

**Lesson 8**  
**James 4:6-17**

Verse 6: But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

The interpretation we give to verse 5 will determine the meaning of the contrast we find in the first half of verse 6 – “but he gives more grace.”

If verse 5 is taken as a statement about the sinfulness of the human spirit, then this greater grace suggests the willingness and ability of God to overcome that sinfulness. As Phillips translates it, he gives us grace potent enough to meet this and any other evil spirit.

If, however, verse 5 is depicting the jealousy of God for us, then the contrast in verse 6 emphasizes that God's grace is completely adequate to meet the requirements imposed on us by that jealousy.

Our God is a consuming fire, and his demands on us may seem terrifying at times, but our God is also merciful and gracious and loving, and he willingly supplies all that we need to meet his demands. As Augustine said, God gives what he demands.

There is, however, a requirement for the experience of this grace and that is humility.

James tells us this with a quote from Proverbs 3:34 – God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

God's gift of sustaining grace can be received only by those willing to admit their need for that grace and accept that gift. The proud, by contrast, meet only resistance from God, and that of course is a theme that sounds loudly throughout the Old Testament.

And it is worth noting that such pride is very often associated with jealousy of the sort we have seen here in James.

Augustine: "If you ask me what is the first precept of the Christian religion, I will answer first, second, and third, humility."

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

That quote from Proverbs leads us into verses 7-10. In fact, the commands in verses 7-10 flow from that quotation from Proverbs. If God indeed gives grace to the humble, then clearly we must submit to God

This command to submit to God acts like a heading for the following series of commands in verses 7-10, and it is matched in verse 10 by the command to humble yourself.

Between those two fundamental commands to submit to God and to humble yourself, there are three pairs of commands: (1) resist the devil ... draw near to God, (2) cleanse your hands ... purify your hearts, and (3) be wretched ... let your laughter be turned to mourning.

The context here starting with verse 6 is very similar to what we find in 1 Peter 5:5-9, where we also find a quotation from Proverbs 3:34 followed by a series of commands, including a command to humble yourself so that in due time God may exalt you. Peter also tells us there to resist the devil. (See the website for notes on 1 and 2 Peter.)

The New Testament writers understood that Satan is real and must be actively resisted, and they understood that human pride provides the easiest road for Satan to move into someone's life.

Back in Chapter 1, James stressed the individual's own evil tendency to sin. (See 1:14, for example.) But here, James recognizes the role that Satan plays.

We are reminded of Satan's temptation of Eve in the Garden – each had a role to play in that first sin and each bore responsibility.

We must never forget that Satan's purpose is to separate God and man, and that he is viciously opposed to the message of reconciliation in Jesus Christ that would undo that separation. It is this separation that Christians must actively resist, both in their own lives and in the lives of others.

When we resist Satan, we receive a promise.

James tells us that the devil will then flee from us. Not just back away or turn aside, but flee! Whatever power Satan may have, the Christian can be absolutely certain that he can be defeated and made to flee – not because of our own power, but because of the power of Jesus Christ who has already defeated Satan.

The Gospels and Acts are filled with examples of Satan and his cohorts fleeing before divine authority.

Luther: "If we sing Psalms and hymns or read Scriptures, Satan will flee from us lest he scorch his wings."

Instead of allowing Satan to separate us from God, we must make certain that just the opposite is true.

We must draw near to God. Satan may be running away, but that doesn't mean we should then stand around like we did it ourselves. We must be humble and draw near to God, who will be waiting for us as the father waited for the prodigal son.

God's grace, as James tells us, points to our own responsibility, and, in fact, in verses 7-10 there are no less than 10 commands to obey.

James does not see the inexhaustible supply of God's grace as sweeping us along to some sort of effortless holiness. He knows of no such easy victory. The benefits of grace and more grace are ours along the road of obedience and more obedience.

The God who says here is my grace to receive also says here are my commands to obey. Faith, wisdom, grace – none of it can be divorced from obedience.

In verse 7, James describes this humble walk with God by commanding active allegiance.

