

“Living in God’s Will”
James 4:13-17

June 2, 2013

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A. Introduction

1. Fearing God’s Will

a. Pastor David Payne of the Campus, wrote these words in his recent book: ‘I think the greatest fear of surrender is that if I surrender everything to God, He is going to take everything from me and send me to a swamp somewhere at the ends of the earth to live on a log and eat bugs. God is going to “take me down!” Well, first of all, God doesn’t need to wait for you to pray a prayer of surrender to take you down. He can do that anytime. Secondly, if the swamp is where God wanted you, the life of surrender would make you, the swamp-dweller, the most fulfilled person on earth because you are where God wants you. Joy and fulfilment have nothing to do with comfort; they have everything to do with living where God wants you to live, doing what God wants you to do and being who you were meant to be. The swamp would be your sweet spot. Thirdly, Jesus said He came to give the abundant life, not a (rotten) life. The issue is not what you give up but what you gain.—{2}.’

b. there have been many messages about the will of God

(A) and surrendering to God’s will

(B) unfortunately, all too often, the speaker being convinced of God’s will for his or her own life, and the method and means whereby he discovered that will, tries to apply the same to the audience

(1) with an implication that everyone listening should become a missionary or enter the so-called ‘full-time ministry’

(2) that how they came to the place of surrender – in an agony of prayer, for example – so should everyone else

(C) this ignores ...

2. The Character of God’s Will

a. first, there is a specific will of God for each individual that God has framed particularly for that individual

(A) it is just as unique as he or she is unique

(B) while there is only one Pattern, Jesus Christ, for each of us to follow, God does not make cookie-cutter Christians

- (C) each of us has a specific calling, a vocation, for which God has placed us in this world and in the church of Jesus Christ
- (D) elsewhere in his book, Pastor Payne writes, 'As you live your life, God uses the history of your upbringing, particular people who have helped to influence your life, prayer, circumstances and events, successes and failures, the Scriptures, challenges, training, spiritual gifts, talents and anything He may choose to shape your purpose, legacy and life call. The Holy Spirit whispers in your ear. He stirs a passion in your heart. He tugs on your soul. There is a gravitational pull that cannot be suppressed. And when your sails catch the wind of where the Spirit is blowing your life, you know this is what you were meant to be and do. You are in your sweet spot.'^{3}'
- (E) that then is the matter of God's specific will for each one of us
- b. second, there is the general will of God for each and every believer
 - (A) these are not to be found in some secret place or ritual
 - (B) they are plainly written in the scriptures for us to see
 - (C) here are a few – but I will leave you to discover others (perhaps not so specifically stated) as you read through the Scriptures
 - (1) in the matter of Christian giving and service: "... in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." (2 Corinthians 8:5)
 - (2) in the way we work for our earthly employers: "not by way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." (Ephesians 6:6)
 - (3) in the purity of our marriage relationship: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;" (1 Thessalonians 4:3)
 - (4) in our attitudes: "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:18)
 - (5) in handling criticism by unbelievers: "For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men." (1 Peter 2:15)
 - (6) in the acceptance of suffering and persecution: "For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong." (1 Peter 3:17)
- c. in today's text, James combines these two aspects of God's will to teach you and me a practical lesson

about living in God's will – one that encompasses both His specific and His general will for our lives.

B. The Planning Problem

1. "C'mon Now!"

