

**Winter 2021 Bible Study**  
**Week 6 - James 4:11-5:6**

We return to a dominant theme in the book of James, *right speech* (cf. 1:19, 26; 2:15-16; 3:1-12; 5:9, 12). In this section of the book, James points out the ways in which the lack of right speech, reveals dangerous inner attitudes, especially attitudes about resources.

**4:11-12 - Arrogance of judgment**

- Our culture often reprimands people for “judging” the actions of others in broad and sweeping ways, even excusing harmful behaviors under the sweep of not judging others. (For example, a popular Miley Cyrus song includes the line, “Remember only God can judge us, forget the haters, ‘cuz somebody loves ya” in the midst of a verse about doing cocaine.) How is what James says about judgment in 4:11-12 different from our cultural idea of judgment?
- The implication here is that to speak evil or slander someone is to place oneself in the seat of judge, lowering your neighbor’s standing and elevating the self. Why are we so tempted to do this to one another?
- Leviticus 19:16 specifically bans slander of others, thus James suggests that when we choose to slander someone, we not only place ourselves in authority over the other person, but we also act in authority above the Law. How do we, as Christians generations removed from the level of authority James gives to Law, respond to these verses?

**4:13-17 - Arrogance of certainty and resource manipulation**

- James now shifts toward a new sign of arrogance that he wishes to address - the arrogance that places oneself in control of all resources and financial gain, and all that is to come.
- When we make plans and assume they will come to fruition, we take part in a closed system of resources, one that assumes there is only so much available and that we must manipulate plans and methods to get enough for ourselves. How does this kind of arrogance of control show up in our world today?

**5:1-6 - Arrogance, envy, and the habits of the rich**

- Commentators point out that the root of arrogance is envy - we are envious of things that others have, and attempt to increase our own standing and value in response to our envy. Once we achieve and receive that which we envied, we feel a need to show it off to others. Keep in mind that this community of James in Jerusalem was incredibly poor. So why would James speak about the woes of the rich if he is working primarily with the poor?
- How do envy and arrogance show up in our lives in non-material ways? What might we envy or boast about that is not a financial or material resource?
- Compare with Matthew 6:19-21 and 28-34. How are the tone of these passages similar and different?