

JAMES 4:10-12
Who is The Judge?

Have we ever lived in a more openly judgmental age?
Hardly a day goes by when “the twitter mob” isn’t seeking to judge or cancel someone.
Or social media conversations about politics, cultural issues, or Covid protocols

10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. 12 There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

v. 10 gives a hint as to why we judge others – we want to be exalted. If we can bring others down, then we can rise up... or so we think.

HUNTER DOCKERY HUMILITY TEST

This is Hunter's "Siberian Humility Test" given to that group of unteachable pastors and church leaders in Novosibirsk, Siberia Russia. God used it to open their eyes to their deeper sin patterns (they were superb "lawkeepers") and to break their cold, proud hearts so that they began to repent and fall in love with the Good News about Jesus all over again.

- ❖ Do you take criticism well?
- ❖ Are you a good listener?
- ❖ Are you in frequent power struggles and arguments?
- ❖ Do you ever take the lowest place?
- ❖ Is anger often lurking just below the surface?
- ❖ Are you easily offended and hurt? Do you quickly perceive things as slights and insults?
- ❖ Do you quickly impute negative motives to others?
- ❖ Do others experience grace in and through your words?
- ❖ When you correct others do you include the gospel of hope knowing that your sin is as great as that of the person being corrected?
- ❖ Are you a forgiving person?
- ❖ Are there some key people who know the areas of temptation in your life at present?

Verses 11-12 are relevant in light of our series in SS on Dealing with conflict. Today’s SS lesson is tailor-made for this sermon. I wish I could say that I planned it this way, but it just “sort of happened”. Most conflict begins or is escalated by words that convey judgment.

These verses remind us of the words of James’ brother, Jesus, who said, “Judge not lest you be judged.” That is a popular verse among non-Christians who seems to think that it is the only verse in scripture that deals with ‘judgement’.

This gets tricky because there is a built in tension in scripture, which calls us to be discerning, to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves

Part of the tension is in how we use or translate the words ‘speak against’ and ‘judge’. When it comes to being discerning, we must exercise wise judgement. We are never called to set aside Biblical truth or principles in discerning right from wrong. We are never called to NOT make a distinction between truth and error or between right and wrong. There are things that we as believers are to avoid as we use good discernment or judgment. Admittedly, in doing so, some will be there to say, “Judge not lest you be judged.” Often, the person who says that is already making a judgement that YOU should NOT be exercising discernment about a given situation. It is a self-defeating argument.

Wise judgment and discernment are a part of the corporate Christian life experience.

James 5:9 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin. - Bonhoeffer

But I think we need to see the first negation as probation of “slander or speaking against”, which is different from judging. The context does not indicate the specific issues going on but it certainly indicates that there is verbal jousting that is disturbing the peace and harmony among believers. James is talking about speech that is often behind the back of a fellow Christian, which tears them down. It builds us up at their expense.

This slander or defamation may relate to something that is true, but it doesn't need to be spread. This behavior may not be a breach of truth, but it is a breach of love and a breach of humility.

HPC NEW MEMBER CLASS

I will promote Harmony in the church because brotherliness and neighborliness are emphasized in scripture, especially here in James 4.

We avoid slander and back-biting by remembering the one about whom we are speaking – brothers, sisters, neighbors in Christ. Now James is reminding you of this simply to point out that brethren ought not to be hurting brothers and sisters and neighbors. We ought to be cultivating close and friendly and encouraging and mutually helping relationships in our speech.

James says to remember against what you are speaking. The audience had a high view of God's “law” or Torah. They wanted to obey it, but were actually violating it by slandering one another. It's more serious than you think because it's not just your brother's reputation that you're breaking. It is God's law that you're breaking. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges or condemns the law. This is a very God-centric view of life – everything is done before the face of God and has God's glory in view.

We are not only speaking against the law; we are judging it as deficient or wrong in telling us not to speak ill of one another. We are putting ourselves above the law and judging it.

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

You can promote Harmony By Means Of Giving Only Good Reports.

Definition Of A Bad Report: “It is using words, tonal patterns or facial expressions to put someone else in a bad light. It is damaging someone else's reputation with information that does not need to be shared. It is encouraging or spreading discontent or discord among others.” –Bill Gothard

Regarding Good Reports

“In obedience to the Word of God, I hereby commit myself to the goal of giving only good reports. I hereby purpose to approach an offender in a spirit of genuine love having first examined and corrected my own attitudes and actions. Only if I am unable to restore an offender will I share the problem with others according to the principles of Scripture. When I violate this goal, I purpose to ask forgiveness knowing that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Ways to Stop Someone from Giving a Bad Report:

1. Lovingly ask, “Do you feel I am responsible to know about this? I would rather not hear about this unless I am directly involved.”

