

The Deadliest Disease Facing the Church... And Its Cure

#13 in series "Doing What We Believe"
(A Study in the Book of James)

With a title to a sermon like that – you may be wondering if I'm about to talk about Covid-19... Let me quickly say that the pandemic caused by Covid-19 is not the deadliest disease facing the church today.

There is a fatal virus that comes against the local church that has been around since the first century... There are countless examples of local churches who have succumbed to this disease and have long since closed their doors and sold their property to be repurposed into anything from an antique mall to becoming someone's home...

What could I possibly be talking about?

James deals with these issues throughout his book, but perhaps nowhere more clearly than in our text today:

James 4:11-12 (NASB)

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?

Let's look closely at the imperative in :11a. It is a negative prohibition, originally given in one word but it takes up to four words to translate – "*do not speak against*"...

(NASB) Do not speak against one another

(NIV) do not slander one another

(NKJV) Do not speak evil of one another

Now, before we delve into the text, I want you to make an observation with me about the text. Notice how many times a form of the word "judge" appears:

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Six times!... And only once is it used to refer to the One legitimate Judge – and its not you... or me!

I want to think through this passage following a simple outline. We begin by identifying:

1. The Danger of Judgmentalism

We use the term “judgmentalism”, because that seems to be at the root of the issue. To be judgmental is to “judge harshly”, to defame, to slander, or to simply be overly critical and condemning of others. It is a term very much different from “discernment” – which is a very good term for recognizing the difference between good and bad, or even right and wrong...

We need discernment. We need wisdom to make good choices and be able to call something out when it is in violation of what it means to be Christ-like... But “judgmentalism” is very different... Consider first that –

It devastates our own lives

Judgmentalism has to have a heart to take up residence... The germ that leads to the disease of judgmentalism is *pride* and it is the default attitude of a depraved heart.

This raises a question – does judgmentalism precede pride, or does pride precede judgmentalism?... I believe it is the later – but the more judgmental we become – the more arrogant we become as well...

Pride and judgmentalism go hand-in-hand.

Pride is really the issue James has been dealing with, at least since verse one of this chapter:

- **Pride strains our relationships** :1a

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?

- **Pride sours our own lives** :1b

Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

- **Pride produces anxiety in us** :2

You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

- **Pride highjacks our prayer life** :3

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

- **Pride rouses God’s enmity** :4-5

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?

- **Pride stops our spiritual growth** :6a

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, “God is opposed to the proud...”

All of this is to say that judgmentalism is based in pride, and it is devastating – even deadly to ourselves. But notice that judgmentalism also –

It strains our relationships

Notice the two type of relationships that James says we are not to judge:

11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother...

12 ... who are you who judge your neighbor?

The obvious question to answer is – who is my brother, and who is my neighbor?

The first question can be answer in this book study alone. James identified his readers as “brethren” / “brothers and sisters” in verse 11. In fact, this whole letter was written to brothers and sisters in Christ. He uses the term “brethren” 15 times throughout the book!

It should be easy for us to know who our neighbor is as well... When Jesus was asked by “an expert in the law” – “who is my neighbor” – He told the story we call; “The Good Samaritan” found in [Luke 10:30-37](#)... We won’t take time to revisit that story, but in short, do you remember the answer to the question?... Our neighbor is EVERYONE! Everyone we encounter!

And James, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God asks –

¹² ... who are you who judge your neighbor?

Getting “judgment” wrong will strain your relationships with ... everyone!

It deludes our thinking

Look at our focal passage again:

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?

Notice – that being judgmental toward others – we are setting ourselves up as the *authority* over and against the “law”...

One becomes so deluded – so deceived that they will think they are not subject to the law! They will think themselves to be the standard-barrier of what is right or wrong. How do they do that – by thinking themselves better than everyone else...

Martin Luther – “Be careful not to measure your holiness by other people's sins.”

Again – notice that being judgmental toward others – we are setting ourselves up as the *authority* over and against the “law”...

What law?... Well, some have argued that such attitudes and behavior is actually a violation against all of God's moral law – as what is summarized in the ten commandments found in [Exo. 20](#)...

But, you remember the discipline that is required for all good Bible study?... *Context, context, context*... What law has James already referred to in his letter?

James uses the term “law” – 12 times in 8 verses! The first place James used the term is in –

James 1:25 (NASB)

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.

He goes on in chapter 2 describing this law as –

James 2:8-12(NASB)

⁸ If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

Now, not only does judgmentalism mess us up, and mess relationships up, and messes perspective up –

It misrepresents legitimate judgement

Now stay with me on this point.

James is expressing grave concern about how Christians can be judgmental against one another – or against a “neighbor” – and we should share that same concern!

James’ words come so close to the words of Jesus that He stated in the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 7, that we cannot think about what James said without also considering what the Master said: Matt. 7:1 (NASB) “Do not judge so that you will not be judged.”

These words are probably the most misunderstood and misused words found in the Bible... How many of you have had someone quote those words in objection to a statement you just made about someone’s character, beliefs or actions?...

