

JAMES 4

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to James chapter 4 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

And, as I have said many times, James is a tough letter to read because it causes us to take a good look at our own lives and it challenges us to grow in the Lord.

And keep in mind that James is writing to Jews who were scattered abroad, driven from Jerusalem because of the persecution that they were facing.

And they did struggle with this and James is trying to encourage these Jewish believers to live out their faith, to have a faith that is active.

His main point is that a faith without works is a dead faith and thus, Grace through Faith alone saves us but saving faith is never alone, works flow from it.

You see, works don't save us, but they are the evidence or the fruit that is found in a person that is saved!

Look at what we have covered so far.

We have seen in James chapter 1 ***THE BELIEVER AND SUFFERING***.

In other words, trials will come our way and we need to count it all joy for God is growing us through these trials, He is maturing us in the faith.

On the other hand, Satan will come in and try to tempt us to sin, don't let him, don't take his bait and get hooked!

Then, in James chapter 2 he shows ***THE BELIEVER AND SERVICE.***

In other words, how we are to live out our faith by not showing partiality, to accept people, to be courteous to them, to have compassion upon them, to help those in need because again, faith without works is a dead faith!

Then, in James chapter 3 he showed us ***THE BELIEVER AND HIS SPEECH.***

In other words, how we are to talk, have our tongue controlled by God's Spirit working in our lives. James' point is that a tongue that is out of control is not consistent with how a believer is to live out his faith!

And James has hit us hard. He has caused us to examine our walk and our talk!

And by this point you would think James would just ease up a little bit, but he doesn't.

We will see in our study tonight, in James chapter 4, that James is going to focus on ***THE BELIEVER AND A SEPARATED LIFE.***

In other words, he is speaking of issues of the heart, the character of our lives.

Jesus said in Matthew 12:34, "**Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**"

Thus, James shows us how fights, quarrels, lust, hate, envy, pride, sin manifests itself when God is not on the throne of our lives!

Again, James wants them to mature in the Lord, grow in the faith and this kind of behavior is the exact opposite. It is carnal, it is fleshly, it is not good, and it is not of God!

Before we get to our text this evening, let's look at how chapter 3 of James closes.

In James 3:17-18 we are told, **“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”**

Notice the beauty that flows from a life that is guided from above, Godly wisdom is seen. A life that is surrendered to God is a beautiful life!

Paul put it like this in Colossians 3:1-4, **“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”**

It is important where we are focused because a life that is focused on God will manifest Godly characteristics.

You see, Paul goes on to say, because we are focused on the things above, **“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.”** Colossians 3:5-10.

This is a life that is surrendered to God and because of that their relationship with others, with their fellow man, will be in line!

But, as chapter 4 of James opens up, we see fights and quarrels. And, it is pretty obvious, this is not Godly wisdom, this is not from above but is from below, it is earthly!

And that tells me that this person is not right with God and it is manifested in how he is treating others.

It is as James 3:14-16 tells us, **“But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”**

Not a pretty picture nor is it intended to be pretty, he just tells it like it is!

That is what we will see tonight, and James is admonishing us that this should not be something that is seen in us, our life should be separated from this world and we are to live unto God.

Please understand that the church, Christians are not exempt from wars, from fighting, from quarreling. And again, this should not be because as the world looks at this they just laugh. As young Christians look at this they are disheartened. And as Christians in general look at this, sad to say, they may see this as just a way of life. But it should not be, and, again, James is going to deal with this issue tonight, and it is so important for us to understand and apply these lessons to our lives.

One writer put it like this,

Recently I read of a congregational business meeting that turned into a brawl which was finally stopped by the local police!

Stories like this are such a part of our American folklore that the caricature of a feuding church is found everywhere, as a young father learned from his children. Hearing a commotion in his backyard, he looked outside and saw his daughter and several playmates in a heated quarrel. When he intervened, his daughter called back, “Dad, we’re just playing church!”

