

We are more than halfway through our sermon series on the book of James. A series I am affectionately calling Jim Time, yes, a play on words. As we've learned, James doesn't pull any punches, doesn't mince words. James is committed to creating a healthy church and he is not worried about who's toes get stepped on. Church family, I seriously planned on taking these last 8 verses and turning them into one sermon. But as I dug into these verses, I realized there was a whole sermon alone in vs 11 & 12. So will you humor me to break this into 2 sermons? It means we'll extend this series one more week.

To judge or not to judge. That is the question for the day. I think many Christians would be inclined to say that they do not judge anyone. But how does that statement show up in our lives of faith? Are we so comfortable with passing on judgment, that we don't even notice it anymore?

It's easy to say to someone, "I'm not judging you," and then go on to judge them six ways and on to Sunday. But scripture is clear, God is the judge and we are not!

Our job is to be concerned with where we are in our relationship with God and let God worry about everyone else.

Taking on the role of a judge is detrimental to any relationship, but particularly to those within a church. In the last 10 years an estimated 10 million people have left the church for one simple reason, because of hurt they encountered in their church. Mistreated, looked down on. Rejected because of the way they looked, the clothes they wore, who their parents were. Yes these are real reasons.

And we aren't alone in this. James was speaking on this very topic almost 2000 years ago. Just look at how he starts in v. 11, "Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another 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 "

To speak evil can take many forms. For example, we can speak the truth about someone and still be unkind. We can spread information we know and have no business sharing. We may question someone's authority or nullify their good work by backbiting.

The Greek verb James uses for speak evil is katalaleo. It includes actions like destructive verbal attacks, gossip behind another person's back and false accusations. James repeats the word katalaleo and second verb which means to judge each other. Speaking evil is equated with judging. Judging is James' real focus in these verses, and he goes on to explanation how judging is so wrong.

The tense of the verb indicates a practice that is in progress. This is a real situation. The recipients of this letter formed a habit of viciously criticizing one another.

James then for 6th of 8 times in this letter brings God's law into the conversation. You see, this is a royal law. It's a law that frees or convicts, it's a law that must be kept. And with the recipients of this letter, it is a law that is under attack.

It's a law that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 22 when he says, "Do not testify falsely against your neighbor."

It's a law that Moses speaks of in **Leviticus 19**, "Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people...Do not nurse hatred in your heart for any of your relatives. Confront people directly so you will not be held guilty for their sin...Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."

When we speak against another person, we are criticizing AND condemning the law because we are not showing love, we are not treating others as ourselves.

This shows disregard for the law, this is passing judgment, this is putting ourselves above God. This is our failure to submit to God.

When we criticize and judge others we are judging God's Law, and when we judge God's law, might we be judging God? Might we be saying, "God you messed up, but you know what, I'm going to fix it for you!"

It's reminds me of the story of a man named Bishop Potter. "Bishop was sailing for Europe on a transatlantic ocean liners. He went aboard and found that he was to share his cabin with another passenger. After checking out the room, he went to the purser's desk. He asked if he could leave his gold watch and other valuables in the ship's safe. He explained that ordinarily he wouldn't ask, but he had met the man he was sharing his cabin with. Bishops' quick assessment of the man deemed him to be untrustworthy. The purser graciously accepted the responsibility for the valuables and remarked, 'It's all right, bishop, I'll be very glad to take care of these for you. Your cabin mate left his valuables for the same reason!'"

I have an idea, based on what James is telling us. Let's not judge. Let's give that job back to God. I seem to remember Jesus saying something about fixing our own plank first?

Plus do we really want the full weight of that job? After all, James adds that the same standard we use to judge others will be applied when we are judged. Let that sink in a bit. (repeat)

This brings us to the central point in these two verses...

God Alone Is Judge. God Alone is Judge. You see we don't always know the whole story.