2. Lovingly say, if speaking with a member of this Church: “Don’t forget about our covenant concerning bad reports.”

Slander and judging violate the standard of humility and they violate the reality of our being limited creatures. We all live with a fear of our inadequacy being exposed, so if we can expose someone else first, then we create a temporary sense of measuring up.

The PROBING QUESTION...

v. 12 “Who are you to judge your neighbor?”

We are not qualified to be in that position. Only God can do that.

We don’t know everything, or at least we don’t know enough.

EX: times when I’ve said something or asked Linda about something that I thought needed to be done and it was already done.

In chapter 4 James is exposing a human spirit of prideful self-interest. It is seen in quarrels and conflicts (v.1,2), adulteress friendship with the world (4,5), and seeking to dominate others through our speech (11,12).

Relationships flounder in an atmosphere of judgment – marriage, parents/children, children/parents, work, recreation, church, etc.

We will impose standards on others because their “success” will validate our place in their lives – parents with children, at work, even in churches.

This is the toxic formula...“my opinion and acceptance of you is determined by your ability to measure up to my standards.”

Even if we don’t say it, the aroma of judgment is evident.

The anti-dote to this lack of humility is to give God His rightful place

12 There is *only one* Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy;

Yes, God is a Judge. WHO knew this verse would be so relevant today? We all know that “God as judge” doesn’t get a lot of likes on social media, but we didn’t know that, THIS WEEK, a major corporate media voice would come out and give an honest look into the theology behind his opinions.

Don Lemon... in a discussion about the Catholic church’s stance against same-sex marriage, Lemon said this...

I respect people’s right to believe in whatever they want to believe in their God,” Lemon said.

... I think that the Catholic Church and many other churches really need to re-examine themselves and their teachings. Because that is not what God is about. God is not about hindering people or even judging people.”

We see that there is a theological view at the root. Friends, that’s always the case. Remember the series on the Attributes of God and the quote from Tozier – “The most important thing about a person is what he/she believes about God.”

“God is not about judging people” would bring in the likes on social media, but it doesn’t square with scripture. A cursory reading of the Bible would show us that judgment is a big part of God’s role in the universe.. God is for human flourishing and HE DEFINES what that looks like, not us.

James4 12 There is *only one* Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy;

That verse reminds me of the warning that Jesus gave...Matthew 10:28 Jesus is sending out the 12 apostles with a warning about the persecution that they will encounter...

And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

We should not live in awe of the false theology of those who disregard scripture. We should not live in awe of the approval they may bestow on us or how they might exalt us. We should live in awe of THE ONE who can save or destroy both the soul and the body in hell.

THAT IS A HUMBLING TRUTH BOMB.

We may not want to admit it, but when push comes to shove, we want a righteous God who will judge and right all the wrongs. As uncomfortable as it may be, we want a Holy God on the throne of the universe. He alone can bring forth a truly righteous and just judgment. It is better to trust in a God who humbled himself to take on our sin than it is to trust the ever changing standards of those animated by the spirit of the age.

Only God is qualified to write the rules for a meaningful life. Only God is qualified to define us and to give us wisdom from above.

One of the aspects of craftiness in deceitful scheming of the world is that we can write our own rules and definitions for life. They are falsely presented under the guise of two worldviews:

The legalist/traditionalist

VS

The relativist / progressive / woke

The spirit of the age would say that they are opposites, but in reality they are partners in the crime of stealing from the Gospel. They both offer their man-made form of religion with a system of right and wrong, rituals, mantras, and ways of seeing the world.

THEY ARE ON THE SAME SIDE OF THE SPECTRUM in opposition to the Gospel worldview.

TRADITIONALIST & RELATIVIST	VS	THE GOSPEL
Salvation by legalist works or woke works	vs	Salvation by grace alone in Christ alone.
Arbitrary standards that change	vs	Eternal standards A sure salvation through
No possibility of forgiveness redemption	vs	More forgiven than we dare imagine.

The so-called relativist, who says that there is no absolute truth are ABSOLUTELY SURE about that. They don't reject God as judge so that there will be NO judge. They reject God as judge so that THEY can judge. And they offer no redemption. Neither the traditional moralist, nor the current woke moralist, will die for you or offer forgiveness.

Only the God of the Bible is a God of salvation, forgiveness, and redemption.

James 4:12 There is *only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy;*

God has brought salvation through his son

Christ came to fulfill the law for us so that we won't be judged by God; nor should we judge one another. Christ is the end of striving. He is the humble Savior

Christ makes and meets the demands of the law. No other religion does this.

Our desire to measure up is fulfilled in Christ and when we draw near to God and experience all that He is for us in Christ, it will change us.

Amen

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