

James 4:11-17

Commentary: The Dangerous Game of 'Playing God' (James 4:11-17)

James began chapter 4 with his strongest correction against the believer seeking the worldly pursuits of self indulgence. These selfish Christians desired to fulfil their own lusts, which significantly affected their relationship with other believers and with God. James was quick to identify these issues and give instruction for its cure; God's grace received by a humble attitude (v6, v10).

In verses 11-17 James circles back to the issue of selfishness, which had advanced into self-exaltation. James expresses that self-exaltation results in a dangerous game of "playing God" in which the individual gives themselves the final authority in the lives of others and in their own life. These practices result from a lack of humility (v10). James instructs believers against playing such games, reminding them that God alone has ultimate authority. Believers ought to seek His will for their own lives and humbly and submissively act upon that will.

Instructions:

Carefully read through James 4:11-17 and then attempt to answer the questions which follow.

James has just advised his readers to submit to God and live in humility (v6-10). Part of being humble requires them to not speak against (criticise or slander) and judge (taking the position of final authority) others. The Old Testament law forbids spreading slander: 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people' (Leviticus 19:16).

1) What does James say believers are actually doing when they slander one another (v11)?

James notes that 'there is one Lawgiver' (v12). God alone.

2) What authority does God have as the only lawgiver (v12)?

When believers have a critical and judgemental attitude towards one another the result is often to consider oneself as "better" than others.

3) What question does James pose in order to remind individual believers that they are not "better" than anyone else (v12)?

Another part of being humble involves not 'boasting' (v16) about the future. Here James is most likely addressing the Christian merchants of the first-century business world. These people could afford to move their operations from one city to another to take advantage of market trends.

4) What was the flaw in their planning for the future (v13-14)?

5) What image does James use to illustrate the fragile nature of human life (v14)?

6) How can believers show a humble attitude when it comes to the future (v15)?

7) What can we do to find out God's will for our life?

James does not speak against believers that sensibly plan their lives, but rather, the attitude of excluding God as the ultimate authority and decision maker of our life.

8) How does James describe believers that refuse to leave room for God's will (v16)?

9) What advice does James give to stop the game of "playing God"(v17)?

10) What is the sin of verse 17?