

The Evil of Judging

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. Today, we continue in our extended series in the book of James.

! What a wonderful book it is.! James writes to us about real-life situations.

James is not like many pastors we know today who deal with things that really are far out there. No, James is not dealing with get-rich-quick games and miracles. Instead, James deals with everyday circumstances.

One of our brothers, actually, who goes to this church, would say that James is a real brother. The brother is real, is what he would often say.

[1 : 16] Today, we come face-to-face with James' real-life instructions, another of James' real-life instructions.

Let us pray. Father, in this moment, we need you. Without your presence, without your enablement, without your granting clarity to us, this is futile.

And so, Lord, we ask that you would intervene, that you would do only what you can do, that you would cast a light on your word, so that we might see it, so that we might comprehend it, so that we might live by it.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen. We're now at James chapter 4.

James chapter 4. I'm going to ask you to turn in your Bible to James chapter 4. And we've got to consider two verses, verses 11 and 12.

[2 : 37] James 4, verses 11 and 12. James writes, Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.

The one who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

But if you judge the law, you're not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge. He who is able to save and to destroy.

But who do you think you are? Actually, it doesn't quite say that, does it? That's the way, if James were a bohemian, that's what James would have said in this concluding section.

But James writes, But who are you to judge your neighbor? In the passage we just read, it's very, very clear, very, very plain, James is telling us very simply, Do not slander, do not judge, because only God is qualified to judge.

[4 : 10] James tells us, James tells us, do not slander, do not judge, your brother, because it is contrary to God's law, and God alone is qualified to judge.

That's what James tells us. He tells us, don't slander, don't judge, your brother, because it's contrary to God's law, and God alone is qualified to judge.

And when we consider how, those of you who have been following over the last several months, when we consider how James characterized the church, particularly in James 4, it is no wonder that he issued such clear instructions not to scandalize and not to judge.

Listen to what James writes in the beginning of chapter 4 of James. He writes, What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder, you covet, and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. This is a church that James writes to that has problems.

[5 : 41] And so it would seem reasonable that people would be talking about one another and that they would be judging one another.

James is clear at this point. Having observed the actions and the attitudes of these people, James instructs them and by extension he speaks to us.

And I think we would be wise actually to consider these words of James. because how many of you know that we are in a similar circumstance?

Our situation is very much the same thing. Whenever you are in a group with people, you're going to have this kind of thing happening where some people are going to be doing things that you find

out of place.

They're going to be doing things that are sinful, things that are wrong. And the question is, how do you deal with it? How do you address it? And we know what our tendency is as humans and we certainly know what our tendency is as Bahamians.

[7 : 01] James writes to us and James says to us we ought to be careful not to slander our brothers and not to judge our brothers.

So then for a moment we will consider these words of James under two distinct headings which no doubt you know already.

The command not to slander and then secondly the command not to judge. But before we proceed to our first point I want you to take note because it's very important for us to understand James' audience here.

James is not writing to unbelievers. James writes do not speak evil against one another. Brothers. James is not writing to unbelievers.

James is writing to believers. So if you are a believer James is writing to you. And James recognizes how imperfect we are.

[8 : 20] But that's no excuse for us to remain where we are. I also want you to see clearly that James distinguishes between slandering and judging.

Let's take a look at it for a moment. James writes do not speak evil right? We see that against one another. brother. And then he says the one who speaks against a brother the one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother.

This suggests that perhaps James is talking about two distinct things. he says do not speak evil against one another.

Then he writes the one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law. James here speaks about those who will speak evil against a brother based on whatever whatever the motivation might be.

And then he talks about judging a brother. And while we have said in the beginning and this is a very important point that we would do well to consider while we've said in the beginning that James is a pragmatist a practical guy we should not confuse his writing as a humanistic attempt to tell us how to live our best lives now or perhaps how to live trouble free with others.

[10 : 10] That's not what he's doing. James is in fact telling us that these things ought to be an expression of our faith.

They ought to flow out of us. They ought to reflect the faith that we have. As I considered and studied these verses I found John MacArthur's commentary on James very helpful and I'll refer to it from time to time.

Let's consider our first point. The command to not slander. The command to not slander.

