

*James*

# MAKING ROOM FOR GOD EVERY DAY

4:13-17

*“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin” (4:13-17).*

The autumn of 1987 provided some exciting world events. Two particular things I can recall ought to stand out in everyone’s mind. First, the Monday in October when the stock market crashed over five hundred points. Traumatized people everywhere were mourning their lost wealth and broken dreams. Bewildered stockbrokers saw their financial playgrounds come tumbling down. For several weeks, the media concentrated their efforts on trying to understand why the crash happened. The second major event was the “summit meeting” between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. During this meeting, a nuclear arms agreement was reached that was, or is supposed to be, a milestone on the road to peace. Even if that treaty is ratified by both the Russian and American governments, some things in it stand out. First, every time the “superpowers” have signed a treaty in the last thirty years, it has signaled the beginning of an escalation in spending on weapons. What this treaty means is best illustrated by saying that if each side reduced its army to only

one hundred men, they would each still possess, even after the destruction of the agreed upon missiles, enough nuclear warheads to destroy the world three or four times.

This is not intended to be a lesson in nuclear weapons or economics, but these events do point out a couple of facts. First, material possessions can be here today and gone tomorrow. Second, our physical existence is lived in the shadow of the bomb, and with the nature of world politics, that is scary at best. Obviously, with those two lessons in mind, we can see that life, and the things of life, are not where we can put our trust. We can see this truth on the grand scale of life, but what about in our individual lives? If you were to be asked, “What are your dreams for the future?”, how would you answer? Education? Marriage? Family? Travel to distant places? A new car? Wealth? Where, in all of these dreams does God and spiritual considerations fit in? Too many people have only one emphasis concerning the future—physical fulfillment! We are prone to be too earthbound and leave God out of our future planning.

At the end of chapter 4, James discusses the “will of God.” Already in this chapter, he has talked about church problems and talking against each other. Now James converges those themes in a discussion about the “will of God.” Obviously, a believer outside of the will of God becomes a troublemaker. This truth is illustrated by examples from biblical history: Lot moved to Sodom and nearly destroyed his family, David’s adultery brought problems to his family and kingdom, and

Jonah's running from God nearly destroyed a ship and its sailors. In each case, a wrong attitude was manifested toward the will of God.

The Holy Spirit now leads James to rebuke our arrogance and self-sufficiency. He wants us to see that life itself demands that we take God into account. He pushes us on to the point that we cannot exclude God from our everyday lives and that we must be concerned about His will.

### **TO NEGLECT GOD'S WILL IS SENSELESS (4:13-16)**

For us to understand how foolish it is to neglect the will of God in our everyday life, James presents four reasons why we must listen to God. First, we need to consider the will of God *because of the complexity of the lives we live*. When he says in verse 13, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit,'" he is saying, "Stop, and just listen to yourselves." Let us think about our lives: We are buying, selling, getting gain, losing, going here, going there. How many crucial decisions do we make each day? God, through James, is not condemning the business of life, but He is saying how ridiculous it is to do it without consulting Him. Life makes sense with God; it makes no sense without Him.

Second, James says that not only is life complex, *it is also uncertain*. He says, "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. . . ." (4:14). Scripture wants us to know that life is uncertain (e.g., Proverbs 27:1). Jesus illustrated that point with one of His stories (Luke 12:16-21). Even the world, with its warped view of life, has grasped this fundamental point. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, is reputed to have said, "How foolish it is for a man to make plans for his life, when not even tomorrow is in his control." The circumstances of life, the people we know and have known, and the events we see every day point to the reality of this truth. James is not saying that we should sit back and do nothing because of our uncertain future. He says we should commit our plans and our future into the hands of God. Only when we commit our future to God can we have any certainty about the future.

James next explains that life is uncertain because *it is brief*. When he says in the latter part of verse 14, ". . . You are just a vapor that appears

for a little while and then vanishes away," he borrows a figure from the writings of Job (Job 7:9). I am sure that at times, especially during the days of pain, the days dragged on endlessly for Job. In his agony, he was cognizant of how brief life could be (Job 7:6; 8:9; 9:25; 14:1, 2). In our finite way of calculating time, life may still seem long, long enough that we forget our accountability to God. I am not suggesting that we sit around being morbid, but we do need to realize the truth about our lives. Instead of spending or wasting our lives, we need to be *investing* our lives in those things that are eternal. We invest our lives by being obedient to the will of God.

