

## Practical Reminders for Our Practical Atheism (Jas 4:13-17)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on January 31, 2009

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In the year 1902, a young English boy came down to breakfast to find his father reading the newspaper which carried news of preparations for the first coronation in Britain in sixty-four years. In the middle of breakfast the father turned to his wife and said, “Oh, I am sorry to see this worded like that.” She said, “What is it?” “Why,” he replied, “here is a proclamation that on a certain date Prince Edward will be crowned king at Westminster and there is no *Deo volente*, God willing.” The words stuck in the young boy’s mind for the very reason that on the appointed date the future Edward VII was ill with appendicitis and the coronation had to be postponed.

At this time, at the end of Queen Victoria’s reign, the political, economic, and military power of the British Empire was at its zenith. Yet for all its great might, Great Britain could not carry out its planned coronation on the appointed date.

Was the omission of “God willing” from the proclamation and the subsequent postponement of the coronation merely a coincidence, two events without any relation to one another? Or did God cause Prince Edward to have appendicitis to show that He was “in control”? We don’t know why the situation occurred as it did. One thing we do know, however: whether we acknowledge it ... or not, we cannot carry out any plan apart from God’s will.<sup>1</sup>

James 4:13 *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.”<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.”<sup>16</sup> But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.*

The sin in v. 13 is not profitability or business per se:

- OT & NT speak of God-honoring business and stewardship (further study: Grudem, *Business for the Glory of God*)
- Jesus taught about investing wisely for profit (Matt. 25)
- God set up the nation of Israel as a nation of traders. He told them that as they remained faithful to him they would prosper, so that they would lend and not borrow.
- Jews engaged in commerce all over ancient world, incl. godly women such as Lydia, Priscilla, Proverbs 31, etc..
- Commerce was in NT times and beyond, a great vehicle for spreading the good news to all people groups and lands.

The *Dictionary of NT Background* writes that the historical setting explains why plans like v. 13 were common: ‘with strong ties of military and political communication and a good coinage initiated a two-century-long period of peace—the *pax Romana* ... This created the conditions for a general increase in travel and trade ... This period of relative peace and unprecedented freedom in travel and trade was part of that “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) in which Christ came, and it was the helpful context for the realization of a worldwide witness to him through his disciples (Acts 1:8).<sup>2</sup>

The sin in v. 13 isn't profit, nor is it planning in and of itself

- Proverbs commends wise planning and James is saturated with language from Proverbs, perhaps James' favorite book
- In Scripture, it is the fool who doesn't plan, not a wise man
- But the same Scriptures say it's the fool who says in his heart there is no God (Ps 14, 53). I don't know if you ever noticed, but that famous Scripture text doesn't say the fool says *out loud* necessarily that there's no God – he says it in *his heart*. James argues in this biblical tradition that how you live reveals what your heart really says and believes. This passage is written to us who are practical atheists too much the time (all of us?) though we profess Christianity. We foolishly live and speak as if there is no God often.

Psalm 10:4 (NIV) speaks of the one who '*in his pride ... does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.*' That's what's sinful in v. 13, not profit/planning, but presumption, pride, practical atheism (v. 15-16). James writes this to Christians (at least professing Christians - he used the word "brothers" 3x in v. 11). This is not an apologetic to professing atheists (and actually I believe Rom. 1 teaches God doesn't believe in atheists; all men know God and have to work hard to suppress the truth written on their heart in conscience and by creation). This verse is not for professing atheists but for churchgoing practical atheists like us.

You won't see this check-box for religious affiliation on a survey, but Philip G. Ryken argues it's the religion with the most numbers. 'To be a practical atheist is to live as if God did not exist. Even many people who claim to be religious live as if they did not believe in God at all. They leave God out of their work, their entertainment, their daily conversation, and their plans.'<sup>3</sup> That's what v.13 leaves out, God. It's what we *don't say* that's a problem

Kent Hughes writes that our 'pleasure-seeking world is increasingly filled with people who live their lives with no reference to God ... As the late Walker Percy's protagonist said in *The Moviegoer*, "one hundred percent of people are humanists and ninety-eight percent believe in God." God simply is not a part of daily life. So pervasive is our culture's arrogant independence of God that even many (most?) Christians attend church, marry, choose their vocations, buy and sell homes, expand their portfolios, and numbly ride the currents of culture without substantial reference to the will of God ... They change Augustine's "Love God and do as you please" to "Do as you please and say that you love God." The Holy Spirit challenges this casual arrogance through the hard-hitting words of James ...'<sup>4</sup> [for each of us]

There's a difference between making God a part of our plans from the beginning as opposed to asking God to bless *our plans* at the end. In other words, we tend to tack God onto the ends of what we do, rather than making God the chief end of all we do, start-to-end. I have been using the pronoun "us" and "we" intentionally because what James says in this passage is for me and every person present.

