

Responding to the Will of God

James 4:13-17

59-28

We...we're having a wonderful time in the book that God has given us, the holy scriptures, studying the epistle of James. And I encourage you to look there with me, if you will, to the last portion of chapter 4. James chapter 4, this is a tremendously practical little section of Scripture. Not an unfamiliar one at all. And yet in its familiarity perhaps not well understood as that is often the case in Scripture, sometimes those passages with which we are most familiar in terms of the words, we are least familiar in terms of the significance. And the allusion is often present that because we know what it says we know what it means...this is a tremendously practical portion of Scripture.

Verses 13 through 17 deal with living by the will of God--living by the will of God. Obviously if we look into the life of a believer we will assume that a Christian is a person basically committed to doing the will of God. In fact, Jesus said that, you know, in Mark 3, the one who does My will, the will of My Father, the same is My brother, sister, father, mother. What He was saying is those who are related to Me are related to Me as demonstrated by their desire to do My Father's will.

I would venture to say that nothing is more characteristic of a Christian than a desire to do the will of God. It doesn't mean we always do it, but the desire is there. And when we fail to do it, there's a sense of shame. The psalmist put it this way, in Psalm 40 and verse 8 he said, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God, yes Thy law is within my heart." And if, as Ezekiel said, the law of God was to be written in the heart and if as Jeremiah identified it in the New Covenant, the law was written in the inward part, then it must be true that if I'm a new creation, God has planted His law within me, He has planted therefore in me the knowledge of and the desire to fulfill that law. So we can safely say it is a mark of a believer that he or she desires to do the will of God.

The psalmist also says in Psalm 143 verse 10, "Teach me to do Thy will for Thou art my God." It's as if he is saying in one place I want to do it, and in another place I'm not sure I know how. I delight in doing it, teach me specifically how. Basic to one's relationship to Christ then is doing the will of God.

This is, I think, enforced strongly in the words of the Lord Jesus in John 7 verse 17, "If any man will do His will he shall know of the teaching whether it be God or whether I speak of Myself." Again Jesus identifies a relationship with God linking it with doing God's will.

In 1 Peter I'm reminded of chapter 4 and just at the beginning of the chapter, verse 2, it says that the one who has taken on Christ no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lust of men but to the will of God. Again identifying the will of God as the driving force in the life of a child of God.

But it's said no better than in 1 John 2:17, "And the world passes away and the lust of it, but he that is doing the will of God is abiding forever." In other words, the people with eternal life are the people

who do the will of God. It is then a characteristic of true faith, saving faith, salvation, Christianity, a right relationship to God that we desire to and do to one degree or another obey the will of God.

And who is our greatest example? Who was it who said, "I am come not to do My own will but the will of Him that sent Me,"? None other than the Lord Jesus Christ. In John's gospel, chapter 4 verse 34, chapter 5 verse 30, Jesus essentially said that. "I came into the world to do the will of God." In other words, when I as a believer look at the model of Christ I see the essence of a relationship to God bound up in perfect obedience. And though my obedience is imperfect, it is nonetheless characteristic of my relationship to Him as His child bearing His nature that I have a desire to do His will. On the other hand, if there is in the heart no desire to do the will of God, that is the mark of a rebel, that is the mark of one who has not been transformed, one who does not love God.

So for James, as we come to verses 13 to 17, all of that to say this, "Doing the will of God is another test of living faith, it's another way to examine your heart to see if you're genuinely God's child." Is it your strong desire to do God's will? Do you find yourself with ease praying the disciples' prayer, Jesus taught us to pray with these words, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come...and then He said this...Thy...what?...will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Does that come easy from you because that's the cry of the heart of a true child of God...seeking to do God's will. Constant disregard for and constant disinterest in the will of God is the surest evidence of the presence of pride. That is to say...I am the ruler of my life, I am the king of my own life, I will be sovereign in my own life...and that kind of pride is a barrier to saving faith because in chapter 4 and verse 6 James says God gives grace not to the proud but to whom? To the humble.

And so, just as pride is the ugly sin behind conflict mentioned in the first part of the chapter, just as pride is the ugly sin behind worldliness mentioned in the next part of the chapter, just as pride is the ugly sin behind defaming slander, as we saw down through verse 12, so pride is the ugly sin behind a disregard for the will of God because pride says I will do what I will do and no one will intrude on my sovereignty. And so those who do not submit willingly, even longingly to the will of God, those who violate the law of God, those who seek to pull God down off His throne, as it were, and reign supreme over their own lives give evidence of not having a transformation have happened in their life at all.