Christians must have no doubt in their minds whose side they are on, and by their lives they must leave no doubt in the minds of others that they are on God's side and unyielding opponents of Satan.

The English translation "submit" does not really do full justice to the Greek.

When we think of submission we think of that point at which the struggle ends and passivity begins. But the Greek word that James uses is much more of an enlistment word – the taking up of allegiance to a great superior in order to engage in the fight under his banner. The word speaks of a subordinate's readiness to await commands and to do the will of the superior.

If the translation "submit" is too passive, then the translation "resist" if anything is too active. In the Greek, it is not a word for one who is carrying the attack over into the enemy's camp, but rather refers to one who is manning the defenses knowing that he is constantly under fire from the enemy.

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. 9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

In verse 8, James spells out what it means to draw near to God. Doing so calls for a sincere and radical repentance from the behaviors that James has been describing.

Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian/philosopher, saw double-mindedness as the essential disease of the human heart.

His book *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing* is a meditation on the statement from James: "Purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:8). The disease diagnosed by Kierkegaard is the failure to have a life that is focused on one thing. It is the failure to make an ultimate commitment to what Kierkegaard calls "the Good" – what Jesus spoke of as "seeking first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33).

One commentator notes the "blunt vividness" that James displays with Greek he uses in verse 8.

Sinners, men of double mind. And in fact, this does create a contrast with James' familiar and affectionate address, "brethren." James is very concerned about the seriousness of the situation he is not addressing, and he wants his readers to understand and appreciate that concern.

"Men of double mind" is from a Greek word that literally means "two souled."

We have seen this theme throughout the book of James, and in fact it could be argued that this is "the theme" of James. In Chapter 1, James described such a person as one whose faith is marked by doubting and instability. He used it just a few verses ago to denote the mind of doubleness in a person who seeks to be friend of the world and a friend of God.

God and the world. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The age to come and our own evil age. The Christian is being pulled and torn between them.

To allow the world to entice us away from a total single-minded allegiance to God is to become people who are divided in their loyalties, people who are double-minded, people who are spiritually unstable, people who are useless to God.

If we ever become ineffective in the kingdom of God, James is telling us here about the root cause of that ineffectiveness – our divided loyalty, our lack of spiritual focus, our flirtation with the world, our failure to be true-hearted and whole-hearted.

What is required of such double-minded people is a repentance both from this external behavior (cleanse your hands) but also from the internal attitude that has led them to that behavior (purify your hearts).

The Psalmist in Psalm 24:3-4 said that clean hands and a pure heart are required of those who would stand before the Lord.

We are reminded of a beatitude: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

(Note that once again we see one of Jesus' beatitudes shining through from the pages of James' letter. If I were ever to pen a commentary on this book, I believe I would try and take that repeated comparison as my theme.)

In verse 8, James continues his description of the humble walk with God by commanding us to draw near to God. And we are encouraged to obey it by the promise that goes along with it – that he will then draw near to us.

But of course we would tend to reverse that order. How easy it would be to enjoy a daily time with God if only we had to begin with a more vivid sense of his presence. If he would only draw near to us, then we could draw near to him. We want the promise to come before the command, but that is not what James says at all. God enriches with his presence those who obey the command to seek his presence.

James is not just giving some haphazard and unrelated list of commands here. He is setting them down for us in an ordered pathway of obedience.

The first thing we must do is live near God, and that involves the disciplines of regular Bible reading, and prayer, and worship, and communion, and Christian fellowship, etc.

Fellowship with God and the consequent blessing of his fellowship with us do not just happen. We can't drift into it any more than we can just drift into holiness. It is something we must obey, something we must do. Christian people are deliberate people; they don't drift anywhere.

We are also commanded to purify our lives in verse 8.

We are told to clean up the outer life of the hands and the inner life of our heart. And note the use of the verb here – we are to purify ourselves and cleanse ourselves, not be purified and be cleansed. The verbs are active, not passive. Of course, the purification comes from the blood of Christ, but we have a vital role to play in that process.

We are commanded to clean up our conduct and clean up our hearts.