- R. Kent Hughes, James – Faith That Works, p. 166

Ouch, that one hurt! But again, it is a reality, and we need to learn these lessons that the Lord has for us in this chapter.

With that said, let’s begin reading in James chapter 4, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us as we look at ***THE BELIEVER AND THE SEPARATED LIFE!***

JAMES 4

VERSES 1-3

Now when we read this, we love to think James is basically saying this. ***“Look at this world and how evil they are. They war and fight and it is all for their own pleasure. They are just plain horrible!”***

Isn't the world bad! Isn't the world evil! It is but that is not who James is writing to. He is writing to Christians and the reality is, if you are acting this way, you are carnal! That is why we don't want to apply this to Christians, but James is looking right at us and telling us that these things should not be so in a Christians life!

You see, these battles, these conflicts, these fights are a result of selfishness on their part.

The word "**pleasure**" or "**lusts**" is the Greek word HEDONE, (hay-don-ay') and we get our English words "*hedonist*" and "*hedonism*" from it.

Folks, hedonism is never positive. It speaks of an uncontrolled desire to fulfill every passion of the heart, to satisfy sensual desires. It is pure selfishness!

And if you noticed, there is no room for God here, just our own selfish desires, our own pleasures and that is not a good thing because the heart is wicked and as we try to satisfy those passions of the heart, it is ugly.

Again, this was going on in the early church, these believers were quarreling with believers, fighting with each other and it is born out of selfishness, carnality!

And please notice that James is not at all concerned about who is right and who is wrong but the selfish spirit that is being manifested in their lives. He shows the ugliness of bitterness that is being manifested in their lives!

Now here's the thing. Almost all who have such a critical and contentious attitude claim they are prompted and supported by the Spirit of God.

But James is correcting that wrong view and he makes it clear that this contentious manner comes from your desires, it is of the flesh, it is carnal and it is not of God!

Morgan put it like this, "*It is self-evident that the Spirit of God does not create desire which issues in envying.*"

Even Paul had to address these issues of carnality within the church.

Paul tells us in I Corinthians 1:11 said, **“For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you.”**

By acting carnal, as the Corinthian church was, Paul tells them you are dividing Christ when we are supposed to be one in Christ! This is selfishness, it is about you and that is the flesh nature and not the nature of God!

Maybe you heard the story of the old, very contentious Quaker who went from one church to another church never finding the “True” church he was looking for.

One day someone was bold enough to ask him, “Well, what church are you in now?”

He replied back, “I am in the true church at last.”

“Really,” said the man, “How many belong to it?”

The Old Quaker replied back, “Just my wife and myself, and I am not sure about her sometimes.”

Funny, yes, but not right!

In I Corinthians 3:1-4 he tells us, **“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?”**

And in II Corinthians 12:20-21 Paul tells us, **“For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.”**

It was a problem in the early church, and it continues to be a problem today and the Lord wants us to deal with it, not ignore it or hide our head in the sand believing everything is perfect.

Now here in James 4:2 we see the heart of the matter. They want something and they can't get it, and they are jealous, like little children but their actions are more violent.

But murder? I can't believe that! Well, it can and does happen but that is not the point here.

I think what James is speaking of is murdering someone in the heart through hatred or murdering their reputation thru gossip.

That is what Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5:21-22, **“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”**

Make no mistake about it, the Scriptures are clear in that we are not to murder and the punishment for premeditated murder was death. (Genesis 9:6; Exodus 20:13)

But Jesus takes that external command and makes it internal as well. And keep in mind He is not adding to the Word of God or coming against the Old Testament, but He is coming against the Rabbinic tradition.

You see, they thought that they were doing good, they did not murder anyone! And that is good, but Jesus says that if you have anger in your heart it is that anger that leads to murder and you are guilty!

