

Let God Be God Because God is Good

James 4:11-12

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Reading scripture is an awesome privilege. By that, I mean it is nothing short of amazing that God has gifted us with His word and that we can read it, learn His heart for us, obey it and live life to the full.

The Book of James is an amazing book. It's super practical, yet not easy, fluffy reading. Because I'm a sucker for a good food analogy, reading through James is like the creating of a delicious, multilayered sandwich! Each new section is another tasty ingredient that adds to the complexity and succulence of the sandwich! They're not separate foods or courses, they're expertly woven together elements building on and enhancing one another. Are you ready for a tasty bite? Let's dig in!

James 4:11-12 - 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?

Because God is God and we are not, we should never condemn one another or tear one another down with our words.

Verse 11a

- Do not speak against one another, brothers and sisters NASB
- Do not speak evil against each other, brothers and sisters NLT
- Do not slander one another, brothers and sisters NIV

In verse 10, James was talking about humility, so at a glance it may seem like James is switching topics on us, but this section is actually just another ingredient of our sandwich, not a side dish. In fact, it points all the way back to Chapter 3. Listen to how Douglas Moo describes it. I'm paraphrasing the commentary a bit for clarity and unity of thought. The verses on slander or speaking against one another point back to the warning about the tongue in 3:1-12. Speaking against others is a manifestation of pride which God resists (4:6) and pride is to be countered by humility toward God. This kind of "speaking against" people

is often linked to jealousy, selfish ambition, quarrels, and pride, and is said to be a manifestation of double-mindedness. In other words, “speaking against people” is part of a cluster of words that address the issue of selfishness which shows up as slanderous speech. This cluster is exactly what James addresses in 3:1 through 4:12.

Isn't that great!? James isn't topic hopping at all. He's actually just being thorough as he crafts this excellent description of Christian behavior.

If you remember way back to when Chris Klein preached, he informed us that James's audience was claiming to be Christians. And the book of James, at a super basic level, is saying “if you're a Christian, then you shouldn't act like A,B,or C, but should do X,Y and Z. So church, we should not be characterized by any of these negative attributes - jealousy, selfish ambition, quarrels, or pride, and now James says we shouldn't talk down about or slander others.

This command in 11a seems pretty clear at a first glance. Don't slander. The definition of slander is - the action or crime of making a false spoken statement damaging to a person's reputation. The Bible is very clear about this being wrong. It's in the famous top 10 sins – #9 do not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Leviticus 19:16 You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people

Proverbs 25:18 *Like* a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow

Is a person who gives false testimony against his neighbor.

Ephesians 4:31 All bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and **slander** must be removed from you, along with all malice.

Jesus even had something to say about it in Matthew 15:18-19 But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and those things defile the person. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, *acts of* adultery, *other* immoral sexual acts, thefts, false testimonies, *and* ^[a]slanderous statements.

The New Living Translation is the one that uses the word slander, but listen to this quote from Hughes - It is important that we understand the precise wording of this command as the Greek has it, because it actually forbids more than slander. Literally the command is, “do not speak down on one another, brothers” or “do not speak against one another brethren” (NASB). Slander is malicious speech that is untrue. But the command here forbids *any speech* (whether it is true or false) which runs down another person. Certainly no Christian should ever be party to slander – making false charges against another's

reputation. Yet some do. But even more penetrating is the challenge to refrain from any speech which intends to run down someone else, even if it is totally true.

This kind of reminds me of the sermon on the mount where Jesus says, “you’ve heard it said, but I say” and he steps up what people thought the commands were. Here we maybe thought it says don’t slander or lie about someone, but we’re actually called not to say anything negative whether true or false.

But this command isn’t just for anyone. Listen again as I read more of verse 11. Do not speak against one another, brothers *and sisters*. The one who speaks against a brother *or sister*, or judges his brother *or sister*, speaks against the law and judges the law.

Did you catch the repeated words? Brothers and sisters – 3 times. James is talking to the church about how to treat fellow believers in the church. Why? What’s the big deal? Shouldn’t we just talk kindly about everybody? Why is he specifically talking to us about believers?

Two weeks ago Kraig said a phrase that I wrote down, cuz I was like “Bam” that’s the thrust of what James is getting at in my passage, thanks Kraig! He said Church Unity is paramount. It is of the utmost importance! Paul talks about unity all over the place – Ephesians, Philippians, Corinthians, Timothy – but why? Why is church unity so important?

First and foremost, the church is Christ’s bride and He wants a bride of purity. Remember Ephesians 4:31 All bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and slander must be removed from you, along with all malice. We need to purify **ourselves** to purify the church so Christ has a pure bride. Now that alone should be reason enough to give us the motivation to attack every sin in our lives and pursue church unity by loving each other and building each other up rather than attacking each other. But there’s more.