But again, we must keep this command in the proper place in the sequence. Logic might suggest that we should first clean up our lives and then draw near to God. James says otherwise. It is when we draw near to God that we

are at last in a position to face the demands of holiness and find ourselves motivated by the desire to be holy as he is holy.

In this way we are prepared for the command in verse 9 to lament our sin and to repent of it.

And perhaps surprisingly, as we follow the sequence we see that this awareness of our own wretchedness is the goal of the program.

The decisive taking of sides in verse 7 leads us to draw near to God, which then prompts in us a longing to be like him in his holiness, and as we work toward that goal the more we see our own sins and shortcomings. But God sets the downward path before us because there is no other way up.

Paul knew that the path up begins as a path down. See Romans 7:24-25. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The severe commands of verse 9 echo the language of the prophets.

They often used the language of mourning to describe the disasters that accompanied the judgments of God. But they also used that language to call God's people to repent from sin.

Thus, Joel, warning of the nearness of the day of the Lord, pictures in 2:12 the Lord inviting his people to return to him with all their heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. James uses that language here in the same sense.

James is demanding a deep, heart-felt sorrow for sin, which is a mark of true repentance. It is what Paul called in 2 Corinthians 7:10, a Godly grief that leads to salvation and brings no regret.

This is also how we are to understand James' command that laughter be turned to mourning and joy to dejection.

James is certainly no killjoy denying any place for laughter and joy in the Christian life. (No brother of Jesus could ever be such a person!) But laughter in the Old Testament is often the scornful laughter of a fool who refuses to take sin seriously, and we hear that same laughter all around us today among those who live and prosper in this world without any regard for the world to come.

It is to this group that Jesus said, "Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." (Luke 6:25) What men will do when God's judgment overtakes them can be avoided if they mourn and weep for sin now. At some

point everyone will mourn and weep for the sin in their life, but for most that day will come too late.

Again, we are reminded of a beatitude, Matthew 5:4, "blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Most people today are marked by a superficial joy. They live under the hedonist banner -- eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. They ignore the world to come. And Christians, also, can slip into a casual attitude toward sin, perhaps presuming too much on God's forgiving and merciful nature. God is not mocked!

True Christian joy comes from true Christian repentance, and that is what James is telling us here. That kind of real joy is a joy that overflows from a knowledge and consciousness that our sins have been forgiven.

**10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.**

James concludes his series of commands with the summarizing command to humble yourself.

To humble our self before God means to recognize our own spiritual poverty, to acknowledge our desperate need for God's help, and to submit to his will with whole-hearted devotion.

It is this type of humility that was shown by the tax collector in Jesus' parable who, deeply conscious of his own sin, called out to God for mercy. In response, Jesus said in Luke 18:14, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

**11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?**

In verses 11-12, James once again discusses problems associated with the tongue.

Some commentators argue that the connection between these verses and its immediate context is not clear. Perhaps it is simply that speaking evil of others is a clear manifestation of the sinful pride that James has been addressing. But speaking evil of others is also often linked with jealousy and envy and is a manifestation of double-mindedness, which also fit into the context here.

David linked slander with a lack of humility in Psalm 101:5. ("Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy. Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure.")

In verse 11, after the harsh tone in verse 8, James once again addresses his readers as brethren. The Greek word used here for "speak not evil" literally means "to speak against."

It would include many types of harmful speech, such as questioning legitimate authority when the people spoke against God and against Moses in Numbers 21:5, or slandering someone in secret as in Psalm 101:5, or bringing false accusations as in 1 Peter 2:12 and 3:16. Perhaps the disputes in the church that James has been addressing provided the context for these personal attacks and slanderous accusations.

The Rabbis referred to slander as the third tongue because it has three victims: the speaker, the one spoken to, and the one spoken about.

The justification that James provides for his prohibition of these slanderous attacks is interesting.

He says that to speak against or to judge one's brother is to speak against or to judge the law. Which law does James mean? He could mean the Old Testament to which he has been directly and indirectly alluding to throughout his letter. But since James 2:8 tells us that James likely has another law in mind here -- the royal law of Christ.

