

Are You Humble? or Critical and Judgmental?

James 4:10-12

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC, May 23, 2021

How many of you as kids had a doctor tell you to stick out your tongue? It was the only time my mom let me stick out my tongue! But doctors seem to be able to learn about our health as they look at our tongues.¹ James 3 says a lot about the tongue and what it says about our spiritual health. Today we'll be in James 4 if you'll turn there. Jesus said from the abundance of the heart a mouth speaks, what's inside overflows out. Your tongue shows your heart

James gives a reformed tongue-ology, how to reform a tongue by the solas.

This week we restarted SS and I remember as a kid in SS learning the song "be careful little mouths what you say." We need that as adults with bigger mouths, too. The old Jewish Rabbis pointed out that God gave us 2 ears and 1 mouth so we might listen twice as much as we talk. Some also pointed out God designed our tongue to be caged in by 2 rows of teeth to help guard it!

Maybe you've heard about the young man working at the grocery store in the produce section. His first day on the job an old woman came up to him and said she wanted to buy just half a head of lettuce. He said he couldn't, it was all or nothing, but she kept persisting. So finally, he told her "I'll have to go to the back and talk to the manager." He went to the rear of the store to talk to the manager but didn't notice that the woman was right behind him following him, very impatiently and unhappily. He got to the back and said to the manager, "There's a stupid old lady in the store who wants to buy only half a head of lettuce. What should I tell her?" Seeing the horrified face of the manager and then turning to see the woman behind him, he quickly added, "and this nice lady wants to buy the other half of the head"²

There is a foot-in-mouth disease, and the book of James has the cure. James 3 says we all stumble in many ways in what we say unless we're perfect. That chapter compares the tongue to an unbridled horse, an undirected boat, an unstoppable fire, and untamable trouble. Today we'll see God's help for critical and judgmental words on a tongue. It comes through a humble heart.

James 4:10–12 *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you [lift you up].¹¹ 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 are not a doer of the law but a judge.¹² There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*

Why James? Series we left off before COVID (chap 4 but never finished)

- Haven't resumed Sunday PM, discussing (prayer night June 6th)
- This year resuming SS, small groups, PM meetings discussing
- Need to finish that study in James, decided in AM this summer
- Why James 4:10-12? This is the section we never got to in 2020
- The world changed, but the unchanging truth in James is timely
- Epidemic of judging (racial issues, facial masks, vaccines, etc.)
- I've felt more judging this last year than ever (pride, decisions)
- Media and social media very critical to Christians and by them

- People are slow to hear, quick to tweet or to comment in anger
- James 1 says be *'quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger'*

Who is James and who is he writing to?

- Bondservant of Jesus, brother (half) of Jesus, same mom Mary
- 12 tribes dispersed abroad, Jewish Christians esp. outside Israel
- Some had a dead faith with no works, said faith, no saving fruit

What is his style, compared to Colossians or other letters?

Practical (1:22-25) – ratio of theology / commands vs. Colossians

- James averages a command every other verse
- James is a man of action, his concern: faith in action
- Dead faith with no works? Or 'said faith,' no saving fruit

Personal – story of Southern preacher against drinking, cards, etc.

- Sister's amen till he said gossip – 'he's gone to meddlin'!
- James goes to meddlin, messin' with you, in your kitchen
- James confronts you in your home, heart, how you speak

How many saw the video in the weekly email on James 3? [*Summarize it?*]

- Dad sinning all the way there then singing at church hands raised
- Mom and daughter in conflict on way, you see hardness forming
- Long before COVID masks, people wore other kinds to church
- The Bible word 'hypocrite' was used of actors wearing masks
- Many have spiritual split personalities (Sunday and rest of week)
- James talks about being double-minded, or here double-tongued
- Not just the hypocritical, but the hyper-critical and judgmental

I wrote in the blog: 'The video was humbling as I could see me - but for the grace of God - and even the same van we used to have, and [our family many times experienced] sin in that van on the way to church!' I don't know about you but I've felt like the devil was in our backseat working OT!

There's spiritual warfare to disturb from church, often in a war of words.