### **3 Practical Reminders for our Practical Atheism:**

1. You Don't Know (v. 13-14a)
2. Your Don't Own (v. 14b)
3. You Don't Control (v. 15-16)

## 1. You Don't Know

<sup>14</sup> *Yet you do not know ...*

The first problem with how we speak so confidently about “today or tomorrow” in v. 13 is that we simply *do not know* the future. You do not know what today will bring forth or tomorrow or even the very next moment. Phil Johnson tells a great story of this truth:

[It was Wrigley Field, the most perfect moment of his life]: ‘score was 10-3 in the fifth inning. The Cubs were comfortably in the lead. They had already hit a couple of home runs that sailed right over our heads. This game was awesome. I was feeling good. A sense of absolute well-being swept over me. I decided to roll my sleeves up over my shoulders and get some serious sun.

[He says his beloved wife] Darlene has this thing where she starts to act like a mother when everyone is having fun. And so she asked me if I didn't want some sunscreen for my pasty-white shoulders and knees. (She carries this big bag to baseball games, and she can pull anything she wants out of the bag.) Before I could even say no, she had dragged out about five varieties of sunscreen concoctions and started trying to foist them on me. But I didn't want lotion or oil. It makes you all gummy and sticky, and I didn't want to spoil a perfect moment.

Now that moment is frozen in my mind, and I have often recalled it, because that particular moment was one of the most perfect moments of my life. I was on vacation—no pressure. My kids were loving it. My wife was especially beautiful in the outfield sun. A heroic aura seemed to surround me. The Cubs were comfortably out in front, and we had front-row bleacher seats on a day when the weather was as close to heaven as Chicago ever gets.

And the thing I remember most about that moment was what I said to Darlene when she started nagging me about putting on sun screen. She was warning me that I'd be sorry later if I didn't.

I said, "This is a perfect day. We've got perfect seats at the perfect game on a perfect day. The Cubs are in first place. They're way out in front in this game. The weather is perfect. *Nothing* will ruin this day." As soon as those words escaped my lips, James 4:15 came to mind ("ye ought to say . . .") and my conscience smote me. But before I could tack on the words "...Lord willing" to the end my sentence, a home run from the bat of some Philly sailed right over my head onto Waveland Avenue.

Before the fifth inning was over, the Phillies had hit two homers. By the end of the inning the score was tied 10-10. But that was only the beginning of troubles. The final score was 16-13. The Cubs lost. And in the last two innings a thunderstorm blew in from Lake Michigan. The sky turned incredibly dark—so dark they had to turn on the lights. Lightning was hitting the buildings all around Wrigley field. And at the very moment the game ended, it began to rain so hard that by the time we got to our car, we could not have been more wet if we had actually gone for a swim in lake Michigan.

We were too wet to turn on the air conditioner, and the windows were steaming up from the humidity. It was miserable. We were soaking wet. The traffic was terrible. The kids smelled like—well, wet kids. We were facing a ten-hour drive that evening to get to my sister's house in Missouri. And my sunburn was already killing me.

Later that night, several hours into our long drive to Missouri, Darlene looked at me sweetly, and said, "You're right. This was an absolutely perfect day. *Nothing* could've spoiled it." [Phil Johnson concludes] then she whacked me on the knee, right where my sunburn was the worst.'

James reminds us, and God will remind us, “you don’t know.” Repeatedly both OT & NT remind you and me “you don’t know.”

Solomon said in Eccl. 11:2“...**you do not know** *what misfortune may occur on the earth.* <sup>3</sup> *If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies [any of us experience that in a storm?]* <sup>5</sup> *Just as **you do not know** the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so **you do not know** the activity of God who makes all things ... **you do not know** whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.*

James says *you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow.*

The uninspired English poet Robert Burns wrote:

... proving foresight may be vain:  
The best laid schemes of mice and men Go often askew,  
And leave us nothing but grief and pain, For promised joy!