Now remember, James is dealing with black and white issues. And he says on the one hand people who do not do the will of God are proud, that's the essence of what his meaning here is, and therefore give evidence of no transformation at all for God does not give grace to proud people. On the other hand, those who do the will of God do so because in humility they were saved and granted a new desire and a new nature which is manifest in the longing to do God's will.

Now in handling the subject and the test of the will of God, he does it in a very pragmatic way. And I think you're going to enjoy the insights that James gives us here. But let me read the text because he really couches his words in very practical terms using illustrations rather than abstract concepts.

Verse 13, "Come now, you that say today or tomorrow we'll go in to such-and-such city and continue there a year and buy and sell and make money. Whereas you know not what shall be on the next day for what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time then vanishes away. For you ought to say if the Lord will we shall live and do this or that. But now you boast in your braggings and all such boasting is evil. Therefore to him that knows to do good and does it not, it is to him sin." Or literally in the Greek "sin it is to him."

Now in that very fascinating passage which basically is built around the illustration of a businessman who thinks he can run his own life we get great insight into this matter of how we approach the will of God. There are given here four possible attitudes toward the will of God, you have them on the outline there in the bulletin, or the outline you received tonight. Four possible attitudes toward the will of God flow out of this text.

Attitude number one I call the foolishness of ignoring God's will...the foolishness of ignoring God's will. There are some people who just live flatly ignoring God's will. They live as if God wasn't even around. That's not something that's even on their agenda, that's not something occupies any thought at all for them. We meet them in the form of this businessman who is the illustration in verses 13 and 14.

Look again at verse 13, "Come now," "come now" that means "get this," that means "now listen." This is a signal for attack in somewhat familiar Old Testament prophetic style. "Let me have your ears," this is a sort of insistent, rather brash call for attention. It is used, by the way, again in chapter 5 verse 1, "Come now, you rich men," and these are the only times that that particular address are used anywhere on the pages of the New Testament.

So in a very abrupt and a very forceful and a rather insistent way, James says...Now I want you to get this and I want you to get it good. And he directs his attack to those that say, this identifies the target of his rebuke. The ones who are saying, present tense, the ones who are characteristically saying...in other words, this is their habit. The word for "say" is *lego* which means saying something out of reason or logic. So those of you who have reasoned this out and you're continually talking like this, I have something to say. To those of you who have absolutely no regard for God's will at all, you reason and you articulate your plans as if God never existed. You say "today or tomorrow, we'll go into such-and-such a city and continue there a year and do business or do trade and make money." Now that's the picture of a typical merchant, a typical businessman. He was involved in commerce. He was involved in trade of some sort, but he totally ignores God. There's no place for God in his planning. His agenda does not include God.

Many of the Jews, of course, in the ancient world were traders. They were businessmen then as they are now and they were very successful. As towns sprung up in the ancient world or as they flourished and grew or as they became the trade route towns where there was the intersecting from various countries, they became focal points of business. And a strategizing businessman would set out to do his trade in a hot spot where he could succeed and lay out his plans. Here is that typical merchant, that typical Jewish merchant, if you will. Of course James' audience is Jewish as he notes in chapter 1. And they have constructed the whole plan of operation. There are no contingencies, you will notice...today or tomorrow we will go in to such a city, such-and-such a city, we'll stay there a year, we will do our business and we will make money. That's pretty confident talk, isn't it? That's typical non-contingency self-designed planning...typical of men.

First of all, they choose their own time. Now it's hypothetical so he says "today or tomorrow" putting a little bit in a general sense, but basically saying you choose your own time, the time that you affirm. Secondly, you choose your own location, we will go into such-and-such a city. Thirdly, you choose your own time table, and we will stay there for a year, or literally the Greek says "do a year there." And then you choose your own operation, and we will do business. Interesting Greek word. It is the word *emporeu somatha*(??), the first part of it, *emporeu* is the root from which we get *emporium*, and

an emporium is a place of business, to conduct business is what it means. And so we'll go and do our business. So they choose their own time, their own location, their own time table, their own operation and even their own objective...we will make money. We will make a profit.