One writer had this to say, *“Murder translates [a Greek] verb which, in this context, could include murderous hatred, extremely destructive behavior, and even suicide. When the lustful person cannot achieve his desired goals - whether for reputation, prestige, sexual gratification, money, power, escape through drugs or alcohol, success, possessions, the affections of another person, or whatever - the result is often catastrophic to others and always destructive of oneself. Even when they were struck blind by the angels in Lot’s house, the men of Sodom were so obsessed with their perverted lust that, ignoring their blindness, they continued groping for the door in a vain attempt to gain entrance and satisfy their unrelenting passions (Gen. 19:11).”*

And the idea here is simple. They want what others have and they are willing to fight, and quarrel and they do obtain it at times, but it is not of God.

Look at church splits, fights within the church and you will find that it is primarily because someone wants something, and they will do anything to get it!

They are thus, self-seeking instead of God-seeking.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, **“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”**

That would put an end to this behavior!

You see, they may not ask God or even if they do, they are asking “amiss” which is the Greek word, KAKOS, (kak-occe’) and it has a basic meaning of being bad, being evil, diseased, sick, it is obviously not good.

In fact, they want to “spend” it on their own pleasures instead of what God desires.

The word “spend” is the same verb used in Luke 15:14 of the wasteful spending of the prodigal son.

Folks, prayer is not to change the will of God or to pull some strings to get what you want.

Prayer is done to align our will with His, to accomplish His will on this earth and not our own!

They were self-seeking and trying to get their will done and it caused all kinds of contentions in the church!

That kind of behavior will cause conflict, it is never good.

What a powerful lesson for us to learn!

And again, if you are walking in the Spirit, if your vertical axis with God is in line, then your horizontal axis with man will be in line as well. If your relationship with God is off, then your relationship with man will be off as well.

And James wants them to wake up and smell the coffee, you might say. Get right with God so your relationships will be in line!

VERSES 4-5

What is James rebuking believers for?

He is rebuking them for having a love affair with the world, which is idolatry, instead of loving and remaining faithful to God. Thus, he calls them “**Adulterers and adulteresses.**” And again, this is not speaking of physical adultery, which is wrong, but spiritual adultery or unfaithfulness to God!

Now some may be thinking, “*Easy James, that is not seeker-friendly!*”

It may not be seeker friendly, but why beat around the bush while the church is devouring each other!

In fact, Paul tells us in Galatians 5:15, “**But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!**”

The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, “**But if you bite and devour one another [in partisan strife], be careful that you [and your whole fellowship] are not consumed by one another.**”

Thus, this needed to be dealt with because if you are living a life that is self-seeking you are a friend of the world and an enemy of God! You see, where your heart is at, that is where your treasure will also be! And it is a destructive nature!

The word for “**world**” that James uses is the Greek word “kosmos” and it is a word that doesn’t mean the planet earth but the world system which is controlled by Satan.

One writer put it this way, *“Kosmos (world) does not refer to the physical earth or universe but rather to the spiritual reality of the man-centered, Satan-directed system of this present age, which is hostile to God and God’s people. It refers to the self-centered, godless value system and mores of fallen mankind. The goal of the world is self-glory, self-fulfillment, self-indulgence, self-satisfaction, and every other form of self-serving, all of which amounts to hostility toward God.”*

And this is the same word that John used when he said in I John 2:15-17, **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”**

And, here in James 4:4, the Greek word for **“wants”** expresses more than just wanting a wish to be fulfilled, it carries the stronger idea of choosing one thing over another.

And, in this case, it is choosing the world over the Lord!

Now let me also add this. The word **“adulterers”** is not in many of the Greek manuscripts and a copyist may have added it for clarity.

The thing is, like I have said, this is not speaking of sexual fornication or adultery but spiritual.

Thus, only the word **“adulteresses”** is in the best manuscripts and the reason is simple.

If we are the bride of Christ and we are having an affair with this world while being married to Christ, we are in an adulterous relationship, we are adulteresses!

In Matthew 6:24 Jesus said, **“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”**

That is the same point that James is making here, you can't serve God and the lusts of this world.

Imagine trying to walk in two directions at the same time, you can't!

Exactly the point, and thus, who are you going to serve, God or this world?

