

# If The Lord Wills

James 4:13-17

13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. (James 4:13-17 (ESV))

In the days before personal computers and smart phones, I used a reminder system called “Day Timer”. And in there I kept notes of my plans and all my reminders of tasks and appointments. It was a helpful guide to keep me on-course in my daily rush of work.

But sadly, as I think back on those days, I really can’t remember having a regular habit of thinking, “If the Lord Wills” I will do these things.

Which brings the question that is prompted by the words of this text. By that behavior, was I perhaps demonstrating a kind of “arrogance” within my soul? And as for you, “Do you have arrogance lurking within our personality?”

That question might, at first, seem a bit harsh to you, because in most of our minds, we usually consider “arrogance” to be one of the more offensive attributes that a person might have within their character. And it often is! But the question still needs to be asked by each of us, “Am I, are you arrogant?” Do I have arrogance quietly living within my soul?”

Consider with me for a moment, the nature of arrogance. The stereotypical forms of arrogance are usually easy to recognize. A person’s behavior reveals it. They are prideful, self-centered, conceited, egotistical and boastful.

But arrogance is also a very clever form of sin, and it doesn’t always present itself in those more obvious behaviors. Arrogance can also be very “subtle”, and almost imperceptible. And that can be especially so within the heart and the character of a genuine believer, manifesting itself in quiet and inoffensive ways, such that we might never recognize its presence within ourselves.

And that's the manner of arrogance that I would like for us to consider most within these moments that we have left today. Because recall that these words of this Book of James are given to fellow believers, believers like you and me. And here in these words, God is giving a warning to us as believers that, yes, those of us who do earnestly believe in Him and who do earnestly desire to be "good Christians", can not only "stumble into", but can actually live out most all the days of our life bound up within subtle forms of arrogant behaviors.

And may I say that you and I are not usually the best of source to ask this question of! We are seldom really truthful with ourselves or anyone else, when it comes to criticisms. If we are seriously seeking to know truth about ourselves, the very best source to go to is God. In Psalm 139, we're told that God really does know us. And there in Psalm 139, He gives us the perfect prayer to ask such questions about ourselves. Listen! Psalm 139, verse 1,

1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me! 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. (Psalm 139:1-4 (ESV))

And then in verse 23, a prayer,

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV))

If we really want to know if arrogance lives within us, then God is the one we must go to for that answer.

Turn back with me to our text and let's consider these words!

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. (James 4:13-17 (ESV))

To the average reader, plans such as these in verse 13,

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit". (James 4:13)

These are very ordinary plans, especially if a person works in a field such as “sales”. Salesmen and their sales organizations must, of necessity continually be on the lookout for “new territories” for their products. And it is not a sin for us to make plans, even very detailed plans.

With school beginning this week, I’m reminded that every good teacher needs to make plans for their teaching schedules, planning for the subject matter that they will teach in September and in December and in April and May.

Planning is such a very important thing to do. So then, yes, plans are good and not in themselves sinful.

The warnings given here about how sinful behavior can creep into our planning process has not so much to do with the plans themselves, but with our “presumption” that the times and the activities that we are planning are solely within our own hands and our own control, that if we plan it well and execute it well, our plan will succeed. And that is the essence of the “sin of presumption”.

But how and when does “planning” cross the line and become a “sin of presumption”? What is “presumption”? Just to remind those of us who don’t use this word often, some of the synonyms for “presumption” are, arrogance, self-centered, impropriety, disrespect, inconsiderate, overconfident and insolent. And those words give the exact reason why “presumption” is sinful. Such a behavior completely ignores, even denies that God is anywhere to be found, denies that He truly is sovereign, denies that He has plans and desires for the days, the activities and the behaviors of our lives.

And the very moment that we begin to think and say such things as, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”. Or, perhaps more appropriate to us, we might say, “I want a new truck or a new car. I think I’ll be on the lookout for one”. Or, we might say, “I think I’ll move to Jackson and find a job there.”

If our heart and our mind has not first brought God and His plans fully into the consideration, then we have probably crossed the line onto the sinful path of “presumption” and “arrogance”, and we are denying the sovereignty and providence of God.

I’m reminded of the parable that Jesus told in Luke 12 about the “presumptuous” farmer. There He said,

16 . . . “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, 17 and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ 18 And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” 20 But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ (Luke 12:16-20 (ESV))

And in Mark 8, we read,

36 "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?  
(Mark 8:36 (NASB))

Look with me again at these words of James 4, and note carefully the manner in which God worded verses 13 and 14. These two verses are intentionally set in direct opposition to each other so that you and I won't be confused about the point God wants to make to us. Verses 13 and 14,

13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. (James 13-14)

God cannot be any more clear to us. We really do not know what tomorrow will bring. Our life really is like a “mist”, a “vapor”. And while we might think that we can “catch life in our hands and control it”, this comparison of our life and our plans being like a morning “mist” is so fitting. The next time you're out on a cool morning and the mist is all around you, try to catch some of it in your hands. You can't!