James writes in verse 11, Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother, a judge's brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

Notice who the perpetrator is. The perpetrator is the brother. The perpetrator is a believer. James writes to the believer, Do not speak evil against another.

[11 : 34] And notice, not only is the perpetrator a believer, but the person about whom this believer speaks is himself a believer.

James makes clear. The one who speaks against a brother, against another brother, James says, brother slandering brother.

on pages 217 and 218 of his commentary on James, this is an extensive quote.

I couldn't improve on it, so I thought I'd share it with you. John MacArthur writes, despite our seemingly, and I believe it's projected, yep, despite our seemingly casual attitude toward it, slander is a particularly destructive sin.

Writing in the 1828 edition of his dictionary, Noah Webster defined slander as a false tale or report maliciously uttered and tending to injure the reputation of another by lessening him in the esteem of his fellow citizens, by exposing him to impeachment and punishment or by impairing his means of living.

[13 : 22] Slander strikes at people's dignity, defames their character and destroys their reputation, their most priceless worldly asset.

Human society recognizes the gravity of slander and passes laws allowing those whose good name is slandered to sue for defamation of character.

Not only is slander a devastating sin, it is also a ubiquitous one. While other sins require a particular set of circumstances before they can be committed, slander needs only a malicious tongue driven by hatred.

That's a mouthful. That's a mouthful. Let's see if we can break it down a little bit for you. So what is slander? slander is a really just talking about somebody.

Talking bad about somebody. A bad report. And in this instance we're talking about people in the church, a brother. Slander is saying something mean about somebody to someone else.

[14:53] slander is an attempt to cause someone to look less than they might would otherwise in the eyes of another person.

Slander defames. Slander touches on the reputation of the individual who's being talked about.

Slander destroys. Slander makes you look bad. It's nasty. When we it's gossip. You go out there and talk about that's a good word.

Slander is going out there and talking about someone. then MacArthur says that this thing slander, it's everywhere and because it's so cheap.

Slander is cheap. You can do it on the cheap. All you need is a tongue to slander. You don't need money. You just need a tongue and a listening ear.

[16:17] So everybody can do it. everyone can do it. But the Bible teaches us that whether one is a slanderer or not is a defining trait of godliness.

Consider Psalm 15 verses 1 through 3. The psalmist helps us to see that a godly person is one who does not slander.

He writes, O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart.

Then he says in verse 3, who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor nor takes up a reproach against his town.

That is the godly man, the godly person that Psalm 15 writes about, the one who does not slander.

[17:40] And then we see in Psalm 50 verses 19 through 20 talks about the ungodly man. This is what it says. It's ungodly man.

give your mouth free rein for evil and your tongue frames the seat. You sit, verse 20 says, you sit and speak against your brother.

You slander your mother's son. slander, destructive, harmful. There's nothing worse than piercing words that we share about our brothers.

But the question that we should ask ourselves, and we understand this well, this is what we're talking about, it's not foreign to us. I said at the very beginning, James is practical.

James talks about real life situations. He talks to us about right where we are. These things are not foreign to us. So the question that we should ask ourselves is why do we have such a strong sinful desire to slander?

[19:04] Why do we have such a strong sinful desire to slander? Could it be that we desire to knock people down a notch or two in the eyes of others?

And in so doing, in their eyes, we seek to elevate ourselves. Could that be the reason?

In the end, though, it evidences our lack of genuine love for our brothers.

Indeed, James says, in the verses that we read, James says, it speaks evil against the law.

He says, do not write, do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother, a judge's brother, speaks evil against the law.

[20:13] What's James talking about here? Why does slandering speak evil against the law? You will be aware that the law of God is summed up like this, as Jesus teaches us in Luke chapter 10, verse 27.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.

So when James tells us that slandering speaks evil against the law, James is telling us that slandering is evidence of an absence of love.

It's an evidence that love does not exist in our hearts for our neighbor. God is telling us that we are above the law.

It's telling us that the law is not enough. But perhaps you ask, maybe there are some here who would ask the question, what if the thing about what I speak is true?

[21 : 46] What if it's true? What if it's this thing that I'm sharing about my brother is true? What if it's true that my brother did X, Y, and Z?

Am I still prohibited these verses from sharing it? Let me ask you a question if you have that question for me.

My question for you is consider what is your motive? What is your motive? What are you seeking to accomplish by sharing something with someone else?

