

9. **The Divine Decree has numerous characteristics:**

1. They are all comprehensive which means that not the slightest uncertainty could exist as to one of the smallest or most insignificant of events without confusion to all.

Therefore, all events in the life of every person are interwoven and interdependent. God is not the author of confusion.

Everything you think, why you think it, and the environment in which you think it, was all known to God in eternity past. This says everything in life is a chain of cause-and-effect events.

2. The decrees are eternal. God is not gaining in knowledge. Omniscience means God knew simultaneously everything that ever was or will be in their causes, conditions, successions, and relations.
3. God is perfect; therefore, His decrees are perfect. They are not perfect in content because they include sin, failure, human good, and evil. But everything that would ever happen was known to God. His is a perfect system of comprehension.
4. The decree is unchangeable and certain. Nothing could possibly occur to necessitate a change. God is never found not knowing something. God has never had to make changes or any adjustments in the divine decree.
5. The decree is the free choice of God in eternity past. This is the central and most important point in this doctrine which every pastor and evangelist must understand. God is not bound to follow any necessary path. Having decreed, however, He is bound by His infinite faithfulness and truth to complete what He has begun.

10. The free choice of God is very important, because God, from His own sovereign volition, invented free will in two categories of creatures—angels and mankind, so that both categories can choose for or against God.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His production, having been created in Christ Jesus for good achievements which God has prepared in advance [**divine provisions**], that we should walk [περιπατέω (*peripatéō*)] by means of them. (EXT)



B. The Decree and Omniscience

1. The decree of God is the sum total of God's plan designed in eternity past relating to all events of every classification collected into one single all-comprehensive whole through the omniscience of God.
2. The omniscience of God is the key to understanding the decree. God has three categories of divine knowledge: **(a)** Self-knowledge: Each person of the Godhead has infinite and eternal knowledge about Himself and the other two members of the Trinity. **(b)** Omniscience: God knows all the knowable simultaneously about creatures, both the actual and the possible, but only the actual is programmed into the decree. **(c)** Foreknowledge: It merely acknowledges what is in the decree but does not make anything certain; the believer still has free will that is uncoerced.

C. The Decree and Election

1. Election is the sovereign right of God over His creation. It is the expression of the sovereign will of God for every believer in eternity past for fantastic blessings both in time and in eternity.

Ephesians 1:4 God the Father has elected us for Himself in Christ before the creation of the world for the purpose that we keep on being set apart to God, holy and blameless in His presence. (EXT)

2. Election and Predestination provide equal privilege and equal opportunity for all believers.
3. The equal privilege of election is God's decision to make every Church Age believer a royal priest forever.
4. The equal opportunity of election is God's provision of logistical grace support for every Church Age believer.
5. The equal privilege of predestination is God's decision to enter every Church Age believer into union with Christ forever through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and resultant positional sanctification.
6. This results in the creation of a new spiritual species.
7. The equal opportunity of predestination is God's provision of the divine dynasphere for the Church Age believer in time.



8. Under the omniscience of God, all decrees were simultaneously known to God and simultaneously decreed by God in eternity past. There never was a time when God did not know all that was knowable.
9. Divine knowledge about creatures is programmed into the computer of the divine decree. While the possible and alternatives to reality are known to God, only the reality is programmed into the computer of the divine decree.