The inspired prophet Isaiah said “*But evil will come on you Which you will not know ... disaster will fall on you ... And destruction about which **you do not know** Will come on you suddenly.*” (47:11). God in Job 38-41 goes through 70 questions w/ the same point *you don’t know* (cf. Dt. 29:29). Jesus reminds us of many other things we don’t know: “**you do not know** which day your Lord is coming” (Mt 24:42) “**you do not know** the day nor the hour” (25:13)

But prideful men are not content to recognize they don’t know some things, even the most secret future events that Jesus said not even the angels in heaven know, only the Father. You may recall the booklet by Edgar Whisenant, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988* (September and WWII in October) or his sequel *Final Shout* published the next year predicting Sept. 1, 1989 instead, where he explains *why he does know* what Jesus said no man can.

"My mistake was that my mathematical calculations were off by one year. The miscalculation was so simple, perhaps the reason I did not see my error was God's will..." (p. 1). He blames the calendar and God’s will for his false predictions! He explained "...September 1, 1989 as the most likely time for the Rapture, plus or minus one day" (p. 6) ... "If September 1, 1989 comes and goes, and there is no Rapture, then the next date we should look for would be September 30, 1989. If that date passes, and the Rapture still does not occur, I believe we have to move the whole sequence of events forward another year to Rosh-Hashanah, 1990" (p. 81).

On Sept. 6, 1994, dozens of Harold Camping’s believers gathered inside Alameda’s Veterans Memorial Building to await the return of Christ, an event Camping had promised for two years. Followers dressed children in their Sunday best and held Bibles open-faced toward heaven [but no go]. Camping also taught the 7-year Great Tribulation began in 1988, which was the end of the church age so we shouldn’t attend churches anymore, but we should just study and listen to his family radio program instead. His latest date-setting false prophecy says he actually knows the day Jesus will come back for His saints and it’s May 21, 2011 for Christ’s return and Oct. 21, 2001 for the end of the world.

This brings us to another *do not know* statement in Scripture in Paul in 1 Timothy 1:7 about men who *want to be teachers ... but they **do not know** what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.*

Jesus: “*But of that day or hour **no one knows**, not even the angels in heaven ... **you do not know** when the appointed time will come ... **you do not know** when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning*” (Mk 13:31-35)

“You do not know” is how God intentionally designed the future. There are some things we can know with probable likelihood, ex: that the sun will rise tomorrow (even if we don’t see it behind the clouds). But *you do not know what **your life will be like** tomorrow.*

It may be pretty likely that there will be a day and night tomorrow, but you don’t know if you’ll be there to see it! *You don’t know* (#1)

## 2. You Don’t Own

v. 14b ... *You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say “If the Lord wills...”*

A pastor from NY tells a story of a man in a rural town who came with his horse past the house of a preacher who was out by the road painting his fence. “The preacher spoke to the man and said, “That surely is a fine horse you have there. Where are you going with him?” The man replied, “I’m going to town; I have an appointment with a man who wants to buy *a* horse, and I’m going to sell my horse to him.” The preacher said, “Well, that’s fine, but don’t you think you ought to say, ‘If it’s the Lord’s will, I’m going to sell my horse?’” The man arrogantly refused, saying, “No, sir! This is my horse! I’ve raised him, fed him, and trained him, and I’m going to sell my horse!” The preacher asked him again, “Yes, but don’t you think you ought to say, ‘If it’s the Lord’s will?’” The man responded adamantly, “The Lord doesn’t have a thing to do with it; this is my horse, and I’m going to my appointment to sell my horse!” Then he went on his way.

A couple of hours later, the man returned without his horse, and without his boots, and all scratched up from head to toe. Again the preacher spoke, “Say, aren’t you the fellow who came by earlier on his way to sell his horse? I see you must have sold him. But what in the world happened to you?” The man answered, “Well, you know that you stopped me to talk with me this morning. You detained me and slowed me down. I realized I was going to be late for my appointment, so I decided to take a shortcut across a man’s field. He came out with his gun and started shooting at me, and hit my horse and killed him. When my horse fell, my leg was caught up underneath him, and I had to pull off my boots to get out from under him. The man kept shooting, so I ran, and had to climb through a barbed-wire fence to get away from him. So here I am, horseless, bootless, and scratched from head to toe!” The preacher said, “That surely is a sad story; I’m so sorry. But tell me, what are you going to do now?” The man said, “I’m going home—if it’s the Lord’s will!” [*TURN TO LUKE 12*]

We must not look to the future with presumption, making our plans without reference to God’s will. All of life must be yielded to God’s will ... Our faith must impact every area of our lives, so that we express and live in an attitude of humble dependence on God<sup>5</sup>

A vapor is only visible briefly and then it quickly vanishes. We're just a vapor and we can be vaporized at any time! We don't own anything in this temporary and transient world, our own very life is temporary and transient. 1 Cor. 6:19 says, "you are not our own." We are just a mist or vapor, or as this word is translated in its only other occurrence in the NT: "vapor of smoke" (Acts 2:19). The image here is the brevity or quickness of our life, here today gone tomorrow, and what we have is here today, gone tomorrow.