God's words are clear. Our lives, the moments that we live each day and our length of days on the earth, no matter how long they may be, are still only a “mist” as compared to eternity. And in eternity is where God lives. And Here He is exhorting you and me to join with Him, and have Him and have eternity always in view, in every thought, word and behavior. He reminds us in Psalm 90, that

10 The length of our days is seventy years - or eighty, if we have the strength;  
yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.  
(Psalm 90:10 (NIV))

And God wants you and me to cry out to Him, saying,

12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.  
(Psalm 90:12 (NIV))

And He want us to always remember the warning given in Ecclesiastes 12, that He  
14 . . . will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is  
good or evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:14 (NASB))

As I mentioned a moment ago, our subtle form of arrogance often causes us to make excuses, saying such things as “but I’m just trying to make it through each day. I’m not really trying to be “unspiritual” when I say such things as, “I’m going to buy a new car or a new truck.” Or, “I think I’ll move to Jackson. I hear there’s work there.” I’m just being “practical”.

But may I say again, as I have said on so many, many other occasions, “Everything, everything that we think and say and do is always “spiritual”. And while we may not intentionally try to ignore, or deny the Lord when we make our plans and say the things we say, Jesus’ words to us are ever and always true, that out of the hidden things of our heart proceeds hidden sins, such as this sin of presumption.

And again, perhaps you and I really are not intentionally trying to leave the Lord out of our plans. But please understand that by our presumptuous words and behaviors, we might as well have been intentional. If we live every moment by our own wits and abilities, are we not doing the same thing as those who intentionally declare that they will be the “masters of their own destiny”. If we look and act and behave like them, are we not one of them?

You and I must begin today to change our behavior. And no, we really can’t change our behavior by our own power. But the Holy Spirit can do things that we can’t do.

And simply put, if you and I can develop bad habits, like the habit of forgetting to acknowledge the Lord when we plan, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can begin to change and develop a habit of “tarrying” for a while with the Lord, asking His counsel, listening for His “still small voice”. And then folks, life will begin to have far different and far better results.

The Holy Spirit can save us a lot of time and heartache. If we will simply pause in the rush of the day and ask Him if it is His Will for us to “go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”. Think about it! Perhaps there is no profit to be had there, and He can save you the trip and the heartache of failure.

Before we close, may I share some lyrics from a song from the 1960’s. It’s not a Christian song, but it has Christian principles that are appropriate to this warning from

the Lord. The song is entitled Mr. Businessman, and it's by Ray Stevens. Listen, he sings,

Itemize the things you covet  
As you squander through your life,  
Bigger cars, bigger houses  
Term insurance for your wife

Your morals are exempting you from guilt and shame  
Heaven knows you're not to blame

You better, Take care of business Mr. Businessman  
What's your plan? Get down to business Mr. Businessman if you can,  
Before it's too late, And you throw your life away

Did you see your children growing up today?  
And did you hear the music of their laughter  
as they set about to play?

Did you catch the fragrance of those roses in your garden today?  
Did the morning sunlight warm your soul and brighten up your day?  
Do you qualify to be alive?  
Or is the limit of your senses just so as only to survive?

Spending counterfeit incentive  
Wasting precious time and health  
Placing value on the worthless  
Disregarding priceless wealth  
You can wheel and deal with the best of them  
And steal it from the rest

Eighty-six proof crutches prop  
you up to where the smiles are all synthetic  
and the ulcers never stop.  
And when they take that final inventory,  
yours will be the same sad story  
as so many others, and  
No one will really care,

You better, take care of business Mr. Businessman

What's your plan?

Get down to business Mr. Businessman if you can.

Now again, this may not qualify as being a Christian song, and perhaps the singer was only thinking of home and family when he sang of "Getting down to business Mr. Businessman".

But may I suggest that he might have really intended to warn Mr. Businessman to "get down to business with the Lord", because, as these scriptures for today remind us.

14 . . . you do not know what tomorrow will bring. (Mr. Businessman) What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."  
(James 4:14-15 (ESV))

The simple truth is as simple as Psalm 31 declares it to be. "My times are in your hands, oh Lord"!

And God is calling out to each of us, saying

33 . . . seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33 (ESV))