D. The Will of God and the Divine Decree

1. God did not decree Himself to be. God eternally existed before and separate from the decree. Therefore, the decree does not act upon God, but God acts upon the decree.
2. God's decrees are efficacious, determining all that ever was or will be, including the directive, permissive, and overruling will of God.
3. All things depend on God's will and nothing is certain apart from God's will. There comes a point in theology where God's will and the decrees must be understood as synonymous.
4. God's decrees originate from His own omniscience in eternity past separating fact from fiction.
5. Therefore, distinction must be made between the omniscience of God and the foreknowledge of God.
 - a. God's decrees do not originate from His foreknowledge.
 - b. The foreknowledge of God makes nothing certain; it merely perceives what is certain, what is decreed. Only the decrees or foreordination makes anything certain.
 - c. Therefore, nothing can be foreknown until it is first decreed. This means you never have to run to God and say, "Oh God, help."
 - d. Foreknowledge is cognizance of what is decreed.
6. Distinction has to be made between the decrees of God and the desires of God. The decrees include a lot of things which are not God's desires, because the decrees include all things you think, say, or do. Many things in the decrees are not the desires of God.
 - a. Sin, human good, and evil are not the desires of God but are in the decrees because they are performed by our free will.



- b. God desires His perfect will and sovereignty, but both angelic and human creatures use their God-given free will and self-determination to violate the desires of God. So the decrees contain both the will of God and desires of God. The decrees are the all-inclusive will of God.
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- c. God does not desire to cast His creatures into the lake of fire forever, but it is so decreed under the printout of retribution for all who express negative volition at God consciousness and at gospel hearing.
- d. God does not desire the discipline of believers, but it is decreed for all carnality and reversionism.

E. Conclusion

- 1. Sin's liability creates punitive action from God.
- 2. Therefore, while all sins are judged at the Cross, personal sins carry liability from God under the law of volitional responsibility.
- 3. However, at the Great White Throne judgment, the unbeliever is never indicted on the basis of his sins because his sins were judged at the Cross, but on the basis of his good deeds. You cannot commit a sin without it effecting someone else, without it hurting someone else. The liability for personal sins does not extend outside of time. Sin is not a liability outside of time, i.e., in eternity. Therefore, there is no contradiction between your liability for personal sins in time and the judgment of all personal sins on the Cross.
- 4. In the function of the rebound technique of 1 John 1:9, the purpose is to recover fellowship with God and to recover the filling of the Holy Spirit through citing personal sins to God the Father. As a result, two things can happen to the believer with regard to the liability of sin: the believer is forgiven and the sin liability is completely removed, or the believer is forgiven and the sin liability continues and punitive suffering is replaced by suffering for blessing.



5. The decree of God removes no person from what—within the sphere of his own experience—is the outworking of his own choice based on the function of his own volition.
6. The plan of God and the decrees of God are totally consistent with human freedom and volition. God does not limit and coerce human freedom or violate self-determination. Free will isn't free unless man can decide against God and His plan.
7. However, distinction must be made between what God causes directly (such as the Cross), and what God permits indirectly (such as sin and evil).
8. God created man with a free will. Therefore, He permits human volition to function in self-determination; otherwise, there would not have been the fall of man. It is His permissive will. The permissive will is just as much a part of the decrees which glorify God as the directive will. Remember, the decrees are simply human history in the mind of God in eternity past before any creature existed.
9. God is not the author of sin or evil. Free will and self-determination are the origin and source of sin, human good, and evil.
10. Both sin and the cross are fed into the computer by omniscience. One is the direct will of God. The other is the permissive will of God. But the permissive, directive, and overruling will of God are all a part of the decrees.
11. The sovereignty of God and the free will of man coexist by divine decree. Every decision and desire of God and man were recorded in the divine decree. Omniscience programs this data into the decrees.

Commentary:

In James 4:13–15, James gives the two men in this passage a lecture on their failures to recognize several principles. Let's review the translation of:

James 4:13 Come now, you reversionists who say, “Today or tomorrow [unsure] we will go to this or that city [unsure; wanderlust], and shall work in that place [unsure] about a year [unsure], we shall engage in free enterprise and make a profit [working objects].” (EXT)



1. These two men have done no research to discover when to leave, what city to visit, and how long they will stay in town, but are confident they will engage in free enterprise and make a profit.
2. James intervenes with a reality check in:

James 4:14 You two do not understand what kind of life ... yours tomorrow. You two are just a fleeting vapor trail which soon vanishes from view. (EXT)