- a. James begins this passage with two Greek words, which translated literally do not make much sense, 'Lead now!' The AV uses an idiom of that era, 'Go to now,' which is not familiar today. In Greek these words formed an interjection, used to call the audience's attention with cajolery or sarcasm to something that needed to be corrected
- b. so you have here the tone of voice: 'c'mon now!'
- c. 'Let those pay attention who are saying, "Today or tomorrow, we shall travel unto this city, work there for a year, trade, and make a profit."' (RGH)

2. A Habitual Way of Talking

- a. the way that this is written in the Greek emphasises that this was not merely one isolated incident of which James had heard
- b. the attention getting, 'C'mon now!' is addressed to a group of people – the business class, if you like – who discussed things in this way
- c. they had their plans all set – specific times, places, results

3. A Secular Way of Talking

- a. one of the responsibilities I had when I was working in the insurance business was the preparation of the 5-year financial plan
- b. it was always a bit of an exercise in futility, because
 - (A) within a month events had occurred which changed everything
 - (B) and, every year it had to be redone – and be markedly different
- c. some churches have adapted this thinking with their 5-year plans – and often with similar results
- d. here at Faith Fellowship, we set an ambitious budget for 2013, but as givings are down, we have to take some care to ensure that sufficient funds are in the chequing account to pay the bills and to send out the missions support at the beginning of each month

- e. it is all too easy for us as Christians to get caught up in this secular way of thinking – looking at times, places, results as though the things of the Spirit were under our own control
- f. as well as which, as you see in this verse, the concern comes to be with the treasures of earth rather than the treasures in heaven
- g. by the way, the word translated 'trade' can also be translated 'exploit' or even 'cheat' – not exactly suitable for a Christian's way of life

C. The Human Limitation

1. We Are Not Prophets

- a. the hiddenness of the future is brought out in the next verse
- b. Thus you speak, even though you do not know tomorrow. Of what kind of nature is your life? For it is a mist, appearing for a short while, then disappearing.
- c. even if a person were to have the prophetic gift, this is of no assurance that they know their own situation for the next day
- d. indeed it is a blessing that we do not know our tomorrows for Jesus has reminded us, 'So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.' (Matthew 6:34)

2. The Brevity of Life

- a. life is but a passing mist: when I was going to work every day it often happened; even now, there are many mornings when it happens – I get up and go out and can see barely out to the highway, yet I travel but a few concessions north or south, to Wellington or Stouffville road and it has disappeared – come back in an hour, and it is gone
- b. the ultimate foolishness of the human nature is that 'All men think all men are mortal but themselves.' – everyone else will die, but not I.
- c. yet the Scriptures concur with universal human experience in this
- d. even while rejoicing in God's present blessings, the Psalmist confesses: 'As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place acknowledges it no longer.' (Psalms 103:15-16)

- e. it can lead to pessimism, as with Job: 'My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, And come to an end without hope. Remember that my life is but breath; My eye will not again see good.' (Job 7:6-7)
- f. or to joyful anticipation as with Paul: 'we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.' (2 Corinthians 5:8)
- g. but it should always lead us to wisdom: 'So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.' (Psalms 90:12)
- h. that is what James would have us do: learn from our frailty so that we get everything in its proper perspective

D. Recognizing God's Will

1. 'Instead,' – you who have been talking in this secular, Godless fashion – 'instead you are to say, "If the Lord should will, we shall both live and do this or that.'
 - a. as I understand the original language of this verse, the dependence upon the will of God is the condition both of the living and of the doing – there is a recognition of His sovereignty over all our being
 - b. James now comes to the crux of the situation
 - c. God and His will need to be recognized in every facet of our being: that He is in charge, and our dependence upon Him is complete
 - d. that is the meaning behind the phrase, 'walking by faith'
 - e. consider the following aspects of this recognition
2. Acknowledging God's Will
 - a. this is a spiritual and intellectual response of faith
 - b. it is based upon who God is, the Nature of God Himself
 - c. that God is in charge, as for example when it describes God the Son as He '... upholds all things by the word of His power...' (Hebrews 1:3)
 - d. that on the one hand, as Jesus points out in John 15:5, without Him we can do nothing but that on the other, 'I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.' (Philippians 4:13)
 - e. this is the confession of what should be a self-evident truth

