

James: The Folly of Self-Confidence

James 4:13-17 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.

So the leader of a Colombian drug cartel had a coca plantation. He was making millions of dollars selling cocaine. One year, he had a bumper crop: “What shall I do?” he thought. “So much cocaine, and so little room. I know, I’ll pull down my barns, and build bigger ones. And I’ll say, ‘Self, you have so much money. Relax, retire, and take it easy. Don’t worry, be happy.’” Then God spoke to him: “You fool, this night I will require your soul. Then who will get all your money?”

I’ve called this message *The Folly of Self-Confidence*.

1. The Folly - Making Plans without God

James uses the example of a businessman.

Like many businessmen, he makes travel plans, and market projections, and has time frames and profit forecasts.

But where is God in his planning?

Instead of involving God in his planning, he is full of self-confidence.

According to verse 16, he is arrogant, evil, and boastful.

There is nothing wrong with making plans.

For instance, SMART goals are a great idea: these are goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-oriented.

But we ought to include God in our planning and setting goals.

2. The First Reason

I am referring to the first reason we need to rely on God and not be filled with self-confidence.

We do not know what will happen tomorrow.

God sees the future and we do not.

Which is why in verse 16, James refers to this self-confidence as boasting.

That word, in Greek, means braggadocio and it applied to the wandering quacks who offered shonky cures, and so were boasting of things they were unable to do.

We don’t have the wisdom to know the future or the power to control the future; only God does.

3. The Second Reason

Life is a vapour.

Have you ever noticed on cold mornings, your breath is steamy?

It’s an interesting phenomenon because you breathe out and you can actually see your own breath.

And then what happens?

It's there for a few moments, and then it's gone.

This life is like that.

How we admire a person who reaches 100.

In Australia, that person can expect to receive a telegram from the Queen.

But 100 is nothing, only .00001% of a billion.

And eternal life is much longer than that.

Life is short, it's unpredictable, and no one knows when they'll die.

I had a high school friend who didn't know that he wouldn't even live to eighteen.

He was riding along on his motorbike, noticed too late that the truck in front of him had slammed on its brakes, and he ploughed into the back of the truck.

Gone just like that.

4. The right attitude

"If the Lord wills."

This is not a formula, but a sense of dependency.

I don't think for one minute that God expects us to walk around saying things like, "See you tonight – if the Lord wills" or "I'll meet you at the movies – if the Lord wills"; or "I'll see you tomorrow – if the Lord wills."

That would be really dumb.

But we have to recognise that all of our plans are ultimately in the hands of God.

God has a plan and a purpose for our lives, and our plans must constantly be submitted to His plans.

Think of the prophet Jonah, who was running from God.

He made plans to go to Tarshish in the eastern Mediterranean.

Jonah discovered the hard way that no matter what our plans are, God can intervene to get done what He wants to get done.

I like what someone said: Jonah had to trust in God, because there are only two ways out of a fish.

5. About the will of God

I want to share some things about the will of God.

First, God wants us to know it.

Colossians 1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Ephesians 5:17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

If you don't know God's will for your life, ask Him.

Second, walk in the light you already have.

Why would God reveal more to us, if we're not already doing His will in the things we already know?

Third, God doesn't reveal all of His will to us in one hit.

He shines a light in front of you, and you may not be able to see any further than that, but you don't need to.

He gives us the light we need when we need it.

Fourth, we may not always understand the reasons for what God wants us to do.

Children often don't understand why their parents say what they say.

You tell your children, “Stay in car!”

What do your children say? “Why?”

What's most common answer from parents? “Because I said so.”

And that might be the only answer we get from God too sometimes.

Psalm 103:7 He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel.

Notice that God revealed His ways to Moses, but not to the children of Israel?

He doesn't have to give an explanation for everything He says or does, because there are times He just wants us to trust Him.

But according that that Psalm, the Israelites knew what God did, but Moses understood the why.

In the times when you do understand the why, you'll know God is always motivated by love.

By love and nothing else.

Finally, God's will involves transformation.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

This verse was never intended to imply that there are three different levels of the will of God.

Instead, they are three descriptions of the same will of God: good, acceptable, perfect.

If we go back to our original story of the Colombian drug lord, you might have noticed that all I did was retell a story that Jesus told in Luke 12:16-20.

It's a story that fits in perfectly with what James is saying.

The man in Jesus' story went ahead and made plans with an attitude of arrogant self-reliance.

But to be in the will of God, our will has to be submitted to God's will in an attitude of reliance on Him.

Ultimately, God wants us to trust Him – because the safest place in the world is in God's will.