3. James gets their attention with an ellipsis, indicated grammatically by three dots: ... and defined as, “the omission of one or more words that are obviously understood but that must be supplied to make a construction grammatically complete.”¹
4. The critical thing missing in these men’s plan is certainty. They have a plan but they do not have the knowledge required to execute it and James points this out to them with his ellipsis.
5. The reason they do not understand what kind of life is ahead for them “tomorrow!” Why? Because they cannot look into the future. Every minute of every day no one has the ability to have absolute knowledge of what is going to happen tomorrow.
6. God has omniscience and we have just noted some critical aspects of His complete knowledge of the future while we are left with an ellipsis. It is because of this that James follows with a piece of good advice in:

James 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, “If [ἐάν (eán)] the Lord wills [gnomic aorist active subjunctive of θέλω (thélō): “to desire, to intend, to design], we will live and also do this or that.” (NASB)

1. In this context, the gnomic aorist refers to eternity past, when God set up a plan for their lives. The aorist tense reminds us that billions of years ago, God knew every idea we would ever have, and provided for it, or not.
2. This means God anticipated a request in eternity past and incorporated His answer into the decree. However, in this context the “if clause” is associated with potentiality: “If the Lord wills.” Does the Lord desire to accommodate these two men or does He not intend to do so?
3. The two men have displayed by their actions and they have not sought divine support for their plan, therefore, the subjunctive mood puts the divine response up in the air, “Does He desire or intend to accommodate their plan?”

¹ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (2014), s.v. “ellipsis.”



4. This places the Lord's response squarely into the divine decree for divine approval or disapproval. These two men do not have the power to look into the future and make a decision based on assumed divine approval.
5. God does not work this way. These men's rationale must be based on their personal inculcation of biblical principles, guidelines, and doctrines from which to draw a conclusion that their plan is well thought-out.
6. **PRINCIPLE:** In human history, the sovereignty and God and the Free Will of man coexist by divine decree.
7. God's desire, intention, and design for believers is for their inculcation, retention, facilitation, and application of Bible doctrine. It is from that inventory, and that inventory alone, that the Lord's will is determined.
8. Otherwise, it is guesswork from rationales based on human viewpoint. The verse is clear and must be applied, "If it is God's desire, intention, or design," then move forward with your rationale.
9. James has set in place a system by which, without the asset of prophecy, a believer can make a good decision from the resource of divine guidance, a doctrine that is not only applicable to this verse but also a major resource to inform believers on how to make good decisions in concert with the desire, intention, and design of divine viewpoint.
10. This leads us to a study of the doctrine of:

Divine Guidance

Introduction:

1. Often you may hear someone ask, or maybe you have been the one to wonder, "What is God's will?"
2. The simple answer is discovered by engaging this process: "Find a church where the pastor teaches Scripture from the original Hebrew and Greek languages.
3. "Concentrate on the subjects taught, retain what you learn in your soul, facilitate the doctrines into paths of least resistance, and apply what you learn to life and circumstances."
4. You have to do this by yourself. Spiritual growth is a walk, not a run. The Word of God is alive and powerful and as such requires strict concentration on your part.
5. However, the primary Teacher is the Holy Spirit whose spiritual link to you is through the teaching ministry of the pastor-teacher in a local church.



6. It is through this system that the believer grows in grace, acquires multiple doctrines which are categorized in Scripture, and which ultimately becomes the inventory of immutable truths retained in your soul for recall and application to life and circumstances.

Principles of Divine Guidance:

1. Divine Guidance is the process of systematically acquiring personal knowledge God's guidance for the believer through the biblical system of spiritual growth revealed in Scripture.
2. This process is provided specifically for only those who have placed their personal faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. This person knows he is delivered from the condemnation of spending eternal life in the Lake of Fire.
3. The principle for divine guidance for salvation, spirituality, and application of the Royal Law is found in:

1 John 3:23 This is His [God's] commandment, that we believe in His Son Jesus Christ for salvation [**John 3:16**], for the believer, status quo spirituality [**Ephesians 5:18b**], and application of the Royal Law [**Leviticus 19:18 cf. James 2:8 et. al.²**].