3. Surrendering to God's Will

- a. from confession we turn to practical action
- b. yes, God's will is paramount, He is in charge, but within us there is that old, stubborn self that say, "But I want to do this; or that."
- c. so Jesus, our Saviour, has a word for us who would be His disciples – 'Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."' (Matthew 16:24 NAS95) – denying oneself is surrendering our self-will to God
- d. it is the end of our battle against the One whose desire is for our good

4. Accepting God's Will

- a. there seems to be a final stage in this matter of recognizing God's will
- b. even though their old nature may be crucified with Christ, Christians all experience its coming back to life in the form of ingratitude, self-pity, and rebellion against where God has placed us
- c. in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, Paul in defending his apostolic authority against those teaching lies, recites some of the hardship and privation he has undergone for the sake of the church – he does so reluctantly and refers to what he is writing as 'a little foolishness'
- d. for Paul had learned the lesson of accepting God's will in all things; 'Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.' (Philippians 4:11 NAS95)

E. Planning Without God Is Sinful Arrogance

1. Boasting, Not Humility

- a. 'But as things are now, you are exulting in your false pretensions; all such exulting is wicked.'
- b. in this chapter, James has been exhorting his readers to humility: 'Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.' (James 4:10 NAS95) – leave any exaltation, any success to God
- c. but making plans without taking God's will into account is doing just the opposite: it is full of pride and arrogance
- d. the word translated 'false pretensions', 'arrogance' or 'boastings' is the same as is used in 1 John 2:16 to sum up the evil world culture: 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life'
- e. to make decisions without seeking God's will is to walk Satan's way

2. Now You Know!

- a. you may have plead ignorance before: after all, this is how everybody else does it – but now you know it not how Christians are to do it
- b. 'Thus, to the one knowing to do good and not doing, it is sin.'
- c. you can apply this to the sins of omission: the words of Micah are not much different from those of James – the one Holy Spirit inspired both – 'He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?' (Micah 6:8 NAS95)
- d. Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for neglecting 'the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness' (Matthew 23:23)
- e. but the verse in James could be rendered equally well, 'Thus, to the one knowing to do good and doing otherwise, it is sin.'
- f. Therefore, those who have heard James words in the four chapters thus far are responsible for living them out in practical terms: taking account of God's will in the living of their lives – as found in Scripture as well as impressed upon them individually by the Holy Spirit

F. Conclusion

1. Be Wise in God's Will

- a. 'Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.' (Ephesians 5:15-17)
- b. seeking to live daily with the recognition of and desire to follow the will of God is the wise thing for the Christian; it is part of growing up into Jesus Christ

2. It Only Makes Sense

- a. 'Life at best is very brief, like the fading of a leaf'
- b. 'The world is passing away, and [also] its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.' (1 John 2:17 NAS95)

- c. in view of all these considerations, does it not seem eminently logical and reasonable that seek to live in God's will to prove how good and acceptable and perfect it is (Romans 12:1).
- d. this is what Jesus did; it is what He calls us to do.

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

BM	-	Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
EBC	-	The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan – Volume 12, James, by Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, ISBN 0-310-36540-6
EGT	-	The Expositor’s Greek Testament, <i>James</i> , by W. E. Oesterley, Hodder & Stoughton, 1910 (Liberal, but generally helpful on Greek idiom.)
Lange	-	Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange, translated by Philip Schaff, Volume 9 of the New Testament; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915 (His interpretations sometimes take strange twists.)
NICNT	-	The New International Commentary on the New Testament, <i>Commentary on the Epistles of James and John</i> by Alexander Ross, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954 – ISBN 0-8028-2192-8
TYN	-	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, <i>The General Epistle of James</i> , by Professor R. V. G. Tasker, The Tyndale Press, 1956
Kerux	-	The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com .

2. From *'Run! The Amazing Race,'* by David S. Payne, p. 54; Word Alive Press, © 2012 by the author.
3. *Ibid*, p. 50
4. *'Night Thoughts,'* by Edward Young (written 1742-1745)