

The Epistle of James
October 15, 2017
James 4:13-17
God's Will

Sermon #17
Reading: Psalm 39

Devotion To God's Will

The Scriptures are replete in laying out the marks or outward life of a true Christian. The Epistle of James main theme is that one may know by their outward works and behavior the outpouring of their true inner self and by this they know if they have truly been regenerated and are saved. What are the marks of a true Christian? To begin with, they love God, repent of their sins, turn away from the sins of the world, seek humility, live for God's glory, pray, love others, desire to serve others, show spiritual growth, have a deep love of God's Word and desire to be obedient to his Word. Nothing is a stronger testimony of a true believer than their testimony in living out the will of God for this includes all the other marks of a true Christian. King David wrote, "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." (Psalm 40:8) Jesus taught, "For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:35) However, Jesus also warned and made clear, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21) Peter exhorted the believers in Christ, "...to live for the rest of the time in the flesh (*a person's moral life here on earth*) no longer for human passions but for the will of God." (1 Peter 4:2) John in his first letter also wanted believers to understand, writing, "the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:17) For one to grow in spiritual maturity and to experience the transformation in life by Jesus replacing their heart of stone with a heart of flesh one must desire to live the will of God. This is what the prophet Ezekiel said would happen, "I (*God*) will give you a new

heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26)

Both Old and New Testament prophets have declared for one to live out the will of God brings together all elements of a believer’s life; spiritual, love, humility, submission and obedience. There was and is one who expressed this perfectly, one who did the absolute will of God out of love and that was our Lord Jesus Christ. He had a mission to fulfill the will of the triune God and he completed that mission perfectly. In John chapter 6 are the words of Christ, first he gives us some background and promises and then states his mission. Reading from John chapter 6 beginning at verse 35, “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.’” In this passage we find out for believers - Jesus is the very substance of our spiritual nourishment in life and those who wholly give themselves to Christ he will never cast us out. Christ continues by giving us his mission,³⁸ “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.” Christ’s whole life and mission was to fulfill the will of the Father. One might ask, what is the will of the Father? Listen as Jesus continues,³⁹ “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:35-40) So Jesus was completely faithful in doing the Father’s will and he asks us to surrender to him. If we surrender to him, he will help us be faithful to the will of God. We need to focus our lives on living the will of God because of our love for him and “We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

On the other hand if there is a disregard for God's will it indicates pride and the sin of pride underlies most of the conflict and sin of the world. Those who refuse to submit to God's will give evidence that their lives have not been transformed by God's saving grace. Paul summed it up so well in his letter to Titus writing, ¹¹“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹²training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:11-14) We belong to Christ and are to live zealously to do good works for his glory.

Now we move to James and his practical approach of one's response to God's will. James uses people's response to God's will to give us insights – three negative and one positive.

Disregarding God's Will

Read along with me in James chapter 4, verse 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’ — ¹⁴yet 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.” Our first negative response is to disregard God's will, living as if God does not exist. Look at verse 13, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.” These are the people who habitually live without regard to God's will. James is rebuking those who think they have control and make plans without concern for God's will.

At the time of James writing many Jewish people had spread out from Israel and migrated throughout the Roman Empire and were known for being effective

business people. There is nothing wrong and it is not sinful to be wise and good at business. There is nothing wrong with these men working hard and becoming successful. The problem here was not what they did do - but in what they did not do. In their goals, plans and hard work they disregarded God's will. God was not part of their daily life or their business plans. They may have made time for God on the Sabbath just as some who call themselves Christian behave throughout the week, at work and in business as if God does not exist and then change their behavior for a few hours on Sunday.

Remember last Sunday when we looked at Satan's 5 "I wills" from Isaiah 14. Let me read them again, "You, *Satan*, said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' " In the same way the businessmen James is referring to make 5 self-centered assumptions that leave out God. First, they chose their own timing, "today or tomorrow." Second, they chose the location that seems good to them, "such and such a town." Third, they have decided on the duration of their venture, "spend a year there." Fourth, they have chosen the business they will "trade" in. Fifth, they have decided their goal is purely "profit" motivated. James is not criticizing their plans as evil, but that they have excluded God and this is evil. They are planning as if they have control and know the future, just as Satan attempted.

