

“Spiritual Maturity: Cleansing from Determining”

Intro: There is one last area in chapter 4 that James addresses, wanting us to be cleansed: cleansing from the attitude of self-determination. Who determines the course of our life? How much, really, is free will?

And how much might a rat maze and an ancient Latin saying teach us about what really determines our life?

OUR TEXT: JAMES 4: 13-17

- 13** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."
- 14** 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.
- 15** Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."
- 16** But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.
- 17** Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Little Thought to the Will of God

So persuasive is our independent and arrogant culture that many (most?) Christians live life, making decisions while giving very little if any thought to the will of God. Dating choices, vocation choices, church choices, spouse choices, purchasing choices, living choices, portfolio choices – often are all carried out with little more than the thought that God will bless my choices because I am a Christian.

St. Augustine's famous summary on life choices, "Love God and do whatever you please" is conveniently changed to "Do as you please and God will love you" Might this describe you?

Surely James is not suggesting that we should not make advance plans or anticipate a future event. (v. 13)

Rather, he is condemning an arrogant and boastful attitude that betrays self-determination of our future rather than God-determination. (v.16) **THIS IS PRACTICAL ATHEISM.**

WRONG: SELF-DETERMINATION ("this is how I will determine my future") Why?

- 1. Life is complex (v. 13)** Apart from God and His will, life is a mystery
- 2. Life is uncertain (v. 14a)**

Proverbs 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.

"I don't know what the future holds, but I know Who holds the future"

PERSONAL STORY ABOUT A SECOND AWAY FROM DEATH (Car/ Truck/ Fred/ Tom)

3. Life is brief (v. 14b) “you are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away”

Job 7:6 My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle

Job 7:9 As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return.

Job 9:25-26 Now my days are swifter than a runner; they flee away . . . They slip by like reed (papyrus) boats, like an eagle that hastens to its prey.

Psalms 102:11 My days are like a lengthened (evening) shadow, and I wither away like grass

Psalms 39:5 You have made my days a mere handbreadth

Psalms 102:3 For my days vanish like smoke (“Poof” and it’s gone)

MAY THIS SPIRIT’S MESSAGE SINK DEEP INTO OUR BRAINS AND HEARTS

Psalms 90:12 Holy Spirit of God, teach us to number our days that we may have a heart of wisdom!

RIGHT: GOD-DETERMINATION (“If this is Your will for my future, God . . .”)

It is not the WORDS that are needed. Paul often spoke of plans saying “I will come back if it is God’s will (Acts 18:21) I will come to you soon, God willing (1 Cor 4:19)

It is the ATTITUDE that is needed. Paul often spoke of plans without mentioning God’s will, yet this was always in his heart and mind. (Acts 19:21, Romans 15:28, 1 Cor. 16:5)

In the same way, we can make plans and create future schedules. But we must always realize that God may have differing plans and may restrict or redirect. And we must be OK with that!

The Latins has a phrase that has been greatly popular in Christendom through the centuries: “**Deo Volente**” = “**God willing**” = the posture of a burning heart to please God

The Puritans used it often. The Methodists regularly signed documents “D.V.” and put “D.V.” on posters advertising upcoming events.

James tells us that to plan and schedule and choose, without first consulting God and then failing to embrace a continual attitude of God having permission to guide is ARROGANT and BOASTFUL = sin (v. 16) Or is “D.V” your “watchword?”

The Metaphor of the Maze (Curt’s grade school science project)

A “goad” is a sharp, object used to urge or stimulate into action – like spurs on a boot for a horse. It is not meant for evil, but for good – to produce discipline and correct direction. Solomon likened Godly wisdom to “goads” –

Ecclesiastes 12:11 The words of wise men are like goads and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd.

Remember Paul describing what he heard on the road to Damascus (the voice of Jesus) -

Acts 26:14 "Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

In this regard, the author of Hebrew wrote:

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how to stimulate (goad) one another to love and good deeds.

Like a "goad" are the walls of the maze. They gently, but surely guide the rat down the path that will lead to the desired result, both for the maze maker and the rat. The rat has choice – to not try, to resist, or to comply. He can determine his own destiny only as far as he chooses not to choose the path that is best for him.

When the rat chooses not to "kick against the goads" and learns to avoid the dead-end paths, he finds the path of least resistance is the path that brings the greatest reward. His will becomes the will of the maze maker.

And it is the very obstacles and dead ends that teach the rat endurance and correct direction.

Granted. The maze metaphor is not perfect. We are not rats. Yet, here is the point:

1. Let us see the obstacles and dead ends in life as **Godly teaching tools** to rightly direct our path
2. Let us know that ultimately there is no "self-determination" in life – only resistance or compliance with God's determined path for us – always for our good **I don't chart my course – God does.**

Isaiah 30:21 And your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it." whenever you turn to the right or to the left.

