

WHOSE WILL BE DONE?

(James 4:13–17)

WHAT IS TRUE, AND WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Christians should not plan for the future as if they are in complete control of their own lives but should seek the Lord's will in every area of their life.

Planning apart from God's will is sinful arrogance (4:13–17)¹

- Christians should not **presume** to know the future but should always leave room for God's will to overrule theirs (vv. 13–15).
 - ✓ The **wrong** attitude is to confidently announce coming events as if you alone control your future (v.13–14).
 - ✓ The **right** attitude is to plan but to make allowance for God's will to change those plans (v. 15).
- Such **presumption** about the future is, in fact, **boasting** in one's own arrogance (vv. 16–17).
 - ✓ For Christians, all such boasting is particularly **evil** (v. 16).
 - ✓ This is because Christians **know better** (v. 17). This verse sums up pretty much all of chapters 1–4 and even the entire Epistle of James. Sinning is more than *doing wrong* (e.g., committing specific acts). Sinning is also not *doing what is right* (omission). For example: It is a sin to lie; at times, it may also be a sin to know the truth and not tell it.
- Presumption **disregards**:
 - ✓ Our ignorance of the future.
 - ✓ The brevity of our lives.
 - ✓ The sovereign will of God (and our dependence upon Him).
 - ✓ That God is more interested in your holiness than your success; His moral will for us is to become more Christ-like.
- The Christian life is **not** "I did it my way."

APPLICATION:²

- ❖ Your motivation in life should be to glorify God, not yourself, in all things.
- ❖ Humble submission to God's will means humble obedience to God's will. Christians ought to dispose of any proud and independent Spirit. Pray!
- ❖ God's Word and Spirit motivate us to make decisions that conform to His desire and energize us to fulfill those desires. Finding the will of God is NOT "Love God and do whatever you want."
- ❖ Intuition is not always the leading of the Holy Spirit; often, it is simply wishful thinking. Beware! Test your hunches. Are they explainable?
- ❖ A biblical program of guidance for finding God's will: 1) read your bible, 2) develop a heart for God, 3) protect your heart, 4) seek wise counsel from other believers, 5) test yourself and your motivations, 6) recognize God's providence, 7) does it make sense? 8) is it divine intervention?

Practices to avoid:³

- Envisioning retirement as merely a time to enjoy the fruit of our labor (Christians do not 'retire' in doing kingdom work)
- Seeing work as a way merely to make money to get what we want
- Viewing material prosperity as a symbol of our power and independence
- Imagining God as being uninterested or aloof from money matters
- Making financial decisions without consulting Christ for guidance
- Examples of doing the right things: 1) not boasting as just warned in (James 4:16); 2) caring for widows and orphans (James 1:27); 3) avoiding favoritism/discrimination (James 2:1,9); 4) showing mercy.

Bible Background (for reflection):

"The transience of life is commonplace in Jewish wisdom literature. The entire book of Ecclesiastes highlights the fleeting and unsatisfying vanities of earthly pleasure. Pr. 27:1 and Hos 6:4, 13:3 5 are just a few of the texts that make this point, including by means of the metaphors of mist or smoke. Vv. 14–15 effectively counter the presumption that we can plan our lives out meticulously for months on end, by reminding us of our ignorance of the future, our frailty as fallen human beings, and our utter dependence on God's will.

The last of these points harks back most immediately to the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9–13; Lk 11:1–4), with its central role for petitioning God that *his* will be done on earth, as it is already being done in heaven. But that requires us to leave enough time to listen to God on a regular basis so that his plans can overrule ours when necessary so that we can distinguish a divine from a diabolical interruption to our daily schedule, and so that we can make "the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:16).

The generalizing language in the text of "such-and-such" (v. 13) and "this or that" (v. 15) refutes the claim that adding "if the Lord wills" applies only to certain kinds of prayers, but not to others in which false teachers today encourage people to "name it and claim it." [Doing that kind of thing wrongly] turns prayer into magic—attempting to manipulate God or the gods through ritual or formula—and replaces God's sovereignty with human presumption, precisely what these merchants were doing wrong in our passage today!

Keep in mind, long-range planning would have stood out as far more unusual in James's world than in ours. The high value we place on such strategizing "is decidedly a modern phenomenon," not typically practiced even by the minority in the ancient Roman empire who *did* have surplus savings or investments. The antidote in our modern world is not to try to recreate some mythically ideal past society, which would prove impossible, but to reflect biblically on what *Christian* planning within contemporary economic systems should look like."¹

Ask yourself: How does a concern for the will of God demonstrate our belief in His sovereignty?

¹ Craig Blomberg, *James*, vol. 16, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on NT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 212.

² Bruce Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

³ Bruce B. Barton, David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson, *James*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992), 114.