11. The Epistle of James—4:11-17

(2/22/17)

James has been challenging his readers to greater maturity in their lives for the Lord.

Maturity in the Christian life is all about becoming more and more godly or 'God-like'—and that means drawing closer and closer to God so the Holy Spirit can transform us into His (Christ's) image (2Cor.3:18).

However, the thing that *separates* us from God and keeps us from drawing close to Him is sin—and the only remedy for sin (on our part) is repentance.

And so last time we looked at chapter 4:7-10 where James focused on repentance by giving us ten commands in the Greek that are essential elements of true repentance.

Tonight, we continue in our study as James zeros in on other sins that, if practiced by Christians, will not only stunt their growth in Christ—it will bring carnality and discord into the local church keeping it from growing in unity and love as well.

In verses 11-12 he admonishes Christians not to speak evil of nor judge one another—

James 4:11-12 (NKJV)
[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. [12] There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

In verses 7 to 10 James is dealing with believers getting right with God thru repentance (turning away from sin towards obedience to God).

James seems to be saying in these next couple of verses that getting right with God will also of necessity involve getting right with others and showing love to them—even as the apostle John said:

1 John 4:7-8 (NKJV)
7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

If the goal of the Christian life is to become more like God and God is love—then loving each other must be our goal.

Of course, loving people starts with the way we talk about them—or in this case how we are *not* to talk about them—hence James' command: **"Do not speak evil of one another, brethren."**

'Speak evil' translates the ancient Greek word *katalalia*.

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."

Of course, today the word we would use is ***'slander'*** in place of **'speak evil'.**

Writing in the 1828 edition of his dictionary, Noah Webster defined slander as,
"A false tale or report maliciously uttered, and tending to injure the reputation of another by lessening him in the esteem of his fellow citizens, by exposing him to impeachment and punishment, or by impairing his means of living."

Slander is really a cruel and hateful thing to do to another—who is not there to defend themselves against our accusations.

Therefore, we can portray them in the mind of another with absolute autonomy and impunity—and they are helpless to stop us—that's evil!

Which is why James said earlier that the tongue from which slander springs is: *"An unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the image of God."* (3:8-9)

Of course, to be a slanderer is the exact opposite of what is means to be godly or like God.

In fact, one of the names given to Lucifer in the Bible is **'devil'** which is the word 'diabolos' in the Greek—a word that literally means **"slanderer".**

Proverbs 16:28 (NKJV)
28 A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends.

James 4:11a (NKJV)
11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. **He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother…**

Notice how James connects slandering with judging—it's because they go hand in hand.

The word **'judge(s)'** is *krino* in the Greek and doesn't refer to evaluation (as in judging an athletic competition)—but to <u>condemnation</u> (judging them to hell)—not literally of course since we don't have the power to do that.

But, the idea is pronouncing people defiled and irredeemable, those that were created solely for the fires of hell—as the scribes and Pharisees constantly did with people they disagreed with like the gentiles.

This is not the same as correcting or rebuking a Christian for sin as we are commanded to do in Scripture (2Tim.4:2).

This is sitting in the place of God and condemning them to hell as their judge, jury and executioner—something Jesus commanded us not to do:

Matthew 7:1-2 (NKJV)
1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

James 4:11 (NKJV)
…**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.**

Slander is the *accusation* of guilt—**judgment** is the *condemnation* for that guilt.

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

One author put it this way—
"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."

You remember what James said earlier on this subject—**"If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"* (James 2:8)**

As Christians, we are not under the law of Moses—we are under an even greater law, *the law of love*—which James called the 'royal law' in chapter 2:8.

This royal law was first expressed in Leviticus 19:18 *"you shall love your neighbor as yourself".*

Remember how Jesus took all 613 commandments in the law and reduced them down to two—

Mark 12:30-31 (NKJV)
30 *And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'* This *is* the first commandment. 31 And the second, like *it, is* this: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* There is no other commandment greater than these."

Paul the apostle did the same thing in Romans 13—

Romans 13:8-10 (NKJV)
8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, *"You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet,"* and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law.

The royal law forbids me from mistreating or taking advantage of another since—I am to love them as I love myself, and treat them as I would want them to treat me (Matt.7:12).

James 4:11 (NKJV)
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.**

James is saying that, when we condemn another with our words, we have taken the place of God as judge over their life.

We are no longer on the same level as them, subject to the same laws of God as they are—instead we have elevated ourselves to the level of God, Who alone is perfect and therefore the only One Who has the moral authority to judge sinners who violate His laws.

In fact, we actually elevate ourselves above God in the sense that, if we judge His laws as invalid or as being unworthy of our respect and obedience—we make ourselves superior to God—which is the ultimate blasphemy against Him.

One author sums this idea up when he said—

"Since slander is a violation of the law of love, a slanderer speaks against the law and condemns the law, thus showing utter disregard for the divine standard. And if you place yourself above God's law, warns James, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. The unimaginable implication of that is that the one who disregards God's law in effect claims to be superior to the law of God, not to be bound by it or to be subject to its authority. By such fearful disrespect the sinner judges the law as unworthy of his attention, affection, obedience, submission—all of which is blasphemy against God."

James 4:12 (NKJV)
12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

One pastor had this to say—

"One of the greatest days in my own Christian walk was the day the Lord whispered a very simple truth into my heart that changed my entire approach to ministry and to life. He said, "Jon, you love 'em, and I'll judge 'em." You see, before that, I had it the other way around. I thought it was the Lord's job to love people and my job to judge them. I can't tell you how freeing it was to discover that I had it backward!"