Now in and of itself, is that kind of planning sinful? Is it? Is there something ethically wrong with planning like that? Is there something immoral about saying we're going to go over here we're going to stay there, we're going to do this, we're going to make money? I think every businessman would say that. I don't think in itself there's anything immoral about it, anything unethical about it. No spiritual principles are violated in that verse by anything that is said. In fact, any businessman worth his salt ought to have some kind of plan, right?

You see, the issue here is not in what is said, the issue here is in what is not said. That's the implication. In fact, careful planning is essential and careful planning is expected. And nothing that is said there reveals the problem. But what is not said does reveal the problem because there's no mention of God. There is no thought for God. And we would say that this is practical atheism, this is living your life as if there was no God at all, the foolishness of ignoring the will of God, planning your life as if God did not exist at all, though you even may believe He does. And believe me, there are folks who believe God exists but do not include Him in their plans. It's basically an attitude much like we saw in verses 11 and 12. The attitude of the sinner is an attitude that is common to every sin, and that is when you sin you exalt yourself above the law of God, therefore you dethrone God and make yourself God and say I have a higher law, I will abide by my law, not God's law. So any sin, in a sense, dethrones God and puts you up on the throne.

And here it is no different. This is the man who runs his own life, this is the woman who runs her own life, foolishly ignoring God and showing utter disrespect for His sovereignty. There are no contingencies at all. And the fatal flaw, frankly, is presumption...presumption. How do you know you can do it today or tomorrow? How do you know you can get to that city? How do you know that you can stay that long? How do you know you'll be able to do business? How do you know you're going to make money? You don't know but you plan as if you knew everything, you plan as if you were omniscient, omnipotent and really invulnerable. That's presumption.

That's very much reminiscent, if you'll look at Luke 12, of an illustration given by our Lord that we noted last week, and I remind you of it. Verse 16 of Luke 12, "And He spoke a parable to them saying, `The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentiful. He thought within himself saying...What will I do because I have no place to bestow my crops, I'm so wealthy I don't even know where to put it I've got so much. He's like a man looking for somewhere to invest the millions of dollars he can't spend. And he said...I'll do this, I'll pull down my barns and build greater and there will I bestow all my crops and my goods.'" Don't think of giving it to anybody else, just think of how you can build bigger barns to store it for yourself.

"And I will say to my soul, `Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years,'" you've got it made. I mean, it's all there, you can live the life of ease for many years. Take it easy, eat, drink and be merry, but there are no contingencies in the plan, however, God said, "You fool, this night your soul will be required of you." You're going to die tonight. A man or a woman is a fool who does not plan for contingencies related to God. We don't know what the future holds. We have no idea.

Look at verse 14 then of James 4. James says you lay out all this planning as if you were invincible, as if you were able to see into the future, presuming that all of this will come to pass with no thought

for God at all. Verse 14, "Whereas you do not know what shall be on the next day." On tomorrow, he says, you don't know what tomorrow brings.

The first thing that makes this planning without God foolish is ignorance. You don't know anything about tomorrow, you don't know anything about tomorrow, you don't know the future. He, of course, seems to be drawing back a principle that's in Proverbs 27 verse 1 where it says, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow for you know not what a day may bring forth," you remember that? You don't what's coming tomorrow. And so when you make your plan, you make your plan to encompass the contingencies of the will of God and you're a fool to do any differently.

Do you understand how complex life is? Life is not simple. It is an infinite complexity of forces, events, people, circumstances, all beyond your control and my control, so variable, so utterly uncontrollable that it is beyond any man to either ascertain the future or design the future or control the future.

I was curious last week to hear the newscast about a major corporate executive who was fired from a very large corporation that you all know very well. And the reason was that he was putting billions of dollars in the stock of a bankrupting company, to the extent that he cost his own company in excess of a billion dollars. He had it all figured out but he didn't plan for the bankruptcy which was unknown to him. Life is loaded with contingencies. And a person is a fool who thinks he or she can order that life with utter disregard for God's will.

I was thinking about how complex life is and I read this, I thought it was kind of curious...suppose you take ten pennies and mark them from one to ten...just one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten on the pennies. Put them in your pocket and shake your pocket...just shake it around for a while, mix them up. Now try to draw them out in sequence from one through ten, the way you put them in. Putting each coin back in your pocket after each draw. You draw out "one" you put it back, draw out "two" put it back, draw out "three"...your chance of drawing out number one is one in ten. Your chance of drawing number one and two in succession is one in a hundred. Your chance of drawing number one, two, and three in succession is one in a thousand. Your chance of drawing one, two, three, four in succession is one in ten thousand, and so on until your chance of drawing number one through ten in succession would reach the unbelievable figure of one chance in ten billion.