Now, James 4:5 is difficult to translate from the Greek but let me tell you what I think James is saying here.

As believers the Holy Spirit is in us and it has a jealous yearning for our friendship with God, and not in a bad way.

Paul, in II Corinthians 11:2 said, **“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”**

In other words, he did not want them to move away from Christ but to be unspotted, not living in Christ and the world and he had a godly jealousy towards them.

A zeal for them to be a chaste virgin to Christ!

God desires us to live that way and His Spirit will convict us when we start to go astray because He has a zeal to see us walk with the Father, to walk with Jesus!

May we be listening to His voice in our hearts.

Warren Wiersbe put it like this, *“Living for the flesh means grieving the Holy Spirit of God who lives in us . . . Just as the world is the enemy of God the Father, so the flesh is the enemy of God the Holy Spirit. There is a holy, loving jealousy that a husband and wife have over each other, and rightly so. The Spirit within jealously guards our relationship to God, and the Spirit is grieved when we sin against God’s love.”* Exactly!

Now where in the Old Testament Scriptures can we find this verse because James tells us that the Scriptures teach us of this jealousy of God the Holy Spirit?

There is not a specific verse that is quoted from, but it is possible that he is just summarizing this truth that is found in several Old Testament passages.

Now, what are the solutions to strife, quarrels, to backbiting, wars and-so-on?

James is now going to tell us and expound on that.

VERSE 6

Here is the secret to us having victory over these things in our lives, these wars, quarrels and the like. It is humbling yourself before God instead of being proud and destructive in your actions!

This is an important point that James is making here.

You see, as the Holy Spirit convicts our hearts of our actions, the compromise we find ourselves in, as we submit to Him, He will then give us the grace to live and serve Him as we should!

But if you are arrogant, self-seeking, you will not receive this grace to walk by.

Wait a minute, I thought grace gifts were free?

They are, but we must appropriate them into our lives by faith, we must be willing to obey God and as we do, He will give us the grace we need to walk! If you don't receive it, God is not going to force this grace upon you is the idea.

Listen to what Spurgeon had to say on this subject. He wrote, *“Note that contrast; note it always. Observe how weak we are, how strong he is; how proud we are, how condescending [Yielding to inferior; courteous, obliging] he is; how erring we are, and how infallible he is; how changing we are, and how immutable he is; how provoking we are, and how forgiving he is. Observe how in us there is only ill, and how in him there is only good. Yet our ill but draws his goodness forth, and still he blesseth. Oh! What a rich contrast!”*

He also wrote, *“Sin seeks to enter, grace shuts the door; sin tries to get the mastery, but grace, which is stronger than sin, resists, and will not permit it. Sin gets us down at times, and puts its foot on our neck; grace comes to the rescue . . . Sin comes up like Noah's flood, but grace rides over the tops of the mountains like the ark.”*

And lastly, he wrote, *“Do you suffer from spiritual poverty? It is your own fault, for he giveth more grace. If you have not got it, it is not because it is not to be had, but because you have not gone for it.”*

And this is so clear as James tells us that **“God resists the proud”** and the Greek word for **“resists”** is ANTITASSOMAI, (an-tee-tas'-som-ahee).

This word was used as a military term picturing an army ready for battle.

God is ready to fight against the proud spirit or a spirit that is arrogant or boastful!

Of this word “**proud**,” coming from the Greek word, HUPEREPHANOS, (hoop-er-ay’-fon-os) William Barclay writes,

This word literally means one who shows himself above other people. Even the Greeks hated this pride. Theophrastus described it as “a certain contempt for all other people.”

Theophylact, the Christian writer, called it “the citadel and summit of all evils.”

The real terror of this pride is that it is a thing of the heart. It certainly means haughtiness, but the man who suffers from it might well appear to be walking in downcast humility, while all the time there was in his heart a vast contempt for all his fellow-men.