James 1 ends with if you think you're religious but don't bridle your tongue it's worthless religion, and our enemy knows it. If we don't make right our wrong speaking, we make worship worthless **3:10** *From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*

People put on their best clothes and best behavior for church acquaintances. 'How are you doing,' they ask, you say 'blessed.' You smile and speak like angels before people you barely know and don't care that much about, and then with the people you know the best and care for the most, you act and speak like fallen angels? You say, 'well, yeah, that's because we put our guards down with people we know well or live with.' God knows that and God knows *that's the real you*, what you are in the privacy of your home.

How is it that our mouths can bless God in prayer before we eat a meal, and then moments later we can use that same mouth to complain or speak ill of someone or some situation sinfully? Some smile nice to your face at church but behind your back they use that mouth to slice and dice you! We can sing thanks at God's house on the weekend, but at home we

express *anything but* appreciation for our earthly family all week long! How can we be singing words that lift up Christ and then after the service we use stinging words to put down those for whom Christ died? Why are we so quick to judge and criticize fellow believers or leaders in our church or another church and to give them labels so quickly and carelessly? If we put others down, James 4:10-12 should humble us and bring us down before God so He'll lift us up.

Outline: 1. Don't Be Critical in your Speech
 2. Don't Be Judgmental in your Spirit
 3. By Grace Be Humble in your Savior

#1. Don't be critical in your speech:

¹¹ *Do not speak evil against one another ...* this is written to brothers in Christ. This isn't constructive criticism. You can lovingly critique in a constructive way, trying to build your brother up. Edifying exhortation, truth in love is good for their good, if you're *for them*

But v. 11 says don't speak evil, or speak against people. NLT has 'criticize' and NIV has 'slander,' but it's broader than that. It can be true, but not in love. It's the Greek word for speaking down, literally, talking down, putting down in what you say. It may be true but unsolicited and uncharitable. It's critical or hurtful words that tear down. It's derogatory or demeaning words.

In Acts 23, the high priest ordered Paul to be struck in the mouth, and Paul struck back with these words: '*God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall...*' but then he confessed he spoke sinfully, Paul said '*it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.*' The best of men speak evil at times, but need to confess it and come under what's written in God's Word.

Paul wrote in Titus 3:2 we're to '*speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.*' The right kind of words are kind words. It's been said 'if you can't say something nice, don't say nothing at all' (Thumper's dad). Someone else said this in a poem

A careless word may kindle strife, a cruel word may wreck a life
 A timely word may lessen stress, a loving word may heal and bless

Look at James 5:9 '*Do not grumble against one another* [NAS 'complain'; v. 16] *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another*'

... your sins of complaining to, grumbling against, or speaking against, you need to confess that to those you've impacted by it. And pray for healing and help. I had to stop the van when we were on vacation and confess my sinful speaking in sarcasm to my family. Confess yours, pray for help in this

Practical help to stop your critical speech before it comes out: **THINK, is it:**

T – Truth in love?

H – Helpful?

I – Imparting grace?

N – Necessary then?

K – Kind (quote Eph 4:15, 29, 31-32a) *NOTE: applies to what we write, too*

#1. Don't Be Critical in your Speech.

#2. Don't Be Judgmental in your Spirit

4:11b: *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 are not a doer of the law but a judge.* ¹² *There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*

This is talking about God's law, in context esp. the law of love to others.

2:8: *If you really fulfill the royal **law** according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well...* ¹² *So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the **law** of liberty.* ¹³ *For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy...* God's law will judge how we speak, and we're in trouble if what we say isn't merciful. So James 4:11 says critical judgmental words actually speak against and judge God's Law.

The end of James 4:12 is famous (*who are you to judge*) but it has a context

- This isn't a defense of a sinful lifestyle (*who are you to judge?*)
- It doesn't mean we have no right to judge something isn't right (women's right to abort, church no right to gather, LGBT rights)
- Starting with our own sin in v. 11, I need to judge if I speak evil so I can stop speaking evil (that takes a moral judgment by me)

This is NOT against judging as sin what God's Word has judged to be sin (James 4:2 'lust...murder' or v. 6 'adultery' – judgment is in on that!).