Another reason church unity is so important is in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 ¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ¹⁸ Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their wrongdoings against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin in our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

That's the gospel right there! We're sinners in need of reconciliation to God so God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin, to pay the penalty we deserve for our sins, and bam you're a new creation! That's all incredibly awesome, but look what it says right there in the middle - He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us.

Church, we are representatives of the God of the Universe! Jesus is a life changing God, and if we belong to Him, if we've truly become a new creation, then our lives should reflect that. People should be attracted to the community of believers, not repulsed by it.

Have you ever known someone who claims to be a Christian but is really a hypocrite? That's terrible, but unfortunately way too common. In fact, years ago before I was saved, I knew guys who fit this description and I remember saying "If that's what being a Christian looks like, then I don't want any part of that!".

Brothers and sisters, we should be winsome for Christ. We should be treating each other so well that people should look at the church and say "Man, whatever is going on there I want it! Those folks are loving, compassionate, kind and generous. I feel encouraged just being around them!" The world is full of hypocritical, rude or judgmental people. So much so, that many may just expect the church to be the same. We simply cannot let that be the case, church family.

Look at what God's word has to say

Galatians 6:10 - So then, while we have opportunity, let's do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

1 Corinthians 14:12 - So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

Ephesians 4:29 - Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Proverbs 25:11 *Like* apples of gold in settings of silver
Is a word spoken in ^lright circumstances.

That's what our speech should be like church! We should be refreshing one another, encouraging each other, building each other up! Praying for one another – for real! Remember a few weeks ago when Barry warned against gossip prayer? Things like "boy we should really pray for Callahan, he's a real mess". Right? That's exactly the type of thing James is warning against here too. So let's not do that. Let's love each other church, with God's kind of love.

Let's finish looking at the next sentence in verse 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

There are times when it's just as important to know what a section of scripture does NOT mean as it is to know what it does mean. This is one of those times. As Tom often points out as we discuss things at the Ironman Bible Study on Thursday morning, when discussing things we need to define our terms. So what does James mean when he says "judges his brother"? What does it mean to judge our brother? I'll begin with what it does not mean. It does not mean that we let other believers do whatever they want. Some like to quote Matthew 7:1 "Do not judge or you will be judged" as a reason to stay out of others business, don't confront their sin or correct them, but to read either this James passage or the Matthew passage that way is to completely ignore the context of the verses and the clear commands of many other verses in scripture.

Keep your finger in James 4, but turn to Matthew 7 if you would. Join me on a brief fly over of this chapter. It only takes a quick look at the full chapter of Matthew 7 to see that Jesus clearly does not mean to let others do whatever they want, but He means for us to use judgment or discernment.

Right there is the famous verse 1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged", but look at verse 5 "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." Jesus is not saying "Hey you lumberjacks, go deal with your logs and leave you speck eyed friends alone." No! He's saying don't be hypocrites who think they have it all together and don't be judgmental or critical. Take care of your sin and then go help your friend with theirs. Do you see that? It says "then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye". Now, Jesus can't mean that you have to be sinless before you can help a brother or sister, because then no one could help anyone. Jesus knows that we're all sinners in need of forgiveness, and He wants us to help other sinners in the same boat. So deal with your sin by repenting and continuing to fight against it, then help your friend, don't leave them stuck in their sin.

Look at verse 6 - Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. First of all, YIKES!, but second, how do you know who's a dog or a pig? You gotta use your judgment.

Now look at verse 13 - Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. Which gate is narrow and which is wide? We have to use our judgment and discernment to determine that. Read the word of God and compare the choice in front of you to what it says.

Look at verse 15 - Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You need to use your judgment, church. What does a sheep look like and what does a wolf look like? How do we know? Verse 16 – you will know them by their fruits. Back to the word or God guys! Do this person's words, thoughts, and actions line up with what we read in the Bible? This is super important church because look at verse 21 – Jesus says Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*.

Someone may swear up and down to you that they're a Christian, but if their thoughts, words and actions don't line up with the word of God, as James says, they are fooling themselves. And Jesus says I never knew you. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 18:15 If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. So Jesus clearly does not mean stay out of other's business. He wants us to reach out into the mess of ministry, share the amazing, living, active word of God and make disciples of all nations. That's love guys! The world says that correcting people or telling them no is unloving. Not according to Jesus.

Listen to 2 Timothy 3:16 in the NLT - All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

Isn't that amazing? So bringing the word of God to bear in people's lives is truly loving them.

Let's look back at James. If he means "don't confront or correct others" here in verse 11 then he completely contradicts himself later in chapter 5:19-20 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. Sounds just like what Jesus said, doesn't it?

