Sins of Omission!

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” -James 4:17

James has done the spiritual minded a favor. He has warned us about something that we may have neglected. He has warned us about our sins of omission. So, what are sins of omission anyway?

One thing that we can be sure that James is not saying is that a person’s sins depend upon their knowledge of sin. He is not saying that what we don’t know can’t hurt us. James is not saying that. Sin is always sin whether we know it is sin or not. Ignorant thieves are thieves nonetheless. Though those that knew their masters will were punished with more stripes than those who knew it not, they all received stripes (Luke 12:48).

Sins of omission are the opposite of sins that we commit - like breaking one of the ten. That is the way we normally think of sin when we do something we should not do. But sins of omission are neglecting, or just downright refusing, to do something that God has shown us we should do. And these are just as much sin as the sins of commission!

These sins involve our refusal to walk in the light that God has personally given us, as individuals. If God has given us light upon something good that we should do, and we do not do it, we have told God, “No, I will not obey you.” This is what the text means.

This is taught in other places in scripture. When the man buried his talents in the ground and refused to use them he was guilty of a sin of omission. God gave him something by grace, and he refused to use it. The Lord took his talent away and gave it to someone who would use it. Then He punished the man quite severely (Matthew 25:28).

Sins of omission are very deceitful. After all, if we are not doing something, how can we offend God? How can we sin by doing nothing? And if we offended God by doing nothing, it can’t be all that bad. So the tempter whispers in our ears. That is why this sin is so deceitful, and causes the righteous to miss out on many blessings and opportunities.

In one sense, this sin can be different in every person’s life because God deals with His people as individuals. That is why James uses the phrase, “To him that knoweth to do good.” It concerns him that God has shown what to do. Just like our children. We may ask one to sweep the yard, and another to dust the shelves. Everyone can’t do the same thing. God gives us all different gifts to use in His house. He calls us all to different duties. He calls us all at different times. He didn’t call Paul when He called Peter. What He called Paul to do, Peter could not do. What Peter should do in his life, Paul may have already done. Peter was to preach to Cornelius, Paul was to go to Rome. Yet, had they not done these things, they would have been guilty of sin by omission.

Jonah’s sin was a prime example of a sin of omission. Jonah refused to do something that God had called him to do. You know the story. The Lord told him to go to Nineveh, and prophesy. Instead of going to Nineveh, he took passage on a boat going in the opposite direction. Then he was swallowed by a whale.

Without the Lord’s commentary on Jonah’s life, we would have all thought he just had a bad day on the cruise. But there was a sin of omission lurking in his life. He suffered for it. Most sins of omission are hidden from the eyes of our peers. They do not know what God has revealed to us personally. You see, Jonah was the only one that knew what God wanted him to do. The other men on the boat did not know what was going on, yet they were involved in the collateral damage of Jonah’s rebellion. So they cast their problem into the sea. From this we learn that our sins of omission affect everyone around us…every time.

There are many sins of omission that are quite common to God’s people that are not as personal as a call to the ministry. I would do you an injustice if I did not give them to you so I will give you five of the most common.

The most common of all is the refusal of God’s people to be in the Lord’s house on Sunday when they know they should. A subcategory to this is refusing to be faithful in attendance, or a refusal to perform an office as we should. This is a grievous omission that affects not only the person, but their whole house, their church…and possibly many generations. Collateral damage! The un-churched population in our nation today is a sad testimony to this popular sin of omission.

A close second to this omission would be the refusal of some to submit to gospel baptism. That is why the scriptures tell us that Peter “commanded” them to be baptized. It was their duty. We can not look on the heart, so we do not know those to whom Christ has been revealed. But we do know that those who
believe in Christ for their salvation are supposed to confess Him by baptism. Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” That is pretty strong language. Though the emphasis of salvation is on the belief, the expectation of God upon the sinner is confession by baptism.

The third sin of omission that is quite common in God’s house, is the omission of offerings in God’s house. The word for this sin is covetousness. Covetousness is not a sin of commission, but a sin of omission. This sin was the curse of the Old Testament saints. There is nothing new under the sun. This omission is so common that some are offended when the personal duty of giving is so much as mentioned in God’s house. Yet, the subject of offering to God is mentioned more often in scripture than election, and predestination. I have learned in my ministry that people are most offended at those sins they are guilty of.

This sin also has a subcategory: the sin of wanting to know how much we should give. To the covetousness, ignorance is bliss. If we refuse to know, we have convinced ourselves we are not committing any sin. Yet a sin it is. Some do not like the word tithe. When they say it, it sounds like a snake hissing, or a person with a lisp. It is truth, the Lord has not put the New Testament church under a law to give a certain amount. We are under a contract of love. Yet, if we were looking for a scriptural example, some standard for us to live up to, this would be the Christian example. As my old friend, Lawrence Clayton once said, “The church can’t put me under a tithe, but I can put myself under one.” It is not that the tithe is unscriptural, it is just too much for most. If you add the tithes, and offerings, of the Old Testament saints, you will find it to be about 30% of their income. To them, it was too much. They lost their kingdom.

Another sin of omission has to do with our duties to those less fortunate than ourselves, those that God has placed in our path who are in need. The priest and the Levite were guilty of the sin of omission when they passed by the wounded man. But the good Samaritan was faithful. He cared for the less fortunate. Sad to say, some Christians have never helped anyone in need. This is one of the duties of any church. Paul said he was always careful to remember the poor.

I will give you one more and leave you to your own thoughts. Another sin of omission that is quite common to God’s people is the refusal to forgive those who have offended us. Even Peter had a problem with this one when he asked our Lord to confine his pride to only 70x7. Surely if God has forgiven us for all the sins we have committed we can forgive our brethren…our husbands…our wives. If we come to church with unforgiving spirits, we can’t rejoice because we can’t forgive. We omit, God omits.

There are a host of other sins of omission that I have not touched upon. Fathers are supposed to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Mothers are supposed to teach the younger women to love their husbands, and their families. There are duties of pastors, deacons, and church members. Children are supposed to obey their parents. Many scriptures fall into the category of omission. These are all common sins of omission. We have all suffered from them. If the Lord has given us light on something that we should do, and we do it not then we are as guilty as the person who commits an open sin. Yes, these are very deceitful.

From here, I must leave it with you. I do not know what the Lord has revealed to you, nor do I know what the Lord has burdened your heart to do. But this is do know, “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”-NMP