This is what Jesus addressed as recorded in the parable found in Luke chapter 12, "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?’²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:16-21) So like Jesus told of the man who planned his future without regard to God’s will, James also gives 2 reasons why those who chose to disregard God in their plans are foolish. First, James says to these people at the beginning of verse 14, “you do not know what tomorrow will bring.” Just like the rich man in the parable, they were ignorant of the future. In Proverbs we read, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.” (Proverbs 27:1) One only has to sit still and observe – life is far from simple and ever is becoming more complex. We have so little control over a very few things. However, by seeking God’s will as we plan life, he will give us wisdom and we will be blessed. As King David wrote,³ “Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. ⁴ Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵ Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.” (Psalm 37:3-5)

The second reason James gives that leaving God out of our plans is foolish is the swiftness of life. Verse 14 continues, “What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” Job understood this saying, “My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away; they see no good. ²⁶ They go by like skiffs of reed, like an eagle swooping on the prey.” (Job 9:25-26) David summed up the breath of the Bible’s teaching on the swiftness of life,¹⁵ “As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; ¹⁶ for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.” For us men or maybe I should for me, when I was young I thought I would set the world on fire and then came to realize I did not even get it to smoke. Now if you are depressed, hold on, hear the promise David continues with in verse 17, “But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his

righteousness to children's children,¹⁸ to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.” (Psalm 103:15-18) Like the businessmen James is writing about, before God saved me, I learned the hard way that to disregard God was foolish. Life is short and if we hope to have an impact on the world then we must seek God's will for his will is sure and eternal. When we submit to God's will David wrote God's love is everlasting for us and our children's children. So, both I, and those James wrote about should,¹⁵ “ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’ ” Living the Lord's will brings peace and purpose into ones life.

Denying God's Will

The first wrong attitude James addresses was the disregarding of God's will in ones life. The second is worst, knowing there is a God, but in order to do as one wants and not feel convicted, they deny God's will. The first set of businessmen was atheists, but this second set are self-theists deliberately placing themselves above God. They foolishly live the “I wills” just as Satan does. James says of these people in verse 16, “As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.” My beloved, we have been saved by the grace of God. However, as redeemed but sinful people, we have the tendency to set aside God's will in favor of our own desires and plans. We may not deny God or look to ourselves as gods, but to deny God's will is at best disobedient and at worst places us on a path of destruction – all this is sin and separates us from God. James is even clearer than I, whether you are a believer or an unbeliever, these boasts are arrogant and “All such boasting is evil.” Believer or not, those who out of their own self-importance deny God's will emulate Satan's sin of desiring to be a god and will suffer God's judgment.

Disobeying God's Will

Those guilty of James third negative found in verse 17 affirm God's existence and recognize his sovereignty, but proceed in life to disobey God's will for their own ambitions. Reading verse 17, **"So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."** This third group knows God's will and that only God deserves honor and glory, but they cannot let go of the world. God expresses his will in the broadest sense through the entire breath of the scriptures as found only in the Bible. In a quick overview, it is God's will according to 1 Timothy (2:4), that **"...God our Savior, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."** and in 2 Peter (3:9) **"The Lord ... desires none should perish, but that all should reach repentance."** God blesses those who come to him with repentant hearts. Paul wrote the Ephesians, **"Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is ... to be filled with the Spirit."** (Ephesians 5:17-18) He wrote to the Thessalonians, **"For this is the will of God, your sanctification."** (1 Thessalonians 4:3) Both Paul and James write that a benchmark of Christians is that they submit to the will of God. Even suffering to obey the will of God is better than disobedience. Peter wrote, **"For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil."** (1 Peter 3:17) When a believer obeys out of love and is repentant, they are filled with the Spirit, enabling them to live the Word of God and be sanctified by it, making them desire to submit to God's will and have a willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ and by this they will be able to as David wrote, **"Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."** (Psalm 37:4) God will plant his will in your heart and his will – will become the resolve be your desires and God will fulfill them.

To be clear, as James is always clear, to know God's will makes one responsible to obey his will and if one fails to do so, they are in sin. Disregarding God's will is sin. Denying God's will is sin. Disobeying God's will is sin. The

best illustration of one man sinning against God in all 3 of these areas is the prophet Jonah. He knew the will of God and disregarded, denied and disobeyed it. God's will and his plans will be fulfilled. God disciplined Jonah in order that Jonah would submit. Like Jonah those who chose to sin against God will be disciplined here on earth and possibly for eternity. Avoid the chastening Jonah received by submitting your heart and soul to God's will.

Doing God's Will

In contrast to these 3 negatives James lays out as sins against God, he does place 1 positive in this passage. As children of the living God this is what I want to close with. Receive God's encouragement as James writes in verse 15, that as those saved by the grace of God we should always say, *"If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."* Simply, we are to accept and do God's will and by this we will know peace. Although believers, we still sin. But our heart's desire is to always be in God's will. We are to work at making God's will central to every plan we have. As believers we recognize we live by God's grace and his will. For us, my beloved, doing God's will is an act of worship done from the heart of flesh he has given us. Living God's will becomes our greatest desire and therefore it becomes our way of life. As Paul prayed, I also pray for all of you. Let me close in prayer, Lord I ask *"that you our church and my beloved brothers and sisters may be filled with the knowledge of his your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*(Colossians 1:9-14) Amen and amen!