

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 31

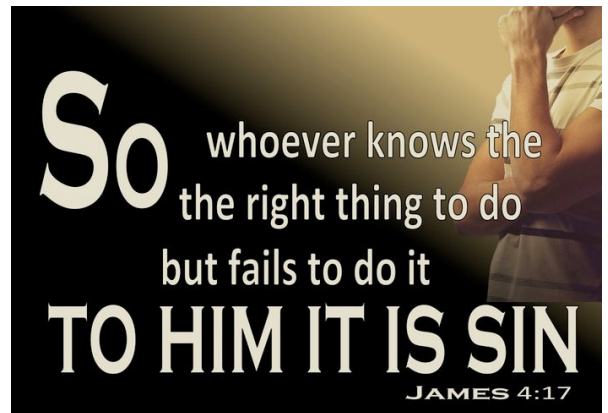
Text: 4:16-17; 5:1-6

Date: 10-29-23

Trinity Lutheran Church

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TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

(4:16) 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.

(Mt 25:31-45; Lk 12:47,48; Jn 9:41;

1 Cor 4:18-21; 5:1-13; 13:4;

2 Tim 3:1-7; 2 Pet 2:21)

NEXT WEEK – *We will begin the last chapter of the epistle:*

(5:1) Come now, you rich,

weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

(2) Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.

(3) Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.

(4) Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached **the ears of the Lord of hosts.**

(5) You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence.

You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

(6) You have condemned; you have murdered the righteous person.

He does not resist you.

“Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin” (v. 17) might appear to be out of flow with the general context of this pericope. It definitely does not fit into the next pericope (5:1-6), one not directed to Christians and undoubtedly the most severe in the epistle. Others here attribute a rather shallow concept of sin to James, as morality involves merely outward acts of good or the omission of such acts. One recent commentator claims that “unlike Paul, James is silent on man’s moral depravity.” Leveling a charge tantamount to Pelagianism against James hardly does him justice.¹³ For James sin infects man’s entire nature. Evolving from innate desires, it expresses itself in the most hideous of acts.

This statement about failing to do right could by itself stand as a theme for the entire epistle, as a goodly portion of the readers in giving attention to the rich had neglected the poor (2:15-17). It is obviously directed to Christians who knew the divine will for positive action in certain situations but who failed to undertake the appropriate action. This sentence summarizes the malady which called for the writing of the epistle. It thus concludes the major body of the epistle, which is a treatise directed to the problem of the contradiction between Christian life and their professed faith. Those who are only buying and selling in carrying out their ordinary life’s pursuits and thus neglecting the needs of the poor are guilty of sin as much as those who are actively persecuting some Christians. Sin is not only an explicit offense against the Decalog, it is also the failure to provide needed assistance.

The sentence “Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin” in its thought content is not unlike the condemning words of Jesus: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to Me” (Matt. 25:45). Some have thought it could be a logion of Jesus unrecorded in the gospels. The sin of omission in not offering assistance puts such an offender in a condition of unbelief. Faith without works is, of course, James’ central message. It can only be speculated whether James knew the parable of the good Samaritan, as that account certainly develops the same theme of failure to help the distressed.

This sentence concludes and summarizes the major portion of the epistle, since Chapter 5 begins with a tirade against the rich, who seem to be outside of the congregation (5:1-6).¹⁴

LIFE APPLICATION

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

These are described as “sins of omission.”

Why do we often dismiss these sins and downplay them as insignificant?