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Tillamook, Oregon

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## ***A Faith that Works The Epistle of James***

***You see that a person is  
justified by works and not by  
faith alone. (2:24)***

***“Two Case Studies in Pride and  
Humility”***

**October 4, 2015**

**Sermon Text:** James 4:11-17

**Scripture Reading:** Luke 12:13-34

### **Introduction-**

Recently Mary made the following excellent comment in response to our blog post on many allies of abusers being abusers themselves. Listen to what Mary said:

I grew up very sheltered. I mean genuinely sheltered and protected in a

godly Bible-believing home. And if someone had just walked up to me and started describing an abusive situation in a “nice Christian home”, I wouldn’t have been able to understand. I wouldn’t have accused the person of lying, but I wouldn’t have been able to grasp that level of evil and deceit hiding under the facade of Christianity. I would have looked for some other explanation, some way that there was some sort of misunderstanding or something.

I know now that that innocence and naivete on my part would have made me ripe for being manipulated into aiding the abuser, but it would have been genuine ignorance on my part, not evil. I didn’t even begin the process of really understanding that abuse as it really is even existed until I read *A Cry for Justice* a couple of years ago when I was 19, and things have been slowly filtering through my brain since then. I guess I’m just trying to say that though there are a lot of people whose lack of understanding

hides the fact that they are themselves abusive, there are others like me who have just been so sheltered that they truly can't comprehend such things in their most raw form.

So keep on going after the bad guys—especially the subtle ones—but please remember to give people like me a chance. (I'm not saying you haven't been; I'm just sort of throwing the idea out there.)

It is the wisdom of the Lord that enables people like Mary, and us, to become truly *wise*. Yes, we must know sound doctrine. Theology is most certainly NOT unimportant because biblical theology is TRUTH. However, true theology – true “words about God” – ALWAYS take us right out into life, giving us the *wisdom* to put into practice that truth. Without wisdom, theology is incomplete and really in a way, untrue. It is not enough to know about the devil and about his tactics as recorded in Scripture. We must then take what we have learned and extrapolate it into our world, our lives, our churches – because the devil is pulling off the very same things among us today. *And it is these life-applications of God's truth that so many people want to reject and cover their ears from.* James tells us that we need not ask God for wisdom if we are

covering our ears! That is the double-mindedness he speaks of.

Here is the text we want to look at this morning, as soon as we make a few more comments about vss 1-10.

James 4:11-17 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against 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 only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? (13) Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"-- (14) yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. (15) Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." (16) As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (17) So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

I wanted to briefly comment on two Scripture references that we looked at last time, vss 1-10. Namely –

James 4:5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

James 4:6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

We talked about the fact that verse 5 is a difficult one to translate, and we concluded that the main point James is making is that anyone who is a professing Christian but who in fact is "double-minded" and tries to be a friend of the world is the person James calls "adulterous." That is, they are really idolaters, breaking the first commandment. And those biblical commandments about idolatry very often remind us that God's very name is "Jealous." He is jealous for His glory and will not tolerate the worship of false gods. So verse 5, we conclude, is a sobering warning to people who claim to be Christians but in fact are friends of the world (thus enemies of God).

Now notice that the ESV puts quotations marks around that "He yearns jealously..." statement. This is actually misleading because search high and low in the OT, you will not find this statement. You will find the truth of that statement made many

times, but you will not find a specific verse with those words. So James is most likely telling us something like "you know that the Scripture teaches us that God is a jealous God." Although it is possible as well that he is speaking of the human spirit that is given toward sinful jealousy (Kistemaker)

In the next verse, you have another quotation:

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

You have the very same thing from Peter-

1 Peter 5:5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

This statement is very probably from Proverbs 3:34. I give the entire context here because you can see that James had this same passage in mind elsewhere in his letter:

**Proverbs 3:21-35 My son, do not lose sight of these-- keep sound wisdom and discretion,** (22) and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. (23) Then you will walk on your

way securely, and your foot will not stumble. (24) If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. (25) Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, (26) for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught. **(27) Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. (28) Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it"-when you have it with you.** (29) Do not plan evil against your neighbor, who dwells trustingly beside you. (30) Do not contend with a man for no reason, when he has done you no harm. (31) Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways, (32) for the devious person is an abomination to the LORD, but the upright are in his confidence. (33) The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous. (34) **Toward the scorers he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.** (35) The wise will inherit honor, but fools get disgrace.

