

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-29-15 AM NOTES
"THE PERIL OF PLAYING GOD"
JAMES 4:11-17
#13 in Series, "James: Practical Wisdom"

Genesis 3:5a (NKJV) "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God..."

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced or cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

—Ernest Henley

James 1:18b (HCSB) "...a new birth by the message of truth..."

Matthew 6:10 (NKJV) "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven."

*Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter;
I am the clay.
Mold me and make me
After Thy will,
While I am waiting,
Yielded and still.*

—Adelaide Pollard

I. Playing God With Others (vv. 11-12)

1 Peter 3:16b (NKJV) "...when they defame you as evildoers..."

Leviticus 19:16a (NKJV) "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people..."

Psalms 101:5a (NKJV) "Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy..."

2 Samuel 10:18-11:1a (NKJV) "¹⁸ Then the Syrians fled before Israel; and David killed seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen of the Syrians, and struck Shobach the commander of their army, who died there. ¹⁹ And when all the kings *who were* servants to Hadadzezer saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and served them. So the Syrians were afraid to help the people of Ammon anymore. ¹ It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out *to battle*, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah."

Matthew 7:1 (NKJV) "Judge not, that you be not judged."

1 Kings 8:39b (NASB) "...for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men."

Ephesians 4:15a (NKJV) "but, speaking the truth in love..."

James 4:12 (HCSB) "There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?"

*Judge not the workings of his brain,
And of his heart thou cannot see.
What looks to thy dim eyes a stain,
In God's pure light may only be
A scar brought from some well-won field
Where thou wouldst only faint and yield.*
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II. Playing God With Ourselves (vv. 13-17)

Psalms 40:8 (NKJV) “I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart.”

Matthew 7:21 (NKJV) “Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

1 John 2:17b (NKJV) “...he who does the will of God...”

A. A Prideful Attitude (v. 13)

Luke 12:16-21 (NKJV) “¹⁶ Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ ²¹ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

The world is an organized system of ideas and values that is energized by Satan and leaves out God and His Word.

B. A Presumptuous Assumption (vv. 14-15)

1 Samuel 20:3b (NKJV) “...*there is* but a step between me and death.”

1 Chronicles 29:15b (NKJV) “Our days on earth *are* as a shadow...”

Job 7:6a (NKJV) “My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle...”

Psalms 102:3a (NKJV) “For my days are consumed like smoke...”

*When as a child, I laughed and wept—Time crept.
When as a youth, I dreamed and talked—Time walked.
When I became a full-grown man—Time ran.
When older still I grew—Time flew.
Soon I shall find in passing on—Time gone.*
—Author Unknown

Acts 18:21 (NKJV) “but took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.’ And he sailed from Ephesus.”

1 Corinthians 4:19a (NKJV) “But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills...”

C. A Presumptuous Arrogance (v. 16)

D. A Presumptuous Omission (v. 17)

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.”

Romans 12:2b (NKJV) “...that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

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The very first temptation given by Satan to Eve in the Garden of Eden was to be her own god. We read in **Genesis 3:5a (NKJV)** “For God knows that in the day you eat of it [the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God...” The basic sin of all mankind is the desire to be our own god. Every other sin proceeds out of that stream. Perhaps the clearest statement of proud man desiring to be his own god was written by William Ernest Henley entitled “Invictus” (Latin for “unconquered”). Here is a portion of that poem:

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced or cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

- Ernest Henley

That poem reflects human pride that flows out of the desire to be our own god taken to the max! While it may not always come out that arrogant or blunt, Henley simply took what Adam and Eve and all of their descendants who suffered the effects of the fall desired and shows what it looks like taken to its logical end.

One of the recurring themes of James is that those who have been born again have been drastically changed down to the core of their being. That change is evidenced in the way they walk in the world and in the deepest desires of their heart. Those who have been as **James 1:18b (HCSB)** says, given “...a new birth by the message of truth...” have a strong desire for the will of God. Let me just put it bluntly. One of the clearest evidences of a true Christian (a person who has been born again) is that they have a desire to allow the one true God to be their God. A true believer desires to pray according to the model prayer in **Matthew 6:10 (NKJV)** “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven.” Certainly we struggle with the programming of that old us before Christ (the flesh or the self life), but down at the core of our being we desire God’s will and way. Perhaps these words written by Adelaide Pollard best summarize the heart and desires of a true Christian. They also point out the drastic difference between one who has been born again and those who have not. While Ernest Henley boasts, “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul”, Adelaide Pollard humbly voices the desire of her heart:

*Have Thine own way, Lord!
Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter;
I am the clay.
Mold me and make me
After Thy will,
While I am waiting,
Yielded and still.*

- Adelaide Pollard

In this portion of James, we see what playing god looks like and what submission to the one true God looks like. Let's study these verses looking at our own lives and see if the views of Ernest Henley or Adelaide Pollard best describe our deepest desires and our lives.

