

# Studies in James

## Lesson 17

### Do The Right Thing

#### INTRODUCTION:

- I. As we come to the end of James chapter four, James deals with an ALL TOO common problem among Christians, and that is the tendency of SOME to DELIBERATELY choose to do the WRONG thing and begin PLAYING GOD with the lives of OTHERS, and even with our OWN lives.
  - A. In the first part of chapter 4, James exposed our tendency to be self-assertive and quarrelsome.
    1. He even described the CONFLICTS between brethren as "*wars and fights.*"
    2. Then James revealed the devastating CONSEQUENCES of a self-assertive and quarrelsome spirit – it ultimately makes us a friend of the world and an enemy of God.
  - B. Now, in the LATTER part of chapter four, James goes a step FURTHER and exposes some of the WAYS in which we often assert this ARROGANT and HAUGHTY spirit.
    1. One way has to do with the way we TREAT others, and James deals with this in **verses 11-12.**

- a. Our HAUGHTY SPIRIT causes us to become JUDGMENTAL toward some people, and THEN begins saying things about them to OTHERS.
  - b. When we play this kind of game, we often try to cleverly disguise our judgment and criticism of others as GENUINE CONCERNED for their spiritual welfare.
  - c. But our MOTIVE has nothing to DO with genuine concern for that person's spiritual welfare.
  - d. We just want to make ourselves look better and more RIGHTEOUS than them in the eyes of others.
2. ANOTHER way James says we assert an ARROGANT and HAUGHTY spirit has to do with the way we sometimes view OURSELVES, and James discussed THIS problem in **verses 13-16**.
- a. In those verses James addresses our tendency to take the place of God by becoming PRESUMPTUOUS and BOASTFUL of our accomplishments or abilities, and all the while leave God completely OUT of the equation.
  - b. We focus ENTIRELY on our OWN wants and desires, and our ability to ACHIEVE those wants and desires, without ever ONCE taking into consideration that God may have other plans.

- C. The FINAL point James addresses in this lesson is the SIMPLE, DIRECT solution to this problem found in **verse 17**.
  - 1. James tells us how we can AVOID having this ARROGANT and HAUGHTY spirit that causes us to play God with the lives OTHERS, and with our OWN lives as well.

II. OUR purpose in this study is THREE-FOLD.

- A. First, we want to define the main OBJECTIVE we're trying to achieve when we play God with others and with ourselves.
- B. Then, we want to familiarize ourselves with the METHODS we often use when playing God with others and with ourselves.
- C. And finally, we want to take a close look at what GOD thinks about all this.

**BODY:**

- I. Let's begin by looking at how we often play God with the lives of OTHERS.
  - A. Our OBJECTIVE in doing this is very SIMPLE.
    - 1. The objective is ELEVATE ourselves in the eyes of OTHERS by saying things about a brother or sister that we SHOULDN'T be saying.
    - 2. But to successfully ACHIEVE this objective, we need to make certain we carefully disguise our REAL MOTIVE and INTENT.

- B. When it comes to the question of METHODS, James tells us there are actually TWO, and he mentions them BOTH in **verse 11**.
1. The FIRST method we employ to make ourselves look better in the eyes of others is to SPEAK EVIL of a brother or sister.
    - a. This is why James specifically warns, *Do **not** speak evil of one another, brethren. (James 4:11a)*
    - b. The words translated "speak evil of," or as some translations render it, "speak evil against," come from a combination of two Greek words that mean, "to talk down."
      - (1). These words carry the idea of speaking harsh or unkind words about someone who is ABSENT and not able to properly DEFEND themselves.
    - c. We use this method of trying to ELEVATE ourselves when we talk about one person to another, with the intent of lowering the WORTH of the person we're talking ABOUT in the eyes of the one we're talking TO.
      - (1). We generally do this by attacking some area of WEAKNESS in their life – whether it's physical, emotional or spiritual.
      - (2). But the PROBLEM with doing this sort of thing is that we don't always have all the FACTS – and in SOME cases, we may not have the facts AT ALL.

(3). So, we often make ASSUMPTIONS about some area of perceived weakness in someone's life. But in reality, it may only be the way WE perceive this person's weakness.

d. But perhaps the most SINISTER aspect of all this is that we attempt to creatively DISGUISE our motives by saying such things as:

(1). "Now stop me if I'm wrong, BUT..."

(2). "Perhaps I shouldn't say this about him (or her), BUT..."

e. And the real POWER behind this cleverly disguised motive is that we're often able to hold our listener's ATTENTION and FACINATION with some JUICY bit of information we've linked to some brother or sister.

