

- 1) James now begins a new subject speaking of boasting, arrogance, and leaving God out of our lives ...

James 4:13–17 (NASB 2020)

¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. For you are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while, and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” ¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ So for one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, for him it is sin.

- 2) James begins with a clear-cut example of how we can be boastful and arrogant perhaps without even realizing it.
 - a) The first implication is that we show arrogance and boastfulness in making plans without the slightest consideration of what our life might be like tomorrow.
 - i) Truth is, we may not even be here tomorrow.
 - ii) He makes the point that we are like a vapor – here today and gone tomorrow.
 - b) The most important implication here is that the person who is making these plans is doing so without any regard for what God may want.
- 3) As I considered this, I do not think James is saying we have to get a permission slip from God in order to do anything.
 - i) We have lives to live every day and a lot of what we do in those daily lives may be almost too mundane to involve God directly.
 - b) Instead, he is making the point that we must never take God out of our consideration regardless of the situation, mundane or not.
 - c) We must never close any part of our lives off to God.
 - d) We should always be open to the possibility that God might have input for us on whatever we might be planning.
 - i) And that is also without regard to whether it is an activity for God or for ourselves.
- 4) Indeed, I think this may be as simple as having the proper state of mind – a mind and heart that is never without God’s presence.

Now, this leads to a couple of questions – first, are we always in that state of mind?

If not, why not?

- a) If you are I personally am glad for you.
 - i) I realize now that when I was working it was much less the case.
 - ii) The idea of making every activity we participate in during a normal workday include God was for me, not really an easy thing to even consider let alone accomplish.

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- iii) The relationship and interaction parts of work were great but the sitting at a computer designing circuits or designing code – not so much.
- b) Not an excuse, just a statement of fact – and of course again I think we can be honoring of God in all that we do with the proper state of mind.

Second question is what are things that we might do that would assure we do not cut God out of our plans – that we are indeed in the right state of mind?

- 5) James concludes this passage with a statement that “knowing the right thing to do and not doing it is sin.”
 - a) We have discussed this before – this is basically ignoring God and what He intends for us.
 - b) That of course is the root problem of what we were just discussing – leaving God out of our plans and/or, even our daily lives. God wants to be part of our lives!
- 1) All of these last verses beginning with 4:7 have been about an appeal for submission to God with helpful applications of the principle to several different groups.
- 2) In 4:7–10 says, submission to God means truly repenting of our sins.
- 3) In 4:11–12 says, submission to God means that brothers do not verbally abuse one another.
- 4) In 4:13–16 says, submission to God means that our future plans are always made with God in mind.
- 5) And, as we just said, verse 4:17 says submission to God means doing what God wants us to do and realizing that when we do not it is sin.
- 6) As we move on, James turns his attention to a group of folks who appear to be far from truly submitting to God.

James 5:1–6 (NASB 2020)

Misuse of Riches

¹ Come now, you rich people, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. ² Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and your silver have corroded, and their corrosion will serve as a testimony against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! ⁴ Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, *and* which has been withheld by you, cries out *against you*; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of armies. ⁵ You have lived for pleasure on the earth and lived luxuriously; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and put to death the righteous person; he offers you no resistance.

- 1) Are these folks Christians whom James is calling to task or are they non-believers that James is speaking to here.
 - a) I have tried to consider this from both sides and I can see arguments for both as possibilities.
 - b) If these folks were not Christians reading this letter, then why this much detail about the shortcomings of these folks?

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- c) On the other side, this could be a warning to anyone who is rich among his readers not to let this become their plight.
- 2) He considers them as doing great now but warns them of the miseries and calamities that may be coming upon them.
 - a) Perhaps a warning and a sign for his rich readers of things to look out for in their lives.
- 3) Then he gets to the real issue.
- 4) If they are Christians and have deteriorated to this point then he is speaking of how they live their lives and some of the bad things they are doing.
- 5) If on the other hand, he is speaking to rich people who have not gotten to this point then it is a stark warning of how bad things can go if they do not heed his warnings.

We know we are not persecutors of the righteous, but are we rich people? Yes/No? Why/Why not?

⁵ You have lived for pleasure on the earth and lived luxuriously; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

Is having nice things really what verse 5 is about? If not, then what is James really saying to us?