3. Just as the cheese is worth the rat's steadfastness, so **our heavenly reward is worth our steadfastness** in maneuvering through our life maze, with an attitude of total trust in the maze maker's wisdom and purpose

The Sin of Omission (v. 17)

James finishes this section with verse 17 – teaching what is called "the sin of omission."

James 4:17 "Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."

In Chapter 4 (as in all of James) he has told us the right thing to do – and now to fail to do that right thing is sin. Lack of knowledge can no longer be an excuse.

The sin of commission is doing the wrong thing. The verse that best describes it is:

1 John 3:4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

(i.e. breaking God's law, or "kicking against the goads")

The sin of omission is NOT doing the right thing. Here is its clearest teaching:
James 4:17

To DRIFT in our spiritual growth is the SIN OF OMISSION. In other words, doing nothing to advance our spiritual maturity is SIN.

Specifically, from today's verses, to live our life with a sense of self-determination hoping for God's blessing is the SIN OF OMISSION and is SIN.

The metaphor of the rat maze can give us yet another thought:

After only a few times through the maze, making a few wrong turns, Curt's rat quickly learned to go through the maze without wrong turn – straight for the goal. The rat had learned "the right thing to do" and he did it consistently thereafter, avoiding distraction on his way to the cheese.

MAY WE BECOME AS WISE AS THE RAT – KNOWING AND DOING THE RIGHT THING, LISTENING TO THE "STILL, SMALL VOICE" OF GOD.

Here is the essence of what I want you to remember today:

- 1. DEO VOLENTE = "God willing"**
- 2. LEARN FROM THE MAZE Don't "kick against the goads" - hear His voice!**

JAMES, Chapter 1 (My Paraphrase)

1. To my Jewish brothers of all twelve tribes, wherever you might be after having been forced out of your homeland – this letter is from James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, by calling and by choice. Dear brothers:

Confidence in Trials

2-4. Take a different perspective at the many trials you face, seeing the positive in them, rather than the negative. One, your faith is being proven and strengthened. And two, you are

But is not an academic lesson, but is profoundly PRACTICAL – teaching us the "how to" in making Godly DECISIONS.

WISDOM is not the ability to understand circumstances - God may or may not reveal the "why" of why developing endurance for the long haul of life. Don't balk at being tested, but hang in there, letting the tests accomplish their Godly purpose: your maturity, that you may be spiritually "buff" without flabbiness or weakness of character.

5. Remember, if you need wisdom (and who doesn't?), just ask God, who gives it abundantly and without making you feel bad for asking. Just ask, and Godly wisdom will indeed be given to you.

6-8. But you have to ask really believing the answer will come. No doubting allowed! Because if you doubt, you are acting just like the waves of the sea blown around by the wind – up one minute with your belief and down the next with your doubts. This kind of supposed “faith” won’t get you anything from God. He doesn’t accept on-again, off-again faith, which by the way, indicates instability in other areas of life.

Confidence in Status

9-10. Hey, believing brother - how about this for God’s “upside down” perspective on wisdom? If your earthly status is on the “humble” side, be proud that you are standing rich and tall in God’s spiritual kingdom. And if your earthly status is on the “well off” side, be proud that in God’s kingdom you are just a spiritual beggar. After all, your earthly status is about as secure as flowering grass in the heat of the sun.

11. See the picture? Just like the sun rises, so does your status. Then comes the “Santa Annas” of life – and just like the grass withers and the flower falls, so does your status wither and fall. What once appeared beautiful is no more. Our status, and the futile pursuits of achieving it, will soon fade away.

12. So what’s worth achieving? - persevering through the trials of life and proving your Godly character through it all. This is how you will receive the true “crown of life” – God’s heavenly reward – which He promises to each one of His lovers.

Confidence in Temptation

13-16. I don’t ever want to hear you saying, “I am being tempted by God.” One, evil can never tempt a perfect God. And two, a perfect God could never lower Himself to tempt any one. Rather, it’s really you that brings on temptation by your own luring lustfulness. Sin comes when you give in to temptation by acting on your lust. And when that sin gets full sway in your life it kills your relationship with God. My dear, believing friends whom I love - don’t be sucked in by temptation!

17. Everything that is good is a perfect gift, especially given to you from God. “Good” is never by accident. The Giver is always our Heavenly Father, and like a bright light he never wavers or compromises in His delivery of good.

18. God exercised His Divine prerogative when He chose to pull us into truth by the power of His Word. This was so that we Jewish believers could be considered as the first ones to receive His special blessing of spiritual victory.

Confidence in Reactions

19-20. Now I’m going to tell you something you already know, but you must apply it to your reactions. One, be quick to listen to others and especially to God. Two, be slow to voice your opinion. And three, put any tendency to anger on a slow fuse. Pleasing God and getting angry never go well together. The short version: open your ears, close your mouth and chill your anger.

