

IS GOD A PART OF YOUR PLANS?

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Text: James 4:13-17

It's sad to see people in this world going about their daily lives without any regard for God's will. It's tragic, however, to see Christians doing the same. If anyone should be seeking to live according to God's will, it should be us.

James is writing to people who evidently have left God completely out of their plans. As he has before, James continues to point to the lack of godly wisdom in the daily lives of his readers. Apparently, he is speaking to Christian businessmen (though it applies to all of us) that are probably already aware that their actions are wrong. They are arrogantly going about their daily lives without the least bit of concern for God's will—something that is dangerous.

The following story illustrates how man's stubbornness and his obstinate attitude can get him in trouble:

■ The captain of the ship looked into the dark night and saw faint lights in the distance. Immediately he told his signalman to send a message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south."

Promptly a return message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north."

The captain was angered; his command had been ignored. So he sent a second message: "Alter your course 10 degrees south—I am the captain!"

Soon another message was received: "Alter your course 10 degrees north—I am seaman third class Jones."

Immediately the captain sent a third message, knowing the fear it would evoke: "Alter your course 10 degrees south—I am a battleship."

Then the reply came: "Alter your course 10 degrees north—I am a lighthouse."

In the midst of our dark and foggy times, all sorts of voices are shouting orders into the night, telling us what to do, how to adjust our lives. Out of the darkness, one voice signals something quite opposite to the rest—something almost absurd. But the voice happens to be the Light of the World, and we ignore it at our peril.

(Larson, 134)

Look with me at the advice James gives concerning making *plans*.

I. JAMES POINTS TO THE ABSENCE OF GOD IN THEIR PLANS (v.13).

A. James is attempting to reason with them when he says, “Come now,” or “Now listen.”

They were so wrapped up in their plans they were not listening to God. They had made many assumptions about a future they had no control over. *Making assumptions can sometimes get us into trouble.*

■ The photographer for a national magazine was assigned to shoot a great forest fire. He was told that a small plane would be waiting to take him over the fire.

He arrived at the airstrip just an hour before sundown. Sure enough the Cessna was waiting. He jumped in with his equipment and shouted, “Let’s go!” The pilot swung the plane into the wind and soon they were in the air.

“Fly over the north side of the fire,” said the photographer, “and make several low-level passes.”

“Why?” asked the nervous pilot.

“Because I’m going to take pictures!” retorted the photographer. “I’m a photographer, and photographers take pictures.”

After a long pause, the pilot replied, “You mean you’re not the instructor?”

(Rowell, 14)

B. Notice their plans.

1. They had picked the city.
2. They had decided the time.
3. They had decided their business.
4. They had set their goals.

But God was nowhere to be found! Can you search your plans and find God? If not, why?

II. THEIR PLANS MADE NO ALLOWANCE FOR THE UNSEEN (v.14).

A. They had planned the future with no knowledge of tomorrow.

■ In *A SLOW AND CERTAIN LIGHT*, Elisabeth Elliot tells of two adventurers who stopped by to see her, all loaded with equipment for the rain forest east of the Andes. They sought no advice, just a few phrases to converse with the Indians.

She writes: “Sometimes we come to God as the two adventurers came to me—confident and, we think, well-informed and well-equipped. But has it occurred to us that with all our accumulation of stuff, something is missing?” She suggests that we often ask God for too little. “We know what we need—a yes no answer, please, to a simple question. Or perhaps a road sign. Something quick and easy to point the way.

“What we really ought to have is the Guide Himself. Maps, road signs, a few useful phrases are good things, but infinitely better is Someone who has been there before and knows the way.” (Larson, 106)

B. They forgot they would not be here forever.

■ The Psalmist said in Psalm 90:3-6, “You turn men back to dust, saying, 'Return to dust, O sons of men.' For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning—though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.” (NIV)

■ Phillips translation renders the B part of v.14, “What, after all, is your life? It is like a puff of smoke visible for a little while and then dissolving into thin air.”

III. THERE WAS NO CONSIDERATION FOR GOD'S WILL IN THEIR PLANS (v.15).

A. No Christian can live independently of God.

We have no right to ignore God's will; in fact, it is arrogance on our part to do so.

B. Our plans must always be conditional – “if it is the Lord's will.”

■ Charles Swindoll writes, “It is the height of arrogance to disregard God as the master of our fate.” (156)

■ In Colossians 1:9 Paul said his prayer was “that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

IV. THEIR PLANS WERE BASED ON THEIR ARROGANCE (v.16).

A. They were boasting and bragging about what they would do.

They felt that they were the final authority concerning their lives. They were not depending on God at all or for that matter even recognizing Him.

■ Lloyd Ogilvie writes, “Our need to be in charge of ourselves, others, and situations often makes our relationship with Christ life's biggest power struggle. We are reluctant to relinquish our control and allow Him to run our lives. We may believe in Him and be active in the church and Christian causes, but trusting Him as Lord of everything in life can be scary.

Even though we pray about our challenges and problems, all too often what we really want is strength to accomplish what we've already decided is best for ourselves and others. Meanwhile we press on with our own priorities and plans. We remain the script writer, casting director, choreographer, and producer of the drama of our own lives, in which we are the star performer.”

-- Lloyd Ogilvie in 12 Steps to Living Without Fear. Christianity Today, Vol. 32, no. 3.

B. Boasting that we will do as we please is evil, even wicked.

Why is it evil? This boasting is an arrogant disregard for God. *To guard ourselves against this error we need to ask ourselves a couple of questions.*

1. Do we have a total disregard for the will of God when planning our lives?
 2. Do we know the will of God for our lives and yet refuse to obey it?
- If we answered “yes” to either we are in trouble.*

B. In fact, aren't we sinning by *not* praying for God's will to be done in our lives?

■ James sums up his thoughts in v.17, “If we know to do good and fail to do it, then it is sin.”

God sees sin not just as doing what is wrong, but in *failing to do what is right*.

CONCLUSION

Now that James has pointed out their error, they have no excuse for not doing what is right. They have no excuse for excluding God from their plans. When we think about it, we have no reason for failing to include God in our *plans*.

■ Bob Mumford, in *TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT GUIDANCE*, compares discovering God's will with a sea captain's docking procedure:

A certain harbor in Italy can be reached only by sailing up a narrow channel between dangerous rocks and shoals. Over the years, many ships have been wrecked, and navigation is hazardous.

To guide the ships safely into port, three lights have been mounted on three huge poles in the harbor. When the three lights are perfectly lined up and seen as one, the ship can safely proceed up the narrow channel. If the pilot sees two or three lights, he knows he's off course and in danger.

God has also provided three beacons to guide us. The same rules of navigation apply—the three lights must be lined up before it is safe for us to proceed. The three harbor lights of guidance are

1. The Word of God (objective standard)
2. The Holy Spirit (subjective witness)
3. Circumstances (divine providence)

Together they assure us that the directions we've received are from God and will lead us safely along his way. (Larson, 108)

References

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