- 6) The answer is – “not really.”
 - a) There is no doubt that he is taking them to task but looking carefully at what James is saying, it appears to me that it is not having nice things.
 - b) Instead, it is the effect the things have on them – their attitude toward these nice things (or as James says “lived for pleasure on the earth and lived luxuriously”).
- 7) James concludes his indictments of these rich folks by showing what their obsession with wealth leads to - condemning and putting to death righteous people.
- 8) One way this could happen is how these folks treated anyone who owed them money.
 - a) In the first century, one could be thrown in prison for not paying debts owed to others if the others were powerful and rich.
 - b) In many cases since debts had to be paid by relatives or by selling what they owned, if they were placed in prison, it actually became a life sentence.
 - c) There was also provision in the law that debtors could be placed in “debt bondage” – forced to be slaves of those to whom they owed debts.
 - d) While death was not a direct punishment for debt, the conditions these folks suffered in prison or as slaves would many times result in their death or at a minimum their life being destroyed.
- 9) These folks obviously did not have a “right attitude” toward wealth and possessions.

One final question to conclude this passage. What are some things that might say we have the wrong attitude toward our wealth?

- 1) This next passage highlights one of those things we have discussed in the past.

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- 2) Early Christians were expecting Christ's return to be "sooner rather than later" – meaning probably in their lifetimes or shortly thereafter.
- 3) In verses 7-8 James asks them to be patient and to be strong.

James 5:7-9 (NASB 2020)

Exhortation

⁷ Therefore be patient, brothers *and sisters*, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹ Do not complain, brothers *and sisters*, against one another, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

- 4) If we think back on all that James has been telling these believers, we will see that he has really brought into sharp focus many things that they might have to change in their lives.
 - a) Things that are not easy but things that are necessary in order to live lives that are pleasing to God and being true emulators of Christ.
- 5) At the conclusion of verse 8 he says, "the coming of the Lord is near."
- 6) James did not know any more than you or I about exactly when the Lord would return.
- 7) However, given our lives and regardless of our age, one thing we can know is that our struggle is finite.
 - a) We need to have what I think James is trying to give these folks – hope – hope that the struggles we have every day will not last forever.
 - b) There will be rest! There will be peace!
 - c) And there will be an end to the physical and mental struggles and an end to our struggle against self.
- 8) He concludes his request for patience with an admonition.
 - a) Don't complain against one another so you won't be judged.
 - b) He emphasizes again, the end is near, and the Judge is at the door.
 - c) This also adds a perspective that perhaps we don't think of much.
 - i) Regardless of whether we go to the Lord or the Lord returns – what is done is done.
 - ii) We will be judged on where we are at the moment of our departure.
- 9) Now that is not just a really pleasant thing to think about, but I think it is a perspective that James is trying to convey to these folks.
- 10) I have shared this little quip with you before I'm sure – one old fellow's secret when asked how he seemed so happy all the time was "I keep my sins fessed up"!
- 11) All that James has been saying is important for them to put into their lives
- 12) They must be strong, patient, and persevere to the end.
- 13) If we define patience as having some amount of anticipation and complacency as just waiting without much regard or desire for the end then ...

Do you think we are exercising patience with our view of the time of the second coming or is it more complacency?

- 1) James continues in verses 10 and 11 with a couple of examples of patience with a dash of perspective thrown in for good measure...

James 5:9–11 (NASB 2020)

¹⁰ As an example, brothers *and sisters*, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful.

- 2) In these verses is the hope that we spoke of a bit ago – the hope we all need.
- 3) The first example he gives is that of the prophets and their patience.
 - a) The perspective here is – go and do likewise.
- 4) The second example is that of Job.
 - a) The perspective I think he is offering here is to keep in mind that God is gracious and merciful.
 - i) We sometimes forget that even though the devil was part of the reason Job was in the predicament he was in, he still did not always think the way God wanted him to during his ordeal.
 - b) As those who have had a relationship with, loved and served the Lord in the ways that James has been sharing we have hope.
 - c) If we have not turned our backs on the Lord and forsaken Him – whatever state we are in at the end we can count on the grace of our God to bring us to our reward.
 - d) Those who have ignored God and lived their lives as they pleased did not have the privilege of trusting in God's mercy and grace.

- 1) Ok here's another subject change...

James 5:12 (NASB 2020)

¹² But above all, my brothers *and sisters*, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you do not fall under judgment.

- 1) In our society today, at least in the US, there are several times one is required to take an oath:
 - a) In court when we are testifying.
 - i) Even in this situation today, most courts are offering alternatives.
 - ii) Many are moving toward generic oaths or affirmations without any religious text or context involved.
 - b) When we enter the military.
 - c) When we are sworn into a federal (and sometimes local) office.

