

**Dig Deeper, September 17, 2008**

James has rebuked the wars and fighting among the those he writes and marks where their affections should rest. **At stake is friendship with the world – adultery against God.** Yet he doesn't mean isolation from the world for Jesus has said "ye are the light of the world." We are to be a shining witness of Christ here on earth, not hidden away in seclusion in the wilderness or a monastery. We are to live and walk in this world as a witness to it, not immersing ourselves in its pleasures or involving ourselves in its causes and government. But we should do good unto all men, Galatians 6:9,10. But we are not its judges. We should cooperate with the government in reporting crimes we might happen to observe and serving as witnesses to criminal investigations if necessary, but not occupy ourselves seeking to root out crime or corruption in the world. Our primary witness is to the Christ who has come to save lost sinners out of the world. Simply by our faithful presence in it we are preserving it from premature judgement, Matthew 5:13-16. He will come from heaven with us to judge it all in due time. Meanwhile we are to be in it, but not of it, displaying the life and love of Christ. The world will see our satisfaction and hope in Him by our attitude and conduct while here. We ought to be friendly and caring for our neighbors and fellow employees. Praying for them, we will be given opportunities to witness to them about their souls destiny and need for salvation though the Saviour. Our attitude toward the world and its pleasures and attractions and concerns and causes will speak much to others around us. Our attitude and conduct toward each other will say even more.

**We all know the feeling.** So and so is getting away with something and we resent that. If we aren't actually envious, we may tend to be self-righteous and despise our brother or sister as being inferior in learning or conduct. We may rightly be deeply pained at dishonor to the Lord's Name. We should be deeply concerned at a lack of spiritual maturity demonstrated by a brother's or sister's indiscretion and worldliness. We all tend to become judges of others, often forgetting to judge ourselves. We easily use the law upon others as their judges, rather than "lawfully" to convict a sinner of sin, leading to repentance. Paul speaks to the same problem

*1 Timothy 1:6 From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; 7 Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. 8 But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; 9 Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, 10 For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for*

*liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; 11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.*

We unwittingly take God's place and judge one another. The Lord condemned that, Matthew 7:1. Rather He sends us out to urgently seek and restore His sheep that have strayed, Matthew 18:15 - 18.

Individually, a believer has no authority to judge another person. Only the Lord does. He has delegated that authority and responsibility to earthly governments of all forms which, we learn from Paul and Peter, are ordained of God. Whether they know it or not, they have been established by Him and are responsible to represent His law and order in this world. They have God given authority, power to preserve alive or take a life, or to otherwise punish a murderer or other convicted criminal. We don't personally nor does the church. Our duty is to obey God and the government in power. But while individual believers do not have scriptural authority to judge one another the church has limited authority to judge professing believers in it, Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5. This authority is limited to a local assembly rebuking or even expelling a wicked person from among themselves and shunning such a one, 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 1 and 5. According to scripture the church can neither condemn a person to corporal punishment nor a soul to perpetual judgement. Historically Christendom has vastly and flagrantly overstepped its bounds usurping such powers to itself and abused them to even persecute true members of Christ. It will be judged by the Lord when He returns. See Revelation 17 & 18. James reminds us there is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. He rightly asks **"who art thou that judgest another?"** See also Romans 12:17-21 and 13:1-7.

We may find ourselves judging another simply by accusing them. Satan is the accuser of the brethren, Job 1;10,11; 4,5; Revelation 12:10. Don't do his work! For instance if a person says or writes something that we regard as factually untrue we can and should courteously challenge them. Respectfully expose the inaccuracy or untruth but do not judge them by calling them a liar. Similar cautions apply for other sins. Apparent dishonesty may be a simple mistake or oversight so we do not start a conversation about this with an accusation, "you are a thief." An Assembly may, after careful prayerful investigation and interviews, judge a professing believer and label him or her a thief, railer, liar, fornicator, etc if there is no sign of repentance. But caution with the tongue is always called for while disciplining one called a brother. All discipline should be administered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in our midst as a gathered assembly.

May we seldom if ever have to reach this extreme. Timely, godly, loving care for one another should preclude such a necessity.

Less flagrant perhaps, but still acting beyond the authority granted us, we are apt to act **independently of God**. Certainly mankind from Adam on down is characterized by this disrespectful and self-centered trait, **self-sufficiency**. James denounces this. “Go to now . . .” That is “come now and listen to me,” or, “go on, don’t do that.” He gives another faithful reminder of the brevity and fragility of life but with another twist. Life is in God’s hands. The Lord graphically spoke of the rich man who was going to retire and live off his wealth,

*Luke 12:20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*

Have you met folks like this? I have. Their frame of reference in their future ends short of their death – of which they usually prefer not to think – beyond a will and a burial place. Eternity? One very intelligent and shrewd man told me “we don’t think about that.” Solomon in the Ecclesiastes and the Proverbs repeatedly warns us of living for today and for self without reference to God. Yet even believers are tempted, in one form or another, to leave His protection and provision and His grace. Not that we shouldn’t take precautions and make reasonable

provisions for the future but these should be no more independent of God than getting a job and working for a living. All is still in His hands and we certainly live from day to day by His mercies and grace and in His wisdom, whether for our health, our safe keeping, our necessities and our well being. Lord, give us faith and wisdom to do so.

There is nothing inherently wrong with honestly getting gain though industrious application of talents, skills and wisdom. Questionable shortcuts, poor quality work or materials, greedy grasping, separating the foolish, the ignorant, the covetous from their money to their harm dishonors the One who honestly bought us with a price far beyond our worth. Let His love show in every facet of our lives including business. Let Him be a partner. Get His advice /wisdom before embarking on a venture and while engaged in it. He blesses those who honor Him.

To know to do good and do it not is sin. Paul speaks of the other side in Romans 14: 23, “for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” So we sin by failing to do what we should, doing what shouldn’t or by acting apart from faith. The path is plainly marked. Confide in the Lord and depend upon Him in all we do, say or think. Self confidence and independence are not the way to success, happiness or blessing.

By Ron Canner, September 17, 2008