In our study of James, chapter four this week, James warns us of the dangers of worldliness and a lack of humility. In the first ten verses, he shows how self-gratification--our arrogant pursuit of the pleasures, honors, and riches of the world--is the source of all the quarrels and fights we find ourselves embroiled in. When we choose friendship with the world over obedience to God, we make ourselves--quite literally--enemies of God and subject ourselves to all the disorder of those who embody the wisdom we read about in chapter three that is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. James's solution is quite simple: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

In the second part of this chapter--verses eleven and twelve--James addresses the arrogant judging of others in violation of the royal law of loving your neighbor as yourself. Not only do those who critically judge others fail to see the faults in their own behavior, they also place themselves above the law as if it didn't apply to them. To correct this, James tells us that "There is only one lawgiver and judge." Here again, as we humble ourselves before the Lord, we can trust Him to judge in His perfect righteousness. After all, that's how we would want to be treated.

In verses thirteen through sixteen, James denounces the presumptuous, arrogant trust in self-made plans made without considering the frailty of life and the sovereignty of God. We should always remember that the future is God's, not ours. To think and speak of the future as if we had the power to control it / is as foolish as to think and speak of others as if we had the power to judge them. James's solution? "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'" Not that reasonable planning for the future is sinful, but that every plan for the future should be entrusted to God's sovereignty. It's planning diligently while surrendering every expectation to His wisdom and His providence.

James closes this part of his message with the reminder that "Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." Whether doing something we ought not to do or failing to do something we should do, we can't set aside our obedience as if we were the ones who made the rules. James leaves no room for a faith that knows God's will but fails to act on it. Genuine faith responds in obedience to what God has revealed. Christian maturity is seen

not merely in growing knowledge, but in growing obedience so that we might “be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”