

# Sins of Omission

James 4:17 states: “*Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.*” This simple verse puts forth in plain terms the sin of omission, that is, the sin of failing to do what God has commanded of us. How do we commit such a sin?

## **By Knowing What Is Good Without Doing**

The term “good” in James 4:17 is from the Greek word *kalos* which describes what is qualitatively good, morally excellent, worthy of honor, and upright. The term “knows” is translated from the Greek root *oida* which means “to know perfectly well.” As your mother would say when she caught you doing something you should know is wrong, “Danny, you know perfectly well that you were wrong to get into the cookies right before dinner.”

A knowledge of what is right creates the obligation to discharge the duty involved in it. Moses failed to circumcise his son. God threatened his life for his omission. Many hear but seldom heed. They are practical atheists. They are Christians who believe there is a God, but behave as if there is no God. For example, atheists do not pray to God because they do not believe He exists. Christians do not pray to God who they believe does exist. What is the difference? Think about it: if you were on a plane that was going down, both you and the atheist would start praying. We know it is good to pray to God at all times and not just in bad times. Samuel said, “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way” (1 Sam. 12:23).

## **By Knowing of Needs Without Helping**

In several passages, Christians are commanded to do good to others in need.

- Heb. 13:16 - But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.
- Gal. 6:10 - Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.
- 1 Jn. 3:18 - My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus told a story about a man who was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. “Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side” (Luke 10:31,32). Surely, the priest and the Levite sinned in their failure to render aid. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, the Lord says to the goats, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41).

Why? Had they committed murder, adultery, robbery or some other such sin? Christ explained, “for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me” (Matt. 25:42,43). So it is for Christians who rail against abortion, but don’t do anything to help moms in crisis pregnancies. They condemn those getting divorced, but do nothing to strengthen their marriages, They abhor the homosexual lifestyle, but do nothing to lead them out of sin.

### **By Knowing Your Abilities Without Serving**

One day Jesus was hungry, “And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. And when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, ‘Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.’ And His disciples heard it... Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, ‘Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away!’” (Matt. 11:13,14,20,21). Now, the order of the Palestinian fig is first it puts forth fruit and then comes the leaves. This tree had leaves. Therefore, the assumption was that fruit was there also. On observing that the leaves were mere pretense, Jesus pronounced the curse upon it. The lesson is clear. We must not make a mere pretense of being a Christian. We must bear fruit that shows we are Christians.

Jesus taught a similar lesson in the Parable of the barren fig tree, “He also spoke this parable: ‘A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down!’” (Luke 13:6-9). This barren tree required space, moisture, fertilizer, time and labor just like all the other trees, but it bore no fruit. What about those who could serve but don’t? They could and should be elders or deacons, song leaders and teachers, but they just take up space in the pew without anything more to do.

### **By Knowing the Truth Without Telling**

It has been said, “All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” In Nazi Germany, nothing could have explained it better. Good men and women were silent and did nothing while millions were slaughtered. Many knew the truth but were too afraid to speak up.

The prophet Jonah was called by God to preach to Nineveh. Instead, he made an attempt to flee to Tarshish, which was directly in the opposite direction. God found a way to turn him around. Jonah preached the truth and there was a great repentance.

God cautioned Ezekiel not to fail to warn the wicked, "When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul” (Ezek. 3:18,19).

How would you feel about a neighbor that would not wake you up to the fact that your house

is on fire? What would you think about a doctor who knew you had cancer but failed to warn you about the danger? How should God respond to those who fail to warn man of the dangers of sin and the fires of hell?

### **By Knowing the Truth Without Obeying**

God was sorry He made Saul king, because Saul omitted what was commanded: "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.' And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night" (1 Sam. 15:11).

Everyone who ultimately misses Heaven does so because of a sin of omission. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (Jn. 3:18). It is the sin of not believing (Mark. 16:16).

### **Conclusion**

Sam Jones was a preacher who held revival services, which he called "quittin'" meetings. His preaching was directed primarily to Christians, and he urged them to give up the sinful practices in their lives. Sam's messages were very effective, and many people promised to quit swearing, drinking, smoking, lying, gossiping, or anything else that was offensive to the Lord. On one occasion, Jones asked a woman, "Just what is it that you're quittin'"? She replied, "I'm guilty of not doing something -- and I'm going to quit doing that too!" Even though she had no bad habits to give up, she wasn't actively living to please God. (Our Daily Bread, September 6, 1992).

If you have been doing nothing, it is time to quit it.

– Daniel R. Vess, The Forum, October 21 , 2007