

Expectation of Eternity

This Life is Temporary. Short. Fleeting. It's here today, gone tomorrow.

Live Everyday with Eternity in Mind.

If the Jesus were to return today, what condition would He find us in? What would we be doing that matters for eternity, and what would we be doing that is a waste of time? If we are living everyday with the expectation of eternity in mind, it should make a difference in: How we treat our brothers/sisters. How we plan our schedules & run our businesses.

Imagine you lay in your deathbed today. Your hourglass is about to empty. You throw you calendars in the garbage. You give your business to your children, the cash in your hand now does you no good. You take the last few focused views of your family & friends as you draw your last few breaths...it suddenly STIKES YOU...Only one life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last. If we are living everyday with eternity in mind, it should make a difference in how we treat each other.

This entire letter from James is about the life within the believing community. Yes, we must assume individual responsibility to help make the community healthy, but James wasn't as concerned about the individual as he was the health of the entire community.

James 4:11 -12 (NLT) Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you.

¹² God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So, what right do you have to judge your neighbor?

Let's deal with what this DOESN'T mean before we deal with what it DOES mean. This doesn't mean that believers are never to judge one another since Jesus and Paul said we should (Matt. 18:15-20, 1 Cor. 5:11-13). James is NOT disagreeing with them. Instead, judgment here is referring to those who are quick to speak against one another. As brothers and sisters, we should want to encourage instead of discourage, to build up instead of tear down, to honor one another and not dishonor each other.

The Greek word for evil in this passage means: speak against, speak evil of or slander. Early translations of the N.T. translated it "backbite".

Slander is a way to promote oneself & while tearing down another. It might either mean to speak against someone truly or to speak evil falsely.

“I was just speaking the truth”. May have been, but Eph. 4:15 instructs us to “speak the truth in love”. Gossip is to take a story where it should not go. To slander is to create and spread false stories. James says both gossip & slander are sins that cause real harm in the body of Christ.

If we claim Christ and are living everyday with the expectation of eternity, we should be picking each other up, not pushing each other down. When a Christ – follower pushes another down it can suck the life out of that person. It’s painful.

So, to understand this verse we must remember the context we’ve covered so far over the last several teachings of this writing. James had earlier reminded the believers:

- No partiality (NOT to treat rich folks better than poor folks)
- To love your neighbor as yourself, show mercy to one another (2:1–13)
- Use words to bless instead of using them to curse people made in the image of God (3:1–12)

To speak against or judge the law, in context, is about speaking against the royal law mentioned in 2:8-9:

James 2: 8 – 9 (NIV) If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

Those who judge and bypass this royal law and speak against one another (v.11), are saying they know better than God's law. Somehow, they think that God’s law doesn’t apply to them. In this way they have judged the law and Lawgiver as lacking. When we reject the law & lawgiver, *we enthrone ourselves as judge*.

James 4:11b – 12 (NLT) **But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. ¹² God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So, what right do you have to judge your neighbor?**

As mentioned previously, James is not saying we should never judge. In fact, he is telling those who are speaking against each other, that they are WRONG! If it’s WRONG to say someone is WRONG...then James is WRONG & needs to quit saying they’re WRONG! RIGHT?!?

James is focusing on condemning a critical spirit where we judge one another without mercy. *The mercy given, give mercy.*

If we are known for JUDGING our brothers & sisters rather than LOVING them, we should be warned that there is a day coming when ONE will determine the fate of all. Since God gave the law, he *alone* is **qualified** to judge those who are responsible to keep it.

When we violate the standards we enforce on others, we have no excuse. If we hope to receive God's mercy, we should show mercy.

According to Jesus, believers ARE to judge each other, yet WITH mercy and WITHOUT hypocrisy (Matt. 7:1-6). But a critical & hypocritical attitude is divisive and defies the law of Love.

If we live everyday with eternity in mind, it should make a difference how we treat other believers. Living everyday with the expectation of eternity should also make a difference in how we *plan our schedules* and *run our businesses*.

James 4:13 – 16 (NLT) Look here, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." ¹⁴ How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. ¹⁵ What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ Otherwise you are boasting about your own pretentious plans, and all such boasting is evil.