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- d) Also, in some professions oaths are required.
- 2) Serious oaths between individuals very seldom if ever take place.
- 3) We definitely do not have to take oaths when making purchases – even very large purchases such as businesses, houses, or cars.
- 4) This situation is really in stark contrast to the 1st century.
 - a) In the 1st century, oaths were very highly regarded at all levels.
 - b) They were most always connected to religious beliefs and even specific deities.
 - i) Many were required to be sworn by the Emperor who was most often deified.
 - c) People took oaths as witnesses and guarantors of their promises and in legal proceedings.
 - i) Oaths were crucial and were used in both social and political contexts, to solidify agreements, alliances, and loyalties.
 - d) Most 1st century societies, including the Romans and it seems especially the ancient Israelites placed a high value on the sanctity of oaths.
 - e) There were severe consequences for those who broke them.
- 5) The Jewish people were especially keen on personal oaths, and they added their own special twist to them. They set up a hierarchy of objects vs. seriousness of the oath scale.
 - a) The objects of their oaths were:
 - i) God's name
 - ii) The temple
 - iii) The altar
 - iv) Heaven
 - v) Earth
 - vi) Jerusalem
 - vii) One's own head
 - viii) The Law/Torah
 - ix) The lives of your children
 - x) By one's own life
 - b) The hierarchy was:
 - i) Most Binding – Direct oaths using God's name.
 - ii) Highly Binding – Oaths made using sacred objects (Temple, altar, sacrifices).
 - iii) Binding (avoided using God's name) – Oaths by natural elements (heaven, earth)
 - iv) Obligatory (less formal) – Personal oaths were more easily broken.
- 6) Now, hold on to all that and let's look at the problems that James is really addressing.
- 7) First, one of the biggest issues here is the third commandment.

Exodus 20:7 (NASB 2020)

⁷“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.

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- 8) I think this can be seen for the problem it is when we look closely at Jesus' teaching on the same thing.

Matthew 5:34–37 (NASB 2020)

³⁴ But I say to you, take no oath at all, neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God,
³⁵ nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, nor by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. ³⁶ Nor shall you take an oath by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. ³⁷ But make sure your statement is, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil *origin*.

- 9) It would be my assumption that if you were not to swear by heaven because it was God's throne then it would be even worse to use God's name.
- a) Of course, we add to that many Jews avoided even pronouncing God's name to prevent violation of the 3rd commandment.
- 10) Many scholars do not really see any of that as part of the issue being addressed here.
- a) Instead, they put forth that the real problem being addressed is one of honesty.
- 11) I definitely agree that honesty is a major thing that is being addressed here.
- a) However, we must realize that honesty is in actuality, a two-way street,
 - i) When we obey Jesus' command to let our yes be yes and no be no, it is inferred that as the hearer, we must do the same.
 - ii) In other words, we must believe our brothers and sisters and not require an oath – truly not how things were being done!
- 12) However, in addition to that, if we really look at what both Jesus and James are saying, the recipients of this teaching have another problem, and it is a BIG PROBLEM!
- 13) Their brothers and sisters might accept their yes or no but Rome would not accept a simple yes or no.
- 14) If, by law, you were bound to swear an oath by a specific deity or the Emperor, you were going to be required to break this teaching.
- 15) In the research I did on this I could not find any definitive numbers.
- a) However, there were probably many 1st century Christians who were martyred for that very reason – they would not break this teaching.
 - b) A couple of specific examples I found were:
 - i) First, in the accounts of Polycarp's martyrdom. He refused to swear by Caesar's genius (guiding spirit) which was one of the factors leading to his death.
 - ii) Second, in Eusebius' Church History (book V) he describes a horrific martyrdom scene in Lyon.
 - (1) A Christian woman and her 15yr. old son would not swear by pagan gods, so they were tortured and killed.
- 16) Ok – having said all that, let's get to the question.

What are our takeaways here? What does this command say to you and me today right here in Ft. Worth at the corner of Altamesa and Hulen?

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- a) Obvious #1 – Be truthful in all things and all ways – “yes be yes and no be no”.
- b) Obvious #2 – Not to take the Lord’s name in vain.
- c) Obvious #3 – Do not swear frivolously.
- d) Obvious #4 – Do not swear by other things.
- e) NOT so obvious #5– What about oaths of office, witnesses, etc.?

Other comments / questions?