

“Lord Willing...”

Most of us have heard someone tell future plans preceded by or followed by the expression, “Lord willing....”

What do they mean? Why would someone say, “Lord willing” before telling their vacation plans, or meeting up with friends, or even in reference to the next worship service? Surely these things are not *opposed* to God’s will.

Did you know that this practice is rooted in scripture?

Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.”
(James 4:15, NASB)

Does this passage teach that we must always attach the phrase, “If the Lord wills” to our future plans? Or does it mean that we need to acknowledge that we can really do nothing unless God ‘wills’ it? What does it teach?

Remember how Jesus rebuked the hypocritical Pharisees for empty, external forms of religion? We learn that God desires a response from the heart. So, there is no benefit in saying words, “If the Lord wills” unless we do so with understanding.

Consider the context of the verse quoted above.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” ¹⁴Yet 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. ¹⁵Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.” ¹⁶But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. (James 4:13-16)

Is James teaching that telling one’s plans is boasting?

The key to understanding this passage is found in the preceding verse. In verse 12 James states that no one really knows what tomorrow will bring. More specifically, no one really knows *whether they will live tomorrow*. To make future plans without acknowledging this uncertainty is arrogant. A failure to acknowledge the uncertainty of life is a failure to acknowledge our Creator who gives the breath of life. James correctly calls such arrogance *evil*.

Telling one’s plans is not boastful. After all, God allows us to make choices in all areas of life. It is not boastful to choose to move to another city, engage in business, choose a career, choose a college, etc. However, we must realize that life itself is essential for carrying out one’s plans; and God is in control of life. He is the one who gives breath.

These verses are not about our *future plans* as much as they are about our *acknowledgement* of the One who gives life. So, the phrase “Lord willing” is really incomplete by itself. Stated fully and more accurately: “If the Lord wills, we shall live.” Then, if we have been given life by our Creator, *we will also do this or that*.

Acknowledging God’s supremacy over life will keep us from the evil of boasting about things that are in His control.

Our lives are in His hands.

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