

Is It Sinful to Make Plans?

[James 4:13-17](#)

James, Day 21

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

- James 4:13-17, ESV

What makes something sinful? Is it just because it breaks one of a list of rules? Do we only sin when we intentionally violate one of the Ten Commandments? Could it really be sinful just to make plans for the future? That seems to be what James is saying in today's passage, or is it?

Jesus Himself said it was a good idea to count the cost before beginning a project (Luke 14:28), and counting the cost involves making plans, to see whether or not we can afford something before we begin it. Proverbs both recommends making plans according to wisdom and also acknowledges the limitations of the plans we make. "*The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.*" - Proverbs 16:9, ESV

So, our plans have limited effectiveness, for God can always overrule them, but surely making plans is not in itself a sinful activity. So, what is James saying is evil about them? Well, what is evil is not the act of making plans, but the arrogance of making plans as if God does not exist.

For us to confidently boast about what we are going to do and what we are going to gain from what we do is to live and make plans as if God were a mere figment of our imagination. It is to effectively nullify in our lives everything we say about God in our worship. It is not a light, small matter.

But it is also not enough to simply add the words "Lord willing" or "If the good Lord is willing and the creek don't rise" in some empty, quasi-superstitious sense. Rather, we must, in sincere faith and true humility, submit all of our plans to the providence of God and confess that He is Lord, and He is free to do as He pleases with our plans. If they please Him and He blesses them, then we praise and thank Him. But if they don't please Him and He doesn't bless them, then we praise Him still, for He is always wise and good.

To fail to do this is sin, because it is a profound lack of faith in God. As Romans 14:23 says, "*whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*" So, let us trust the Lord and submit our plans in faith to His providence. He never fails to act in wisdom and love toward His children.