Why share it with the world? Are you seeking to correct or are you seeking to destroy?

let's consider James' command to not judge.

[23 : 05] James writes, do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

But if you judge the law, you're not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy.

What does it mean in this context to judge? What does it mean to judge? What is James telling us? I think before we understand what it means to judge, perhaps it would be useful to consider what it does not mean to judge.

You get that? Believers should not judging does not mean, it does not mean judging in this context does not mean that believers should not humbly point out false to one another.

That's not what it does not mean. It doesn't mean that. You can do that. Judging does not mean that believers should not correct one another.

[24 : 30] It does not mean that. Judging does not mean that the local church should not engage in church discipline. It does not mean that either.

Listen to what Matthew 18 verses 15 through 17 says. It says, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his faults.

See what it says? Listen, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

[25 : 47] What is my point? My point is that James is not saying that we ought to disregard sin.

James is not saying that at all. He's not saying that we should just, if our brother does something, if you are aware of something, that you ought to ignore it. He's not saying that at all.

James is saying we ought to be careful how we do it. what is James, what really is the essence of what James is saying here?

What is he truly saying to us? James is saying to us that we ought not judge in the sense that we ought not to condemn a brother.

brother. We ought not to declare a brother unrighteous. That's what James is saying. James is saying that's not your place.

[27 : 00] So you ought to order when you do that. He's saying there is no circumstance in which you ought to do that. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 15.

The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. But what is, what's James really getting to here?

What, James is saying that it's wrong for us to judge our brothers? And then he says, the one who speaks against, or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

Why is it wrong? Why is this judging wrong? James offers several reasons why it is wrong.

James writes, first reason, he says, the one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

[28 : 18] That's reason number one, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. Yes, indeed, you stand in judgment of the law because in effect, we are saying that the law is not good enough.

when the law says we should love, we are in effect saying that is not good enough.

If we reflect honestly about it, I believe we will conclude that in fact, we are that way sometimes. Sometimes we are just like that.

We stand in judgment of rather than loving our brother, rather than caring, seeking to help our brother.

We judge our brother and James tells us, well, if you do that, then you're disregarding the law. You're saying that this law that God has given to us, it's not good enough.

[29 : 23] It's not all that we need. You're saying it's inadequate. for you are in effect judging the law.

James says, the other reason you shouldn't do it is because if you judge the law, you're not a doer of the law, but a judge. This one reminds me of being in court.

I don't know how many of you have ever had the pleasure or the displeasure of being in court. And when you're in court, there's only one judge in court, and you better not pretend to be the judge. Don't argue with the judge. When the judge lays down the rule, you've got to follow the rule. There's only one judge. James says, but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law. And we are called to be doers of the law and not judges of the law. We're not called to elevate ourselves as judges.

[30 : 40] In fact, we are warned against it. The Bible is very clear with respect to us doing that. Consider what Matthew chapter 7 verses 1 through 5 say about this subject.

It says, Judge not that you be not judged. Clear? Judge not that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged.

And who wants that? Matthew 7 chapter 1 says, Judge not that you be not judged. And it warns us, for with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged.

And with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Who wants that? Who wants to be judged the way we judge others? And who wants to be measured the way we measure others? Anybody? I know I don't. I don't want anybody to judge me that way. And why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye?

[31 : 51] But do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when there is a log in your own eye?

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 very clear here. We are not judged. We are not judged. We are not qualified to judge. We ought to run away from judging because we don't want to be judged ourselves.

We don't want the same measurement that we use to judge others to be used against us. Jesus reminds us that we are all sinful.

We are sinful. We are sinful. We are sinful. James says that there is a third reason. It gives us a third reason why we ought not to judge.

[32 : 56] There is only one lawgiver and judge. James makes clear who he is. Just so that there is no doubt whatsoever, James says, he who is able to save and to destroy.

James says there is only one. If you can do that, James says there is only one.

See, the Bible helps us to see that we judge imperfectly. We judge according to the flesh, John tells us. We judge according to appearances.

We judge according to our own biases. Judging is imperfect. Then we don't judge because we are not qualified to judge another another's servant.

someone for whom Christ died. We cannot judge a child of another.