Brothers and sisters if we know someone is stuck in sin or their mind is caught up in unbiblical thinking, then the least loving thing to do is to leave them there. Christian love looks at the word of God, sees how to live, then obeys and shows others that truth so they can walk in it too. The word of God has to be the basis for our thoughts and actions, because using the world's wisdom we can lead ourselves in any direction we want to go, and that's not going to be good. Remember what James called the world's wisdom? Natural, earthly, and demonic. We can't go there church. Way back in James 1 he said prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. Why? James 1:25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

We want each other to be blessed right? Then preach the Word to each other. Then lovingly and humbly hold each other accountable to the word. Proverbs 25:11 says it beautifully - *Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprovener to a listening ear.*

So we know that James is not at all saying to stay out of other people's business, but what is he saying?

James 4:11 - 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*.

Listen to this section from the commentary by R. Kent Hughes – What the scriptures forbid is judgmentalism, a severely critical spirit that judges everyone and everything, seeking to run others down. It is this unkind, judgmental spirit that James attacks in verse 11. His point is, when anyone speaks uncharitably against a fellow believer and judges him, he breaks the law of love, the royal law (James 2:8) – love your neighbor as yourself (Deut 19:18) - which then makes him guilty of breaking the whole Law of God (James 2:10) His failure to keep the law amounts to judging it, in that he has judged it to be invalid and unnecessary. Such a person, says Douglas Moo, becomes a judge of the law and sits himself “outside” and “above” the law. Thus the law is not kept, it is disdained”. If we think at all, we evidently view our opinion as better than God's. We imagine that given the chance we could improve the law.

Ouch! That sounds terrible, and it is! But to be flat out honest, that's exactly what we say to God with every sin we commit. We don't necessarily verbalize it that way, like, “God, I don't think that rule applies to me”, or “God, I know better than you.”, but that's what our sinful thoughts, words or actions communicate. We've chosen our way over God's way. We have judged the law as not applicable to us.

And James says in the end of verse 11 – If we're a judge of the law, we're not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. But like he said in chapter 1 we must be doers of the word.

Jesus says in John 14:15 If you love me, obey my commandments. He doesn't say “determine if my commandments are right for you. “ or “talk about other people who aren't obeying my commandments”. In John 13:35 Jesus says - Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

That's what James wants for us as a church. Which is exactly why he's preaching for us ask for God's wisdom, to control our tongues, not to judge by appearances, to demonstrate our faith by our works, to embrace humility and flee from sin and pride and now not to slander or be overly critical. In all this, James is saying “Church, we need to act like the unified body of Christ. We are under God's law, not judges over it.”

Listen to verse 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?

Hughes' commentary is helpful here – this second parallel argument takes the absurdity of a critical spirit a step higher, suggesting that a judgmental person sets himself not only above the law, but above God. God's sovereign capacity to "save and destroy" is repeated many times in the Bible. In Deuteronomy, Samuel, and Job. And in Matthew 10:28 Jesus warned His followers not to fear men who could kill the body, but not the soul, but to fear God who can destroy both the soul and the body in Hell. These scriptures illustrate James' logic here, which is this: Since God is the only one who can "save and destroy", only God has the right to judge! Therefore, for us to judge one of His creatures is to usurp (take over) a right that only God has. Therefore, judgmentalism is not only arrogant, but blasphemous. This alone ought to seal our judgmental, demeaning lips for eternity.

MacArthur says this –In a stinging rebuke to those who slander, James demands, who are you to judge your neighbor? In our contemporary speech James would be saying "Who in the world do you think you are, sitting in condemnation on someone else?"

Douglas Moo puts it this way – James rebukes jealous, or severely critical speech, by which we condemn others as being wrong in the sight of God. So don't try to do God's job. It's never going to end well.

Alright guys. Let's hit the application points! I've got two categories – What to do and what not to do.

What not to do –

Don't talk down about others, especially other believers

Don't take part in gossip – even if it's true

Don't try to do God's job, ever! (Don't condemn others)

Don't belittle those stuck in sin

What to do –

Know the Word of God (1 Timothy 4:15-16)

Examine your heart (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Humbly correct fellow believers, (Matthew 18:15-17, James 5:19-20)

Love strongly, and encourage one another. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

What to do

Know the Word of God (1 Timothy 4:15-16) Take pains with these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. ¹⁶ Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

Examine your heart (2 Corinthians 13:5) Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

Humbly correct fellow believers (Matthew 18:15-17) If your brother sins^l, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Love strongly, and encourage one another. (Hebrews 10:24-25) and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Brothers and sisters, we need each other. In fact, one of the greatest gifts God gave us is each other, the church family, the body of Christ. So treat fellow believers as precious gifts. Don't slander or cut others down. Don't be critical or judgmental. But as James says "be hearers and doers of the Word of God." With God's word as your guide, be encouraging and build one another up.