4. The word, "will," is applied to three categories of individuals: (1) The sovereign will of God, (2) Angels, elect and fallen), and (3) Homo sapiens.
5. Jesus Christ in His true humanity had free will:

Hebrews 10:5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me;

v. 6 In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure.

v. 7 "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (In the scroll of the book it is written of Me) To do Your will, O God.'"

No volition among Homo sapiens would imply no volition in the humanity of Jesus Christ.

² The Royal Law expands this Levitical commandment in numerous passages of the New Testament: Matthew 19:19; 22:39–40; Mark 12:31; John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10; 13:8–10; Galatians 5:14; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 2:17; 1 John 3:11, 14, 23; 4:7, 11; and 2 John 5–6, plus our passage in James 2:8. Eleven books; 7 writers. Counting Leviticus 19:18 as the original, it is cited 26 times in Scripture.



The foundational principle of divine guidance, is based on the fact that man possesses free will from the volition of his soul:

free will *n*: freedom of human beings to make choices that are not determined by prior causes or by divine intervention.³

The basic principle of divine guidance is based on the fact that man possesses volition of the soul as free will.

6. The will of God via the human race:

God's directive will is the same as the desire of God. His directives are commands and prohibitions: "Do this; do not do that."

God's permissive will is what God allows to happen because He has given free will to man.

God's overruling will is the principle that Jesus Christ controls history.

7. Mandates of Divine Guidance:

Submit to the will of God by being filled with the Holy Spirit to empower obedience to God's will:

Ephesians 5:18b ... be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Know the will of God by accumulating Bible doctrine in the *kardía*:

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Grow in the will of God by advancing to spiritual maturity in order to execute His will to the maximum:

2 Peter 3:18 Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

8. The will of God for believers:

Viewpoint will of God: What does He want me to think?

Operational will of God: What does He want me to do?

Geographical will of God: Where does He want me to be?

³ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass., 2014), s.v. "free will."



Conclusion:

In our context in James 4:15, is it God's "desire, intention, or design" for these two men to engage in free enterprise "halfcocked"? Here are two dictionary definitions of the term:

Halfcocked. adjective. Informal. Inadequately or poorly prepared: a halfcocked plan to buy out the company.⁴

Half cocked. adverb. Prematurely; unprepared: *not going into this half cocked.*⁵

The advice James suggests to these two men is for them to consider what God recommends from His divine omniscience. He would recommend that they consult His divine guidance.

Divine guidance is available only through Bible study. Scripture provides divine guidance through the teaching ministry of a pastor-teacher and precisely from the one presently available to them, namely James, the half-brother of Jesus, located in Jerusalem.

From his teaching ministry, they would gradually acquire an inventory of doctrinal absolutes in the 11 categories of Systematic Theology that would provide them with the divine guidance they need to make good decisions from a position of power.

Presently, they are not capable of making good decisions based on divine guidance. Their inventory for decision-making is strictly human viewpoint which does not even provide them solid guidance from human rationales:

James 4:13 Come now, you reversionists who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, and shall work in that place about a year, we shall engage in free enterprise and make a profit." (EXT)

James makes the issue clear by insisting they are going off halfcocked in:

James 4:14 You two do not understand what kind of life ... yours tomorrow. You two are just a fleeting vapor trail which soon vanishes from view. (EXT)

(End JAS4-32. See JAS4-33 for continuation of study at p. 321.)

⁴ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, fifth ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Co., 2016), s.v. "halfcocked."

⁵ *American Slang*, ed. Robert L. Chapman (St. Louis: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), s.v. "half cocked."