Luke 12:15b: "...not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." <sup>16</sup>And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. <sup>17</sup>"And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall **I do**, since **I have** no place to store my crops?' <sup>18</sup>"Then he said, 'This is what **I will do**: **I will** tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there **I will** store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup>'And **I will** say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." ' <sup>20</sup>"**But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'** <sup>21</sup>"So is the man who **stores up treasure for himself**, and is not rich toward God."

That's the problem with the plans of James 4:13 – storing up for self with no thought toward God. "I will" or "we will" instead of looking to God's will. This person in the parable may be attending church every Sunday, but he's a practical atheist Monday-Saturday and Jesus calls him a fool who says in his heart *and in his life* that there is no God in regards to his possessions and his planning.

Job 7:6 "My days are **swifter than a weaver's shuttle**, And come to an end without hope. <sup>7</sup> "Remember that **my life is but breath** ... <sup>9</sup> "When a cloud **vanishes, it is gone**, So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up ...

Job 9:25 "Now my days are swifter than a runner; They flee away, they see no good. <sup>26</sup> "They slip by like reed boats [NKJV: "pass by like swift ships"], Like an eagle that swoops on its prey.

Psalm 39:5 "Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths, And **my lifetime as nothing in Your sight**; Surely **every man at his best is a mere breath**.

Psalm 102:3 For my days have been consumed in smoke ... <sup>11</sup> My days are like a lengthened **shadow**, And I wither away like grass.

Psalm 103:15 As for man, his days are **like grass**; As a **flower of the field**, so he flourishes. When the wind pass over it, it is no more.

Psalm 90 <sup>4</sup>For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a **watch in the night**. <sup>5</sup>You have swept them away **like a flood**, they fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. <sup>6</sup>In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; **Toward evening it fades** and withers away ... <sup>9</sup>For all our days have declined in Your fury; We have finished our years **like a sigh** ... <sup>10</sup>As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For **soon it is gone and we fly away**. ...

<sup>12</sup>*So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.*  
 ... <sup>17</sup>*Let the favor of the Lord God be upon us; And confirm for us the work of our hands;*  
*Yes, confirm the work of our hands.*

This is the right attitude in light of life's brevity and fragility, to pray for God to confirm or establish the works of our hands, and to pray that His favor would be upon us and His wisdom to teach us how to be good stewards of God-given time, talent, and treasure.

We're just here for a little while, James says, soon vanishing like a vapor or like steam coming off a stove or like visible breath on a cold day. Our days go by faster than a weaver's shuttle or a runner or a swift ship or like an eagle swooping down to catch a rodent or like a moment in the night or like a flash flood or a fast-moving cloud or a plant being blown away in the wind like a dandelion.

Our possessions and plans are not our own but must be submitted to God as we depend on Him for everything: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread ... For thine is [not mine is as if I own or can even get bread on my own]*

Doug Moo: '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.'<sup>6</sup>

You Don't Know ... You Don't Own ... 3rdly: You Don't Control

### **3. You Don't Control**

<sup>15</sup>*Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."*

Isn't this the source of so much of our problems? When we don't get what we want (v. 1-2) and aren't submitted to what God wants (v. 7). Maybe a better term than *a-theism* would be *I-theism*. One way to spot false teaching: lifts up man instead of God(v10)

Benny Hinn: "Never, ever, ever go to the Lord and say, 'If it be thy will....'" Don't allow such faith-destroying words to be spoken from your mouth." (Benny Hinn, *Rise & Be Healed*, Page 47)

Fred Price: "If you have to say, 'If it be thy will' or 'Thy will be done' if you have to say that, then you're calling God a fool...."  
 (Fred Price, "Ever Increasing Faith", TBN, November 16, 1990)

God's Word calls that mentality boastful (v. 16), if not blasphemy.

