidance when we make our plans is a sin of omission. It's not an option; it's a sin of omission.

Verse 17 certainly shows that the idea that we can reach perfection in this earthly life is false teaching. Have you ever met a Christian who believes that we can progress in our Christian lives to a point where we reach a state of perfection, and we don't sin anymore? I've met some folks who believe that! These Christians all seem to forget about the **sins of omission!** They say, "Well, I haven't sinned for several weeks!" – meaning that they think they haven't committed any sins. But what about the sins of omission?

These people misinterpret 1 John 1 which says clearly that all Christians still sin. Remember, "Christians are not sinless – but they should sin less." As growing Christians, we should certainly sin less often -- but we still sin! So Christians who believe the false teaching of perfectionism not only misinterpret 1 John 1, which clearly says that all Christians still sin, but they ignore their many sins of omission. What about the lack of humility in their lives, for starters?

So if you ever start thinking you are getting close to perfection in your Christian life, don't kid yourself! Remember, there are also sins of omission.