

James 4:11-12

I. Don't play God by judging a brother (11-12a)

A. Do not speak disparagingly of one another (11a)

“speak disparagingly” has the connotation of defaming, slandering, or otherwise speaking evil of something
This same word is repeated three times in this verse in different forms.

B. Reason: To do so is to put yourself in God's place (11b-12a)

1. Disrespecting a brother is standing in judgment of the Law (11b-e)

a Condition: If someone slanders or judges a brother (11b-c)

1) Brothers, whoever is speaking disparagingly of a brother (11b)

“speaking disparagingly” is the same word as earlier

2) Or is judging his brother (11c)

“judging” means passing negative judgement – arrogantly looking down on someone with disapproval for something they are or have done – finding fault with someone

b He slanders and judges the Law (11d-e)

1) He is speaking disparagingly of the Law (11d)

2) And He is judging the Law (11e)

James says that those treating their brother in this way are also treating the Law in the same way. It is to arrogantly place oneself above the Law, as well as above the brother - a place where only God is worthy to occupy.

2. Judging the Law is not keeping the Law (11f-h)

a Condition: If you are judging the Law (11f)

James steps the argument forward from the previous proposition. Assuming that the reader has been judging a brother, which means they are judging the Law, then they are missing the point of the Law and not fulfilling it.

b You are not doing the Law, but judging it (11g-h)

1) Neg: You are not a doer of the Law (11g)

They do not place themselves under the Law, in obedience to it.

2) Pos: But [you are its] judge (11h)

Rather, they place themselves over the Law, as its judge. Again, usurping a position reserved for God alone, which is stated in the next proposition.

3. There is One lawgiver and judge, Who is able to save and to destroy (12a)

Insomuch as James' readers place themselves over the Law, they are wrong. Because that place is already taken by God Himself. God is the One Who gave the Law, and He is the One Who is authorized to judge. Therefore, we should never arrogantly exalt ourselves to a role that is only appropriate for God Himself.

God is the One Who is powerful to save, but also powerful to destroy. Therefore, we should humble ourselves before Him (vv. 7, 10) instead of exalting ourselves over our brothers.

II. But who are you – the one judging the neighbor? (12b)

Finally, James confronts the underlying problem. We are not authorized, nor capable of standing in judgment of others. This is arrogance beyond our station and ability. It is usurping a privilege that God alone has.

It is important to keep the distinction clear. What James is prohibiting is an arrogant attitude of being better than others and being able to stand in judgment.

There is another type of “judgment” which means making reasonable determinations and decisions, which we are commanded to do. We can judge things about people without judging them. We can (and should) make judgments without standing in judgment.