The Son of God Himself prayed *Thy will be done* – according to Fred Price, Jesus was calling God a fool in saying that?! What arrogance to put name-it-claim-it heresy above Christ's teaching?

Paul Crouch: "Quit this old cop out prayer, 'if it be thy will' -- it's bunk!" (Christianity In Crisis, audio-tape, C.R.I.)

Kenneth Hagin: "It is unscriptural to pray, 'If it is the will of God.'" (Kenneth Hagin, *Exceeding Growing Faith*, Page 10)

But James 4 says you ought to say and pray "If it is the Lord's will," and those who don't are arrogant and all such arrogance is evil (v.16). King Jesus taught His disciples to pray *Thy will be done*, and it was the LORD Himself who prayed these words in Matthew 26:39 "*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*" ...<sup>42</sup> Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "*O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.*"

Listen to a true prophet, Paul, and how he prayed: Rom. 1:10 "... *always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.*"

Listen to how he told the same church to pray for him:

Rom. 15:30 *Now I urge you, brethren ... to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me ...*<sup>32</sup> *so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find refreshing rest in your company.*

Even though Paul supernaturally knew the future at times, listen to how he and other apostles and early Christians spoke of their plans

- Paul in Ephesus "*I will return to you...if God wills*" (Acts 18:21)

- to Corinthians (1 Cor 4:19) *I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant*

16:7 *I hope to remain with you for some time if the Lord permits*

- the writer of Hebrews (6:3) ... *this we will do, if God permits.*

- the Jerusalem leaders: "*since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, 'The will of the Lord be done!'*" (Acts 21:14)

- Peter: '*it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.*' (1 Pet 3:17)

There's at least 7-8 different wordings of the phrase and variations of the language James uses in v. 15, suggesting this was not just a catch-phrase or empty tradition or mere words they used to tack on to a sentence, but this was what the perspective of their heart was and so it couldn't help but overflow into their speech at times. Not every time they spoke of the future did they say the phrase out loud but every time we think of the future we must at least think in these terms in our heart, James would insist, and it would do us good to say it often to remind ourselves God is God. It's the fool who thinks in his heart and plans in his calendar as if there is no God.

*If the Lord wills* should be our mindset, but not a mere mindless motto tacked onto every sentence to try and sound super spiritual.

Still, I don't think our danger is saying this too much, but thinking it too little. The Latin of the phrase *Deo Volente* used to mark the speech of Christians in past centuries, in traditions ranging from Puritan to Methodist. D.V. was written in correspondence.

Puritan pastor and author of *Amazing Grace*, John Newton, wrote:

Dear Sir, August, 1778.

If the Lord affords health; if the weather be tolerable; if no unforeseen change takes place; if no company comes in upon me to-night, (which sometimes unexpectedly happens,) with these provisos, Mr. S \*\*\*\* and I have engaged to travel to \*\*\*\* on Monday next, and hope to be with you by or before eleven o'clock.

In such a precarious world, it is needful to form our plans at two days' distance, with precaution and exceptions, James 4:13. However, if it be the Lord's will to bring us together, and if the purposed interview be for his glory and our good, then I am sure nothing shall prevent it. And who in his right wits would wish either to visit or be visited upon any other terms? O! if we could but be pleased with his will, we might be pleased from morning to night, and every day in the year.

Pray for a blessing upon our coming together ...<sup>7</sup>

“If God wills” must be written over student’s plans ... all everyday activities. Older people need to say “If God wills, I will spend my time ... If God wills, my children will become ... If God wills, I will take up this ministry ... If God wills, I will wake up tomorrow.” All of us should have this heart attitude.’<sup>8</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.*

Proverbs 27:1 <sup>1</sup> *Do not **boast about tomorrow**, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.*  
[you don’t know or control]

The Greek word for “boasting” in James 4:16 is only used in one other NT passage: 1 John 2:16 “pride” or “boastful pride” of life, or as one translation renders it: “boasting of what he has and does.”

‘The Greeks called this boastful pride *hybris*, and Homer in *The Iliad* depicted in imaginative detail the havoc it wrecked when Achilles succumbed to it.’<sup>9</sup> Arrogance is our achilles heel as well.