Now if you can't deal with ten pennies in your pocket, how you going to control everything in your environment? You can't. Infinite complexities that are far out beyond your ability and my ability to control. And yet there are some people in the world who imagine foolishly that they are in charge. The foolishness of ignoring God's will. And think about it from the other angle. What your ignoring is not just the existence of God's will but the benefit of it. What a confidence it is to believe in a sovereign God who knows perfectly and with unerring accuracy every factor in the universe and who is controlling them all to His own purposes and wants to make you a part of those purposes. So not only is it foolish to order your life, ignoring the will of God from the viewpoint that you can't control it, but it is foolish to try to live that way because you're cancelling out the very thing which can give your life meaning, and that is the work of God in your behalf. And He alone is the one who controls everything.

Do you remember the familiar words of Psalm 37, I'm sure you do. If you've memorized any scriptures, you probably have memorized these. Psalm 37, "Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt

thou dwell in the land and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He'll give you the desires of your heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass." Give your life to the Lord, give your future to the Lord. Do you remember Proverbs 3 verse 5? "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall...what?...direct your paths." I mean, why would you want to live in the midst of a complex world and try to order it all when you have absolutely no idea of what the future brings and couldn't control anything if you did have an idea? And why would you cancel out the One who does control everything and will do so for His glory and your good?

So the first thing about ignoring God's will is that it manifests itself in disaster because you're ignorant. Secondly, your fragile. Notice verse 14, "For what is your life?" What is a human life? That's what he means, earthly life. What is it? "For...he says...you are," and the best manuscripts translate this passage "for you are," not "it is," and that way it is personalized, "for you are even a *atmis...atmis*," probably related to atmosphere, at least in some form. You're a breath, you're a vapor, you're smoke, you're breath on a cold day that's visible, that's all you are, steam..."That is appearing for a little time and then being caused to vanish." What he's saying is you're so temporary, you are so temporary. I mean, it's coming to pass that you will die very soon. And like the rich man in Luke 12 it was going to be the next day, or even that evening. Life is so brief. Life is so short. And James is saying ignoring God's will is not only foolish because you are ignorant of the future, but it's foolish because you're so frail, so fragile, so vulnerable. How ridiculous to plan as if you were eternal, to plan as if you were almighty, to plan as if you were all wise and all knowing.

You go back to the oldest book in Scripture, most likely the first one written, Job, and chapter 7 we find statements like this, "As the cloud is consumed and vanishes away, so he that goes down to Sheol." In other words, people's lives, life and death, is like a cloud that moves across the sky and vanishes...so temporary, so passing. Verse 6 of the same chapter, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle," they fly by. Chapter 8 and verse 9, "But we are but of yesterday and know nothing because our days upon earth are a shadow." So brief.

Chapter 9 verse 25, "Now my days are swifter than a post, they flee away, they see no good. They are passed away as the swift ships, as the eagle that hasteneth to the prey." In chapter 14 verse 1, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble, he comes forth like a flower, is cut down, he flees as a shadow and does not continue."

The psalmist cries the same things, echoing repeatedly through the Psalms the brevity of man's life. And you can read it in Psalm 39, Psalm 90, Psalm 102, Psalm 103. How ridiculous then to plan your life without the eternal God.

James is saying there are some people who ignore the will of God foolishly. That's not true believers, true believers don't ignore God in their planning. They know they're ignorant. They know they're fragile and they know they need God. And so the first negative and wrong attitude toward God's will is that of ignoring it.

Look at the second one. First the foolishness of ignoring God's will, second the arrogance of denying God's will, or even demeaning it might be another way to express this. Go down to verse 16. There are not only those...now think with me on this...there are not only those who presumptuously ignore the will of God, just blasting on in their planning as if there were no God, but there are those who arrogantly set up their own will as superior to God. They may even know that God is there, as they

acknowledge. They may even know that God has a will and a purpose and that He is sovereign. But they defy that. They deny it in practice.

They're not only practical atheists, but they are self-theists, if you will, they have made themselves into God...made themselves into God, I should say. They may consider that God has a will, the first group didn't consider that God had a will at all, they didn't even consider God. These people may consider it but they don't think it's as important as their plans. Their plans are the most important.

