

Judging Your Neighbor

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all here. It was one of the most significant moments of my life for many reasons.

Sitting in a room, seeking to resolve conflict with a good brother who loves the Lord, a mediator looked at me and said, in effect, that I had exercised judgment in a destructive way in the conflict I was having with this brother and in this relationship.

And in that moment, the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart, revealed to me that the more that I care about something, the more judgmental I become of others.

It showed me how much I loved to judge other people. Ah, to be the judge.

It feels good, doesn't it? I don't think I'm alone. In loving that role, it shows itself, I believe, in all sorts of ways. From the casual, did you see what he wore last night to the party?

[1 : 15] To the deeply destructive, you got fired? I knew you would never amount to anything. Judgment is something that can happen on a societal level.

As our society today is grappling with the fact for years, this country has judged people on their gender and the color of their skin, rather than their intrinsic worth.

It's created in the image of God. Judgment can be brutal, like a lynch mob or a violent confrontation. And it can be subtle, like the quiet whispers at a department cocktail party or a family reunion or a church fellowship hour.

Judgment happens a lot these days online. The culture of canceling is a culture of judgment. Driven by a desire to impose our judgments on other people. Why do we judge, my friends? We love it because it makes us feel superior. We love it because it gives us a sense of power over others.

[2 : 33] We love it because it covers up our own insecurities. And we gain against its significance by distinguishing ourselves from others and disparaging them.

But friends, God has a strong word to us this morning. To us who love judging others.

We're in the book of James, chapter 4. We're looking at just verses 11 through 12 this morning because this is such a significant topic. We're going to focus on this. If you're at home or here in the service, in person, if you have an opportunity to turn there with me, we're going to read James 4 together.

And as you're turning there, just let me remind you what we looked at last week. Last week, James reminded us that we have quarrels and fights. And why is that? He said because we're controlled by passions that are ultimately fundamentally self-centered.

They're about us. And in that, we participate in a world view and a world pattern that is in rejection of God himself. And that God calls us to repent of that and to turn to God in humble repentance, submission, and ultimately to land in a place not of judgment, but of humility.

[3 : 58] That's what we saw in verse 10, that we are called to humble ourselves before the Lord, that he will exalt us. And that leads us then to verse 11 and 12, which we'll read now.

James 4, verse 11 and 12. Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. The one who speaks against a brother or sister or judges his or her brother or sister speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

But if you judge the law, you are 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.

Who are you to judge your neighbor? Let's pray. Lord, we ask this morning, Lord, by your spirit, will you do work in our hearts?

Lord, as we have confessed earlier, how often we love to see the speck in our brother's eye, our sister's eye, how often we see it in our neighbors and yet ignore the log in our own.

[5 : 11] God, I pray that you would help us to see that this morning. And Lord, we pray that by your grace, we would see you and ourselves in light of you this morning and that you would root out this love and change our hearts.

We pray this, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, God has a hard word for us, does he not? What does God think about judgment?

We are not to judge others because God is the ultimate judge of all. And in this passage, as we walk through it, we're going to see two reasons and then we're going to talk about two questions that arise.

We're going to do reason and then a question that arises and reason and then a question that arises. So let, first of all, in verse 11, what do we see? What is the first reason in verse 11?

We are not to judge because judgment is a violation of humility. You see, in verse 11, as you look through the flow, it's actually a little bit more challenging than we think to know what he's saying here, but he starts by saying, do not speak evil.

[6 : 23] And this word has been translated in lots of different ways. Sometimes it's slander. Sometimes it's criticized. In other translations, malign, disparage, backbite.

The core idea here is that of defamation. That is, we speak to denigrate, to speak down of someone else, to speak poorly of someone else.

And here's the thing. This word doesn't say that what you're saying is not true. It could be truthful things that are being said, but they're being spoken with the purpose of elevating ourselves, and more importantly, of diminishing or oppressing or sitting over someone else.

It is not actually as much a violation of love, for we can speak the truth and love to someone, but it is a violation of humility.

I am going to stand over you in the words that I speak about you. You see this because James then turns the corner, right?

[7 : 28] The one who speaks against one or judges one, and that's where you see he turns his vocabulary to say, this is about our judgment of other people. And to sit with a power to condemn others, often, maybe always, with a heart of selfishness or jealousy that drives us, we love to put others down.

We love to put others down so that we might seem better than them. And the focus here, I think, is on verbal judgment.

We're in a long section where Peter's been, or I'm sorry, where James has been talking about speech and words. But remember what we read earlier in James chapter 2, where he was talking about how you treat people when they walk into a meeting room or a meal.

He says, if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, you sit here in a good place, while you say to the poor man, you sit over there or sit down at my feet, have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

So this judgment can be seen by the things that we say and it can be seen by the way that we treat other people.

[8 : 54] James goes on in verse 11 to then say this, the one who speaks evil or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

You see, this violation of humility is not merely because we want to think better of ourselves than other people and to put them down. It's also that we think ourselves better than God's law.

Because when we judge other people, we take on a heart of arrogance. We know what is right. We know what is true. We make ourselves the judge, jury, and executioner of someone else.

