

James: sermon #9  
**2011...Living God's will for us**  
(James 4:13-17)

## Introduction

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). Pride (arrogance) is rooted in worldly, demonic wisdom, which leads to fights and quarrels that destroy **the peace that comes only through living in the life of God's wisdom and will. In this section, James continues to confront those who disturb the peace of the church by arrogantly ignoring God's wisdom and perfect will. He reminds them that God is both “Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy” (4:12). And he goes on now to highlight three attitudes toward God's will—two are destructive and the third leads to peace. Let's choose God's Wisdom. Let's choose to live God's will.**

### 1. Ignoring God's will (4:13–14, 16)

In this section James seems to be addressing primarily the wealthy businessmen within the congregations who originally received his letter. Some of them were apparently boasting about their business deals, but **ignoring God's will in these matters.** It seems that **they measured success by how many times they got their own way and accomplished their own plans.** James reminds them that **God has plans for them that they must not ignore—he does so be reviewing some important truths about life.**

#### *a. The complexity of life (v. 13)*

*13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."*

**Think of all that is involved in life: there's today and tomorrow to consider; there's buying, selling, making profits, losing, gaining, going here, going there. Life is made up of people and places, activities and goals, days and years; and each of us must make many crucial decisions day after day. Apart from the will of God, this is all a perplexing mystery and can be a dangerous trap. But when we come to know the Lord Jesus whose life we share by grace, and begin to seek after and actively participate in God's will for us, then life starts to make sense.** Even the physical world around us takes on new meaning. There is **a simplicity and unity to life that makes for new poise and confidence.** We are no longer living in a **mysterious, threatening** universe. We are **in harmony with God's redeemed world.** We come to know and sing, “This is my Father's world!”

#### *b. The uncertainty of life (v. 14a)*

*14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.*

**This statement echoes Proverbs 27:1, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.” These Christian businessmen**

were making plans for a whole year when they could not even be sure about *one day!* Yet hear their confident assertion: “**We will go. We will spend a year. We will carry on business and make money**” (4:13). This **false confidence reminds us of the farmer in the parable of Jesus** in Luke 12:16–21. The man had a bumper crop; his barns were too small; so he decided to build bigger barns and have greater security for the future. “And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry’” (Luke 12:19). What was God’s reply to this man’s boasting? “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (12:20). **Life is not uncertain to God, but it is uncertain to us.** Only when **we are in his will** can we be **confident of today and tomorrow**, for we know that **he is leading us and that he holds our personal future in his good will and he only has good thoughts toward us.**

### ***c. The brevity of life (v. 14b)***

***14b What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.***

Brevity of life is a repeated theme of Scripture. To us, **life seems long and we measure it in years; but in comparison to eternity, life is only a brief vapor.** James borrowed this figure of speech from the Book of Job where we find many pictures of the brevity of life: “My **days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle**” (Job 7:6). “As a cloud vanishes and is gone” (7:9). “**Our days on earth are but a shadow**” (Job 8:9). “Man born of woman **is of few days** and full of trouble. ... like a fleeting shadow, **he does not endure**” (14:1–2). **We count our years at each birthday, but God tells us to number our days** (Psa. 90:12). After all, **we live a day at a time**, and those days rush by quickly the older we grow. **Since life is so brief**, we cannot afford merely to “**spend our lives**”; and we certainly do not want to “**waste our lives.**” We **must invest our lives in those things that are eternal**—beginning with the **revealed will of God that is revealed in Holy Scripture. The Bible becomes our eternal starting point.** Through the Holy Scriptures **God gives us precepts, principles, and promises to guide our lives as we live in His eternal nature.**

### ***d. The frailty of man (v. 16)***

***16 As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.***

Man’s pretentious boasting only covers up his weakness. “Man proposes but God disposes,” wrote Thomas A. Kempis. But Solomon said it first: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD” (Prov. 16:33). **Man cannot control future events. He has neither the wisdom to see the future nor the power to control it.** So for him to boast is to arrogantly **presume on the future without considering God’s will.** He is, in effect, **making himself God. How utterly foolish!** It’s like going through a dark jungle **without a map**, or over a stormy sea **without a compass. Disaster awaits those who ignore God’s will.**

