

“Practice What You Know”
(James 4:17)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. This morning, James reminded us of the two wills of God:
 - a. There is God’s will of decree/His secret will.
 - b. And there is God’s declared will/His precepts/His 10 Commandments.
2. He warned his readers not to sin against either of these wills.
 - a. We usually don’t think about the fact we can sin against God with respect to His decree, but we can.
 - b. Whenever we presume that we have control of our lives and don’t submit to God’s will, we sin against Him.
 - c. When we pray, we need to take it into account: if we’re asking for something He hasn’t specifically promised, we need to say, “If it is your will.”
 - d. And when we make plans, we need always to consider they will only take place if God wills.
 - e. Have you ever written a letter or e-mail, or received one, that has at the end, D.V.
 - (i) D.V. stands for Deus vult, which means, God willing.
 - (ii) It’s only if God wills that we shall live or do this or that.

B. Preview.

1. James now takes up sins against the other aspect of God’s will: His precepts.
 - a. Obviously, when we fail to obey the Law of God, we also sin.
 - (i) John writes, “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).
 - (ii) The Law defines what is right and wrong, and so breaking any part of it, by implication, is sin.
 - b. Tonight, James deals with law-breaking, specifically with sins of omission.
2. What we’ll want to consider is:
 - a. What sins of omission are.
 - b. How sins of this kind are aggravated.
 - c. What we can do to overcome them.

II. Sermon.

A. First, what are sins of omission?

1. All sins are of two kinds: commission and omission.
 - a. Sins of commission are those sins we commit when we do specifically what God has warned us not to do.
 - (i) Most of the Ten Commandments are put in this form: forbidding certain actions.
 - (a) You shall have no other gods before Me (Ex. 20:3).

- (b) You shall make for yourself an idol (v. 4).
- (c) You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain (v. 7).
- (d) You shall not murder (v. 13), commit adultery (v. 14), steal (v. 15) and so on.

(ii) If we do any of these things, we're committing sin.

b. Sins of omissions are those sins we commit when we leave undone the things God tells us to do.

(i) Two of the Ten Commandments are in this form: commanding certain actions.

- (a) Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy (v. 8).
- (b) Honor your father and your mother (v. 12).

(ii) Not to do these things is to omit a duty, thereby sinning against God.

(iii) Don't forget: for everything forbidden, there is also a positive duty:

- (a) We are to have the true God for our God.
- (b) We are to worship God in the way He commands.
- (c) We must use God's name reverently.
- (d) We must protect life, protect our own and others moral purity, protect their belongings, etc.
- (e) Not to do these things are sins of omission.

(iv) And for everything commanded, there is something forbidden:

- (a) We must not break the Sabbath through not keeping it holy by engaging in worldly employments and recreations.
- (b) We must not dishonor our parents or any authority God places over us.

2. James centers in on sins of omission.

a. Why?

- (i) It could be that we are far more apt to leave undone things we should do than to do things we shouldn't.
- (ii) The fear of the Lord is a powerful motivation to keep us from doing things He forbids.
- (iii) But there is a natural reluctance in us to do what He commands: it's called sin.
- (iv) Sin certainly also makes us want to do what we shouldn't.
- (v) Consider your own experience: Is it harder to keep away from things forbidden or to do the things commanded?

b. Regardless why, James does.

- (i) Certainly it ties into what he has just told us: we know we need to submit to God's will in everything: not to do so is sin.
- (ii) It ties into everything he's told us in his letter.
- (iii) It applies to everything the Scripture commands.
- (iv) Not to be and do what God requires is sin.
 - (a) Jesus told the Pharisees, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier

provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others” (Matt. 23:23).

(b) He didn’t rebuke them for tithing on the small things: He told them they must not neglect this.

(c) But He does rebuke them for neglecting the weightier matters.

(d) They needed to do everything that God required, not just part of it.

(e) And so do we.

(v) Let’s not forget that there are some corporate duties:

(a) There are duties given to the church: make disciples of all the nations.

(b) We are not individually responsible for this, but we all have our part to play through our gifts, time, resources.

(c) James is telling us we must not neglect *our own* duty.

B. How are sins of this kind aggravated? What makes them worse?

1. The number one way is learning more but not putting what we know into practice.

a. We’re better at learning than we are at doing.

b. But what we learn isn’t going to do us any good, unless we put it into practice.

c. The more we know, the more responsible we are to do what is right and the more blamable we are if we don’t.

(i) If your children do things that are wrong, but they don’t know they’re wrong, you are more lenient.

(ii) But if you tell them not to do something and they do it, or to do something and they don’t, you’re more severe. Why?

(iii) Because they know better: with more knowledge comes greater accountability; and because they are committing a greater offense: they knew what was expected of them, but didn’t do it.

2. The same is true with regard to the unbeliever: the more he knows and doesn’t do, the guiltier he is, and the greater will be his punishment.

a. Jesus tells us that those cities that had His Gospel preached in them will have a more severe judgment than those cities that didn’t.

b. “Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for *the* land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city” (Matt. 10:14-15).

c. Thankfully, Christ has borne the punishment of the believer.

d. But we must not sin that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1-2).

C. Finally, what can we do to overcome our sins of omission?

1. The simplest solution is to no longer omit our duty.

a. We need to study to know our duty.

b. But we also need to do it.

2. That’s easier said than done. So what can we do to improve our obedience?

a. First, we need to resolve in our heart that it is the best thing we can do.

- (i) Out of love for Christ.
 - (a) Love desires to please the object of its love.
 - (b) If we love Christ, we will want to please Him.
- (ii) Out of a desire for God's blessing.
 - (a) True happiness comes from God's Spirit dwelling in us.
 - (b) Obedience, submission to God's will, is a means of having more of the Spirit, since we don't drive Him away through our stubbornness.
 - (c) Thomas Brooks wrote, "As sinful commissions will stab the soul; so sinful omissions will starve the soul" (*Treasury*).
- b. Second, we need to identify areas where we are guilty and repent of everything we can find.
 - (i) As long as we continue to neglect our duty, we won't honor Christ or receive His blessing.
 - (ii) So we need to turn in every area where we're neglecting it and begin doing it.
- c. Third, we need to pray daily that the Lord would give us the grace we need to do our duty.
 - (i) We can't do it in our own strength.
 - (ii) Jesus said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5).
 - (iii) But Paul reminds us, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).
- d. Finally, we need to look to Christ daily, to His example for encouragement.
 - (i) In so many ways, Christ is our example: He didn't obey simply to bring us righteousness, but also to give us direction.
 - (a) His meat and drink was to do the will of the Father (John 4:34).
 - (b) He doesn't ask us to do anything that He Himself didn't do.
 - (ii) Let's learn from and follow His example for our good.
 - (a) When we were children, we had to be taught everything.
 - (b) When we were born again, we had to learn all over again.
 - (c) Our sin deceives us still, and we need to learn things over again.
 - (d) God shows us the good and right way to walk in for our blessing through Christ: "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (John 13:15-17).
 - (e) Let's read the Word, learn Christ and put Christ on.
 - (f) It's His image and likeness we have been predestined to put on. Amen.