I. Playing God with Others (V11-12)

The key phrase in these two verses is "Do not speak evil of one another". The Greek word that is translated "speak evil" refers to slander and mindless, thoughtless, careless, derogatory, untrue speech toward another. In **1 Peter 3:16 (NKJV)** this same word is translated "...when they **defame you** as evildoers..." To summarize, the word translated "speaks evil" is words spoken about another which are critical, derogatory, and untrue. You may be surprised at the number of references in Scripture to this kind of speech directed toward others. In **Leviticus 19:16 (NKJV)** God says, "You shall not go about *as* a talebearer among your people..." We are told in **Psalms 101:5a (NKJV)** "Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy..." Especially in the Old Testament, there is verse after verse about the consequences of "speaking evil". In one incident in 2 Samuel 10, the Ammonites slandered David and some of his men when David tried to show kindness to them. As the result of that slander, there was war between Israel and the Ammonites along with the Syrians they hired. Listen to the horrible results of the battle that was 100% caused by slander. **2 Samuel 10:18-11:1a (NKJV)** "¹⁸ Then the Syrians fled before Israel; and David killed **seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen** of the Syrians, and struck Shobach the commander of their army, who died there. ¹⁹ And when all the kings *who were* servants to Hadadezer saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and served them. So the Syrians were afraid to help the people of Ammon anymore. ¹ It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out *to battle*, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they **destroyed the people of Ammon** and besieged Rabbah." Oh, the damage of speaking evil of another!

Let me clear up a misconception that many have about what James is saying which is what Jesus also said in Matthew 7. James says in **James 4:11 (NKJV)** 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." Does the admonition to not judge another mean that we are never to say anything negative or critical about another person? When we say that a person or group of people are wrong, are we guilty of judging? Jesus said in **Matthew 7:1 (NKJV)** "Judge not, that you be not judged." I preached a message on this verse a while back and said that this is probably the most quoted and the most misinterpreted verse in the Bible. It is obvious based on the context of Matthew 7:1 that Jesus had in mind a more negative meaning of "judge". In this context it is speaking of an attitude or approach of censoriousness. That big word means to harshly criticize or condemn. Jesus was speaking about self-righteous, hypocritical, egotistical, unmerciful condemnation of another. To say that another person is wrong when the Bible says that it is wrong is not judging; it is just applying the Scripture. The judgment forbidden also includes judging a person's motives. **1 Kings 8:39b (NASB)** "...for **You alone know the hearts** of all the sons of men". There is never an excuse or reason for judging another's motives for what they do. Neither you nor I know their heart. When I have examined myself and gotten all the facts, I must declare as wrong their words and actions when those words and actions violate Scripture, but I must never judge a person's motives. Even in confronting wrong, the principle of **Ephesians 4:15 (NKJV)** must rule, "but, speaking the truth in love..."

When we "speak evil of one another" we are acting opposite of how love acts. We have violated the scores of commands in Scripture to love one another, as well as violating what Jesus called the second greatest commandment – to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39). Love considers others better than us, but slander is putting others down in order to make us look superior. James has just told us in James 4:10 to humble ourselves, but to speak evil of another is rooted in pride, not humility. Oh, be very careful even in idle conversation what you say about another, and especially about a brother or sister in

Christ. When you make final kinds of judgment, you are taking God's place. **James 4:12 (HCSB)** "There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?"

Do not play God with others by speaking evil and judging them in a non-scriptural way. Years ago, I read this poem by an unknown author.

*Judge not the workings of his brain,
And of his heart thou cannot see.
What looks to thy dim eyes a stain,
In God's pure light may only be
A scar brought from some well-won field
Where thou wouldst only faint and yield.*

- Unknown

II. Playing God with Ourselves (V13-17)

Allow me to reiterate what I said in the introduction to this message. One of the evidences of being a true Christian is that we desire to do God's will. David put it this way in **Psalms 40:8 (NKJV)** "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart." Jesus said in **Matthew 7:21 (NKJV)** "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." John describes a Christian in **1 John 2:17 (NKJV)** as one "...who does the will of God..." When we just leave God and His will out of our daily life and our planning, we are playing god with ourselves. James illustrates how we play god with ourselves by the example of a business person's plans for doing business.

A. A Proudful Attitude (V13)

Don't miss the point of what James is saying in verse 13. He is not saying that doing business is a sin. The description in verse 13 was a fairly common way that many made a living. James begins verse 13 with the words "Come now". This is an insistent call to pay attention to what is about to be said. The NIV translates it "Now listen". It could be translated "Listen up!" If James is not rebuking the business practice of buying goods to take to another place and sell them at a profit, what is he so insistent about that we see as being wrong with this business person's approach? What is rebuked is his self-sufficient attitude that just leaves God out of his daily life. Have you learned that the starting point of all our planning is the recognition of and submission to the sovereignty of God? This business person is not faulted for planning; he is faulted for leaving God out of his plans. The business person or person that James is describing has a proudful attitude of self-sufficiency. Notice that he chooses where he is going, the time that he is going to leave, how long he is going to stay, what he is going to do when he gets there (buy and sell), and that he is going to make a profit. This "wholesaler" as we would call him has been to the motivational seminars; he has read the Wall Street Journal; he has his business degree from the University of Tennessee and he is "large and in charge". This whole scenario reeks of pride. He is even sure that he is going to make a profit because he knows what he is doing and he is in control.