(1). And the SAD thing is that the FACTS may be totally MISREPRESENTED, totally EXAGGERATED, or maybe even totally FABRICATED.

2. The SECOND method we use to make ourselves look better in the eyes of others is to JUDGE a brother or sister.

a. James warns, *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 4:11b)**

- b. The word "*judges*" in THIS context means "to pronounce CONDEMNATION upon someone."
- c. When we DO this, we're simply allowing our CRITICAL, PETTY SPIRIT to run free where it wreaks havoc in the lives of others.
  - (1). This is NOT saying we need to be gullible and never exercise DISCERNMENT.
  - (2). There ARE times when the child of God MUST exercise careful judgment and discernment.
- c. But the problem HERE is that by NATURE many of us have an innate tendency to sometimes be SELFISH and NEGATIVE.
  - (1). Because of this innate TENDENCY toward selfishness and negativity in GENERAL, our judgment of OTHERS is often COLORED by our OWN selfish and negative spirit.
  - (2). When this happens, our judgment is no longer DISCERNMENT – where we use God-given wisdom to fairly and properly evaluate a particular situation or person – RATHER, our judgment leads us to UNJUSTLY CONDEMN another.
- d. The ONLY WAY we can RIGHTLY judge or discerningly EVALUATE another person is to know ALL the facts ABOUT that person.

- (1). However, as humans, we're incapable of doing that.
- (2). Only GOD can look upon the TOTAL man.
- (3). This is why Jesus SPECIFICALLY said in His sermon on the Mount, "*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. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*" **(Matthew 7:1-5)**

- (4). If you TRULY want to help a brother or sister with THEIR life, then get your OWN life straightened out FIRST, and THEN "*you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*"

e. James warns us that when we judge OTHERS, we are in reality judging the LAW (i.e. the law of love, of acceptance, of grace, and of Christian kindness).

- (1). Our major goal as Christians should be to BUILD UP one another in LOVE.

(2). Not to TEAR DOWN one another with CRITICISM, and spread around some HALF-TRUTH, or UNTRUTH about them.

f. James ALSO warns those of us who BECOME judges in this ungodly manner that, "*There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy.*" **(James 4:12)**

(1). The moment we engage in judging others, we're overstepping our boundaries and stepping into the territory that belongs EXCLUSIVELY to God.

(2). HE is the one Lawgiver, which makes HIM the ONLY ONE who is TRULY able to pass judgment BASED on that Law.

(3). God ALONE had the ability and the RIGHT to save and to destroy.

C. What does God think about all this?

1. Obviously, God isn't AT ALL pleased.

a. When we speak AGAINST someone, we're passing JUDGMENT against that person, and when we do THAT, we put ourselves in the place of God – the ONLY one who has the right to pass judgment.



b. Furthermore, when we're so busy focusing all our attention on judging someone ELSE, we don't have to think about our OWN failures.

(1). Often times, those who are the MOST judgmental, have the MOST problems in their OWN lives.

c. This just simply DOESN'T have a place in the life of the Christian. It's CLEARLY the WRONG thing to do.

2. Not only do we play God with the lives of OTHERS, there's ANOTHER way we play God.

II. The SECOND way we often play God is in the way we view OURSELVES.

A. Once again, the OBJECTIVE here is simple.

1. We imagine ourselves as the FINAL AUTHORITY over our lives and then LIVE our lives as if this were true.

a. **James 4:13-16** – *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.*

- b. We often hear this idea of ourselves expressed by the words:
  - (1). "It's MY live, and I can LIVE it any way I please."

B. And so, the METHOD we employ is also very simple.

- 1. We simply LIVE our lives to please ourselves – deliberately leaving God and His will completely OUT of the picture.
  - a. Like the man in James' example, we become arrogant and self-confident, setting our goals to suit ourselves, and then if we DO achieve success, we brag and boast about what WE'VE accomplished.
- 2. Does this mean we should NOT plan ahead, or that we should NOT have goals and aspirations?
  - a. Absolutely NOT.
  - b. I FIRMLY believe God wants us to be successful and enjoy life as much as possible.
  - c. But God wants us to DO all our planning and goal-setting with HIM and HIS WILL in mind. Why?
    - (1). Because there is a PAINFUL REALITY we often try to push to the back of our minds – our life is *"a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."* (v. 14)
    - (2). In other words, we need to be FLEXIBLE enough to provide room in our plans for God to step in and

INTERRUPT or even CHANGE our plans, if He wishes to DO so.