Fourth, in verse 16, James illustrates how man tries to hide his frailty. He says, "But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil." We boast to cover our own weaknesses and insecurities. What can we do about the future? We do not have the power to see into it or the wisdom to control it. Yet we strut and banter as if we were in total control. The problem with our boasting is that we put ourselves into the position of God. We do this by saying that in the future we will do this or that, without taking into account the will of God. James says plainly and simply—*such boasting is sinful!*

One would think that with all the lessons that man has learned through the years, he would know how foolish it is to ignore the will of God. It is like going through an uncharted jungle without a guide or flying over stormy seas without a compass. In a short, pithy statement James tells us what our attitude toward life should be: "Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that'" (4:15). James is not giving this statement as a ritualistic, simplistic formula that we repeat without thought. He says that this ought to be an attitude of heart, whether expressed or implied, that gives God His rightful place in the planning and ordering of our lives.

### **TO NEGLECT GOD'S WILL IS SINFUL (4:17)**

James 4:17 has become a licking-stick used by almost every preacher. When James said, "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin," he gave the preacher a verse with which to whip the brethren concerning any subject. This seems most particularly true concerning whatever the speaker might

be promoting at the time: attending services, soul-winning, etc. It might be logical to use the verse in that way and might even be right, but I am sure that is not what James intended.

Verse 17 should be taken as a concluding exhortation to what was said in verses 13 through 16. James is writing to brethren who have erred by their thoughtlessness; they have left God out of their everyday lives. What they are doing is not wrong, but their neglect in considering God and His will is wrong. It is not too difficult for us to fall into the same trap. Life becomes hurried, cramped, and full of stress. We start making plans about what we will do in that drive to overcome and succeed, and our focus often shifts from a position of reliance on God to self. James has shown them their neglect and, by implica-

tion, ours. He insists that all of us should see the error of our ways. It may be that the Phillips' translation of this verse drives home the point best of all. His translation reads, "No doubt you agree with the above theory. Remember that if a man knows what is right and fails to do it, his failure is a real sin."

### CONCLUSION

Life is a gift from God, and it is to be used to His glory. Solomon hit the nail on the head when he said, "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). We cannot afford to make the mistake of planning the future without God's help.

—Bill Hooten

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## Applying the Book of James to Life

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### Worldliness

Worldliness is a spirit, a temperament, an attitude of soul. It is life without high callings, life devoid of lofty ideals. It is a gaze horizontal, never vertical. Its motto is "Forward," never "Upward." Its goal is success, not holiness. Hearing no mystic voices, it is destitute of reverence. It never bows in rapt and silent wonder in the secret place. It experiences no awe-inspiring perceptions of a mysterious Presence. It has ambition, but no aspiration. God is not denied. He is forgotten and ignored.

John H. Jowett,  
*Apostolic Optimism*

### "Lost Everything"

You frequently hear of people who have "lost everything." This is an expression that usually means their fortune. But when has a person really lost everything? Not when he has lost his

job or even his health, and certainly not when he has lost his property. He has lost everything when he has lost his reason, the love of his family, the pangs of conscience, the movings of the Spirit, faith in the Bible, trust in God and hope of heaven. And until then he may lose his job, his money, his home, his property, his friends; but if he has God he has not lost anything of lasting consequence.

Roy L. Laurin,  
*Acts Life in Action*

### A Picture of Life Without Hope

Shakespeare's Macbeth paints a bleak picture of life without hope:

Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

5.5.24-28

### Utterances of Hopeless Grief

The heathen sorrowed without hope. To them death connected itself with no hope, no brightness, no triumph. It was not *sunset* to them, for that bids us be on the lookout for another sun, as bright as that which set. It was not *autumn* or *winter*, for these speak of returning spring and summer. It was not *seed* cast into rough soil, for that predicts the future tree or flower, more beautiful than the seed. It was pure and simple darkness, all cloud, shadow, desolation. A shattered pillar, a ship gone to pieces, a race lost, a harp lying on the ground with snapped strings and all its music lost, a flowerbud crushed—these were the sad utterances of their hopeless grief.