

HOW TO RESPOND TO GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN OUR LIVES, PART 3

James 4:13-17

¹³Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make profit." ¹⁴Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." ¹⁶But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. ¹⁷Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Theme: We must constantly acknowledge and joyfully accept God's control over our lives and circumstances

① Understand the biblical truth of God's sovereignty and providence

Sovereign is what God is.

- He is absolutely in control over every event and circumstance throughout the universe in both time and eternity.

Providence is what God does.

- His absolute control works itself out in every event and circumstance in our life to accomplish His own perfect ends.

② Understand our tendency to subtly deny God's sovereignty and providence

Even as Christians, we can affirm God's sovereignty theologically, while at the same time deny it practically in how we live.

	The Plan	The Details Considered
v. 13	<i>Today or tomorrow</i>	Start date
	<i>we will go to such and such a city</i>	Location
	<i>and spend a year there</i>	Duration
	<i>and engage in business</i>	Activity
	<i>and make a profit</i>	Purpose

This plan was missing _____

- They ignored the sovereignty of God and did not recognize or express their dependence on Him—they acted like practical atheists

The point: As Christians, we don't overtly deny God's sovereignty, but we have a tendency to subtly deny His sovereignty in how we live.

This subtle denial of God's sovereignty is irrational, because...

1. Life is _____ (v. 14a - *You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow*)
 - It is irrational to plan our lives a year out without acknowledging God's control when we do not even know what will happen tomorrow.
2. Life is _____ (v. 14b - *You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away*)
 - It is irrational because not only do we not know what is going to happen tomorrow, we do not even know if we'll be alive tomorrow.

③ Understand the _____ response to God's sovereignty and providence

HOW should we respond to God's sovereignty?

① Humble _____ of God's providence

v. 15 - *Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."*

God's Will	
_____ will	_____ will
God's will of precept or will of command God's "revealed" will	God's will of decree God's "secret" will
Commands and laws He has given us to obey as contained ("revealed") in the Bible	The eternal, unchangeable plan of God which is always carried out in human history
It is not always done, and it is never done perfectly (because man is a sinner)	It is always done perfectly down to the detail (God even includes sin in His plan, forbidding man to sin yet uses sin as a means to accomplish His perfect ends, and to bring the greatest amount of glory to Himself)*
	<u>Westminster Confession</u> - <i>"God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass."</i> <u>John MacArthur</u> - <i>"This is God's good pleasure, His eternal, unchangeable counsel or decree in which he has foreordained all things."</i> <u>Summary</u>: Whatever _____ is God's sovereign will

*We should bear in mind two cautions about God's decretive will. First, whenever God's decretive will includes sin, that sin is certain to occur, but it will be initiated by the volition of the sinner. And second, God's meticulous providence includes Him upholding the various natural processes and even crafting (without compromising His holiness) the circumstances of an individual's decision to sin.

James' point: It is not enough to recognize the uncertainty of life (v. 14a) and the brevity of life (v. 14b). Many unbelievers recognize that. Instead, as Christians, we must humbly _____ the specific circumstances and events that God, in His providence, brings into our lives that is part of His great sovereign plan.

v. 15 - *Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."*

We are to humbly acknowledge God's providence in two ways:

1. In our _____ existence ("we will live")
 - It is solely God's will that keeps us alive another second
2. In all of our _____ activities ("we will do this or that")
 - It is solely God's will that determines whether the decisions and plans we make will happen

Daniel to Belshazzar (Daniel 5:23):

"The God in whose hand are your life-breath and all your ways, you have not glorified"

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continued existence	circumstances and events of our life

Old Testament examples of believers humbly accepting God's sovereign will:

- 2 Samuel 15:24-26 - ²⁴*Now behold, Zadok also came, and all the Levites with him carrying the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar came up until all the people had finished passing from the city.* ²⁵*The king said to Zadok the priest, "Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the sight of the Lord, then He will bring me back and show me both it and His habitation.* ²⁶*But if He should say thus, 'I have no delight in you,' then here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him."* } "If the Lord wills"
- Jeremiah 3:37-39 - ³⁷*Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?* ³⁸*Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?* ³⁹*Why should any living mortal, or any man, offer complaint in view of his sins?* } "If the Lord wills"

New Testament examples of believers humbly accepting God's sovereign will:

- In the life of Christ
 - Matthew 26:39 - *Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, yet not as I will, but as You will.*
- In the life of the apostles
 - Acts 18:20-21 - *When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus.*
 - Acts 21:14 - *And since He would not be persuaded, we (Luke and others) fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"*
 - Romans 1:10 - *Always in my prayers making requests, if perhaps now at last by the will of God, I may succeed in coming to you.*
 - Romans 15:32 - *So that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.*
 - 1 Corinthians 4:19 - *But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills.*
 - 1 Corinthians 16:7 - *I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.*
 - Philippians 2:19 - *But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly.*
 - Philippians 2:24 - *And I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.*
 - Hebrews 6:3 - *And this we will do, if God permits.*

The phrase "if the Lord wills" (1) should not be used superstitiously and (2) does not need to be said every time we make a plan.

