

IF THE LORD WILLS

James 4:12-17

Amongst James' readers were businessmen whose success seems to have led to an over confidence. Turn to James 4:13-17 and let's read what James had to say to these members of his church.

What attitude is James confronting in these businessmen? Arrogance. About what were they arrogant? They presumed to know the future as if they controlled it. They assumed their plans would come to fruition without consideration of God or their own frailty.

Look at the ways the arrogance of these businessmen expressed itself; first...

...they assumed they would be alive in the future.

...they assumed they would be in a specific place at a specific time in the future.

...they assumed they would start a business and it would be profitable in a year's time

Again, the people James confronted were arrogant because they talked of the future as if they controlled it. They assumed success without regard for God's sovereign will or for the fragile nature of human existence.

In verse 14, James confronted their arrogance reminding them they are anything but in control of the future.

We don't know the future. We don't control the future. We didn't control the day of our birth. We don't know the day of our death. Our lives are fragile. We are weak and impotent compared to many forces in nature. We could trip and hit our head on a rock and be dead just like that. We've lived in fear of an organism so small we cannot see it with the naked eye and even with the many ways we've tried protecting ourselves, it can still get through and kill us. We are fragile. Our lives are tenuous. Our lives are anything but certain. In light of eternity, our time here on this earth, in this age, is a mist; a wisp.

We don't know what the future holds. The Scriptures teach us not to boast about the future (Proverbs 27:1). Because the future is uncertain to us does that mean we shouldn't make plans and have goals? No. James was not correcting his people for making plans; James was correcting them for failing to acknowledge God's sovereignty. They needed a big dose of humility (4:15).

Here is the corrective: when making plans, these businessmen needed to humbly take into account God's sovereignty and their frailty. They needed to adopt the proper perspective they were not in control of the future. God has the right to break in and redirect their lives at anytime and in anyway He sovereignly chooses.

Here is an example of the outworking of human free will and divine sovereignty. James wasn't correcting them for making plans, but for being arrogant and presumptuous. He doesn't forbid them making plans and setting goals; but they are to do so humbly acknowledging God's sovereignty.

Is this passage teaching us to be passive and "let go and let God"? No, James assumes these businessmen were going to continue to do business, but admonished them to humble ambition that recognized God's sovereignty over their plans.

God has made us to work. God has made us to be creative. So make your plans, start a new business, start a new ministry, but do so humbly recognizing that God is sovereign and has the right to do with

you and your business or ministry whatever He deems best. We are not ultimately in control, but the One Who is, is our heavenly Father Whom we can trust.

This is tremendously freeing and the basis of peace. If we really embrace that our good God, Who loves us, is in control, we have peace. When the unexpected happens we know we are safe and secure in the arms of our heavenly Father. He will never leave us or forsake us. He knows we need food to eat and clothes to wear and so even if the business fails we can rest in our heavenly Father's care.

The final verse in this passage is intriguing. At first glance verse 17 appears unrelated to verses 13-16, but it must be. The best two options seem to be 1) "the right thing to do" is what James has just told them to do, namely, humble themselves and acknowledge God's sovereignty in their planning. If they don't, they are sinning. A second possibility is that "the right thing to do" referred to flexing their plans in the future in response to God's redirection rather than stubbornly sticking with their plan. [Just before relocating, father dies, mother needs care]. [Teaching Elder dies about time you planned to leave. If you leave, it will leave your church family with no teacher and one fairly inexperienced elder].

This passage causes us to think about our picture of reality. Do we really believe God is sovereign and good? Do we recognize we are not ultimately in control (we do have responsibility and influence, but ultimately God is in control).

How can we become people of humble ambition?

- Identify examples in your life that demonstrate you are not ultimately in control.
- Reflect on ways God has provided in the past and is providing for you in the present. Were there situations in which you sensed God redirecting your footsteps? Thank God for His care in the past, present and future.
- Memorize Scripture that assures you of God's loving care such as Romans 8:31-39.
- Make your plans, pursue your goals, but do so with humility knowing your future is in the hands of your Heavenly Father.

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