How is it that judging or speaking ill of a fellow believer judges or speaks ill of the law?

Since James contrasts judging the law with doing the law, he is telling us that a failure to do the law involves an implicit denial of the law's authority.

However high and orthodox our view of God's law may claim to be, our failure to do it says to the world that we do not in fact put much store by it. Again, we see a theme of this book that our faithfulness to God is tested by our obedience to God, and absent obedience, faith is dead.

Verse 12 tells us that speaking evil of fellow Christians is wrong, not only because it involves judging the law, but also because it involves judging the neighbor.

And such criticism not only disobeys the command that we love the neighbor, but also displays an arrogant presumption on the rights of God himself because God is the one lawgiver and the one judge.



We in effect set ourselves up to be in his place, which perhaps is the underlying cause of all sin – our desire to be in the place of God. In any event, that is the very issue with which James will close out Chapter 4.

Of course, there is a proper and necessary kind of judgment and discrimination that every Christian must exercise.

After all, if we cannot make judgments based on whether we or others are obeying the commands of God, then how can we take the gospel to the lost and how we can in fact know that we ourselves are saved? How could we exercise discipline within the church absent the ability to make any sort of judgment?

James is speaking here of harsh, condemning judgments, and, in particular, such criticisms of our fellow Christians over matters of opinion. His concern was with the same kind of viscous personal attacks that we see, for example, around us today in the world of politics, and again we are reminded of the political partisan term that James used to describe what was going on. He is describing yet another flirtation with the world.

The command "do not speak evil against" could be translated "do not defame."

A defamatory word may be perfectly true, but the fact that it's true doesn't give us a right to say it. It gives us no right to talk down to the person to which it applies – to adopt a superior position from which to denigrate or defame that person.

Defamation is forbidden here not because it is a breach of the truth or a breach of love, but it is forbidden here because it is a breach of humility. If we are really low before God then we have no altitude left from which to talk down to anyone.

The Greek verb used here is found elsewhere only in 1 Peter 2:12 and 3:16 where it refers to the dismissive condemnations of the world that were directed against Christians.

One commentator claims that the Old Testament denounces evil speaking against God and against others more often than any other offense.

James elaborates his prohibition against defamatory talk along four lines. First, he tells us how we should regard each other.

He tells us we are brothers and neighbors. This relationship puts us all on the same level. None of us is the firstborn. (Romans 8:29)

The reference to God as the lawgiver and the one who could condemn or destroy is a reminder that God chose to save rather than to condemn, and he

did so while we were yet enemies. That is the example we must follow when we are tempted to hurl condemning speech at someone.

As for neighborliness, Jesus' definition of the term in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 leaves no room for talking down but rather for reaching down.

"If I know something that is to the discredit of a fellow Christian, and be it ever so true, my task is not to publicize it nor even to privately berate him with it, but rather to go where he is and to lift him up. I must be the Samaritan to him. He is my neighbor."

Second, James tells us how we should regard the law.

He told us in 2:8 that God gave us his royal law that we should love our neighbors. What happens then when we desert that path of love for that of criticism and defamation? Verse 11 says we speak evil against the law when we speak evil against a brother.

First, we break the law by doing that. It commands love, and we respond with defamation.

Second, we set ourselves up as knowing better than the law. We judge the law. In effect, we say that the law is mistaken in commanding love. It should rather have commanded criticism, and if we were the one lawgiver it would have done so.

Third, we take a new position – not a doer of the law, but a judge. We want to take on the authority of God himself, and this leads us to James' third observation.

Third, James tells us how we are to regard God.

In verse 12, he says there is one lawgiver and one judge. When we disobey the law, what are we saying with regard to the lawgiver? We are disputing his authority, but more than that. His law is the expression of who and what he is. He gave us his commands so that by obeying them we might become more like him. We reject all of that when we make ourselves the lawgiver.

Finally, James tells us how we are to regard ourselves.

"But who are you?" he asks in verse 12. If we exalt ourselves over a brother, doesn't that call into question the reality of our whole life with God?

