

Patience and the Sovereignty of God

Galatians 5:22; James 4:15

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Why do we become so impatient in waiting for and working toward future goals and plans? How do you handle the delays in your life? What would you do if you could not reach that goal for which you have worked so hard and prayed so much? Would it be as if your life was over?

In part we have been trained in our fast pace, technological society, to expect results (and quick results at that). Our lives are built around quick responses to emails rather than waiting days/weeks for a response to a handwritten letter. We expect to get through a grocery line in record speed in the express check-out line. We expect to get cash quickly at the ATM without having to wait in line in the bank. We zip around in our cars to be served sooner in the drive-thru rather than having to wait in a long line inside for food. And when any of these services are slower than we think they should be, we begin to grumble at having to wait a little longer at the inconvenience (we get stressed, complain, and feel like pulling our hair out). Is it any wonder that we who are so accustomed to quick service and have been trained to expect quick results should struggle in our hearts with a God who works all things after the counsel of His own will and in His own time, and not according to our watches and calendars?

We live by our calendars and by our watches. We become so oriented to filling our calendars and making future plans for this or that event or goal that we forget that it is God that holds our future and ordains our paths every day. We so often forget to sanctify our plans (even mundane, ordinary plans) with God's blessing and prayer. Dear ones, it is so easy with such busy schedules to act as though we are directing our own paths

and ordering our own lives. And when our plans do not materialize or when they are delayed, we become frustrated, impatient, tired of waiting, and often make decisions and embark upon roads to reach goals without submitting our will to God's will (Proverbs 20:24—man proposes, but God disposes all things for His own glory). Dear ones, we must look to our gracious God and learn to patiently wait upon Him to direct us and to bless us in all of our plans for tomorrow, since our times are in His hands (“My times are in thy hand” Psalm 31:15).

As we continue in our study of the Fruit of the Spirit, we consider once again *patience* as being a closely related fruit to that of *longsuffering* (Galatians 5:22). From our text, let us consider the following main points: (I) Patience and the Sovereignty of God (“If the Lord will” James 4:15); (II) Patience and the Responsibility of Man (“We shall live, and do this, or that” James 4:15).

I. Patience and the Sovereignty of God (“If the Lord will” James 4:15).

A. Our text is surrounded by verses that point out a common sin into which we are so inclined to fall—making plans about the future without a complete submission of our lives and plans to the overriding, sovereign, providential will of God. Note the verses leading up to our text.

1. In **James 4:13**, James calls us to carefully consider this very real-life scenario when he says, “Go to now.” James says that you make definite plans in regard to future business goals of buying and selling. Obviously, this may include all plans we make concerning the future.

2. **James 4:14** provides a caveat/ caution to making plans and setting goals for ourselves in the future.

a. First, you do not know what the future holds (“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.”). You are not

omniscient. How can you make such certain plans that your goals will fall out just as you have set them forth when you do not even know what tomorrow will hold for you? Such confidence is completely misplaced. In pride, we act as though we were god. Dear ones, you set yourself up for a huge fall, when there is a long delay or when your plans fall apart altogether.

b. Second, you do not even know with any certainty whether you will be alive to fulfill your dreams, ambitions, plans, and goals (“For what is your life. It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”). Dear ones, your life is as temporary here upon the earth as a foggy mist that is here one moment, but dissipates so quickly once the sun shines upon it. You cannot build your life, your hopes and your dreams upon the foundation of a mist any more than you can build it upon the sand (as Jesus says in Matthew 7:24ff—it will not support you). It is vanity to do so (so learned Solomon).

3. In **James 4:15**, the righteous and biblical perspective is presented in contrast to foolishly trusting in our plans and our dreams.

a. First, always qualify in your heart and by prayer before God your aspirations and goals, submitting all that you are and all of your plans to the most sovereign and most wise providential will of God for you (“For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will . . .”).

b. Second, such a submission to the sovereign will of God is not inconsistent with making plans and setting goals in your life. It is our duty to prepare for the future in submission to the Lord (“we shall live, and do this, or that.”).

4. In **James 4:16**, James (speaking by the Holy Spirit) makes clear that to make plans without submission to the Lord in all things is evil, for we are rejoicing in our own pride, in our own sufficiency, and in our own resources, rather than in the Lord God Almighty (“But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.”). This is likewise what Proverbs 27:1 forbids.