We determine by our words their standing before God's law. And we pronounce their place before God's law by our evaluation.

Mother Teresa famously said that you can't judge others because if you do, there's no room to love others. When we spend our time condemning others, we fail then to become a doer of the law as James has been encouraging us throughout this whole letter.

[10 : 15] When we allow our minds to be consumed with thinking and meditating on and developing our argumentation for why someone else is in the wrong and why we should disparage them, we have no room left in our heart to actually love someone.

We violate God's law and it's called a humility and it's called to integrity. This is what Jody read to us in the passage earlier. The words of Jesus.

Why do you look at your brother and see the speck in his eye and ignore the log in your own? when we speak and think and act in judgment of others, we are denying the reality of our own sinfulness and our own deserve of judgment.

One commentator, Alex Motier, says this, defamation begins and lives on in our minds. It is something we say to ourselves long before we pass it on.

But if our minds were drilled in biblical attitudes, then love for our brothers would begin to root out censoriousness. That's a big word. Would root out our critical spirit.

[11 : 45] Consideration for our neighbors would begin to replace the hurtful and arrogant words. Replace them with helpful and caring pastoral concern for others.

Friends, God tells us to stop judging others because it is a violation of the humility that he calls us to. what are the contexts in which we might be tempted to?

I thought about a few in our culture today. Our political leanings and affiliations are areas where it is very easy to demonize the other who disagrees with us and to look down on them and to treat them as less because of our disagreements.

it also can happen in lots of other ways. In families, how we parent is an easy place for us to sit in judgment of other families and other parents.

It's easy for us to judge one another in the choices of schools that we make. It's easy to look down on a Yankees fan if you're a Red Sox fan.

[13 : 07] All right, that's humor. We can laugh about that, right? But we do this from the trivial to the very important, how we spend our money. There's so many different areas in which we are so quick to judge other people.

What movies will you watch or not watch? What media will you consume or not consume? all these things.

It's so easy for us to judge one another. And look, we need to recognize something. In all of these areas, from the most serious ones to the most trivial, there's a great opportunity for robust discussion, civil disagreement, and strong feelings.

It's okay to talk about these things and to have disagreements about them. In fact, we ought to see them as wonderful opportunities for us to grow by discussing and learning how others who think differently than us, how they think about what they believe and how they live.

So I'm not saying that we ought to never talk about these things or even not to disagree about them. But when we become the police, when we sit in judgment of others, when we dismiss them, disparage them in word or in deed, James says we lack humility and we have failed to walk in the path of wisdom and wholeness that this book is encouraging us to walk in.

[14 : 44] So this is the first thing and it raises a question for us. If you've been in church for a while or even if in our society, there are times when we have this sense, but doesn't the Bible tell us to judge?

Doesn't the Bible says we need to make decisions about things? We need to determine what is right. And the fact is that the answer is yes, it is true. Jesus himself told the crowds stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment about the religious leaders.

In Matthew 7, right after the do not judge, Jesus tells the crowds in 7, 15 and following to beware of false prophets of those who will teach untrue things and who live lives that are contrary to God's path.

In Galatians 2, we see the apostle Paul confronting his brother, the apostle Peter, because of his behavior and how he was disparaging the Gentiles and denying the gospel in the process.

We know that in Matthew 18 and in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6, the church is called to address sin in the lives of a brother or sister, even to the point of declaring them no longer consistent in their profession of faith and their life.

[16 : 14] So we need to acknowledge that yes, the Bible does call us to have discernment and even at times to make judgment. But listen to Galatians chapter 6 verses 1 and 2 or 1 through 3.

The apostle Paul writes this, Restore a fallen brother or sister, but do it in all humility. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him.

in a spirit of gentleness, keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. So what the Bible says is there are times to make determinations, to make evaluations, to discern truth and error right

from wrong.

it is right to do that. But the only way that we are able to do that before God properly is with the kind of humility that James has talked about in the previous passage and the kind of humility that Paul addresses here.

[17 : 34] I am not better than you. I know that I too am prone to sin. I know that I am not beyond failing. I know that I don't have all wisdom and knowledge and yet I bring this to you, brother, sister, with gentleness and with tears and humility.

That's the kind of judgment that God does expect us to exercise more broadly. And so Doug Moo in his commentary says, James is not prohibiting the proper and necessary discrimination that every Christian should exercise.

James rebukes jealous, censorious, again there's that word, critical speech by which we condemn others as being wrong in the sight of God.

And friends, this leads us to the second reason why judgment is wrong. It is because judgment of others usurps God's right role as the judge of all.

The end of verse 12, he says, who are you to judge your neighbor? And the answer is, you are nobody. Because, go back to the beginning of the verse, because there is one God, one judge, one lawgiver, and it is not you.

[19 : 01] You were not tasked with being the judge of the world. You were not tasked with making all things right everywhere. It is not your job to redeem and fix the world.

There is a God in heaven. But we love judgment. Do you know why? It's because it's at the very root of our sin nature. Go back to the Garden of Eden.