[34 : 26] It is God who chooses. It is God who saves. We are not qualified to condemn. We are not qualified. We don't save anybody and we don't unsave anybody.

we are not qualified to do it. Only the one lawgiver and the judge can do that. But if we are honest, we would acknowledge that we do have a thought of whether someone is saved or not.

We do. We do. We do. ask ourselves based on what we see, what we observe, what someone says, whether someone is a believer or not.

But the truth is that in the end we don't know. And we should leave the judging to God. Yes, the Bible tells us, the Bible teaches us that by their fruits we will know them.

But it doesn't tell us that by their fruits we should judge them. I came across words to this effect in my research from a devotional.

[36 : 01] I'm not quoting it verbatim. but it says something like this. May I remember how unqualified I am to judge my neighbor.

And then it says, the full evidence of which made only the knowledge of my heart. what's Can I say that again?

May I remember how unqualified I am to judge my neighbors. What's the evidence?

The full evidence being only the knowledge of my own heart. What's the point of that quote? The point is this.

If you're honest with yourself, if you would only consider your own heart, then you can only arrive at one conclusion, that you're not qualified really to judge another person.

[37 : 16] we think that, perhaps we think that by judging we make ourselves look better.

That's not the case. Not in the eyes of the Lord. And ultimately, He is the one to whom we give an account.

But I wonder, as you think about these very clear and simple words, practical words, everyday words to live by, do not slander, do not judge.

That's it. That's the message. There's nothing profound about this message. James just tells us, don't listen, don't slander, and don't judge your brother.

But as you consider these words, I wonder, how do we come to a point in our lives where we are in an increasing way following the commands contained in these verses?

[38 : 40] How are we getting better at it? I don't think we'll ever get to a place of perfection as it relates to this. I think we're all guilty of this to some extent.

How do we get better at it? I think the first thing is to be equipped with the truth of what we just read. Thank God for His words. He didn't leave us alone. the Holy Spirit gave us these words for a reason, to help us.

So let's start with these words. We've been reminded of these words, do not slander, do not judge. It teaches us why.

It tells us that it is contrary to the law. And when we do this, when we do these things, we seek to elevate it as if we're elevating ourselves above the only judge there is.

[39 : 58] So let's be mindful of these words. That's the first point. And then the second point that I think will help us.

Let's be mindful of the effect on others. Let's be mindful of how painful, how sharp our words can be.

I don't know if you've ever been a victim of slander. But if you have, it's not something that you easily forget.

So we can help one another. Why don't we commit to helping one another in this way? By not slandering and by not judging one another.

And here's another thing that I think will help us. Having a healthy dose of fear of the consequences.

[41 : 11] Slandering and judging. We talked about a few of them already. Jesus says you judge, you'll be judged similarly.

You measure someone, you'll be measured with the same yardstick. Serious consequences. fair helps.

And then finally, how might we get better? Asking the Lord for his help.

Asking the Lord to do in our hearts what we cannot do for ourselves. coming to him in humility.

Saying, Lord, I need your help. I need your help. Every day we need the Lord's help.

[42 : 18] I'm going to ask the praise team to come now as we pray and ask the Lord to help us.

Father, as we consider these words in James, they remind us of this truth that lights up our face, brings gladness to our disposition that you have not left us to ourselves.

us. You've given us clear instructions. Lord, as we consider these words, not to slander and not to judge our brothers and our neighbors, we acknowledge, Lord, that we have been far from perfect in this regard.

So, Lord, we ask that you would forgive us. Lord, forgive us. Lord, enable us to live according to your command.

Lord, cause slander to be bitter to us. It's our prayer. Cause judging to be bitter to us. Cause us, oh Lord, to demonstrate love for our brothers and our sisters in practical ways.

Cause us, oh Lord, to value your instructions. Lord, do a work in our hearts like a surgeon, like the surgeon you are.

[44 : 11] Do a work in our hearts, oh Lord, so that we might grow in this area. Oh Lord, and Father, for, as we consider this, Lord, for the one perhaps we might have slandered, as we think through these words, we pray, Lord, that you would grant to us the courage to ask for their forgiveness.

Lord, we pray that the one whom we have slandered would readily be open to forgiving us.

Help us in this area, Lord, in Jesus' name we pray. And all God's people say, Amen. Amen.