

What is Your Life? # 17

James 4: 11-17

As we continue our study in the fourth chapter of James, we come to a passage that ought to challenge each of us. We have dealt with the struggles we all face, living in a body of flesh, and the opportunity to overcome these struggles. James now turns his attention to another set of struggles that are known to plague humanity.

As we move through these verses, I am sure you will realize times in your life when you have faced these challenges. As we have said, we are human and there are times when our humanity shows. This passage spoke to me, as I too have struggled with the challenges revealed in the text. There are likely times when we are more susceptible to engage in such activity, but I am sure we all can relate to these particular struggles.

No doubt each of us like to feel as if we are living in a way that pleases God, and if we aren't careful, we will be critical of those whom we perceive have strayed or are not walking in a way that pleases God. We like to feel as if we have a measure of control over our destiny. We talk of faith, but many times we want to choose our path and make our own way rather than seeking the Lord and trusting His guidance. These are the struggles addressed in this passage of Scripture. I would like to look at the [reflections](#) of James as we consider a question he raised in the text: [What is Your Life?](#) We would do well to examine our lives from time to time and the motivations that drive us. First we discover:

I. A Word Regarding our Attitude ([11-12](#)) – James realized our attitudes are not always as they should be, particularly in regard to others, and there are times when we express those attitudes. Keep in mind, we will eventually speak what is within the heart. Notice:

A. The Admonition ([11a](#)) – [Speak not evil one of another, brethren.](#) That is simple enough, isn't it? We have heard similar admonitions all our lives. We were taught as children not to speak if we didn't have something good or positive to say, and yet many times we are guilty of speaking against our brother. We must suppress the desire to condemn or speak evil of another.

- I want to point out that James is speaking directly to the brethren, to the church. He admonishes the believer not to speak evil of another. One would expect better from those who are born again, and yet we all know that is not always the case. Some of the harshest words ever spoken to me have come from fellow church members, and those comments were made within the house of God. We must guard against such attitudes that result in harsh words being spoken.

B. The Clarification (11b) – *He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law.* That really puts things in their proper perspective. If we speak evil of another, judging them, we are in essence speaking evil of the law of God and judging it. I know that we live under grace and are not under bondage to the law, but the law represents the holiness of God. It reveals His desire for our lives. When we speak evil of a child of God, judging them, we have actually spoken evil of God's Word and the Lord Himself.

- If we judge another because of their convictions, we might as well say that God's Word is too strict and shouldn't be followed. Many in our day approve that which the Word condemns. If we judge another because they are not living as we think they should, we could very well be guilty of adding to the Word and placing undue restriction on those who enjoy liberty in Christ. Many become legalistic and judge others unnecessarily.

C. The Identification (11c) – *but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.*

James speaks of those who feel as if they have reached a level of spiritual superiority. They have judged others for their behavior, and whether known or not, judged the law of God as well. In essence these have excused themselves from accountability to God and have become a judge of what is right or wrong instead of one submitted to Christ and His lordship.

- That is powerful when we consider the depth of what James reveals. Judgmental attitudes convey that we know what is best for others, regarding how they should behave and respond to the Word, and whether we realize it or not, convey that we have the right to judge the Word of God, determining what is acceptable and what isn't. Keep that in mind the next time you want to offer a judgmental word to another!

D. The Confirmation (12) – *There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?* The hearer is admonished to realize that our Lord is the only lawgiver that is able to pardon or condemn. He alone can save from sin or reject unto everlasting punishment. We have no right to assume the role that only God possesses.

- I have been Baptist all my life and am unashamed to admit that. I agree with Baptist doctrine because it agrees with biblical doctrine. However, I will also admit that Baptist' are some of the most judgmental people I have ever met. Many are quick to condemn and judge their own simply because they do not line up with every aspect of their philosophy. There are some basic fundamentals of the faith that I am unwilling to compromise, but as long as we can agree on those, I can fellowship with another, even if he doesn't do "church" exactly as I do.

I. A Word Regarding our Attitude (11-12)

II. A Word Regarding our Anticipation (13-15) – These are very familiar verses, but they have much to say in regard to how we view life and anticipate our future. James speaks of:

A. The Plan of Life (13) – *Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:* James deals with the plans we make for our lives. He illustrates one who makes a decision to enter into a particular city, planning to stay for a year (a specified amount of time) with the purpose of buying, selling, and making a profit. In and of themselves plans are not wrong. I think we should plan and prepare for our future. Those who fail to plan, plan to fail. However, our plans must be consistent with God's plans and will for our lives. We must be willing to go where He leads, staying as long as He sees fit, and find contentment with what He provides. It is okay to make plans, just make sure you don't leave God out of the planning process.

B. The Perplexity of Life (14a) – *Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.* Here we discover a simple and profound truth: life is complex; plans can and do change. James reminds us that we have no way of knowing what a day will bring forth. We can arrive at a plan that we are happy with and determined to pursue, but circumstances of life may cause us to change our plans, altering our course.

