

# Sin Has Many Faces

James 4:17

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. (James 4:13-17 (ESV))

In our message last week, we considered the sin of arrogance spoken about here, and how arrogance can have a subtlety within its nature, so subtle that it sometimes, perhaps often, is able to conceal its true nature from our conscious mind, allowing us to go about all our many daily plans and behaviors ignoring, sometimes even denying the “still small voice” of guidance from the Holy Spirit.

And we accepted that as verse 16 tells us, such arrogance, though subtle, is still a form of boasting, and is evil, and is therefore “sin”. Verse 16,

16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.  
(James 4:16-17 (ESV))

In my study of these words, I found that the Greek word translated here as “boasting” gives the exact reason why our boasting is so sinful, and why it is so abhorrent to God. The Greek word, “kauchesis”, means “that I might glory”. That I “personally” might glory!

So then, to “boast”, though it may be a very subtle, and well-hidden kind of boasting, does the one thing that we must never do. Boasting robs God of His glory and claims it for ourselves. And as we know, the first duty of man, all men and women, is to “glorify God”, to “glorify Him” in everything we think, everything we say and everything we do!

And when we do not, when we do things like that mentioned in verse 13, where we would without thinking of God and first asking if it is His Will, we would say

13 . . . “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”. (James 4:13)

Or perhaps as you or I might more likely say, “today I will go to my workplace and I will do all the things that I have written in my planning book.” If we have neglected to bring God into the equation of those daily plans, each plan, individually, if we have not first considered in our hearts, “If the Lord Wills”, then we might have crossed over that thin

line from Godly planning into that subtle form of arrogance called “presumption”. And as we have said, “presumption” is a serious form of sin!

And no, most often, when we make those quick, off-the-cuff decisions and plans, we don’t mean to intentionally ignore or deny God. But as we said in our last message, though our actions and behaviors may not be fully intentional, the effect of our behaviors still accomplish the same results. We have kept God, and His Will, out of the equation and prevented His loving hand from intervening and accomplishing His plans and His purposes through us. Subtle, but so very effective!

And how sad that is for us! We have foolishly chosen a counterfeit agenda over the loving plans and purposes of God! How truly sad!

Thankfully, thankfully, God is a loving Father and He knows our frame, how we, like children, race about the things of our day. And because His mercies are “new every morning”, each new day really is new. And though we didn’t remember to call on Him yesterday, beginning today, we can start all over again, and this time hopefully do it right. And the words of His promises in Proverbs 3:5-6 are standing ready to bless and to guide us. There He tells us that if we will

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;  
6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.  
(Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV))

And I especially love God’s connotation with these words “direct your path”. The Greek words translated there give the vision of a clear and straight and level path, one that is easy to recognize as being the right one to follow. And though the paths of God are often narrow and difficult, with the Holy Spirit guiding us, God’s chosen paths for us can be easy and pleasant.

As I began to study our scripture text for today, this verse 17, it occurred to me that the words might seem to be somewhat of an “add-on” to all the other sixteen verses. But of course, they aren’t. These words are very intentional and very much a part of this whole consideration of our “quick, off-the-cuff” manner of decision-making and handling of the matters of our daily life.

These words in verse 17 are brief, but they are filled with meaning and purpose. Here we are told that

17 . . . whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.  
(James 4:17 (ESV))

“For the person who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for that person, it is sin!”

Again, as we considered last week, sometimes, perhaps more often than not, before the day even has time to begin, you and I quickly get caught up in the rush of all that lies ahead, our internal engine running at break-neck speed, and we fail to stop and take the time to ask God, “What is your Will for these matters in front of me, each individual one of them?”

I say this because this has been the way of my own personal life for most every day of it. I’ve said to you often that I have lived with an ADD kind of personality all the days of my life and it has been a struggle. And though I might have gotten a lot of work done in all those busy, busy days, looking back, I have often questioned whether those things that I did were the things God really wanted me do, or was it simply my own Will that got accomplished?

I have concluded that all those many things that take place in the busy rush of our day are an ultimate test of our personal “intimacy” with Christ. Do we really, really believe that the Lord Jesus is with us every moment and is intimately involved in the most minute of details of our life, or do we believe something less? Is our relationship with Jesus, like many of the husbands and wives of today who live in the same house and make claims of “oneness” and “unity”, but each has their own “space”, their own separate involvements.

As I observe the behaviors of many of my closest Christian friends, I see lifestyles and behaviors that are lived as if God was only to be involved in the “big” matters of life. Otherwise they seem to believe that they are expected to depend upon their own “freewill” efforts to do all those many other things. And again, that seems akin to a husband and wife living together, but only talking with each other when “big things” arise, otherwise each is own their own. How sad! How truly sad!

As believers, you and I are the beloved Bride of Christ. And if we haven’t taken the time to develop an intimate relationship with Him, such that we would be thinking of Him and of His desires and plans for us throughout our day, it’s an easy step to drift over onto that dangerous “broad path” as we quickly get about our business without first asking Him, “is this your Will?”