Chuck Swindoll was speaking at a pastor's conference. The first day there a man approached him and expressed how he was so looking forward to hearing Dr. Swindoll speak. He added that it had been his lifelong dream. That night Swindoll noticed that the man fell sound asleep only a few minutes into of his sermon. At this point, Swindoll thought rationally. Perhaps the man was tired after a long day's drive and couldn't help himself. But the next night again, the man fell asleep. And the next night and the next night. Now Dr. Swindoll was angry with this man! The nerve! How dare he? Wasn't this his life-long dream?

On the last night the man's wife came up and apologized for her husband's perceived inattention to the messages. She explained that he had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. The pain medication he took made him extremely sleepy. But it had been one of his life-long ambitions to hear Dr. Swindoll speak before he died, and now he had achieved that goal.

Church Family, we cannot see inside other people's hearts, only God can. We are unqualified to judge. And James says just that in vs 12, "God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?"

God is the sole judge: and unlike mortals, God is God, unique, the divine One, the original fountain as well as the ultimate arbiter of the law. And unlike human judges, God is completely impartial.

God alone is both the source and enforcer of the law. We who are accountable to God's law cannot put ourselves in God's place.

James also takes away any rights we might claim for criticizing our neighbors. Behind that critical spirit is an attitude that take over God's authority and is full of pride. There should be no critical, harsh fault-finding in the body of Christ.

Now let me be clear, the principle in this verse does not prohibit the proper action of a church against a church member who is acting in flagrant disobedience to God.

Rather, James is concerned with the critical speech that condemns or judges others' actions and their standing with God.

James is confronting individuals who might be tempted to set themselves up as personal watchdogs on others behaviours.

We might think that criticizing a church member or spreading a little interesting gossip is not that serious, I mean, especially when compared to other sins. But the Bible sees it as a sin of utmost seriousness because it breaks the law of love and it tries to take over God's authority. When we fail to love, we are breaking God's law.

This is an invitation to examine our attitudes and actions toward others. Do we build people up or tear them down? When you're ready to criticize someone, can you remember God's law of love and say something good instead?

Saying something beneficial to others might just cure us of finding fault and increase our ability to obey God's law of love.

There was a little boy who ran to his mother with excitement. He just measured himself and saw that he was six feet tall. His mother, of course, was skeptical. She asked him to measure himself again and she watched. She quickly discovered the problem. The boy took out a 6-inch, not a 12-inch ruler.

His calculations were correct. He was six-ruler-heights tall, he just had the wrong ruler. He just had the wrong standard.

We fall into the same problem ourselves. We judge ourselves by very different standards than the ones we judge others by.

Because God is the only one who is all-seeing and all-knowing. Only God has the qualifications to judge.

When we look at people to judge them there are certain things that we can see. We can see what they wear, what they do, and we can hear what they say.

But there are so many other things we cannot see. We cannot see what their day has been like, the struggles they are dealing with, the obstacles they are facing, or the hurt they are dealing with.

Most importantly, we cannot see their hearts. We mere mortals can judge only by what we see. But our all-knowing, all-seeing God judges by what only God can see.

So maybe it's time for us to stop and recognize when someone might be going through stuff we can't see. Maybe it's time to admit that we don't know all that person has gone through to become homeless. Most of all we need to realize that we are not qualified to judge anyone because we are not God!

How about this instead of judging. Can we pray for that person. But I challenge you to go one step further than thoughts and prayers. What if you are able to actually help that person you are judging? We should ask God if there is anything that we can do to help that person. You might be the only Jesus they'll ever see. This reminds me of an old school song by Bruce Carrol called "Who Will Be Jesus?" I think it nails James's message very well.

[Play song]

Remember, we are not qualified to judge anyone. So with that in mind, will you be Jesus to them instead?

Let us pray

Gracious God, we know in our hearts that you are the only one to judge. But our minds take us to places where judging someone else is acceptable and even necessary. Help us to realize when that is where we are being directed. Help us to realize that this direction is not from you. Help us to return the role of judging to you and in turn let us be a living example of your precious son.