21. You know all that leftover filth of the old life that's still seeps out? Dump it in the spiritual trash can. You know God's Word that He has planted deep inside of you? Humbly receive its wisdom and let it save you from drowning in your own foolish reactions.

Confidence in Religion

22. It is delusional to think that you are religious by merely hearing the Word, believing it, and participating in a few religious activities. Rather, you prove and demonstrate your true religion by living out the Word actively in every area of your life.

23-24. Hearing the Word and not doing it is like looking at yourself in a mirror and not fixing what needs fixing. Why even look if you just go away unchanged and oblivious to the need?

25. God's Word is the perfect rulebook for life, with rules to set you free, not tie you down, and therefore worthy of a long and hard look. If you let them sink in, and turn your thinking into meaningful action and change, your life will surely be blessed for it.

26. Do you think that your religion is healthy? Then put it to the test by whether you can control your tongue. If you can't, not only is your religion worthless but you're deceiving yourself into thinking your religion is OK. It's not.

27. I'll tell you what real religion is about. It's about practicing love and care for those with special needs – like children without parents or women who have lost their husbands. Bottom line, true religion is keeping yourself pure from the wickedness of the world!

JAMES, Chapter 2 (My Paraphrase)

Conviction in Equality

1. Don't you dare call yourself a believer in our amazing Lord and Chosen One, Jesus, if you treat people differently based on their appearance or background.

2-4. Here's a test. If one person walks into to your church service looking like "a million" and another comes in looking like a "bum," will you treat them the same? Or will you give special attention or seating to the one looking great and ignore the other, even making him or her sit in a place where they might not so easily draw attention. If you'd honestly treat them differently, you fail the test. You would be making an ungodly judgment based on unfair distinctions.

5-7. As my brothers in the Lord, I really do love you. So, listen up. Don't we read that God so often has chosen the poor in wealth to be rich in faith and receive His kingdom inheritance? This is exactly what God promises to all who love Him. It doesn't make sense to dishonor the poor person. More often than not, it's the rich one who will give you a hard time, even pulling you into court or using your precious Lord's name in vain.

8-9. The highest law of God's kingdom is this: "Love others as you would want to be loved." If you do this, you're right on. But if you love people differently based on externals, you're practicing sin and guilty of breaking God's #1 law.

10-11. Here's the hard fact. Even if you were to keep all of God's law perfectly, one sin (like favoritism) makes you guilty of all in God's eyes. God forbids adultery, just like he forbids murder. But if you are clean regarding adultery, yet commit murder – you're guilty of adultery, and all the other laws as well. Ouch!

12-13. Now don't be frozen with fear in your words and actions toward others – God's royal law of love is meant to motivate and free you, not condemn you. If you show no mercy, then mercy won't come your way. But if you learn to show mercy in your assessment of others, that demonstration of mercy will trump any judgment that is due you.

Conviction in Works

14. Tell me, fellow Christians, what is "saving faith?" If someone claims to be a Christian by their faith, and yet there is little visible sign of that faith in their actions, it seems to me that kind of faith is useless faith – not "saving faith."

15-16. For example, if a believing brother lacks some basic necessity such as clothing or food and you essentially tell him "blessings on you, I hope you'll be okay!" and don't make an effort to meet his need, I say your supposed faith is a sham.

17. The principle is this: Faith, if it isn't backed up by action, is dead faith.

18. Now, I can just hear someone say, "Some Christians are more private, and some are more outgoing in expressing their faith." Well, if you're one of those "private in your faith" types, I dare you to prove your faith without any action, while I prove my faith to others by living it out in action.

19-20. You believe that God is one? That's good, but think of this: the demons, as they shudder, believe the same (and they're not believers!). Can't you admit that believing alone without actions to back it up means nothing?

21-23 After all, haven't we heard Father Abraham was "justified by faith" when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? His faith and works "teamed up" so that his behavior proved his belief to be authentic. This was the fulfillment of the Scripture that says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Remember, this faith matched with action resulted in Abraham being called the friend of God.

24. So here's the principle said another way: A man is made right with God by action that demonstrates inward faith, and not by action less faith.

25. Another example would be Rahab, who was once a harlot. But she too was justified, (that is, made right with God) by her works. Remember, she received and hid the spies (Joshua and Caleb) and then let them exit by a safe way.

26. To say the principle a final way: Just like a body without a spirit is lifeless, so also faith without demonstrative action is lifeless.

JAMES, Chapter 3 (My Paraphrase)

Control of Giftedness

1-2. Think long and hard about whether God has called you to be a teacher of His Holy Word. Why? First of all, God will give teachers a stricter judgment when it comes to handling His Word. Secondly, we are all sinners. (And this implies that a teacher will be rightly held to a higher standard by his students, as well.) And thirdly, since teaching uses a lot of words and many words lead to certain stumbling, a teacher will never be perfect in his teaching.

Control of Tongue