

James 4:13-17 The Subtlety of Sin

1. *1 John 2:15-17 "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."*
2. Why do we open a study in James with a quote from John?
 - a. Concerned with the same thing
 - i. James 4:4 *"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."*
 1. See some similarities?
 - b. identify the same qualities of "false faith" ..."earthly wisdom"
 - i. "Lust of the flesh"; internal desires resident in the flesh...the "old man"
 1. Nate's sermon; James 4:1 *"What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?"*
 2. Gal 5:19ff *"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."*
 - a. God warns, encourages, and exhorts constantly
 - i. It is the heart of His word...His loving message to us.
 - ii. Easy to understand...it is our heart toward those we love as well
 - ii. "Lust of the eyes"; desires that are triggered by outside influences
 1. Nate's sermon; James 4:2 *"You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel."*
 2. Tit 3:3 *"For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another."*
 - iii. "Pride of life"; *alazoneia*... only found in two places in scripture. Here in 1 John and in James 4

1. TDNT defines it this way; 1. “an insolent and empty assurance, which trusts in its own power and resources and shamefully despises and violates divine laws and human rights”. 2. “an impious and empty presumption which trusts in the stability of earthly things”
2. Not only does it affect our view of ourselves, it affects our view of others.
 - a. James 2:2ff. *“if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?”*
3. Perhaps the best example... Luke 18:10ff *“And He (Jesus) also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ 13 But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*
 - iv. All three; lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life, are interrelated. They feed on each other and join together in destruction
- c. Preventative and corrective to all three is humility
 - i. Remember the verse we just read? James 4:4 *“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”*
 1. Just a few verses later, James gives the counter... the cure... *“Therefore it says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES*

GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.” 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

2. The importance of humility

a. Humility precedes salvation (James 4:6)

i. Matt 5:1ff *“When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 “Blessed are the gentle (humble), for they shall inherit the earth.”*

1. Same thing as James 4:6ff.

b. Humility precedes love

i. 1 Cor 13:4-5 *“love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,”*

c. Humility precedes effective prayer

i. James 4:2ff. *“You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures”*

d. Humility precedes submission

i. Only the humble submit; to God or to others

3. So we come to our text this morning,(and it may have something to do with humility...)
James 4:13ff. *“Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”*

- a. *“Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.”* What’s wrong with that? Shouldn’t we be “planners”? people of commerce? Business men and women?
- i. Jesus, when teaching on the cost of discipleship, says this, *“For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ 31 Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.”*
 - ii. Prov 21:5 *“The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.”*
 - iii. Prov 15:22 *“Without consultation, plans are frustrated, But with many counselors they succeed.”*
 - iv. Prov 16:9 *“The mind of man plans his way,...”*
- b. So, what is the problem? James tells us in the next verses, *“Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.’”*
- i. Remember the title of this message, “The Subtleness of sin”. These verses are the reason I chose that title. Again, we see a lack of humility and the presence of pride, but it’s fairly subtle in its presentation. Not like some we have looked at...
 1. The “praying” Pharisee
 2. The tumultuous quarrels, conflicts, selfishness and partiality of the “scattered brethren”
 3. The list of deeds of the flesh we saw listed in Galatians, *“immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these”*
 4. Nothing subtle about these expressions of sin
 - ii. But here, we simply see the wise and beneficial act of planning, but without an awareness of our own limitations and nature...failing to reflect upon and

acknowledge God's sovereignty and our dependency.... It shows a life in need of humility and exhibiting a disregard for the complexities and uncertainties of our lives.

1. Prov 16:9 *"The mind of man plans his way,..."*
 - a. The rest of the verse, *"... but the Lord directs his steps"*. We can all too easily forget that part...
2. Other verses that remind us of that truth
 - a. Prov 3:5ff. *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight."*
 - b. Jer 29:11ff. *"For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart."*
 - c. Prov 16:1ff. *"The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD. 2 All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives. 3 Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established."*
3. This is not fundamentally a call to cease... it is a call to seek. Not a call to cease rebellion but a call to seek wisdom... security... direction... understanding... in God's arms and under His care. It is a call to understand our nature...that we are but a vapor...transitory, fundamentally powerless in ourselves. It is a call to seek God's will instead of our own.
 - a. Personal example... one of my greatest failings... I did not pray for my children and my wife as I should have.
 - i. I knew the Word of God
 - ii. I had a plan in accordance with His Word
 - iii. My practice... my behavior... demonstrated that I believed I was sufficient to carry out "the plan"
 - iv. You see, I was there to take care of business...God had ME...

4. And what does God call this subtle sin of pride... this sin of ignoring and not even considering His will... my sin of thinking of myself more highly than I ought? Better equipped than I was?
 - a. Vs 16 *“But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.”*
 - i. “arrogance”; Same word as “pride of life” in 1 John 2:16
 - ii. Is evil; *ponēros*, “bad, of a bad nature or condition”
 1. Speaks more to nature than action; a state of being rather than an activity
 2. Bad heart... bad thinking
 - b. Though it is, perhaps, more subtle, it is every bit as evil
4. So, we come to our final verse, *“Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”*
 - a. This stands as a key verse in James’ letter as a whole and in this chapter specifically.
 - i. It is not enough to stop doing the “wrong” things, but to start doing the “right” things
 1. Stop following earthly wisdom and start following heavenly wisdom
 2. Stop thinking and acting out of pride and start practicing humility
 3. Stop acting out of selfish interest and start acting out of godly interest... *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*
 4. Stop acting independently and start acting in dependence upon God, our Master, our King and our Great Shepherd

Beloved, we engage in spiritual warfare on a multitude of fronts every day. We face battles with “the sins that so easily beset us” and struggle to lay them aside. We seek to shoulder the responsibility and heed the call of doing the “right things” as we submit to the Lord...praying and seeking His will through His word. And we have to deal with the enemy in the camp...those things that have snuck through our defenses and seem harmless or of little consequence...but that seek to subtly and quietly destroy our lives and our testimony. Our success in this warfare is determined by how we respond to the commands and counsel of our Captain and Head, the Lord Jesus, our faith in His understanding and love, and our reliance on His power and not our own.

Let us pray...