**Disciples of Jesus Do Good Things**

James, the brother of Jesus, wrote, “To one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). Many have come to refer to this principle as the sin of omission; a failure to do what we know is good.

Satan would love for us to conclude that James’ statement expresses divine expectations that are impossible to satisfy. He would love to discourage us with the idea that failing to accomplish any one of an endless list of good things would constitute a sin before God. Satan will try to convince us that yielding to one more temptation is a small thing considering we inevitably disappoint God on a regular basis anyway.

John taught that our every intention should be to avoid sinning (1 John 2:1). The Scriptures clearly teach that pleasing God includes both avoiding those things He prohibits as well as doing the things He has commanded. They also teach that it is possible to satisfy God’s expectations in James 4:17.

**Sheep and Goats.** In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus describes the final judgment when the King will separate all men into two groups. Those on His right hand, the sheep, will be those who provided for the needs of their brethren when they saw their suffering. The goats on His left were those who observed the same need but failed to take action to alleviate that suffering.

These “sheep” were disciples who had cultivated Christ-like hearts of love and compassion that manifested itself in action when they became aware of hunger, thirst, nakedness, loneliness, sickness or imprisonment in the lives of their brothers and sisters. They feel the same compassion when they encounter someone who needs the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, “Knowing the fear of God, we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:11).

James 4:17 is not suggesting some open-ended, nebulous range of expectations that inevitably make us sinners, but the message is powerful nonetheless. Only sheep make proper application of this doctrine. They put Christ first in their lives and don’t allow trivial affairs to interfere with doing His will (Matthew 10:37-39). They share in Christ’s compassion that motivates them to lighten the load of others. Christ’s sheep share His love for the souls of others. They share in their Shepherd’s submission to the Father.

This is no half-hearted commitment. Putting Christ first is the minimum threshold for discipleship and it is non-negotiable. If I’m not there, I need to go to work on my spiritual growth, and the same applies to you. Like Paul, our ambition in life must be to please Christ (2 Corinthians 5:9). If that is our daily focus, sins of omission will be of less concern for us.

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