- d. Rather than boastfully say, "If it's to BE, it's up to ME, " perhaps we need to MODIFY that saying to, "If it's to BE, it's up to ME as long as it's ALSO the Lord's will."

(1). **James 4:15** – *Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."*

- f. This isn't FATALISM – where we walk around all the time waiting for our lives to be DRIVEN in some direction against our will, and thinking of ourselves as the victims of FATE.
- g. Instead, this is REALISM – where we live our lives, set our goals, and accomplish great things IN KEEPING WITH God's will.

C. So, what does God think when we deliberately leave Him and His will out of our plans?

- 1. James says it's EVIL – it's EVIL when we ARROGANTLY think we should be able to do what WE want to do, then BOAST about all our OWN accomplishments.
  - a. It's EVIL because we DELIBERATELY leave God and HIS will out of our plans – and that's ALSO the WRONG thing to do.

III. So what's the SOLUTION for all this? What can we do to STOP playing God with others by being their JUDGE, and STOP playing God with our OWN lives thinking we don't have to consider GOD'S will at all?

A. James says we SIMPLY need to have a NEW objective.

1. **James 4:17** – *"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."*

2. To ACHIEVE this simple objective, we need to do two things:

a. First, we need to KNOW the right thing to do.

(1). This means we must evaluate our plans – all our goals and aspirations – to see if they meet with GOD'S approval.

(2). I think we do this TWO WAYS:

(a). First, we use our God-given intellect to HONESTLY and OBJECTIVELY EVALUATE those plans and consider how they are going to impact our lives SPIRITUALLY.

(b). And SECOND, we need to evaluate our plans – all our goals and aspirations – to see if they CONFORM to God's WORD.

(3). That's the only way we can truly KNOW the right thing to do. (Back in 1983, deep down in my heart, I KNEW what the RIGHT and GOOD thing was that I needed to do.)

2. And second, after we KNOW the right thing to do, James says we need to then DO IT.
  - a. This means we must to have the DECENCY and HUMILITY to QUIT judging others and speaking about them in a derogatory manner – simply because we want to make OURSELVES look better by bring out all THEIR character flaws.
  - b. AND, this means we must have the TRUST and COURAGE to HONESYLY and OBJECTIVELY test our goals and aspirations to see if they really ARE in keeping with God’s will.
3. To fail to do EITHER of these two things – KNOWING and DOING the right thing – is nothing short of SIN.

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. One of the radio talk-show hosts I listen to occasionally is Dr. Laura Schlessinger.
  - A. She is not only a syndicated radio talk-show host that’s been on the air for 30 years, she also has a Ph. D. in Psychology from Columbia University, and is a licensed marriage, family and child counselor in California, not to mention the author of many best-selling books.
    1. ONE thing I appreciate about Dr. Laura is that she can be BRUTALLY HONEST with callers who are trying to skirt taking responsibility for their OWN actions.

- a. If you think Dr. Phil is brutally honest, you haven't heard Dr. Laura.
2. But one of the things I enjoy MOST about Dr. Laura is that she always ends every segment of her radio program with the words, "Now... go do the right thing."
3. That's some of the BEST advice you can give ANYONE – go do the RIGHT thing.
  - a. NOT the right thing based on what YOU think is best for YOU, or the right thing based on YOUR standards of moral and ethical conduct...
  - b. But the right thing based on GOD'S standards of moral and ethical conduct contained in GOD'S DIVINELY INSPIRED WORD.
  - c. This is the DEFINITIVE standard of what is RIGHT and what is WRONG, AND it's the standard of right and wrong by which EVERY ONE of us will someday be judged.
- B. And so, perhaps the best thing I could say to you is, "Now... go do the right thing."
  1. What is the RIGHT THING YOU need to do?
    - a. Do you need to give your life to the Lord in complete obedience to the gospel of Christ – coming to Him in faith, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Him and being

baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins, and thus being added by the Lord to the body of Christ?

(1). Is that the right thing YOU need to do right now?

- b. Or, have you already done that, but got off track somewhere in the past by doing the WRONG things, and NOW you need to repent of those sins, confessing them to the Lord, and try to the best of your ability from this point on to do the RIGHT thing?

(2). Is that the right thing YOU need to do right now?

- C. I don't think there is a SINGLE responsible person here who DOESN'T know the RIGHT thing to do. The question is, will you DO it?
  - 1. "Now... go DO the right thing."