

James 4:13-17  
Do Not Plan Presumptuously

**Introduction:** This section continues the transition from one form of worldliness to another. He addresses the self-sufficient independence characteristic of the world. These readers apparently hold God's providence in contempt. This paragraph further illustrates the self-oriented desires that were causing division within their group. (cf. 4:1-10) As Alec Motyer says, James addresses himself here to the Christian businessman, planning the expansion of his company into a new area, engaged in forward budgeting for a year's trading. Too often Christians leave God in the church or at home with their wives when they take the train to their offices.

**1) We need to stop and pay attention—4:13**

- a) <sup>13</sup> **Come** now,
- b) To whom is he speaking? *you who say* [pres. act. ptc.],
  - i) When will we go? *"Today or tomorrow ...*
    - (1) The present and their immediate future
  - ii) Where will we go? ... *we will go into such and such a town ...*
    - (1) Indefinite plurality of possibilities
  - iii) How long will we stay? ... *and spend a year there ...*
    - (1) Assuming one has an entire year to spend
  - iv) What will we do? ... *and trade* (engage in business) [evmporeu,omai] ...
    - (1) "Trade" is the root of our word "emporium."
  - v) What will be the outcome? *and make a profit*—
    - (1) No one plans to fail at their business, but these people are enjoying their pleasures before they obtain them. (Thomas Manton)
- c) We've got it covered. We have a plan.
- d) There is nothing wrong with being a successful business owner. Consider Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2, 18) and Lydia (Acts 16:14).

**2) Reasons why we need to listen and learn—4:14-16**

- An echo of Prov. 27:1, *Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.*
- a) Our **ignorance**: <sup>14</sup> *yet you do not know* (grasp) [evpi,stamai] *what tomorrow will bring.*
    - i) Root of our word "epistemology" and "epistemic."
  - b) Our **transience**: *What is your life? For you* (not just your life) *are a mist* (emphatic) [avtmi,j] *that appears* [fai,nw] *for a little* (brief) *time and then* (afterwards) *vanishes* (disappears) [avfani,zw].
    - i) "Mist" is the root of our word "atmosphere."
    - ii) "Appears" is the root of our words "phenomenal" and "phantom."
    - iii) [H]uman life is insubstantial and transitory, here one minute and gone the next. Illness, accidental death, or the return of Christ could cut short

- our lives just as quickly as the morning sun dissipates the mist or as a shift in wind direction blows away smoke. (Douglas Moo)
- c) Our **dependence**: <sup>15</sup> *Instead* (in contrast to 4:13) *you ought to say*, “**If** [eva,n] (3<sup>rd</sup> class, hypothetical or possible) *the Lord* (probably the Father) *will* [qe,lw], **(then)** *we will live and do this or that.*”
- i) Stated in NT examples: Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19; 16:7; Heb. 6:3.
  - ii) Not stated in NT examples: Acts 19:21; Rom. 15:28; and 1 Cor. 16:5, 8.
- d) Our **sin**: <sup>16</sup> *As it is*, *you boast* [pres. mid. ind. kauca,omai] *in your arrogance* [avlazonei,a]. *All such boasting* [kau,chsij] *is evil* [ponhro,j].
- i) Evil in its **cause** (arrogant self-sufficiency), its **nature** (worldliness), and its **effects** (hindering us from good). (Thomas Manton)
  - ii) A mind-set of independence from God is the opposite of faith; it is both foolish and wicked. (Dan McCartney)

### 3) The main principle—4:17

- a) The right knowledge: <sup>17</sup> *So whoever knows* [oi;da] *the right* [kalo,j] *thing to do*
- b) The wrong actions: *and fails to do it*,
- c) The sinful disobedience: *for him it is sin* [a`marti,a].
  - i) Cf. Jesus’ own words in Luke 12:47

### 4) Things I need to remember:

- a) To plan in disregard of God is the very essence of worldliness.
- b) Let us be sure to confess not only the sins we have done, but also confess the sins of not doing the good we ought to have done.
- c) Someone once said, “To know God’s will is the greatest **knowledge**. To do God’s will is the greatest **achievement**.”