B. Having now given a brief overview of the context, it should be clear how trusting in your plans or staking your goals upon a certain deadline or upon a certain dream will inevitably set you up for frustration, for anger, for depression, for impatience, for looking in hope to man and to the events of this life to bring your dream to pass. James warns us concerning a sinful inclination to which we are all subject: presuming upon the future that we will live out tomorrow so as to fulfill all of our goals just as we have planned. Such a sinful presumption on our parts proceeds from sinful pride and misplaced faith. For in so doing, we usurp the place of God acting as though time was our creation rather than God's, and living as though we were masters of our own destiny. Dear fellow Christians, when the Lord is excluded from our plans for the future and when we do not submit ourselves to His providential will (even in our ordinary plans to go shopping or to go to work, or to attend school), we sinfully presume that the Lord will grant us another day to do these things and we do so apart from any acknowledgement that tomorrow belongs not to us, but to the Lord our God.

1. When our plans for tomorrow are not made in our minds (if not with our lips) with this qualification, "if the Lord will", we show that we rejoice in our own god-like pride. James declares that all such rejoicing in our pride about the certainty of our future goals here upon the earth is evil. It is to proudly rob God (by our actions and speech) of His sovereign power and divine authority over our lives. It is the way to produce impatience rather than patience in our lives.

a. Dear ones, the Lord reveals to us in His Word that it is in Him that we live, and move, and have our being and not in ourselves (Acts 17:28). Every beat of the heart, every breath that we take, every thought that comes to our mind, every movement of the hand or the foot, every sound we hear, every sight that we behold, every minute that we live is ordained by Almighty God (Job 14:5).

b. Dear ones, it is the Lord that declares the end from

the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). All His works are known unto Him from the beginning of the world (Acts 15:18). All events are within the grasp of God's knowledge and almighty providence, whether the casting of the lot (Proverbs 16:33), whether the rise and fall of nations (Acts 17:26), whether the exact number of hairs of your head (Luke 12:7), whether the falling of a sparrow to the ground (Matthew 10:29), whether the sin of man (Acts 4:27-28), whether the provision of your daily needs (Matthew 6:30), and whether the salvation of God's elect (2 Timothy 1:9). Nothing is left to chance from God's perspective.

c. Do you believe this is true? As Christians of course, we believe it is true. However, our misplaced faith appears in that we think, speak, and act as though it were not true when we make plans for tomorrow apart from sanctifying those plans with God's blessing and prayer. Our faith is in a practical way placed in our plans and resources, and in people and events to see our plans realized.

d. But dear ones, just as the food we eat is to be sanctified by God's blessing through prayer, so our todays and our tomorrows are to be sanctified by God's blessing through prayer and humble submission to His sovereign plan. God reveals that He is to be included in and called to oversee all of our plans for the future (not simply the big plans, but even in our ordinary plans): Proverbs 3:5-6. Here we see that if we do not acknowledge God in all of our ways or plans, the issue is one of lack of trust in the living God to direct our future paths.

2. But the point of our biblical text is that in all of our ways, we must acknowledge the Lord (which implies we do not simply do what we want to do and then seek His rubberstamp upon our own plans—such pride on our parts will almost inevitably lead to delays and vanishing of goals for our own good).

a. If our desires and goals cannot be supported or defended by Scripture, our goals and desires must vanish (working on the

Sabbath). As Christians who trust in Jesus Christ alone for our eternal salvation, we cannot be conformed to the desires of this present world. We must be transformed by the Holy Spirit to the revealed will of Christ in Scripture as He gradually renews our minds from worldliness to godliness.

b. If you are not willing to follow the Lord and His revealed will in Scripture, you will not be ready to submit to His providential will in what He brings into your life by way of delays or changes in the plans you have made. You must not only acknowledge and trust in Christ as Savior, but also as Lord of your life. Luke 6:46— submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ is evidenced by a loving willingness to take up your cross (and suffer if necessary), deny yourself (of the people and things of this life in order to be faithful to Christ), and follow Christ in what He has commanded in Scripture. Only such a course in your life will lead to your faithful, patient submission when your plans are delayed and when your goals are not realized?