And you know something? Even as Christians we can fall into this, boy, we can stumble into this sin...although it is not characteristic of our nature at all times to disregard or to seek to push the will of God aside, it does happen. There is a will that God has for every dimension of our lives. And I don't even think it's very mysterious because I think if God has a will for us He'll let us know if we seek to know it.

Notice verse 16 and see how James speaks of this particular sin. "But now...he says, actually it could be translated...in point of fact, or the fact is you boast," rather than rejoice, although the word could be translated "rejoice," in this context it's best to translate *kauchestha*(?) as "to boast." It literally means to be loud-mouthed, or to speak loudly and it had to do with either rejoicing on the one hand, or on the other hand loud-mouthing about your own accomplishments. He says you are boasting in your...and here's a word that means arrogant bragging, "You are boasting in your arrogant bragging." That word that is translated "bragging," or in some versions also "boasting," is a word that originally referred to the idea of wandering about. It just...it had to do with itinerating, just roaming. And was used of people who mounted a platform like this or a soapbox, a rock in a public place to do particularly one thing, and that was to sell phony goods. This is the original medicine man...step right up, folks, have I got the cure for you. The old quackery approach, attracting crowds, charlatans and extravagant fakes duping people to buy their product. They're really giving out lies, they could not accomplish what they claimed.

So it's the idea of standing up, opening your mouth and bragging pretentiously about something you haven't got and can't do...hollow pretentious self-glory, brash bragging about your cleverness and your skill which is untrue. So here you have the arrogance of the person who defies or denies the will of God and again usurps the place of God Himself.

I read again this week the famous poem of William Ernest Henley who died in 1903, he expressed this attitude in this poem, you may have heard it, its title is "Invictus." Here is the attitude of the man who knows there is a God but chooses to be God Himself. This is what Henley wrote: "Out of the night that covers me, black is the pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever God may be for my unconquerable soul. In the fell clutch of circumstance I have not winced nor cried aloud, under the bludgeonings of chance my head is bloody but unbowed. Beyond this place of wrath and tears looms but the horror of the shade and yet the menace of the years finds and shall find me unafraid. It matters not how straight the gate, how charged with punishment with scroll, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." It matters not how straight the gate, it matters not how charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul...that is defiance, isn't it? That's defying God. He gives testimony to knowing there is a God. He gives testimony to knowing Scripture...where else the term "straight gate" and "the fear of punishment"? But defying that stands arrogantly before God and calls God to try to withstand His sovereignty.

I was reading in Isaiah 47 about Babylon, just several verses from verse 7 or so, and here is a

judgment being given by the prophet Isaiah on Babylon. Listen to what he says, "And you said...this is Babylon, this is the claim Babylon made...I shall be a lady forever," so you didn't lay these things to your heart, you didn't remember the latter end, you thought you were going to live forever, you thought you were going to just parade your beauty on and on and on, "Therefore hear now this...Thou that are given to pleasures that dwelleth securely, that sayest in thy heart `I am and none else beside me.'" Isn't that an interesting statement? I am and none else beside me. "I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children, I'm in control of everything. But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children and widowhood, they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries and the great abundance of thine enchantments, for thou hast trusted in thy wickedness, thou hast said none sees me." There's no God, where is He? "Thy wisdom and thy knowledge has perverted thee and thou hast said in thine heart...I am and none else beside me." That's the attitude of arrogance.

And there are people who set their life in motion and defy with their plans the will of God...making themselves sovereign. Notice what he says at the end of verse 16, "All such boasting is wicked," poneria, all such arrogance is wicked. The word "wicked" is used of Satan who is ha poneros, the wicked one, the original sinner who sought to replace God, who said, "I will, I will, I will, I will be like the Most High God, I will ascend into the heights, the one who sought to usurp the throne of God, he was the original poneros, the original wicked one. But when you exalt your will over God's will, then you are like him, poneria, wicked. That's what God thinks of your boasting.

So the first attitude James notes is the foolish attitude of ignoring God's will all together. Do you know people like that who basically are practical atheists? They just conduct their whole life as if there wasn't a God at all. They don't even ignore...they don't even acknowledge God. It's not that they're angry, it's just that they're indifferent. And I'm sure you know people as I do who are like the second group, who arrogantly defy God and live their life flaunting it in the face of God.