Is James saying we shouldn't plan? No. We all make plans. We have to, or things would be a mess. I had to plan to share this with you today. You had to plan to be here today. You have to plan for the presentation at work or to study for your finals. If you have kids in school you have to plan their lunches, how to get them there and who's picking them up. Making plans is not the issue here. The problem is the attitude we make plans with.

Prideful Plans by – Pass God. Plans that Prosper Begin with God.

James is saying the issue is presuming we can make our plans & ignore God in the process. He would call it prideful or even arrogant. It's presuming we know how tomorrow, next week, next year or 5 years down the road will turn out. It's assuming I am in control and can do whatever I want to do w/o consequences.

The word translated "brag" refers to proud confidence in one's own knowledge or cleverness (arrogance). The businessmen addressed by James were proud of their arrogant assumption that they could foresee and control the future.

When we make prideful plans and by – pass God we are declaring ourselves as self – reliant and not in submission to the will of our sovereign God. It is not recognizing God's

sovereignty. By – passing God when we plan is ultimately the sin of being self - sovereign. It's taking our lives into our own hands and believing we can be in control.

This way of thinking traces its history all the way back to a garden, with Adam, Eve, the serpent, the fruit of the tree that was off - limits & God himself. How did that work out?

James says we are like a morning fog (mist, vapor) here for a moment & then gone. It is arrogance to prepare plans apart from God. We have no idea what tomorrow holds, let alone next year. James calls it boasting & all such boasting is evil.

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James 4:15 (NLT) **15 What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that."**

It is the opposite of prideful planning. Humbling ourselves before God. Recognizing that He alone knows what tomorrow holds. He alone knows the time we have left. He alone has the power to bless us beyond measure.

Start everyday depending on God, not independent of God.

It is a recognition of our complete dependence on God. That He is sovereign, and we are not. It is humbly beginning with God in prayer to offer our plans to him. To acknowledge that His plans trump our plans. What do You want me to do, where do You want me to go & what do You want me to say? "Here's what I want God, but I will follow your will, your plan, if it is different than mine."

We will never get God's best in our life when we leave Him out of our life. God's best gets better the more we let Him in.

James 4:17 (NLT) **Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.**

James ties this statement to the previous statement. He says, "Now that I have pointed this out to you, you have no excuse". We often think of sin as doing something that violates God's laws and commands. But, *sin is more than resisting temptation. It's also resisting God.* To pursue our plans above God's plans is sin. To leave God out of the equation is arrogance. To by – pass God and plan our lives is **pride**. If we are Living Everyday with Eternity in mind, our plans begin, everyday depending on God, not independent of Him. Are you: planning & living as if God is in control or God doesn't exist? Going to work or school depending on God or by-passing what God wants for you? Making plans based on your hopes & dreams, or God's plan for you? Responding to God's daily guidance or ignoring it and going your own way? *We will never get God's best in our life when we leave Him out of our life.*

Small Group Questions

1. What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?
2. What does it practically look like to *live with eternity in mind* rather than to live for the *here & now*?
3. As the saying goes, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." Why do you think this advice is often so hard to follow? When have your words got you in trouble? What part does pride play in speaking poorly to others?
4. Read James 4:11 – 12. According to James, why should believers in Christ not speak against each other? Is James saying we should not judge a fellow Christ – follower? If so, why? If not, what is he saying?
5. What does it mean to slander another person? How would you define the term? What is gossip? How have you seen slander & gossip erode relationships in the church?
6. Read James 4:13 – 16. What advice does James offer in this passage about making plans? When does planning turn into boastful pride?
7. In what ways are arrogance & pride at the heart of all sin? (Gen. 3:1 – 7 has more to say on this) What have you learned from people in your life who demonstrate a spirit of humility?
8. What was James' point in comparing us to a morning fog (or mist or vapor)? Why is this truth an important reality to keep in mind each day? What attitude does God want us to have about the future? Why?
9. Read James 4:17. How does this verse expand your understanding of sin? In what areas do you need to trust God's plan and rely on His guidance over your own plans and desires?
10. Close in prayer. Seek God's strength to live everyday with eternity in mind so it will influence how we live today.