3. The Lord may take you down the very paths that you had planned, or He may scrap those plans and take you down another path which you had not planned. For who among us ever included in our own plans long delays, setbacks in health, injuries, loss of work and financial trouble, discouragement, the death of children and loved ones, broken personal relationships, or periods of time where it seems that nothing is falling into place in our lives as we had planned? But, dear ones, all of those very events were included in God's plan for your life and mine in order to cast us upon Christ, and that is why the present and the future must be committed every day to the Lord—**for man proposes, but God disposes.**

4. Have you become frustrated, angry, and even bitter over hopes, dreams, and plans you had made for the future which have been interrupted, delayed, or cancelled? Are you wiser than God? We imply as much if we think or act as though we could have done a better job of

bringing our future plans to pass. In our anger (perhaps even silent, buried anger which no one else sees), we attack the very character of the Lord—we attack His sovereignty, His wisdom, His love, and His faithfulness.

5. Where is our patience in waiting upon the Lord when it appears that all of our plans for the future are indefinitely delayed, or have been radically changed due to circumstances beyond our control? Although we are to make godly plans for the future invoking God's blessing upon them, it is the fruit of patience that carries us through when our future dreams and goals are delayed or changed.

6. Sometimes it is not even waiting patiently on the Lord for the goals that we have set for ourselves, but rather waiting patiently on the Lord in the midst of great suffering and trial that we may be suffering (looking and praying for the Lord to intervene). Even at such times, it is “not my will, but thine be done” (just as was true of Christ Himself as He suffered great anguish of soul for His people in the Garden of Gethsemane—Luke 22:42).

II. Patience and the Responsibility of Man (James 4:15).

A. Now, dear ones, I would have you see that God is not condemning all goals and plans we might set for the future, as if it were sinful to make plans or set goals for tomorrow. In fact, our text presupposes that we shall be making plans to live and to do this or to do that (James 4:15). What the Lord condemns is not our making plans for the future, but rather making plans for the future without seeking His blessing and submitting ourselves and our plans to Him, and thus acting as though we were the sovereign masters of our own lives. Though God is sovereign and can (and often does) alter our plans, we are still called to be His faithful stewards of the gifts and resources He has given to us to set before ourselves plans and goals that are consistent with the revealed

will of God in Scripture and are submitted to the Lord for Him to bring to pass in His appointed time and in His appointed way.

1. In various ways, we see how God approves of such godly foresight on our parts in preparing for the future.
 - a. Consider the following admonition from Scripture: Proverbs 30:25.
 - b. Consider the example of Joseph (in Genesis 41) who made preparation for the 7 years of famine during 7 years of prosperity when it would have been easier simply to set back and enjoy the present abundance rather than preparing for the future famine.
 - c. Also consider that Paul himself made plans to visit the saints in Rome after his visit to Jerusalem (according to Romans 15:24-25).

2. Dear ones, it is the one who is lazy who does not make godly goals for his/her future, but merely waits without preparation to see what each day will bring. How foolish to decide to make a trip across country, but to make no preparations for it. That is a disaster waiting to happen. Dear ones, we will only waste the time God has given to us if we do not prepare for the future by making godly plans. We will continually spin our wheels with a lot of noise and lot of promises (like a car stuck in a snow drift), but we will never move from one spot to the next if we do not sanctify plans for today, tomorrow, next month, next year and so forth.

There was a slogan a number of years ago by one of the insurance companies (this will tend to date all of us who can remember this slogan). And this slogan went like this, "You're in good hands with Allstate." Beloved, you're in good hands (yea you are in the best hands) when you are in the almighty, ever-loving, and infinitely wise hands of Jesus (Romans 8:28). Is your trust in your sovereign Lord (whose plans for you have not changed at all from His eternal perspective) even though your

future plans have not worked out, have been delayed for such a long time, or have radically changed? Do you give up, increase in your impatience, throw up your hands, grow daily in anger and bitterness, and dive into the depths of depression or despair? Why? The Lord has not failed you. He is leading and guiding you into the future—perhaps into uncharted waters and unknown territory just as He did Abraham (Hebrews 11:8), and just as He did Jesus (Hebrews 12:2-3), and just as he will do with you (Hebrews 12:2). How big is your God? That is really the question in learning patience in all of the delays and unfulfilled dreams and ambitions. Is He big enough to make all things beautiful in His own time? Impatience answers that question, “I don’t know if He is big enough.” Patience answers that question, “Absolutely—He is big enough. He will certainly make all things beautiful in His own time.”

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