- John Calvin - *"The Apostle Paul often sounds very much like the businessmen of v. 13."*
- Acts 19:21 - *Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying,*
- Romans 15:28 - *Therefore, when I had finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.*
- 1 Corinthians 16:5 - *But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia.*

The point of v. 15: Our thoughts, words, decisions, and plans should have a constant acknowledgment of God's sovereign will.

We must acknowledge God's sovereignty in...	v. 13
our decisions and plans	<i>"We will go"</i>
our daily schedule	<i>"Today or tomorrow"</i>
our future	<i>"We will spend a year"</i>
our location	<i>"We will go to such and such a city"</i>
our occupation	<i>"We will engage in business"</i>
the results of our decisions, plans, and activities	<i>"We will make a profit"</i>

How do you know if you are humbly accepting God's sovereign providence in these areas?

Theological Tests		
1	Do you understand God's sovereignty over these areas? (Psalm 103:19 - <i>His sovereignty rules over all</i>)	Mental
2	Do you acknowledging that God, in His providence, is working out all the details in these areas to accomplish His own perfect ends?	Mental
Practical Tests		
3	As you make a plan or decision, is it with an open hand, holding onto it loosely, knowing God is sovereign in the results of that decision or plan?	
4	Have you _____ submitted to the circumstances in which you find yourself right now? • James 1:2 - <i>Consider it all _____, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.</i>	
5	Have you _____ the Lord for the circumstances in which you find yourself right now? • 1 Thessalonians 5:18 - <i>In _____ give _____; for this is God's _____ for you in Christ Jesus.</i>	

HOW should we respond to God's sovereignty?

① **Humble acceptance of God's providence** (joyfully submitting & giving thanks in the details)

② **Humble _____ to God's Word**

- It is impossible to sincerely say "*if the Lord wills*" if we are at the same time planning to do something outside of His moral will
- It is inconsistent to want God's sovereign will, but then not do His revealed will
- Matthew 6:10 - *Your (moral) will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*
- If we really want God's will in our life, then we must humbly obey His revealed will in His Word

WHY should we respond biblically to God's sovereignty?

① **To refuse to is _____**

v. 16 - *But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.*

- *boast*
 - to rejoice in something (good or bad)
 - to put your confidence in something (good or bad)
- *in your arrogance* (alazoneia)
 - The businessmen put their confidence in _____
 - 1 John 2:16 - *the pride* (alazoneia) *of life* (desire for personal glory)
 - An arrogant sense of self-confidence, self-sufficiency, and independence
 - JB Phillips (translation) - "*As it is, you get a certain pride in yourself in planning your future with such confidence.*"
- *all such boasting is evil* (ponēros)
 - Edmond Hiebert - "In character it is morally akin to Satan who is called 'the evil one'"
 - Matthew 6:18 - *And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the **evil one*** (ponēros)
 - Matthew 13:38 - *the tares are the sons of the **evil one*** (ponēros)
 - Ephesians 6:16 - *Taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the **evil one*** (ponēros)
(arrogant self-confidence is characteristic of Satan)
 - Alec Motyer - "*We might consider it a small thing, a passing feature of life, if we forget how dependent we are and act and mere self-will. James sees it as the hardcore of vaunting pride which is the mark and curse of fallen man.*"
(arrogant self-confidence is the mark of fallen man)

② To refuse to is _____

v. 17 - *Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.*

- To fail to humbly acknowledge God's sovereignty in the details of our lives and to include Him in our planning is a sin of _____ (as opposed to a sin of _____)
 - Sins of omission are omitting things we are supposed to do
 - Sins of commission are committing things we should not do
 - Westminster Shorter Catechism - *“The sin of omission is failing to do what God requires”*
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- We are required to acknowledge God's sovereignty and providence in our lives.
 - If we keep this truth at the forefront of our mind, it will keep us from other sins, because the sin of omission usually leads to sins of commission.
 - John MacArthur - *“Sins of omission are rarely isolated from sins of commission”*
 - If we don't humbly acknowledge God's sovereignty over the details of our lives and to include Him in our planning, how are we going to respond when things don't go our way? Omitting God from our plans will lead to committing:
 -
 -
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Arrogantly leaving God out of our decision and plans, should drive us back to 4:6 – *God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.*

The condition on which we receive grace is to humble ourselves in repentance over our prideful self-sufficiency and accept His providence in our lives.

Alec Motyer - *“All this can be lost, however, if once outside the doors of our private room we take the reins of life into our own hands. We forget our ignorance and frail independence and we plan our day, our week, and next year, as if we were lords of earth and time and there was no God in heaven.”*

So not only do we have to affirm these truths theologically, we have to live them out practically.

- ① Understand the biblical truth of His sovereignty and providence
- ② Understand our tendency to subtly deny God's sovereignty and providence
- ③ Understand the biblical response to God's sovereignty and providence:
 - Humbly accept, joyfully submit, and in everything give thanks for God's sovereign will
 - Faithfully obey God's moral will