This pride shuts itself off from God for three reasons. (i) It does not know its own need. . . . It walks in proud self-sufficiency. (ii) It cherishes its own independence. It will be beholden to no man; it will not even be beholden to God. . . . (iii) it does not recognize its own sin. . . . A pride like that cannot receive help, because it does not know that it needs help, and, therefore, it cannot ask. It loves, not God, but itself.”

- William Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter, p. 124

Here is something we need to understand. Pride is so distasteful to God that we are told in Proverbs 6:16-17, “**These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:**

A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood.”

Notice that pride is listed with murder, that is how bad it is to the Lord, He hates it!

On the other end of the spectrum is humility and when there is humility there is grace, the grace of God.

It isn’t that our humility **EARN**s us grace but as we humble ourselves before God, we place ourselves in a position to receive His grace!

In Isaiah 66:2 we see this played out as we are told, **“For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist,’ Says the LORD. ‘But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.’”**

VERSES 7-8a

We are to rank ourselves under, voluntarily submit ourselves to the Lord.

You see, if we are on the throne, we have then removed the Lord from His position in our lives.

Thus, we need to die to self, humble ourselves before Him and allow Him to be on the throne of our hearts!

Now let me add this. Why don't we cast out the demon of quarrels, the demon of strife's, the demon of wars, the demon of pride and-so-on?

Because we as believers cannot be demon possessed, we can be oppressed and thus, we need to stand against the temptation of the Devil and when we do, he flees.

Why does he flee?

Because he has no patience, and he won't wait around when he can't win.

Thus, place yourself under the control of God, stand against the schemes, the plans of the Devil, and he will vanish from you.

Now, he will come again but continue doing what James says here, submit to God, resist the Devil and he will take a hike!

One writer put it this way. He wrote, *“How many of you have ever had a hard time getting to Bible study, but somehow got there? I commend you because had you succumbed to those pressures; you would have faced them again and again. You see, because Satan isn’t omniscient, because he can’t read your mind or see into your heart, he’s dependent solely upon trial and error to see what works. Therefore, if he sees that a headache will keep you from worship and Bible study, guess what will happen. You’ll have headaches perpetually. If he sees that your kids acting up causes you to pull back, stay home, and not be where you should be, he’ll have found the key to slowing down your walk. I am convinced that many people experience unnecessary hell in their homes or trials in their lives because they don’t understand this verse. They don’t realize that if they resist the devil, he will indeed flee.”*

And God always invites us, and we see that here. We see this *invitation* that James gives to us, to **“draw near to God”** and the *promise*, **“He will draw near to you.”**

The Lord said in Jeremiah 29:11-13, **“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”**

God wants to draw near to us, that is not the question.

The question really is, *“Do we want to draw near to God?”*

It is like the story of the older couple driving in a car together and as she looked at the other cars passing by, she noticed that the couples were sitting close to each other in their cars.

So the woman said to her husband, *“Honey, why is it that we don’t sit close to each other anymore?”*

And the husband replied back to his wife, *“I wasn’t the one who moved away!”*

Folks, if you are far from God right now, He hasn't moved, you have!

What can you do about it?

Draw near to God because the invitation is there and He will draw near to you, that is His promise to you and God is more than able to fulfill His promise to you!

VERSES 8b-10

What happens as we draw near to God?

We see ourselves as we really are and we are convicted of our sin, not for condemnation but for edification, for being built up.

In other words, as we see our sin, we give it to the Lord and that garbage is purged from our lives. You see, we find cleansing at the cross, and in this case, not for salvation, they are already saved, but for sanctification.

Paul, in I Thessalonians 4:3-8 speaks of our sanctification as he says, **“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.”**

And in I Peter 5:10-11 we are told, **“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**

That is what God is doing in us, if we let Him!

Please understand, and we have talked about this, we don't come before the Lord with a self-righteous attitude, but we come before Him in humility and as we do, the Lord showers us with His grace and God's grace always lifts us up!

On the other hand, selfishness does not bring forth grace for we have closed the door to God, and we may try to exalt self, but that attitude always brings us down.

