



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

KNOWING AND DOING GOD'S WILL- JAMES 4:17

COLORADO

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The truthful and sobering reality is that even as Christians, we can tend to forget that God is in control of everything. A person's life is not within their power to control. It is fragile. We all live within the providence of God whether we acknowledge it or not. He holds our life in His hands and that life is a gift.¹ And if there is a continual disinterest in the will of God, that clearly reveals a mark of pride and arrogance because it shows a disregard for God's rightful sovereignty and rule. We cannot ignore His will. And if our life is an outpouring of God's will and work, what do we have to boast about in any way? Nothing, for all is His work and will, not ours. Instead, we are brought humbly to our knees before our Lord in grateful submission and thanksgiving for the privilege of being used in His service.

KNOWING AND DOING GOD'S WILL- JAMES 4:13-17

James 4:13-15: "(13) Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall 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 shall 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."

James exhorts us to evaluate our planning and pursuits in life in accordance with the Lord's will as expressed in Scripture. We must view life from the Lord's purpose and work for us and live obedient to that good work. And James has taken us one step further. James says that if we aren't obedient to the Lord's will, it is sin because it shows a disregard for God's rightful sovereignty and rule. We cannot ignore His will. That's pride and arrogance. Now, in this final verse of chapter 4, James will drive home one more point. *It is one thing to sin by doing and it's another to sin by not doing!*

I. KNOWING AND DOING- JAMES 4:17

James 4:17: "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin."

Here in this verse, pride once again oozes from every letter. There is a sinful pride revealed by our sin committed in defiance of God's way. But there is also a sinful pride revealed by choosing *NOT* to do what is clearly God's will. It is a sin that fails to do God's will. That too is just as arrogant because it says again that you know better.

James reminder here is an important one. For we have a tendency, when we think of sin, to think only of those things we have done that we should not

have done. I know my own confessions before the Lord tend to focus on these kinds of sins. But I should also consider the ways in which I have failed to do what the Lord commanded me to do. These are sins I must seek God's forgiveness – for not helping a brother or sister in need, for not witnessing when I had the opportunity... We must be focused on knowing and doing the will of God.²

A. "THEREFORE"- JAMES 4:17A

James 4:17a: "Therefore..."

"Therefore" is a connecting word that sums up what has gone before. Whenever you see this word, you want to ask what it is there for. For this verse not only confirms the evil, prideful practice committed in the previous verses, but condemns the arrogant sin of failing to do the will of God as well.

B. "KNOWING THE RIGHT THING TO DO"- JAMES 4:17B

James 4:17b: "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do..."

James is speaking directly to *"the one who knows the right thing to do"*. This person clearly knows what is the *"right thing to do."*

"right" Greek **"kalon"** means morally excellent, worthy of honor, upright, good, the opposite of that which is morally malignant.

This kind of an individual could describe anyone of us. He or she has knowledge of what is the right thing *"to do"*. He knows that God is the Giver and Ruler of all life. He knows that God is sovereignly directing the course of all human affairs. He may even know that God's will is pre-eminent in all of life. He knows the right and good thing *"to do."*

"to do" Greek **"poiein"** present, active infinitive. Requires an active, continual, present action. Makes clear that this is not just an intellectual knowing but the knowing is also followed by a continual doing.

There is no question in the mind of this *"one"*. He or she knows what the will of God is, what the good, honorable and right thing to do is. That's a good place to be if it didn't stop there. God doesn't want us to merely have an intellectual understanding or knowing. It must always be followed by an active, obedient doing. Many of us are good at knowing and playing the part of a Christian until it comes to the *"doing"* part and often that is where we fail. We fail to do what we know is right in the sight of God. I always tell my son that it is never wrong to do the right thing. God as sovereign Creator, Giver, Redeemer and Ruler is relevant for every part of our life and we must live actively in light of that; *knowing and doing.*

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS, GOVERNOR & SPOUSES: TUESDAY AT 7:15AM, CAPITOL BASEMENT, ROOM 0109

STAFF, LOBBYISTS, JOURNALISTS & SERGEANTS: TUESDAYS AT NOON, CAPITOL BASEMENT, ROOM 0107

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C. “AND DOES NOT DO IT”- JAMES 4:17C

James 4:17c: “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it...”

So, “the one who knows the right thing to do” fails in doing the right thing. This “one” doesn’t do the thing he knows he should. This is who James condemns in this verse.

Sadly, the prophet Jonah, who was called to serve God, stands as an example of knowing what the right thing to do is, but refused to do it. You will remember that Jonah was called by God to preach to the people of Nineveh. Nineveh was the wicked and ungodly capitol of the Assyrian nation. Instead of going to Nineveh as God asked, Jonah sought to run from God catching a ship headed in the exact opposite direction. Instead of obeying God by doing what God asked, Jonah purposely failed to do what God asked and sinned. The “right thing to do” was to go and preach repentance to this sinful nation, but Jonah refused and fled. But you can’t run from God. So you know the story (which is true). God disciplines Jonah, placing him in the belly of a whale until Jonah repented three days later. Jonah finally submits to God’s will and guess what? The whole city of Nineveh repented, and it started with the ungodly king. God is sovereign and accomplished His good will for the sake of Nineveh in spite of Jonah’s sin.

D. “TO HIM IT IS SIN”- JAMES 4:17D

James 4:17: “Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

It is one thing to sin by doing and it’s another to sin by not doing! When we know the right thing to do and we don’t do it, we are condemned by what we fail to do. In Luke 12:47, Jesus is teaching a parable about one who is a faithful, sensible steward verses the one who fails to do the master’s will. This man in Luke 12:47 was condemned by what he failed to do: “*And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes.*” So it is with we who believe and know the right thing to do; the honorable, moral, upright and excellent way and yet fail to do it. James makes clear that is sin.

Knowledge of what is right and the ability to do it, creates the obligation to do it.³ So James instructs that knowledge without obedience is nothing less than sin and failing to do what we know is right leaves us without any excuse. This is clearly taught in Luke 12 by Jesus Christ.

“The Scriptures give many marks of a true Christian, such as love for God, repentance from sin, humility, devotion to God’s glory, prayer, love for others, separation from the world, growth, and obedience. But nothing more clearly summarizes the character of a genuine believer than a desire to do the will of God.”⁴

We all live within the providence of God whether we acknowledge it or not. He holds our life in His hands and that life is a gift.⁵ And if there is a continual disinterest in the will of God, that clearly reveals a mark of pride and arrogance because it shows a disregard for God’s rightful sovereignty and rule. We cannot ignore His will. James is a book that shows what true faith is like. And in these verses we find that a true and genuine faith lives dependently on God knowing that even our very existence is granted by His mercy. True faith recognizes that all plans must be made in light of His will and we must acknowledge that all our intentions are subject to His will.

May our greatest pleasure be found in submitting, obeying and following God’s will and work for our life!

¹Martin, Ralph P., *Word Biblical Commentary: James*. Word Books: Waco, TX., 1988. Pg.170.

²Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000. Pg.208.

³Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 256.

⁴MacArthur, John F., *James: Guidelines for a Happy Christian Life*. Word Publishing: Nashville, TN. 2001. Pg. 95.

⁵Martin, Ralph P., *Word Biblical Commentary: James*. Word Books: Waco, TX., 1988. Pg.170.