There's a third negative approach to the will of God that is outlined in verse 17. This is a very familiar verse. But perhaps you've never seen it in its proper context. And this is the sin of disobeying God's will. First, ignoring God's will...secondly, defying or denying His will and thirdly, disobeying it. Here's the person who knows there's a God, who affirms there's a God, who knows God has a will, who knows God's will is supreme and yet who does...what?...disobeys it...disobeys it. They agree that God is there, they agree that God's will is supreme, they wouldn't be in class one and they wouldn't be in class two, but they just flatly don't do it.

Verse 17, here is a truism or an axiom, "Therefore to him that knows to do good," that is to do God's will, "and does it not, sin it is to him." Here is the person who believes in God and believes God is supreme and knows God has a will and just doesn't do it...doesn't do it. The one possessing the knowledge of God, a knowledge of God's will, he has an understanding of what is good, that is qualitatively good, morally excellent, worthy of honor, upright, righteous, he knows what's right. I think all of us have found ourselves in this category from time to time...we know and believe in God, we know God is supreme, we know what His will is and we just flatly don't do it.

Most of the time we see this verse as a verse sort of reduced to the idea of sins of omission, right? Not doing what you know you ought to do. And that's really the essence of it. But implied here in not doing what you know you ought to do is the fact that you went ahead and did what you ought not to do. Rarely can you isolate a sin of omission from a sin of commission. If you didn't do what you ought to have done then you surely did what you ought not to have done. I mean, you didn't stand in a

vacuum, did you? I will not do what I ought to do, nor will I do what I ought not to do, nor will I...you can't stand in the middle of that. If you do not do what you ought to do, you are doing what you ought not to do. So you can't...you can't just pull this out and isolate it to some sin of omission, it's really talking about all of life in terms of attitude toward the will of God and it's an attitude that says...I know what You want and I know You're supreme, but I'm not going to do it. That's all, I'm not going to do it.

You say, "Can we know God's will?" Sure. I can tell you what God's will is right now, you want me to tell you? You can get the little book I wrote on God's will and it's all in there. I can tell you what God's will is. First Timothy 2:4, "God our Savior who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God's will is that men be saved. That's God's will. And if you haven't come to Jesus Christ to receive salvation from Him, you haven't done God's will. You're disobedient, you're living in opposition and rebellion to what the Bible says is God's will. And that's why the Spirit of God through the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 16, "If any man loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema," devoted to destruction, damned and cursed because he didn't do God's will. God's will is that you be saved. God's will is that you give your life to Jesus Christ. God's will is that you embrace Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the One who died and rose again for your justification, that's God's will.

I'll take it a step further. Ephesians 5:17 says, "Be not unwise but understanding what the will of the Lord is, be not drunk with wine in which is excess but be filled with the Spirit." God's will is that you be saved and God's will is that you be Spirit-filled. That's not too mysterious. This is the will of God that you be Spirit-filled. That is to say controlled by the Holy Spirit, that you yield your life to His control. That's what Spirit-filled means because it's contrasted with drunkenness. And what he is saying there is if you're going to be under the control of something, don't be under the control of alcohol, be under the control of the Holy Spirit, yield to His power in your life...that's God's will. If you're not living a Spirit-controlled, Spirit-filled, Spirit-directed, Spirit-led life, then you're not doing the will of God.

Thirdly, 1 Thessalonians says, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." And that means your purity because he goes on, describes sexual sin and a call for holiness. God's will is that you be saved, God's will is that you be Spirit-controlled, God's will is that you be sanctified...or living a pure life, that's God's will.

Now if you look at your life and say, "I'm not saved," then you're flatly disobeying God's will. If you look at your life and say, "I'm not letting the Spirit of God control my life, I'm not obedient to His way and His will as it comes through the Word," then you're flatly disobeying God's will. If you're not living a pure life, then you're disobeying God's will.

Fourthly, in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 13, "This is the will of God that with well doing you put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." How do you do that? Verse 13, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." The fourth element is submission, submission to the law of the land, submission to those in authority over you. God's will is that you be saved. God's will is that you be Spirit-filled. God's will is that you be sanctified. God's will is that you be submissive...that you be a model of virtue, no matter what persecution you might be under...that's God's will.