13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: 14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. 15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

The businessmen that James discusses in the next few verses are shown here as deliberate and self-confident planners.

They decide where they will go, when they will go, how long they will stay, and they are certain they will gain profit from their activities.

And the picture that James paints here would be familiar to his readers. The first century was a period of great commercial activity, especially for the Hellenistic cities of Palestine, which were heavily involved in commerce of all sorts.

And today, the picture that James paints is likewise very recognizable, particularly now that commerce encircles the globe. In our time, just as in James' day, the bottom line is the same – profit.

And with that word, profit, we are immediately reminded of Jesus' statement in Matthew 16:26 (For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?).

What we see here is that James' concern is not with someone making a profit. Rather his concern is with the exclusive this-world-only attitude that characterize the plans that are being made, a danger to which perhaps business people are particularly susceptible.

It is interesting that Christians often use the word "secular" to describe certain of their activities as if it has any legitimate place in Christianity. That expression denotes activities that have no religious or spiritual basis.

There are still many people who plan their lives just as James describes. Many young people (and older people as well) plan their education, their work, their location, their family, etc. with no thought for God and for what he would have them do.

The merchants plan and carry on as if God were unimportant or did not even exist.

Instead they should have made their plans in the prayer and anticipation that God may in fact change those plans. They ought to be alert to the new thing that God may have planned for them and to the opportunities that he provides. But instead they go through their lives with blinders on for fear, perhaps, of seeing what God would have them do.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite did not so much violate some detailed command but rather they were just so preoccupied with their own business and their own plans that they failed to do good when given the opportunity. They walked by with blinders on.

In making their plans with reference only to this world, these planners have neglected to take into account a fundamental fact – this world is insubstantial and transitory.

For such people as they are, to plan so confidently and seemingly so carefully, it is the height of foolishness that they have neglected such an important factor.

After all, James tells us, our life is like a mist. The Greek word means a puff of smoke, which could be dissipated by the morning sun or blown away by a shift of the wind. We see this same warning throughout the Old Testament. Proverbs 27:1 says, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." Job 7:7, 9, 16 and Psalm 39:5-6 describe life as a breath.

We are also, once again, reminded of Jesus' teachings on this subject.

In Luke 12:15 he warned the crowds about covetousness and the danger of assuming that our life consists only of what we own. Later in Luke 12, Jesus told the parable about a rich fool who sounds very much like the person James is describing in Chapter 4. That parable must have been in James' mind as he penned these verses.

Instead of this self-confident, this-world-only attitude, we should instead have an attitude in which what we do and what we plan to do are qualified by reference to the will of God.

Paul did this as he frequently expressed his reliance on the will of God regarding his own plans for his missionary work. (Acts 18:21, Romans 1:10, 1 Corinthians 4:19, 16:7)

However, Paul and the other apostles did not always explicitly state that reliance. What was important was not that they mouth the words "God willing" (which can easily become just a glib and meaningless recitation) but rather that they live the words "God willing" and adopted it as a guiding principle in their lives and in their plans.

James is encouraging something much deeper than just words – he wants us to understand God's control of affairs and the utmost importance of his will for our lives.

16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. 17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

In verse 16, James traces the failure to take God into account in making plans to its root cause – arrogant pride.

The Phillips translation captures the idea well: "You get a certain pride in yourself in planning your future with such confidence." It is this pride of life and this arrogant sense of self-sufficiency and self-importance that John highlights as a characteristic of this world in 1 John 2:16. See also Romans 1:30 and 2 Timothy 3:4.

People not only leave God out of their plans, they actually brag about doing so. I take center stage in place of God. What I have done, what I can do. I am a self-made man! Arrogant pride.

Barclay: "In life there is one sin that can be said to be the basis of all others, and that is forgetting that we are creatures and that God is creator."

"We assure ourselves that time is on our side and at our disposal (today or tomorrow). We make our plans as if personal ability (and trade) and the profit motive (and get gain) were the only issues to take into account. We overlook our own frailty; that our life is just a mist; and we ignore that even the small print of life is in the hands of a sovereign God (if the Lord wills)."