- We must not drive our stakes to deep. Be careful requiring particular circumstances or surroundings to dictate your existence and happiness. If your life is built upon anything other than a relationship with Christ, you are destined for a fall. There is nothing wrong with settling down, owning a home, having friends and possessions, but the foundation of our lives must be Christ.

C. The Path of Life (14b) – *For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.* This reminds us of the brevity of life. We are here for only a brief, fleeting moment in time. When we were young we felt as if we had the world by the tail and nothing could hinder or prevent our plans. Before we know it we have reached middle age and begin to assess where we are in life. Shortly thereafter we are in our senior years wondering where time has gone.

- Life is short; we are here for a little while and then we are gone. The best made plans cannot prevent death. If the Lord doesn't soon come, we will all go by way of the grave. Whatever our plans include, we must ensure that we are ready to meet the Lord when our time to leave this world comes. Knowing Christ in salvation is of utmost importance, eternity awaits!

D. The Perspective in Life (15) – For that ye *ought* to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or *that*. Here James speaks of an undeniable fact, the Lord is in sovereign control of our lives. When we think about it, there is very little that we have control over in this life, and even those things are enabled of God. He gives us the strength and presence of mind to do even the most mundane tasks. Our lives are literally in His hands. Jesus said, “**For without me ye can do nothing.**”

- I know that goes against human nature. We like to feel in control of our lives, but in reality God controls them. In fact, if we could learn to allow Him complete control, our lives would be much simpler and filled with joy. Those who have completely surrendered their entire being to Christ have less worry and live peaceable lives. It is available to all, but we must surrender.

I. A Word Regarding our Attitude (11-12)

II. A Word Regarding our Anticipation (13-15)

III. A Word Regarding our Arrogance (16-17) – James closes this line of thought with a word about the arrogance we all must guard against. Consider:

A. The Presence of Boasting (16a) – But now ye rejoice in your boastings. Let’s keep this in its context, considering all that we have discussed. Whether consciously, or even publicly, we all tend to boast somewhat in our attitudes and anticipation. We tend to assume that we have it all figured out. We think we know what is best for others regarding their spiritual lives and are often quick to point out their weaknesses. We like to think we have our lives all planned out for the best.

- Sadly we often fail to recognize the arrogance and pride in such thinking. We pass our judgmental attitudes off as spiritual zeal and our anticipation for the future as well made plans. As we have discussed, we must always ensure that our motives are pure in every aspect of life.

B. The Peril in Boasting (16b) – all such rejoicing is evil. That is a sobering word. James declares that such rejoicing in arrogance is evil; it is sin against God. We may think that God is pleased with our spiritual assessments of others, but He detests it as sin. We may assume that God is pleased when we have thought out and planned every detail of our lives, but if we have left Him out of the process, that too is sin. Our attitudes must be measured with godly compassion and based on biblical instruction, not human tradition or preference. Our anticipation for the future must be consistent with God’s will for our lives, giving Him the priority and living in full submission.

C. The Postponement through Boasting (17) – [Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.](#) This is a statement that has broad application for our lives. We could properly use this verse in many spiritual applications, but again we need to keep it in its context. James speaks of refraining to do good when we know when and how to do it as sin. Looking at the text, let's consider that.

- Is every attitude we have consistent with the Word of God? Have we not all been convicted of an attitude but refused to change our way because it served our desired purpose? Have we not all been guilty of being judgmental at some point? If so, have we sought forgiveness for that? In regard to our attitudes, we know what God desires of us, and yet many times our attitudes remain unchanged. That constitutes sin in our lives.
- Now, concerning our anticipation for the future. Do we always seek God's will for our lives as we plan our future? Do we submit to His leading, even if His guidance is contrary to our wants and desires? Are we willing to follow the Lord and serve at His leisure, doing what He asks, where He leads, for as long as He desires? We often make plans, but many times we fail to seek the Lord in our planning or fail to submit to His will. When we realize what God desires of us, and yet we fail to respond, we have sinned. In either case, we are putting off what the Lord has revealed to us because it didn't fit our attitude or plans.

Conclusion: This has been a challenging portion of Scripture. I am certain we all can relate to it. We all have attitudes that are not pleasing to the Lord. We all have been guilty of making plans, and even living our lives at times, without seeking or doing the will of God. We must remember that such behavior is sinful. We need to repent of it and forsake it for the glory of God. Allow Him to guide your thoughts, your attitude toward others, and your daily lives.

Each time I read this passage, I am reminded of the brevity of life. There is an appointed time for each of us to stand before God. [Heb.9:27 – And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:](#) Should that be today, are you ready to meet the Lord? Do you know for certain that you have been saved? Christian, are there areas in your life that you need to address prior to standing before the Lord? If so, I wouldn't hesitate; you may meet Him sooner than you had planned.