And then 1 Peter also says in chapter 3 and verse 17, "For it is better if the will of God be so that you suffer." It's the will of God that you be such a dynamic, straightforward, strong, faithful, proclaiming Christian that you get a little flack and suffer. That's God's will.

Now are you living out God's will? Are you saved? Are you Spirit-controlled? Are you sanctified, living a pure life? Have you submitted to the ordinances of man for the testimony of Jesus Christ? Are you a model of virtue in submission? And are you willing to suffer for the cause of Christ? In other words, you'll hold true to the faith no matter what the price? That's the will of God. And that's revealed to be the will of God. And I've met people all my life running around saying...Oh, I wish I knew the will of God...oh, if I only knew the will of God for my life...and I have said, "Well let me start with you, I think I know what it is." And you take them through these things and they say..."No, that's not the part I'm worried about, I'm worried about where do I work, and where do we go to school, and who do I marry and what kind of job do I have and what should I do about this and should I move and do I need another car and what do I do about my boss?"

Wait a minute, you get these five in order and all that stuff will take care of itself because you'll be in such flow of the will of God that those other issues will be taken over by the Spirit of God. Remember what I read you? "Delight in the Lord and He'll give you the desire of your heart." I don't think that means that He'll give you what you desire, I think that means He'll plant His desire in you and then fulfill it. The point is, if you're walking in His will, your desires will be His desires, and you'll never have to ask the question...what's God's will?

Once you know the will of God, and now you know it, I just told it to you, so you can ring that one up, it's on your account, you know...you're responsible to obey and if you don't obey, it's sin. "Therefore to him that knows, to do the noble thing, the excellent thing, the good thing, that thing which God wills and does not, or literally is not doing it but living in disobedience, to him it is sin," or to put the emphasis where it belongs, "sin it is to him." That's putting sin in the emphatic place in the sentence. It's just outright hamartia, outright missing the mark, outright violation of God's Word, God's law.

You remember the parable in Luke chapter 12? Listen to these verses. "That servant who knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." Listen now, this is the servant who knew his lord's will and he be beaten with many stripes, "But he that knew it not and did commit things worthy of stripes will be beaten with few stripes, for whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." We like to use that little last part, "to whom much is given much will be required," to speak of blessings. What it's really talking about is accountability in chastening and judgment. So if you know the will of God and you don't do it, you're on the hot seat...it's sin and it's sin which the Lord notes and for which there is retribution.

When I was thinking about a classic illustration of someone who knew the will of God and wouldn't do it, I thought of Jonah, remember him? The prophet who took a long ride in...a short ride really on a long fish. Jonah knew God's will, it couldn't have been more clear, go to Ninevah and preach...go to Ninevah and preach. Turned around and went the opposite way from God and God made him pay. You can't flagrantly, openly violate the will of God without consequence. You look at Romans chapter 1, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, with their vain imaginations they invented an idolatrous system and God gave them over to a reprobate mind. And that's the story of the desecration of human kind who refuse to follow the God that revealed Himself to them and refused to obey His will.

So you have three possible negative ways you can treat the will of God. One, you can just live ignoring it as if there were no God at all. Two, you could acknowledge there is a God but that your will is supreme to His will. Or three, you can acknowledge there is a God whose will is supreme and

just not do it. Those are not the things that characterize a believer.

The things that characterizes a believer is found in verse 15, and this is the positive side. You ought to say, "If the Lord...what?...will we shall live and do this or that." Isn't that good? That's pretty practical stuff, isn't it? I mean, your life is blessed in the acknowledging of God's will, and that's our fourth point. The blessing of acknowledging and inherent in that, obeying God's will, it's the positive.

You remember the words of Jesus in John 13:17, He said, "If you know these things, happy are you if you...what?...do them." That's right.

So, he says instead you ought to say...in other words, rather than your practical atheism or your self-theism or your flagrant disobedience, you ought to be saying...present infinitive...you ought to be saying, "If the Lord wishes," or, "If it is the desire of the Lord, if it's His will, we will live," and that deals with the brevity of life, "and we will do this or that," that deals with the circumstances of life of which we are really ignorant. In other words, God's at the center of your plans. Beloved, that's the message...a simple one.

A true believer marks out his life in a plan at the center of which is His God. That's it. That's it. I was reading back in Joshua chapter 9 about the children of Israel, it said in verse 14 they got into a lot of trouble, they were disobedient, they made a foolish arrangement with the Gibeonites which turned out to harm them. And as I was reading it I came to this fourteenth verse and it says, "They asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." They did it without God. They didn't let His sovereignty touch every dimension of life.

