

James 4:13-17

I. Don't boast in yourself, which is pretentious pride (13-16)

A. You should not trust and boast in yourself (13-15)

1. Pay attention, now! (13a)

James uses a term which serves to call for attention and emphasize what follows, cf. 5:1

2. Don't trust in your own plan and ability, instead, trust God's plan and ability (13b-15)

a Neg: Don't trust in your plans, which you have no control over (13b-14)

1) You make your own plans (13b-f)

a) You who say... (13b)

This is a hypothetical situation for his readers, describing the making of selfish plans for selfish gain

b) What is said: (13c-f)

(1) Today or tomorrow, we will go into a certain city (13c)

"certain" is an ambiguous, unspecified term, "such and such a city," referring to any hypothetical city which one might say

(2) And we will do things there for a year (13d)

Likewise, "do things" is an open-ended term covering any hypothetical situation

(3) And we will be in business (13e)

(4) And we will profit (13f)

The hypothetical plan is to gain wealth through business. The implication is that this is for the purpose of selfish gain and self-aggrandizement.

2) Even though you are not in control over your fleeting life (14)

a) You don't know what tomorrow will bring! (14a-b)

(1) Whoever does not know the things of tomorrow (14a)

James reminds them that they don't know the future, and that no amount of planning can guarantee what they planned

Humans don't have the foresight or power needed to guarantee the future. Only God does. And to assume that they could do so shows that this hypothetical person is mistaken about themselves and their relation to God – i.e. that He is God and they are not.

(2) i.e. what is your life? (14b)

This could be translated literally as "what kind of thing your life is"

This is similar to 1:24, where the person forgets what kind of thing they are after looking at themselves in a mirror

Not only do they not know the future, but they don't even know their own nature in the present – that they are not God

b) Reason: You are like a fleeting vapor (14c-e)

(1) For you are a vapor (14c)

This term ("vapor") may be reference to the term translated "vanity/meaningless" in Eccl. 1:2, 12:8

(2) Which is visible for a moment and then disappears (14d-e)

(a) appearing for a small [time] (14d)

(b) and then also disappearing (14e)

The term "disappear/vanish" is a harsh reminder of the transitory nature of life and a reality check that they are not God

b Pos: Instead, you should defer to God's will & purpose (15)

1) instead, you should say (15a)

Their statement made no reference to God. This is the definition of secular. It may believe in God in theory, but acts as if He did not exist. It is "practical atheism." James' correction of their statement puts the focus back on God as the prime reality and determiner of their life. This is the Christian worldview and wisdom – to acknowledge God and His role in everything.

This alludes back to vv. 1-3 where they desire but are never satisfied because they seek without reference to God and/or seek with selfish motives.

Only God is the source of all good things -cf. 1:17

2) What they should say: If God wants, we will do something (15b-d)

a) Condition: If the Lord purposes, (15b)

The Lord's will is the determining factor for what happens to our future plans James (and the rest of the Bible) gives no explanation of why God wills one thing and not another, beyond the fact that He is God

b) We will live and do something (15c-d)

(1) Both we will live (15c)

Our continued existence is dependent on God

(2) And we will do this or that (15d)

"this or that" is an open-ended formula that could apply to any hypothetical situation

James makes anything we might do contingent on God's will and permission

James' point is that it is wise to recognize our dependence on God and His will, and to attempt to live independently of God is not only idolatry, it is foolishness

B. You make evil boast in your pretentious pride (16)

1. But now you boast in your pretentious pride (16a)

"boast" is to take pride in something – it is a neutral term, which can be positive or negative, depending on what is boasted in, and if it is appropriate for the person to boast in it.

"pretentious pride" is a state of arrogance and haughtiness. This is not the content of the boast, but it is the manner in which the person boasts. i.e. "you boast in a pretentious, arrogant manner" The content of the boasting (from the context) is their plans to go somewhere and profit off commerce.

2. Result: All such boasting is bad/evil (16b)

They are boasting in something that is not yet reality, and which may never come to pass, because it is outside of their control. And it is not theirs to boast in, because all good things come from God.

II. Therefore: If he knows to do good and doesn't, it is sin (17)

A. Condition: If he knows what to do and doesn't do the good (17a-c)

1. If he knows the good to do (17a-b)

a knowing (17a)

The fact that this person knows is specifically highlighted by James. Knowledge of God's will increases moral responsibility. This does not mean that ignorance of God's will makes a person innocent. Paul has excluded this possibility in Romans chs. 1-3. However, there are different levels of responsibility and punishment appropriate for different levels of knowledge, -cf. Luke 12:47-48. Inadvertent sins are punished less severely than high handed sins.

b to do good (17b)

This is both knowing the moral imperative to do good, but also to know the good that should be done. In this context, it most likely refers to avoiding arrogant presumption, and rather, trusting God in every area of life.

2. and not doing [it] (17c)

Even though they know what to do, they make the conscious decision to refuse to do so, and thereby actively do the opposite of what God desires.

B. Therefore [it is] sin to him (17d)

Not only the active commission of misdeeds is sin, but also the passive omission of good deeds.

-cf. Rom. 14:23