We are told, in Luke 18:9-14, **“Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’”**

Folks, the more we look at God, the more we see His holiness, His glory, the more we will see ourselves as sinners and there is no pride in that, only humility. ***“God, be merciful to me a sinner!”*** is the attitude we should have every single day of our lives. And He is merciful to us, but if we become proud and arrogant, we will be humbled!

It is as Peter said in I Peter 5:5-7, **“Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”**

Remember, **“Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”**

James 4:10.

Now, as we move into James 4:11-12 James is going to admonish Christians not to speak evil of nor judge one another. Listen to what he tells us.

VERSES 11-12

Notice how these verses flow from what we have just been talking about. Humbling ourselves and getting right with God must result in our getting right with other people. When we are right with other people, it will show in the way we talk about them. So we must not speak evil of one another and not judge our brother.

And James is coming down hard on those who slander others, tells stories about others, try to judge others by describing the motives of their heart.

Now please understand that James is not speaking of coming against those who are teaching heresy, you need to judge them by looking at the fruit, the doctrines they are teaching compared to the Word of God. You don't do a character assassination or try to judge the motives of their heart, why they are doing what they are doing, but you expose the heresy.

What James is talking about here is storytelling and many lives have been destroyed by these lies spoken by others.

God is the Righteous Judge, and we are not.

Thus, you let God handle things and you walk in love. That is not to say you don't confront a brother or sister in the Lord who is living in sin, but don't get out the church phone list and start talking about what that person is doing.

You confront that person in love and follow the pattern that our Lord gave us in Matthew chapter 18 to confront a sinning brother or sister in the Lord.

And the idea here that James is trying to get across is that when we are humbly walking before God our words will not be slanderous towards others. You see, if you say you are right before God and yet evil towards others, you are living in a fantasy world – you are not right with God! Thus, repent and humble yourself before God and walk accordingly!

These words, "**Speak evil**" is translated from the ancient Greek word KATALALIA.

And author and scholar, William Barclay defined that Greek word this way, "*Katalalia is the sin of those who meet in corners and gather in little groups and pass on confidential information which destroy the good name of those who are not there to defend themselves.*"

Now what about this violating the law, what is that about?

James is telling us that when we are engaged in slander and judging we are guilty of violating God's law ourselves.

One writer put it like this. He wrote, "*Slander is failing to love others, slander therefore is a violation of the law. The law is love codified; it is the expression of how to love others.*"

Exactly!

Let me give you a little test for you to check the words you say before you say them.

A. What good does it do to your brother with the words you are saying to him?

B. What good does it do to you with the words you are speaking?

C. What glory does it bring to God with the words you are speaking?

You see, a 3-point check and if you take it, it will help guard the words you say as you listen to the still small voice of God speaking to your heart.

I am sure James 4:11 is not a memory verse for most if not all of us but maybe we should make it one of our memory verses.

Write it down and place it in your pocket so you can take it out throughout the day and let God speak to you before you speak!

God is the Judge and as far as I can tell, He does not need our help!

Now, as we move into James 4:13-17 we are going to see James show us that a believer must turn boasting into belief. In other words, how are we to seek God's will and not boast on what we are going to do apart from it.

VERSES 13-16

James does not lighten up and the reason being is that this is important, and it is not time to beat around the bush. Here is the reality whether you like it or not.

And what we see here is that James is rebuking them for boasting about what they were going to do, the plans they had made apart from God's will, God's plans for their life.

Why is this so important?

Because it negates the sovereignty of God and replaces it with their will and that is just plain arrogance on their part, it is not humility!

Paul, as he was in Ephesus said this in Acts 18:19-21, **“So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.’ And he sailed from Ephesus.”**

And again in I Corinthians 4:19 Paul said, **“But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power.”**

That is the correct perspective to have, our lives are in the hands of God and it is His will that will be accomplished, not ours!