If you want to live life the way God intended us to live it, then we put God at the center of all our plans. The true believer is the one who seeks divine counsel. The true believer is the one who has a heart to obey the counsel he seeks. And sure there are times of disobedience, sure there are times of disregard and even defiance against God's will, but down deep in our heart is that longing to do that which His will dictates. Submission to divine authority, submission to divine will, submission to divine providence is basic to the life of a believer. To put it simply, the Christian accepts the lordship of Christ over all his plans.

And so he says, "If the Lord desires, we shall live." He controls life. He controls birth. He controls death. Job said, "The Lord gives and the Lord...what?...takes away." The Lord does it. The Lord sets the boundaries, according to Acts 17, of nations and He must therefore set the boundaries of the people who make up those nations. It is God who gives life. It is God who takes it away. It is Jesus Christ by whom all things are made that are made, and it is Jesus Christ who has the keys of death and hell. And so life and death are in His hands.

And so he says if God desires we shall live, and if God desires we will do this or that. All subjects of life fall under His will. All people in life fall under His control. All events in life fall into His calendar. All circumstances fit somewhere in His plan.

So, as believers we should be marked by a sort of constant commitment to the contingency of the will of God. No matter what we've planned, no matter what we pray, no matter what we set out to accomplish, always with the flexibility that says...If the Lord desires. That's how we live.

What a wonderful thought. Henry Ward Beecher, that great preacher of old, put it this way, he said imagine...imagine a man building a house. And the man building the house decides to build it by his own plan, rather than the plan of the architect. And so the man proceeds to build and the architect comes and proceeds to check and there's no relationship between the two. The result is absolute chaos. Henry Ward Beecher said, "So it is in building a life. God is the architect and a man would be an absolute fool if he decided to build it any way his whims dictated." God has designed how life is to be built. And if you're a true child of God you will find yourself enamored, settled on and committed to seeing God build your life the way He wants to build it. It doesn't mean, as I said, that we're perfect, we're going to fight it now and then, but that's the underlying desire of the heart.

Beloved, the message of James is simple. Live your life in the will of God. Do you remember Ephesians 6:6? It's probably a good place to sort of summarize my thoughts. It says this, "Doing...the end of the verse...the will of God from the heart." Oh that's so good. It isn't just doing the will of God, gritting your teeth saying...Well, if that's what God wants I'm going to do, I really hate it...it's doing the will of God from the heart. That's basic.

There's another thought too. If you look at Colossians 1:9 it says that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. And then in chapter 4 verse 12, "That you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." So first of all, do the will of God from the heart, and secondly, do all the will of God all the time...Colossians 1:9 and 4:12. Do it from the heart and do it all the time.

And then Hebrews 13, I close with this passage. Let's look at it together, Hebrews 13:20 and 21. This really wraps it up. "Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect," that is the God of peace make you perfect, "in every good work to do His will." Folks, that's the sunum bonum of all spiritual life, that's what God wants to do in you, that's what Christ died to make possible in you, that's what the Holy Spirit wants to energize in you, that you would do His will and God is working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever, amen. Boy, what a benediction.

Do it with all your heart. Do it all all the time and realize that that is exactly what God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are working to do in you. That's God's will. So James says here is yet another test of living faith. Do you desire to do the will of God? If the answer is yes, then you belong to Him. Or, if the answer is yes and you've never been saved, your heart is reaching out in faith to Him. But the desire to do the will of God is the mark of the transformed life.

James says take a look at yourself. Do you live constantly defying God's will? Ignoring God's will? Disobeying God's will? There's reason to wonder of the delight to do His will is not there. Furthermore, since it is the Spirit working in you His will, if it's not being done then maybe the Spirit isn't there. "And if any man have not the Spirit of Christ," Romans 8 says, "he's not His." Let's bow together in prayer.

We thank You, Father, tonight for this rich and practical portion of Your Word. We bless You for the constant richness that we enjoy as we sit at the feet of the Holy Spirit who is our teacher through the pages of Holy Scripture. Help us to be desirous of Your will in everything...in everything. Help us to do Your will from the heart, to do all of it all the time and to know that that's what the Spirit of God is doing in us and give Him all the credit for He provides all the strength. Thank You in the name of our

Savior. Amen.

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