It is not surprising that James had Proverbs in mind as he wrote, because as we saw right away in chapter 1, he

is instructing us in the *wisdom* of the Lord:

James 1:5-6 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (6) But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

Do you remember that James is comparing and contrasting the wisdom of God with human wisdom –

James 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. (15) This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. (16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. (17) But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. (18) And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

I think that here in chapter 4 we have James giving us real-life glimpses of God's wisdom versus this demonic wisdom. Listen again now to the rest of chapter 4-

James 4:6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

And vs 9-10,

James 4:11-17 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against 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 only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

James 4:9-10 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. (10) Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

(13) Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"-- (14) yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. (15) Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." (16) As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (17) So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Obviously this matter of *humbling oneself vs being proud and arrogant* is a main theme of James' and is central to the wisdom of the Lord. What you have here in chapter 4 really are pictures of these two forms of wisdom living themselves out. Demonic, earthly wisdom says:

- Speak evil about others in order to exalt yourself
- Act as if you are the one who determines the length of your days and the course of your life

The Bible speaks very, very often of the principle of God blessing the humble and being opposed to the proud. Here are a few examples:

Proverbs 18:12 Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.

Remember 4:6 –

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

Luke 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Let's look more closely then at the examples James gives, contrasting pride with humility.

James 4:11-12 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against 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 only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Here we have the arrogant person, who claims to be a Christian, setting himself up as judge – and really as God! And what is he doing? He is passing judgment upon another Christian, but his “verdict” is false and

therefore evil. He falsely accuses and condemns. His verdict is not in accord with God's Law. A true judge has authority to acquit and to condemn, but this kind of person doesn't.

Notice that these verses must not be used to claim that we can never “judge” anyone. That is, discern that they are evil and that their deeds are evil. What James is talking about is a wicked person *speaking evil against* someone. The verdict is wrong. It is evil. And to do that is to violate God's law – that we are not to bear false witness against our neighbor. That is, James is talking here about *slandering*. Psalm 101 links pride with slander –

Psalms 101:5 Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy. Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure.

Listen to Kistemaker on this:

“Slander issues from the heart of the person who fails to consider others above himself. The humble Christian, however, opposes slander and says,

No wicked thing or slanderous accusation

Shall stand before mine eyes with approval;

No hateful doings of apostasy

Shall cleave to me. (Dewey Westra)

The link between verses 7 and 11 lies in the word *devil* (vs 7) and the verb *slander*. In the original, the noun *diabolos* (devil) means “slanderer.” James then is exhorting his readers not to slander one another, for this is the work of the devil. He is telling them to stop this evil practice to which they have resorted. If they continue to slander each other in the church, they will eventually destroy the fellowship of the Christian community.”

The Law says we are to love one another. And if you set aside the law, you have become a judge of that law. Then you have placed yourself on the level of the Lawgiver.”

This is precisely what the *reviler* does, and we have had to battle such people many times in this church. The reviler-slanderer is an incredibly arrogant person who fancies himself as God.

The second form of arrogance James points to is that of refusing to acknowledge God in our lives, and specifically, in the plans we make:

James 4:13-17 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"-- (14) yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little

time and then vanishes. (15) Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." (16) As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (17) So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Boasting in arrogance is to speak as if the man himself is in charge of his future. This is a very easy one for any of us to slide into, but I think James is fundamentally speaking of people who, though they claim to be Christians, *habitually think and behave in this manner*. Just as the slanderer makes himself as God, so does this brand of sinner.

No human being knows what is even going to happen *tomorrow*, let alone further in the future. None of us know what our lives are going to bring even 5 minutes from now. In the grand scheme of God’s plan from eternity to eternity, our brief life spans are infinitesimal. Godly wisdom, the kind that the Lord gives, says instead, “if the Lord wills.” There is nothing wrong with planning, but those plans must always be made with the recognition that God may have a different plan for us. To refuse to do this is evil, and yet we all know that the world, according to its “wisdom,” calls for people to be masters of their own destiny.

Listen to the closing verses again-

James 4:15-17 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." (16) As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (17) So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

The "instead" tells us, "here is God's wisdom." If the Lord wills, we will carry out these plans. Nothing wrong with planning for tomorrow, but to do so in a way that makes us appear to be God is *evil*.

Then James closes off the chapter with a reminder – "now you know. If you fail to obey, you are guilty before God."

How many of us, looking back now, would have had really ANY idea that our lives would take the course they have? We had plans and ideas for our futures. For this church. For our children. Some of those plans panned out, but perhaps many did not. Because Someone else was actually the script writer, not me.

So here is the Lord's promise to us if we will live for Him humbly, acknowledging Him in all our ways. He will give us the grace necessary to follow Him even in the most difficult

times. He will give us His wisdom to be wise in regard to evil vs good. He will call us His own, protect us from the enemy, and bring us safely home.