

## Seeking the Will of God for Your Life – James 4:13-16

**Introduction** – It is of course a good thing to desire to do God's will. Jesus said, *"whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother"* – Mark 3:35. However, we must be careful as finite creatures in our attempts to know God's will for our lives. Many Christians fall into pagan-like activities to discern the will of God for their future. Others, with sincerely pious intentions, get themselves into all kinds of trouble seeking the will of God. Moses instructs us rightly, *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law"* – Deut 29:29.

**A Practical Example from James** – His example regards a business venture and can easily be transferred to all kinds of plans we make; all those important decisions that will affect our lives forever – which school should I attend; whom should I marry; where should we live; what vocation should I pursue? How many times have you heard (or said yourself), *"the Lord has shown me that I should..."* Has He? *"Come now..."*

**Plans With Open Hands** – James teaches that we are not to arrogantly assume we know the Lord's will for our future and by extension we learn we are not to attempt to know the Lord's will for our future in that kind of way. To say that you know the Lord's will in such a situation is *"arrogant"* and a boasting that is *"evil."* His words are plain here.

**Your Life is a Mist** – We are to be disciples who have come to understand Ecclesiastes for our lives. James teaches explicitly, *"...you do not know what will happen tomorrow."* We know exactly what the Lord's will was for us yesterday; we have no idea what exactly is the Lord's will for us tomorrow.

**Pagan-like Presumption** – Pagans look to the stars and Ouija boards, intestines of sacrificed animals, and livers (i.e. Ezek 21:21, Hos 4:12). Christians pray all night and in this we must be careful. When we are seeking to be devoted to God, it is well and good (Rom 12:1-2). When we are seeking the secret things, we are wandering away from obedience.

**Health and Wealth Folly** – There is a strain of false-teaching that claims you can know if you are in God's will by whether or not you are being blessed with prosperity and health. This also is pagan-thinking. Hebrews 11 teaches us that Abel, Enoch, and Noah all had faith (11:4-7). Abel believed God and was murdered. Enoch believed God and never died. Noah believed God and everyone else died. Peter teaches that there are those who, like Jesus, will suffer because they are doing God's will (1 Pet 4:19). Being *"in the will of God"* never guarantees a life free from pain, poverty, or persecutions.

**God's Will in His Decrees and Commands** – We must understand what we mean by "the will of God" and as Deut 29:29 teaches us, there are distinctions to be made. God's decretive will is His exhaustive counsel over everything (Eph 1:11). Jesus made clear that this includes every detail of life (Matt 10:29-31). The decrees of God are the will of God for every detail of human history. This is why Stonewall Jackson would say, "My religion teaches me to feel as safe on the battlefield as in my bed." It was not because he didn't know if something bad was in store for him today. It was because he knew there was nothing that would occur today that His good Father in heaven had not decreed (Acts 4:27-28). When we understand this rightly, all of sudden we realize there are no little decisions. Every decision we make was decreed by God and every decision, from our perspective, can have innumerable outcomes. The battlefield might be the safest place; your bed might be the most dangerous. But there is another kind of "God's will" that gets thwarted all the time. It is His preceptive will, based upon His commands. It is God's will, for instance, that you abstain from sexual immorality (1 Thess 4:3), that you give thanks in everything (1 Thess 5:18). In short, it is God's will that you keep His commands; *"If you love me, keep My commandments."* It doesn't make much sense to seek God's will for the things He has not explicitly told you if you are not following God's will with regard to the things He has explicitly told you. And that is where we are to begin.

**Pursuing Godly Direction and Decisions** – You have a decision to make and you want to know what God's will is. What have we learned?

**First: Obey What You Know** – God's Word directs you. You don't have to seek God's will as to whether or not to marry an unbeliever, to break your word on a lawful contract, or to steal something from someone. And if you are not walking in the light in these things, you can't really move on to the next steps of confidently in God's will.

**Second: Avoid Paganism** – God does not direct us to look for signs from Him and James warns us against hailing that we have seen one.

**Seeking Wisdom** – We are to study the Word for direction (Psalm 119:105) and seek godly counsel (Prov 11:14, 12:15, 13:1, 13:10, 19:20, 15:22, 27:9). We do so trusting God's sovereignty in all of this (Prov 16:9, 19:21).

**In Accordance With** – Godly counsel and decisions will generally be found in accordance with –

**The Light Of Scripture** – Paul, understanding the scriptures, preaches first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-47). Does the counsel line up with Scripture?

**Your Abilities** – The apostles' appointed disciples to care for the widows so that they could give themselves to the teaching of the Word (Acts 6:2-3). Does the counsel line up with gifts and abilities?

**Your Opportunities** – Paul hoped to come through Corinth on his way to Jerusalem "if the Lord permits" but was to tarry in Ephesus because of a great opportunity (1 Cor 16:5-9). Does the counsel line up with actual opportunities?

**Your Desires** – God gave us desires and looks to fulfill them in holy ways (Psalm 37:4). Augustine taught, "Love God and do what you want." That is great counsel.

**Trusting God** – For a man or a woman who is walking in the Light, it might be said that it impossible to be out of the will of God. And so, go ahead and go to that city, always remembering *"if the Lord wills."* Faithfulness means you don't know for sure, but you know God knows for sure.