James' illustration is very similar to an illustration that Jesus gave about a wealthy farmer in **Luke 12:16-21 (NKJV)** "¹⁶ Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' ¹⁸ So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.' ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' ²¹ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.'" Do you see the similarities? In neither case is the subject rebuked for doing well in their business or farm. The rebuke is that they simply leave God out. Remember how we defined worldliness in the last message? The world is an organized system of ideas and values that is energized by Satan and leaves out God and His Word. The farmer in Luke 12 values accumulating more and more, and basking in his success. There is no thought of what God would have him give to others. He saw it as his profit to do with as he pleased. Even so the person James is referring to. He didn't

seek God, yield to God, he presumes upon God, and in reality he plays god. I wonder if I am speaking to some people who are playing god. You may believe in God, even profess that you know and love God, but you are living just like the two men we looked at – the business man and the farmer.

B. A Presumptuous Assumption (V14-15)

James gives us two reasons that those who leave God out of their plans and life are rebuked. First, he says “whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow.” The presumptuous assumption is that we have tomorrow. The second reason that those who leave God out of their plans and life are rebuked is the brevity of life. Every cemetery is full of the remains of people who had plans for a tomorrow that never came for them. David said in **1 Samuel 20:3b (NKJV)** “... *there is* but a step between me and death.” Even if your life is not taken in what the world calls an “untimely death”, your life just passes by so fast. James compares our lives here to a vapor. That is translated, “a mist”, and “a bit of smoke” in other translations. The Bible is full of other verses that say basically the same thing. **1 Chronicles 29:15b (NKJV)** “Our days on earth *are* as a shadow...” **Job 7:6a (NKJV)** “My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle...” **Psalms 102:3a (NKJV)** “For my days are consumed like smoke...”

I have often used a poem that is so true to illustrate the point of James 4:14.

When as a child, I laughed and wept – Time crept.

When as a youth, I dreamed and talked – Time walked.

When I became a full grown man – time ran.

When older still I grew – Time flew.

Soon I shall find in passing on – Time gone.

- Author Unknown

Sometimes someone has a narrow escape in an accident or medical emergency and they will say, “That is the closest I’ve ever been to death”. No, that is not true. Right now is the closest you’ve ever been to death! Selah, think about that.

In verse 15 James shows us the approach to life we are to operate by. Instead of living as practical atheists (operating our daily lives as if God does not exist), James says that everything we do is in the atmosphere of submission to the will of God. To say “If the Lord wills” means that we acknowledge God’s sovereignty and submit to His sovereign will in all our planning. He is not saying that we shouldn’t plan. We should. What James is rebuking is planning that leaves out our sovereign God.

In the earlier days of Christianity, Christians would add the postscript to their letters, D.V. These initials stand for the Latin words *Deo Volente* which mean “if the Lord wills” or “God willing”. I don’t think this is a command to utter these words after announcing your plans (though there would be nothing wrong with that). I think it is talking about an attitude, an approach to life. You find those terms in the ministry of the Apostle Paul. **Acts 18:21 (NKJV)** “but took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.’ And he sailed from Ephesus.” **1 Corinthians 4:19 (NKJV)** “But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills...”

C. A Presumptuous Arrogance (V16)

In verses 13-14 God’s will is just ignored. In verse 16, James is addressing those who deny God’s will by substituting their will for His. Its one thing to ignore God’s will, but it is a sin at the next level to boast about your plans and successes when you know that they are not in God’s will. Your arrogance is in saying my will is better than God’s will.

D. A Presumptuous Omission (V17)

We typically think of sin as acts that we commit. That certainly is sin, but it is also sin to know the will of God and refuse to do it. In other words, there are sins of commission (doing that which we should not) and sins of omission (failing to do what we know to be God’s will for us to do). This sin of omission brings strong consequences from God. Jesus said in **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.”

The perfect example of this sin of omission is the prophet Jonah. He knew the will of God – to go to Nineveh and call the inhabitants to repentance. Jonah, knowing God’s will refused to obey. His sin of not going to Nineveh was a sin of omission and you know what God thought about his rebellion! He became fish food and had a whale for a jail.

CONCLUSION

The Christian life is all about letting God be God in the big things and in the daily details of life. Don’t be guilty of living like the world and just leaving God out. God’s will for His children is described in **Romans 12:2b (NKJV)** as “...that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” That is what every true Christian desires, and why wouldn’t we?