Commentators are nearly unanimous as viewing verse 17 as a traditional saying that James has taken and used here to make his point.

Not only does the sudden shift to the third person suggest this, but the Greek scholars tell us that the verse itself fits a little awkwardly into the paragraph. So it appears to be a common saying of the day that James has adopted into his letter.

"Verse 17 finds James at his abrupt best." He moves without warning from the particular of verse 16 to the general of verse 17, from the evil of the sin of arrogance to a searching statement about the sin of omission.

"The whole idea of sinning by default has never been given more pointed expression." We may be able to avoid committing forbidden evil, but who can ever seize positively every opportunity for doing good, and yet that is the command.

What is the point of the saying?

Some suggest that James is indirectly rebuking the merchants for failing to do good things with their money, and we know that James has much to say in his

letter about rich people who close their eyes to the needs of others. But that suggestion seems premature here since James is not really focused here on the riches, but instead on the this-world-only plans of some who seek those riches.

More likely James adds the saying as an encouragement to do what he has just commanded. He has told them what is right. If they now fail to do it, they are sinning. They cannot take refuge in the plea that they have not done anything positively wrong.

Sins of omission are as real and serious as sins of commission. In Luke 19:11-27, Jesus told a parable about a servant who failed to use the money with which he was entrusted. What did he do? Nothing, and that was the problem.

We sometimes think that inaction is a safe course; nothing could be further from the truth when God has commanded action! In Luke 12:47, Jesus said, "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes."

Verses 16 and 17 are not unconnected. In the Greek, the connecting word "therefore" appears at the beginning of verse 17. All such boasting is evil; whoever "therefore" knows... We might consider it a small thing if we for a time forget how dependent we are on God, but James sees it very differently. It is the mark of human pride, which is the mark and curse of fallen man. Here, above all places, we cannot afford to fall into the sin of omission.

What is this presumptuousness about which James is writing?

In verse 13, it first touches life – today, tomorrow, a year. It is the presumption that we can continue alive at will.

Second, it touches choice – today or tomorrow we will go, spend a year, trade. It is the presumption that we are masters of our own lives so that we need do no more than decide and then lo and behold, it will come to pass. It is the presumption that we are masters of our fate and captains of our soul.

Third, it touches ability – and trade and get gain. Of course we will succeed if we want to! We can do it. We can do anything. We speak to ourselves as if life were our right, as if our choices were the only deciding factor, as if we had in ourselves all that is needed to make a success of things.

How do we guard against presumptuousness?

First, there is our ignorance – we do not know, James says. His irony is clear – he is talking about a person busy laying out his program for the next year, and yet he does not even know about tomorrow.

Second, there is our frailty. We are but a mist.

Third, there is our dependence. We should say "if the Lord wills," and it is there that James comes to the heart of the matter. James is not telling us not to plan. He is telling us not to plan things apart from God. He is banning that self-important planning that keeps God for Sunday but looks on the other days as mine.

James is telling us not to forget our ignorance, our frailty, and our dependence. He is telling us not plan our day, our week, and our year as if we were the Lord of earth and time.

And we should not forget that James' discussion here is focused on business and commerce.

Too often, people try to leave God in the church or in the home, when they go off to work. For many of us, more time is spent at work and with the people at work than in the home or church. Work is our primary mission field and battlefield! How can we leave God behind when we need him the most?

In verse 14, it was the contents of tomorrow that were unknown. In verse 15, it is the very existence of tomorrow that is unknown. We do not receive another day by right or by mechanical law, but by the grace of God.

When we forget our ignorance, our frailty, and our dependence, it is a sign of the proud, boastful, vaunting human spirit, flaunting its supposed independence and self-sufficiency. Verse 16 tells us it is evil, and James offers no qualification of the word.

Proverbs 3:27-28 says: "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,' when you have it with you."

Sin should never be taken lightly, and that is especially true of the sin of omission, which is often called simply an oversight. But James does not treat it lightly at all.