

## **JAMES: PRACTICING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

### **IX. Heeding God In Self-Employment**

(James 4:13-17)

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. Though the Epistle of James offers little formal structure and is less concerned about theological concepts than other New Testament works, it is intensely practical, explaining how to be "doers" of God's Word, James 1:22.
- B. James 4:13-17 addresses the need for self-employed believers to obey the Lord in their business experience, so we view the passage for our insight and edification (as follows):

#### **II. Heeding God In Self-Employment, James 4:13-17.**

- A. Employment in the Ancient Near East consisted either of a self-employed farmer, merchant, craftsman or of a hired hand or a slave quite different from modern large corporation settings.
- B. Accordingly, James 4:13-17 addresses self-employed farmers, merchants or craftsmen, and corrects sinful thinking and actions believers might utilize in James' era (as follows):
  - 1. The expression "Go now" that introduces James 4:13 NIV is "a colloquial phrase" that "goads the reader and gains his undivided attention," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 831. James was addressing self-employed businessmen who were typically "self-assertive," "self-confident" and "self-centered" in their trade who therefore had to be addressed rather strongly to shake them out of their ungodly ways! (Ibid.)
  - 2. The error of these self-assertive, self-confident and self-centered self-employed men was their failure to rely on God by assuming self-reliance for all aspects of their businesses, James 4:13-14:
    - a. These self-employed men boasted that they controlled all the aspects of their business, James 4:13:
      - i. They errantly claimed they controlled the timing of what they would do, James 4:13a.
      - ii. They errantly claimed they controlled the location of where they would do business, James 4:13b.
      - iii. They errantly claimed they controlled the duration of their business efforts, James 4:13c.
      - iv. They errantly claimed they controlled all aspects of buying and selling, what would include today's efforts relative to supply lines, marketing, hiring, distribution, government regulations, etc., v. 13d.
      - v. They errantly claimed they controlled planning, budgeting, cash flow and risk to gain profit, v. 13e.
    - b. Such boasts are futile for two major reasons, James 4:14:
      - i. First, no self-employed businessman knows what will occur even tomorrow to upset any aspect of what he claimed he controlled in his business, James 4:14a. So many upsetting things can occur with the issues of timing, location, duration of efforts, buying and selling and trying to gain a profit that business itself is actually out of the control of the self-employed businessman!
      - ii. Second, no self-employed man knows how long he will live, for his life is like a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes, and with him goes all of his business efforts, James 4:14b.
  - 3. The correction to self-assertive, self-confident and self-centered self-employed businessmen is for them to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that" as it applies to all of their efforts, James 4:15 ESV.
  - 4. However, James taught that many self-employed Christians were boasting in their arrogance, foolishly ignoring their inability to control not only every factor regarding their businesses, but also even their own lives and lifespans that enabled them to carry on business on the earth, what was sin, James 4:16.
  - 5. Accordingly, whoever as a self-employed businessman knew the right thing to do in recognizing his need for God's oversight in his business, his own personal welfare and even longevity, but who failed to do so in still maintaining a self-assertive, self-confident and self-centered mindset was sinning, James 4:17.

***Lesson:*** *Self-employed believers must realize that all aspects of their businesses are beyond their full control due to their ignorance of the future and their inability to secure their own longevity. They must rely on God for success.*

***Application:*** *(1) May we self-employed believers humbly rely on God for business success. (2) If we have relied on our own abilities and not the Lord, may we confess it as sin to God and change our view on business. (3) If God greatly blesses our business, may we realize it is due to His grace and use our profits as He wills: (a) This involves being satisfied with what we need for "the means of subsistence" (diatrophe, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 189) and "clothing or housing shelter" (skepasma, Ibid., p. 761), 1 Timothy 6:8. Such an effort entails more than just "food" and "clothing" as the KJV puts it (in 1 Timothy 6:8) to include even retirement nest eggs to secure reasonable livelihood provisions for the future. (b) However, this also involves not aiming to be rich as an end in itself, but to use the wealth God provides to help others in need, 1 Timothy 6:17-19.*