Let’s look at them for a moment – in their context –

Matt. 7:1-2 (NASB)

¹ Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ² For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

Jesus would go on to direct His disciples to exercise “judgement” against false teachers and “wolves in sheep’s clothing”... In fact – *context, context, context* – Jesus immediately after these words deals with the issues for which we are to repent – and THEN help a brother deal with what they need to repent of – Matt. 7:3-6, 15 (NASB)

³ Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? 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.

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...”

¹⁵ “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits.

Fruit inspection requires the exercising of judgement!... *Context, context, context!*

We are to be “fruit-inspectors” and “judge” a matter as being right or wrong – and there will be times when we are to confront a brother or sister in the Lord for blatant, unrepentant sin!

Matt. 18:15-17 (NASB)

¹⁵ “If your brother sins, 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.

Gal. 6:1 (NASB)

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Later James writes in chapter 5, says this –

Jam. 5:19-20 (NASB)

¹⁹ 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.

Paul wrote the Corinthian church with instructions to exercise “judgement” against a “so-called” brother who’s lifestyle is ungodly –

1 Cor. 5:9-13 (NASB)

⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

(Which is a quote from Deut. 22:21, 24)

We are to live our lives according to God’s standards of righteousness and we are to lovingly hold each other accountable to live lives that faithfully reflect the character and righteousness of Christ in their lives... To do this – does require exercising discernment and even making “judgements” about character and doctrine... But it is never our job to pronounce final judgment or condemnation! As we will see a little later – only God has the final word!

Even if church discipline results in a member being “put out of the church” – and then treat that former member like we would any non-believer – we are NOT declaring that they are finally and forever condemned! That is NOT our job!

That leads to another question – just how are we to deal with a non-believer – when it may be “obvious” that they are outside of Christ – or for that matter – it is obvious that they are “enemies” of God?

Our text makes it clear that we are NOT to judge our neighbors – so what should we do?

We are to love them. Jesus said the second greatest commandment –

Matt. 22:39 (NASB) “The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

We are to pray for our neighbors. Paul said –

1 Tim. 2:1-5 (NASB)

¹First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God

our Savior,⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

We love our neighbors, we pray for them, and we care for them... Was that not a major point in Jesus' teaching about the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37?

So the last thing we need to be doing toward a neighbor is "judge" them... Rather, let's ask God to help us in following –

Col. 4:6 (NASB) "Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person."

So, we have spent our time in this text think about **the danger of judgmentalism**. The next point will be straight to the point –

2. The Cure for Judgmentalism

Just what is the "cure"?... I think the answer is more than implied in verse 12:

James 4:12 (NASB) "There is *only one* Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy..."

There is a two-fold cure:

Recognize

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- Recognize that God is the Lawgiver

Notice that James calls Him "the Lawgiver" – not that He simply gives laws. In other words James is talking about Who God IS – not just what God DOES.

God is the Lawgiver – meaning that He establishes the standard of righteousness and those "standards", those "laws" are not arbitrary, random or capricious. They do not change, because they reflect HIM Who is unchangeable! They stem from His very nature.

God establishes the standards by which all people should live! We don't, and no one is to define what standards we are to live by other than Him!

The sooner we come to the realization that God is God, and we are not – the better it is for ... everyone.

- Recognize that God is the Judge

God is The Judge!

As Jesus said in –

Matt. 10:28 (NASB) "Do not fear 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."

By the way – Jesus is not teaching that hell will be a place where the soul is annihilated! When He speaks of the soul being destroyed in hell – He is saying that everything you think, feel, or will yourself to be – in your self-righteousness and arrogance will be doomed in hell!... Your self-image is a "house-of-cards" in the whirlwind of His righteous judgment!

So – the cure for our judgmentalism is to first recognize that God is The Lawgiver and Judge... And finally – the cure for judgmentalism is to –

Repent

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- Repent of playing the role of being Lawgiver and Judge

James ends these two convicting verses with a pointed question –

Jam. 4:12 (NASB) "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?"

He is implying, "Do you think you are God? If you don't – then why are you setting yourself up in God's place?"...

If another person has wronged you, you do not need to judge that person, because God will!... Instead, you turn that person and that hurt over to God – and pray for that person’s salvation. Remember that your judging of the other person is a sin against God, Who rightfully could have sent you to hell! That leads us to the truth that we need to –

- **Repent of our own sin**

Clearly, judging others stems from incredible arrogance! When you find yourself thinking judgmentally about others, judge your pride! God rightly could have judged you, but He didn’t. He will righteously judge the one that you are condemning, but it is not your place to do so...

The cure is seen in the passage we studied last week –

Jam. 4:10a (NASB) “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord...”

Humble yourself before God! Call upon Him to change your heart!

Application Questions

- Where is the line between being *biblically discerning* and being *overly critical*?
- What is the greatest *danger* you see in being a judgmental person? What harm does that attitude really do?
- What did Martin Luther mean by the statement: “*Be careful not to measure your holiness by other people's sins.*”
- If you confront someone in sin or error and he says, “You’re being judgmental,” how would you respond?
- How can you know when God wants you to talk to someone about sin or error, or when you should wait and pray?
- What is the *cure* for being freed from a judgmental attitude that we may tend to harbor? How can someone who is overly critical battle this sin? What steps would help?