And it **also awaits those**, who knowing God’s will, **disobey it...**

## 2. Disobeying God's will (4:17)

*17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

Now **the arrogance of the self-willed goes even further**. They not only fail to seek God's will, but knowing his will they fail to obey it. In such failure they sin against God. It is as though they are saying to God, "I know what you want me to do, **but I prefer not to do it. I really know more about this than you do God, so I'm going to do it my way instead!**"

Why **do Christians who know God's will deliberately disobey it?** There are at least **three reasons**:

a. **Arrogance (pride)**. People like to imagine they are the master of their own fate; captains of their own ships. They like to think they can do it on their own. They are mistaken.

b. Ignorance of **the nature of God's will**. Some act as though the will of God is something that **may be accepted or rejected**. But in reality, God's will is not an *option*; it is an *obligation to conform with the ultimate reality*. **We cannot "take it or leave it."** He is the Creator and we are the creatures, his will ultimately prevails. **He is the Savior and Lord**, and we are his **children and servants**, we must **conform to his will gratefully and thankfully**. And to treat his will lightly, to **ignore reality, is to invite disaster**. To help us avoid that, God will **discipline those who disobey his will**.

c. The mistaken idea that **the will of God is a formula for misery**. **People sometimes think** God's will for them is **bitter medicine they must force** themselves to take. But they are wrong—in fact it is **disobedience** to God's will that is the ultimate **bitter medicine**. **It leads to misery**.

**What happens to Christians who deliberately disobey the known will of God? They are chastened by their loving Father until they learn to submit to their loving Father's good will for them (Heb. 12:5–11). Such discipline is proof they are God's children. Though it's hard to take, it has a comforting truth of sonship with it.** But in disobeying God's will there is also the danger of losing heavenly rewards. In 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, Paul compared the believer to a runner in the Greek races. In order to qualify for a crown, he had to obey the rules of the game. If any contestant was found to have disobeyed the rules, he was disqualified and humiliated. The issue here is not loss of salvation, but loss of reward. Disobeying God's will today is a serious thing, and it will appear very serious when the Lord returns and examines our works (Col. 3:22–25).

**So James warns us not to be ignorant of God's will or to disobey God's will. Rather, his exhortation to us is to obey God's will—live it actively. Every day...**

### **3. Obeying God's will (4:15)**

*15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."*

"If it is the Lord's will" is not just a statement on a believer's lips: it is the constant attitude of the heart. Such was the case for Jesus: "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Often Paul referred to the will of God as he shared his plans with his friends (Rom. 1:10; 15:32; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7). Paul did not consider the will of God a chain that shackled him; rather, it was a key that opened doors and set him free.

God's will for our lives connects us with the reality of God's purpose for our lives personally and the reality of how things are in general. His will for us is both general (true for all people) and specific (uniquely true for us). It is God's general will for example, that all people yield to him (2 Cor. 8:5); that all avoid sexual immorality (1Thes. 4:3); and that all rejoice, pray, and thank God (1Thes. 5:16–18). Then God has a specific will for each of us related to our unique spiritual gifting and the circumstances of our lives. In short, God's will is "tailor-made" for each one of us! Our challenge is to obey His will for us.

### **Conclusion**

So which of these three attitudes towards God's will is ours? Are we ignoring God's will. Are we disobeying God's will and just "doing our thing"? Or are we obeying God's will?

Two of these attitudes are wrong (the first two) and only bring sorrow and ruin. Let us instead humbly seek, find and then faithfully live the third attitude; obeying God's perfect will for us. To do this, it's important that we realize that God's will is not impersonal like some machine. No, it's a *living relationship between God and the believer in every way that is personal and intimate as we live in God and God lives in us*. Living in God's will IS our active participation in Jesus' life of living in and embracing God's will which is now ours by grace—it's a gift that has always been there, but in ignorance or in stubborn rebellion we have ignored it. So let's embrace God's will for us as Jesus did—let's live it as Jesus did. Thankfully, we can trust God as our loving Father to bring us back to his will, to discipline us if we become callous to his will. He promises to hear us when we repent of our arrogance and disobedience. So let's run to him, seek him and obey his will for us. Live God's will.

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