But that is not what they were doing, and James is calling them out on this and he is basically telling them, *“Who in the world do you think you are, God! You think that you can plan when and where you are going to go without even asking God and seeing if that is what He wants you to do. Not only that, but you also are boasting about all your plans and by doing that it is telling others that you are in charge! Guess what? You are not in charge, God is!”*

Let me give you a few verses to show you what we are to do. In Proverbs 3:5-6 we are told, **“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”**

It is not your way, nor is it my way, but it is ***YAHWEH!***

We need to follow His direction and not our own understanding of situations that we face daily. We need to let Him direct our paths!

And the reminder in Jeremiah 10:23, **“O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.”**

I guess we can direct our own steps if we want but it will not be good. God needs to direct our steps!

And I love Psalm 143:8 because it shows us what we should do as we begin our day. The Psalmist said, **“Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, For in You do I trust; Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, For I lift up my soul to You.”**

I like that! In the morning we need to listen to God and let Him direct our day, show us where to walk, what to do, what to say. Now I am not saying that He is going to give you a detailed plan. But He will show you the steps you need to take as you are just living out your day, but you need to be listening to Him!

And in Ephesians 2:10, Paul wrote, **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”**

God wants to work in us so that He can work through us. He has prepared the work He wants us to do and thus, we should walk in them, we should do all that God has called us to do!

Another reason that this is so important is that life goes quickly by. It is like a vapor!

I can remember when I was in school, time just seemed to drag on-and-on. The school year seemed so long.

But now, as I get older, time seems to fly by. My two sons are adults now, and my oldest grandson is 15!

It seems like only yesterday that I was holding my sons in my arms and then they grew up and I was holding my grandchildren in my arms, and now they are grownup!

Time goes quickly by!

It is just like a vapor and because of that, the Psalmist said, **“So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.”** Psalm 90:12.

In other words, ***“Help me Lord to live out my days so that they will be pleasing to you, that I will walk in your ways and bring glory to you as I seek and do your will!”***

Here’s the thing. It is not the length of your life but what you do with the days that the Lord has given to you! That is so important for us to understand.

May we seek the Lord’s direction and not become bold and arrogant making plans apart from Him because we will just waste away the days that the Lord has given to us!

VERSE 17

Look at how James closes this chapter. He is telling his readers that it is one thing to make plans in life not knowing what the will of God is, but it is even worse if you know what God desires of you and you purposely disobey his will by your plans, by your actions!

One writer put it like this. He wrote,

There are those who say, “I’m going to do this. I’m going to retire there. I’ve got my future all worked out.” But when asked if they’re going to church on Sunday or if they’ll have devotions tomorrow, they say, “If the Lord wills.” Do you see the irony?

“I’m going skiing next week, or on vacation in July,” we say. But regarding church tomorrow night, we say, “We’ll see what God has in store.”

We have it backward! We should be saying, “I may go skiing next week if God wills. Or, I may take a vacation in July if that’s what the Lord has for me. But as for going to church on Sunday? I’ll be there absolutely!”

That's why James says, "If you know what's right, but hide behind the excuse of waiting for God's leading before doing it - it's sin."

- Source Unknown

And Warren Wiersbe put it like this. He wrote, *"These people know the will of God but choose to disobey it. This attitude expresses even more pride than does the first; for the person says to God, 'I know what You want me to do, but I prefer not to do it. I really know more about this than You do!' [Peter said] 'For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them' (2 Peter 2:21)."*

And so, James is telling us that those who know the will of God and don't do it will be punished more severely than the person who didn't know God's will and didn't do it!

As I close this evening, we have seen that James has shown us what God expects and now he tells us to walk accordingly. Put it into practice what God wants for your life. I think that just makes sense.

You see, as we learn, as we grow, we are accountable and folks, we all know these things! Yes, it is easy to read and to talk about living for God, but we need to apply the Word of God to our lives and walk. How can we do this?

Remember what James has said this evening, **"But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.' . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."** James 4:6, 10.

May we, as believers learn to separate ourselves from the world and submit ourselves to the ways of God, to walk accordingly!