

Theme: Godly Perspectives

James 4:11–5:6

¹¹ Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.

¹ Come now, *you rich*, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon *you!* ² Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. ⁴ Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. ⁵ You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

Consider

4:11. What command does James give Christians about how they are to treat one another? What do you think would be involved in speaking evil of someone?

Note: speaking “evil of the law and judg[ing] the law” is probably referring to breaking the law by slandering others.

How do these verses continue the theme that began in 3:1?

4:12. Whose place are we taking when we judge fellow Christians? Why is it better for God to judge them than for us to judge them? (Notice: what is God able to do that we cannot do?)

4:13. What type of planner is James addressing in this verse? How far in advance is he planning?

4:14. People plan out their years, but can they know what will happen tomorrow? Why is this confidence in the future misplaced? What is a vapor? How is life comparable to a vapor according to this verse?²⁰

Note: James is making the point that if you do not know what will happen tomorrow, how can you be sure of what will happen over the course of a year?

4:15. What attitude does James prescribe for us as we consider the future? Is James telling his audience not to plan? How does this passage relate to verses like Proverbs 16:3; 19:21; and Luke 14:28–32?

4:16. The phrase “but now” means they had rejected his instructions to plan “as the Lord wills.” What attitude does James associate with this choice? What two words does James connect with this boasting?

- _____ .
- _____ .

4:17. The word “therefore” usually indicates a conclusion. What conclusion does James draw from the previous section? What responsibility do we have to obey?

5:1–3. James shifts his attention to a different kind of Christian (compare “come now” in 4:13 and 5:1). Describe this person.

What “miseries” will come upon the rich? List the things that will happen to their possessions:

- Riches: _____ .
- Garments: _____ .
- Gold and silver: _____ .

What do you notice about all these results?

Why will these miseries come?

What type of rich person is being addressed?

5:4–5. Who has heard the cries of the workers who have been defrauded? Why should this concern these corrupt landowners?

5:6. Who is the one who does not resist? Who does he not resist?

²⁰ The Preacher of Ecclesiastes speaks frequently about vanity and the temporary nature of life. See Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14; 3:19; 6:12.

Ask Yourself

How can I talk to someone about their sin without judging them? Is there a place for lovingly confronting sin? (Consider Galatians 6:1; Matthew 7:1–5.)

Is my future submissive to God’s will? Would I consider myself flexible—willing to let God interrupt and redirect? How do I respond when my plans are changed or interrupted?

In what ways do I put confidence in material wealth or prosperity as protection against the

unknown? In the end, how effective will this strategy be?

What are some ways that I might be tempted to take advantage of others? Do I treat people with fairness and respect in my business, home, and family?

How does the idea of serving and loving others correct the temptation to use or abuse people for my own benefit?

Cross References

Proverbs 16:3

Commit your works to the LORD, And your thoughts will be established.

Proverbs 19:21

There are many plans in a man’s heart, Nevertheless the LORD’s counsel—that will stand.

Luke 14:28–32

²⁸“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has *enough* to finish *it*—²⁹lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him,³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish?’³¹ Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?³² Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.”

Galatians 6:1

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Matthew 7:1–5

¹“Judge not, that you be not judged.² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye?⁵ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Ecclesiastes 1:2

“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity.”

Ecclesiastes 1:14

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

Ecclesiastes 3:19

For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all *is* vanity.

Ecclesiastes 6:12

For who knows what *is* good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?

Matthew 6:19–21

¹⁹“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Amos 2:6

Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*, Because they sell the righteous for silver, And the poor for a pair of sandals.”