J. B. Phillips paraphrases: *What, after all, is your life? It is like a puff of smoke visible for a little while and then dissolving into thin air ... As it is, you get a certain pride in yourself in planning your future with such confidence. That sort of pride is all wrong.*

In John Piper’s book that gets its title from this passage, *Life As a Vapor*, he writes that James is saying: ‘the person who says, “Tomorrow we will go to Denver and do business,” is arrogant. [How is he arrogant?] He does not comprehend in his pride that his life is like a vapor and that God, not he, will decide if he lives and goes to Denver (or gets out of bed) tomorrow ... You will [soon] be gone, and life will go on without you. It matters, he says, that you keep this view of life in mind ... Scripture puts a premium on how we think and how we talk ... It is meant to make the glory of God known. If He wills we live. If He wills we act. We have minds and tongues to speak this truly for all the world to hear.’<sup>10</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.*

If we know the right way to think and speak from v. 15 and we don't apply this message, we are in sin. If we look at the mirror of God's Word and immediately forget what kind of person we are and walk away unchanged, James 1:22 says we deceive ourselves.

It's the fool who says there is no God, and in the way we live, our practical atheism is not only foolish, it is sinful, v. 17 tells us.

As one writer says it, James 'has urged us to take the Lord into consideration in all our planning. We therefore have no excuse in this matter [who now see this truth in Scripture]: we know what we are to do. To fail now to do it, James wants to make clear, is sin ...

... sins of *omission* are as real and serious as sins of *commission*.

The servant in Jesus' parable who fails to use the money he was entrusted with (Luke 19:11-27); the people who fail to care for the [needy] (Matt. 25:31-46) – they are condemned for what they failed to do. Another teaching of Jesus reminds us very forcibly of James's words here: "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows" (Luke 12:47). James's reminder here is an important one. For we have a tendency, when we think of sin, to think only of those things we have done that we should not have done. I know my confessions before the Lord tend to focus on these kinds of sins. But I should also consider those ways in which I have failed to do what the Lord has commanded me to do [think of those also next communion]. Perhaps I did not reach out to help a "neighbor" in need; or perhaps I failed to bear witness to a co-worker when I had the opportunity. These also are sins ...<sup>11</sup>

As we realize the depth of our sin and our inability to do anything on our own to not sin today or tomorrow, as we remember our own frailty and how infected we truly are with sin and the subtle pride James exposes here as manifested in our lack of acknowledging God in all our ways, as we look in the mirror of God's Word and see that *we are practical atheists* too much of the time, what then?

Come to the endless fountain of grace for the humble in v. 6:

- submitting to God (v. 7) your plans and thoughts and life
- resisting the devil (v. 7b) whose subtle strategy may not tempt Christians to hate God but to simply forget God
- repent (v8), be broken over your sin (v9), humble self (v10)

All 3 of today's points can be convicting and depressing, but they can also be comforting and refreshing. You don't know; God does! You don't own; God does! You don't control; thankfully God does

This is very good news for us sinners who don't know and don't own and don't control that there is a God in heaven who knows all, owns all, controls all and is working all for His glory and our good. Praise God that the God of all knowledge, all resources, and all power is the Almighty One in charge of every event and every element in the universe from supernovas to subatomic particles!

And this merciful and mighty God is sovereignly constantly working through our plans and our pain, even personal mistakes and sins (ours or committed against us) working all things together for good if we love God and are called according to His purpose.

Friend, if you don't love the Lord yet, I plead with you to repent.

- *You don't know* when you will die or when Jesus returns
- *You don't own* what you think you do
- *You don't control* your destiny or future
  - o GOD is in control, God owns you, God knows you and God in His grace has allowed you to get out of bed this morning and to hear of His grace and if you have not repented and trusted in Christ, come to the Lord who gives grace to the humble who repent
  - o By God's grace you can leave your sin, live for Him, love Him, trust Him, because God judged Him in your place on the cross, the One who before that event prayed to the Father words that must also be ours, "*Not my will but your will be done.*"

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<sup>1</sup>Jerry Bridges. *Trusting God*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Porter, S. E., & Evans, C. A. *Dictionary of New Testament background : A compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Discovering God in Stories from the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999), 84.

<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *James*, 202-3.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Gaskins, "Looking to the Future," *Review and Expositor* 97:2 (Spring 2000), p. 241.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Moo, *James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, 204.

<sup>7</sup> John Newton. *The Works of John Newton - Volume II*. Letter VI.

<sup>8</sup> Hughes, 206.

<sup>9</sup> Moo, 207.

<sup>10</sup> John Piper, *Life as a Vapor: 31 Meditations for Your Faith* (Sisters, Or.: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 28-31.

<sup>11</sup> Moo, 208.