Folks, there is an absolute necessity for you and me to live each of the moments of our day, holding to the real truth about God’s involvement in our life, believing and trusting that He really is in us and is intimately involved in every thought, every word and every

behavior that takes place within our day. Otherwise, we really will, without as much as a thought, get about matters of our day, missing out on the loving care and the guidance and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

May I suggest that these two ingredients that we are speaking about, “busyness of activity” and a “lack of intimate relationship with Christ”, are a sure formula to bring about the sin that is spoken about here in verse 17.

17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.  
(James 4:17 (ESV))

Here again, recall that these words of warning are directed towards people who do truly believe in Christ, and who do earnestly desire to be the devout Christians that God wants them to be. But this condition of always being busy, while at the same time failing to nurture an intimate and loving relationship with the Lord Jesus, opens the door wide open to the kind of sins that these words imply, “sins of omission”.

Folks, as we have said often, sin is so very clever. It can clothe itself in any garb necessary to accomplish its evil purposes. It can appear as the most awful of awful disasters, or it can be as satan who disguises himself as an angel of light.

Sin can speak through the voice of the demoniac in the tombs or sin can speak through the voice of your best friend, as with Peter to Jesus.

Sin can also clothe itself in good business practices, so well that you will have gone way past Godly boundaries by the time you realize you have caused more harm than good. And “sins of omission” fit so very well into those circumstances.

Too often, we get so focused on avoiding committing the more obvious and hurtful kinds of sins, “sins of commission”, sins like those of described in the Ten Commandments, and other places, that “sins of omission” get completely forgotten about, until it’s too late, and the damage is already done. But without exception, “sins of omission” are every bit as sinful and as hurtful as our “sins of commission”.

May I pause here for a moment and remind us that not all of our Christian brethren out there agree with my words today regarding “sins of omission”. Some have wide disagreement.

In the Catholic Church, our brethren there teach that sins have more than one level of seriousness with God, that sins come in two basic kinds, and with their own penalties. In their doctrines, there are “mortal sins” which can imperil a person’s soul for all

eternity, sins such as murder, rape, incest, adultery and so on. And mortal sins are committed with willful intention and with the full knowledge that their behavior is sinful.

But there is a second, and less serious form of sin, called “venial” sins. Venial sins are a violation of God’s moral law, but are of lesser consequence. Venial sins are sins such as, cheating and gossip, and several other forms of sin that fit well into the definition of “sins of omission”. Their doctrines teach that venial sins are less likely to send a person to hell.

As a general rule, protestant doctrines have none of those kinds of separations in seriousness and consequences. Sin is simply sin, and left unatoned for, the consequence for all sin is an eternity in hell.

But with that being said, even we protestants tend to redefine sin so that it can better fit into our concepts of fairness from God. While Reformed churches, like ours, take a “harder line” on sin, believing that “sins of omission” are as serious as “sins of commission, many of our Arminian brethren take a slightly softer line, primarily by having a slightly different definition for sin.

John Westley defined sin as being, “A voluntary transgression of a known law of God”. The two key phrases being, “voluntary (or willful) transgression and “known law of God”. In its simplest form, this definition requires that we, know that our behavior is sinful, and secondly, that we commit that sin in a willful manner, otherwise the thing we have done is not a sin. That kind of definition might be confusing to some, leaving them to conclude that, “if I didn’t know the thing that I was doing was a sin, and if I really didn’t mean to do it, then I haven’t sinned”. But unfortunately, that conclusion can leave out “sins of omission”. And we might try to conveniently hide behind the belief that “what I don’t know won’t hurt me”.

But “not knowing” is never really a good excuse for sin. God wants, and expects you and me to add to our faith daily so that we can know Him well, so that we can know His heart, and His mind, and so we can want purity and holiness within our souls. He tells us in 2nd Peter 1 to be diligent in adding Godly attributes to our character. He tells us to, with

5 . . . all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

(2 Peter 1:5-7 (NKJV))

In our intimacy with Christ, if we will be faithful to add to our faith all of these attributes of God, then we will know God's mind. And in the rush of the day, the Holy Spirit will be faithful to prompt us to say and to do the right things at the right times, and then verse 17 will be far less likely to happen.

17 . . . whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.  
(James 4:17 (ESV))

Before we close, may I ask each of us. Is this a problem in your daily life? Do you generally do OK with many of the "sins of commission", but are allowing those "sins of omission" to slip by you in your daily rush?

And perhaps, you are even truly being intentional and purposeful to do some "good things", but are those good things that you are doing, the "right things", the things that God really wants you to be doing?

May I exhort each of us to get alone with the Holy Spirit and ask Him to minister to our souls about our "sins of omission", revealing to us the "right things" that we should be attending to, things such as, loving our families and taking proper care of them, loving other people, even strangers, giving hugs more often, showing affection of all kinds, having a listening ear, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, providing food and other care, and above all else, giving the gospel, so that men and women's souls might be saved.

And may I add, be aggressive, with all diligence and fervor in these "right things", people's souls are in need!

17 . . . whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.  
(James 4:17 (ESV))