Do you remember what the serpent brought to Adam and Eve? doubting God. Did God really say? And then denying God's truthfulness. You will not surely die.

And then baiting him. In fact, you can be like God. You can take God's place of determining what's right and wrong in the world. You can take God's place to be the judge of your own goodness and happiness.

James says, there is only one lawgiver and one judge. And it is not us. It is the God who created the heavens and the earth.

[20 : 14] And the root of our self-centered, self-important passions, the root of our sitting above God's law or sitting above our brothers and sisters and judging them and putting them in their place is ultimately a rejection of God himself.

God who is the only one who by his nature is the lawgiver because he is the one who embodies all that is perfectly right and good in the world.

He is the only judge for as creator all of his creation is accountable to him. He knows all things.

He has created all things and given all things life. life. And the Bible affirms over and over again that he is altogether right in all of his evaluations.

James goes on and says he alone has the power to save and to destroy. We recognize that as our creator God holds our life in his hands.

[21 : 23] He holds right and wrong in his hands. he holds the eternity our eternity in his hands. And he is able to both save and destroy.

And when we take up that place, when we sit in the seat of judgment, we are usurping God.

Friends, this is a frightening place to be.

Listen to the words the writer of Hebrews. A warning to us. He says, for if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse do you think will be deserved for the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the spirit of grace.

For we know him, that is God, who said, vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.

[22 : 42] God. And friends, it is to our peril when we choose to try to usurp that God's role and to be the judge, jury, and executioner ourselves.

And this raises a second question for us that is a very pertinent one today. God doesn't seem to be getting it right. What about the injustice of the world?

What about the wrongs? What about the wrongs that I have suffered? What about the wrongs that have happened in our history? What about the wrongs? It looks like evil is winning sometimes. We're afraid that evil will triumph. And that God's judgment is not sufficient. And he does not execute his judgment in our timing quickly enough.

There's a whole other sermon to be preached in response to this question, but I want to give just two thoughts. First, there is a right place for speaking the truth in love.

[23 : 55] There is a right place for resisting evil. There is a right place for confronting sin, both individually in relationships with others, and societally and globally.

It is right to call sin, sin. It is right to point out what was wrong. This command that to not usurp God's role as a judgment does not mean that we cannot work for a better society.

It does not mean that we cannot look to and call our society to a higher standard. But in the end, we must recognize that we will never create the perfect society.

Our ability to judge and our ability to redeem are similarly weakened by our creatureliness and by our sinfulness.

We are not the ones to make things right in the world. ultimately, God is. We will all stand before his judgment one day.

[25 : 02] We will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, says 2 Corinthians 5. So is God not doing it right?

Well, friends, the Bible assures us that God will judge every sin. He has promised to eradicate all unrighteousness.

He has promised a kingdom that is coming that will be perfectly just and beautifully right. The arrogant, the wrongdoer, the proud, the violent, and the bigoted, they will all be judged and they will receive their reward.

When we feel like the unjust are winning, there is great comfort. And throughout history, the church has found great comfort in knowing that even if God does not punish them today, there will not be one who will get away with what they are doing.

You see, the gospel tells us something much more wonderful. God is so committed to justice, so committed to righteousness, so committed to punishing evil, that he sent his very own son to die on the cross so that he may redeem sinners.

[26 : 27] You see, friends, if we were honest, we would recognize that as much as we want to judge others, we are terrified of God judging us. If we are humble enough to know our own sin, then we are terrified that God is a judge.

judge. And only the proud would think, I have the right to judge others because I can stand before God as a righteous man. The gospel says, no, we are all sinners, and because of that, we are all under God's judgment.

And God takes that so seriously that he will not give us a pass because we're a little better than someone else. He won't give us a pass because we've been doing good church things for a long time. He doesn't give us a pass simply by our own righteousness.

It will never be enough to satisfy his righteous standards. For God to be the judge of the world and the justifier of the ungodly like you and me, there was only one way he could do it.

He sent his son, Jesus Christ, the perfect man who deserved no judgment. And he, the just, went to the cross to bear the punishment for the unjust, which is you and me, that he might bring us to God.

[27 : 52] And friends, this is the good news of the gospel. This is the great news about judgment is that judgment is real and it will happen, but God has created a place of safety.

He has created an ark by which we might ride through the storm of God's judgment when all evil will be judged. And that is in faith in Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the only righteous one, the only one who has the power to judge.

Friends, it is on this basis that James calls us to forsake our sin of judging others, forsake our proud, self-justifying, forsake our trust in our own discernment and our own righteousness, forsake our judgmental spirit and our condemning words and our shunning actions.

To forsake all of these things and the humility come to the cross, come to the place where justice and mercy meet, come and know the grace of God.

God. And in doing so, let God be the judge of all things. Let's pray. Lord, we are thankful for you this morning.

[29 : 16] Lord, we are thankful that even though we deserve judgment, you have made a way for us in Christ. Lord, may we not trample on the greatness of that salvation by becoming judgmental people who look down and disparage others.

But Lord, help us with humility to walk before you. And Lord, help us to be those who walk in a path of wisdom for righteousness sake.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.