Romans 14:4 (NKJV)
4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

Once a person begins to take the place of God as judge and jury over other people's lives—this mindset begins to subtly bleed over into areas of their own life—starting with an independent attitude.

James 4:13-16 (NKJV)
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.

In saying this, I think that James has in mind primarily businessmen—in particular, those who are successful and wealthy.

The Jews looked at wealth as a blessing from God upon a righteous life—and conversely, they looked at poverty as a judgment from God upon an unrighteous life.

This mentality led to a lot of pride on the part of the rich and caused them to look down on the poor.

And so starting in verse 13 of chapter 4 and running thru verse 6 of chapter 5—James has some harsh words for the rich.

He labels them as proud, arrogant, judgmental people who believe their wealth (God's approval) gave them the right to judge and oppress the poor (those that God has judged with poverty).

But not only that, it produced a lot of pride in them which bred an independent, self-reliant attitude in the way they were living their lives.

Apparently, they felt they didn't have to ask God (the One in charge of their life) where He wanted them to go and what He wanted them to do each day—even though Jesus, Himself never planned His day without consulting His Heavenly Father first (Mark 1:35).

So James 'calls them on it' by basically asking them—*"who do you think you are—God! That you think you can plan where you go and do what you want without consulting God and then boast about all your plans as if you're in charge!"*

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)
5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

Jeremiah 10:23 (NKJV)
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.

Psalm 143:8 (NKJV)
8 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.

Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV)
10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Verse 14 is a really important verse for all people—but especially for those that are busy laying up for themselves treasures on the earth and planning for their financial future (retirement) but who have laid nothing up in heaven for their eternity. (Luke 12:16-21)

There is a parable that Jesus gave in Luke 16 that has given some Christians 'fits' in trying to understand just what the Lord is teaching thru it—since it dove tails with the subject we're talking about, let's look at it.

Luke 16:1-9 (NKJV)
1 He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. 2 So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no

longer be steward.' [3] Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. [4] I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' [5] So he called every one of his master's debtors to *him,* and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' [6] And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' [7] Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' [8] So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. [9] And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home… (Explain)

We know Jesus is coming back soon—all the signs are there.

When the Lord comes back and we are taken to be with Him—at that time all our money will be worthless.

Jesus is encouraging us to use our money now for eternal purposes—the saving of souls:

"Make friends (converts) for yourself with your money so that when you die they will be in heaven waiting to greet and rejoice with you."

("I checked the board when I got here and noticed that it was your offering that allowed the missionary to come to my village and share the gospel which is how I got saved—so thank you!")

Of course, none of this will become a reality in a Christian's life as long as they live their life as if they are in control of their time on earth—again James admonishes these folks:

James 4:14 (AMP)
[14] Yet you do not know [the least thing] about what may happen tomorrow. What is the nature of your life? You are [really] but a wisp of vapor (a puff of smoke, a mist) that is visible for a little while and then disappears [into thin air].

It is the height of arrogance for a person to act like God where they live as if they have control over their life—and especially over when it will end.

In this regard, Satan has deceived them and has kept them harboring under the mistaken and dangerous notion that—they have time.

Time to receive Jesus and/or time to start living for Him before they die.

Matthew 24:45-51 (NKJV)
45 "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? 46 Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. 47 Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. 48 But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' 49 and begins to beat *his* fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, 50 the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of, 51 and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In his commentary on this passage, William Barclay relates the following story to illustrate the danger of spiritual procrastination:

"*There is a fable which tells of three apprentice demons who were coming to this earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan, the chief of the demons, about their plans to tempt and to ruin men. The first said, "I will tell them that there is no God." Satan said, "That will not delude many, for they know that there is a God." The second said, "I will tell men that there is no hell." Satan answered, "You will deceive no one that way; men know even now that there is a hell for sin." The third said, "I will tell men that there is no hurry." "Go," said Satan, "and you will ruin men by the thousands."*

The most dangerous of all delusions is that there is plenty of time to get serious about God so there's no need to hurry—however, that isn't what the Bible teaches.

God's Word admonishes unbelievers not to put off receiving Jesus when the gospel is presented to them—*"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts…" (Heb.3:7-8); "…behold, now is the day of salvation." (2Cor.6:2)*

And to believers—

Romans 13:11 (NKJV)
11 And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed.

And yet James is indicting the Christians he was writing to for boasting about their plans for the future—

James 4:16 (NKJV)
16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil [because if leaves God out].

Proverbs 27:1 (NKJV)
1 Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.

Just last week on the news there was a horrific accident in Arlington Heights where a father, mother and their 20 year old daughter were on their way to a soccer game when another driving traveling a hundred miles an hour came out of nowhere and t-boned their car killing all three of them instantly…

We just don't know when our life on earth will be over.

Therefore, live every day as if this could be your last by making sure you're right with the people you love, but especially that you're right with God.

James 4:17 (NKJV)
17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it,* to him it is sin.

James finishes the chapter by telling his readers that—it's one thing to make plans in life not knowing what the will of God is.

It is another thing altogether to know God's will and to purposely disobey His will by your plans.

One pastor gave clarity on this verse—

"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."

Warren Wiersbe—

"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)."

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—

Luke 12:47-48 (NKJV)
47 And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to
his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes.* 48 But he who did not know, yet committed things
deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him
much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.