God's Law has already given the verdict on many sins. So if you point out where God's Word calls something sin and the response is "well, *who are you to judge?*" you can reply, "I know I'm nobody and wouldn't expect anyone to trust my personal judgments or opinion, but God's Law says..."

This is NOT against judging that another is in sin and in need of your help (James 5:19-

20: *My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth [how do we know without judging that they wandered?] and someone brings him back,* ²⁰ *let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

James doesn't say in this context "don't be concerned of a brother straying; *who are you to judge*, we all like sheep go astray?" No, if God has judged something to be sin and better judgment sees your friend on its dangerous path, who are you *not* to try to help him? (Matt. 18:15-17, Gal. 6:1-2, etc.)

This is NOT against discerning judgment (1:16: *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren...*). 1 Thess 5:21 *examine* [discern] *everything carefully ...*

Jesus praised Simon for judging in Lk 7:40 "You have judged correctly."

In Luke 12:57, Jesus rebuked for *not* judging: "why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?" We are to judge correctly what's right.

This IS against taking God's place (4:12 says there's only one judge in the sense of the lawgiver, only God can destroy or save, who are you...?)

- Judging our brother's heart or motives

Jas 4:11b *'...He who speaks against a brother or **judges his brother...**'*

In 1 Sam 17 when David heard about Goliath and came, his brother Eliab said *"I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is"* [NAB

'I know your evil intent']; you came down only to watch the battle." [David replies] *"Now what have I done?...Can't I even speak?"* (v. 28-29 NIV).a

That's chapter after man judges by outward appearance, God the heart, 16:7

1 Cor. 4:5 *'do not go on passing judgment **before the time**, but wait until the Lord comes who will ... disclose the **motives of men's hearts**; **learn not to exceed what is written**, so that no one of you will become arrogant'* NAS

- **Speaking as if above the law and others**

v. 11b he who *'...judges his brother, 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.'*

God actually is above the law and others, but we're never to speak like that.

And this is hypocritical judging, because it says you're not a doer of the law

Matt. 7:1 *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. 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.*

- **Talking as if we're the Law (4:12 There is only one lawgiver)**

Legalistic man-made laws, like Col 2:20: *'why...do you **submit to its rules**: ²¹ "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? ²² These ... are **based on human commands and teachings**.*

²³ *Such **regulations** indeed have an **appearance** of wisdom, with their **self-imposed worship**, their **false humility** ... but they **lack any value in restraining sensual***

indulgence... [man's rules don't make man righteous, don't submit to them in that way]

Don't judge others by extra-biblical rules you make for you / your family (alcohol, cable TV, courtship / dating, worship style, homeschooling, etc.).

Who Are you to Judge? The Dangers of Judging and Legalism, D. Swavely
Respectable Sins, J. Bridges (chapters on judgmentalism, sins of tongue).

Don't be critical or judgmental, #3. By Grace Be Humble in your Savior

End of James 4:12 says *'who are you...?'* That's the question of Rom 9:20

'O man, who are you to reply against God?' Or Rom 14:4 *'Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls'* (NKJV).

See, if you speak to or about others in a way that only God the Judge has the prerogative to, He'll hold you in contempt of His court. Who are you?

In God's courtroom, we are all guilty; we are all in the place of the accused, not the attorney, we're not the jury, certainly not the judge or the lawmaker.

There's only One Judge who makes laws and He's not retiring or looking for replacements, and He doesn't need your advice on His job performance!

The Supreme Court of heaven doesn't need your counsel or condemnation.

Think of the story of Job and all the misjudging, here's what the Judge of the universe says at the end:³ *'Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?... Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?... Would you indeed annul My judgment?... Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His?... Can you lift up your voice to the clouds... Can you send out lightnings, that they may go, And say to you, 'Here we are!''?... 'Have you commanded the morning since your days began, And caused the dawn to know its place... Who shut in the sea... I said 'This far you may come, but no farther, And here your proud waves must stop!''... Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him. Look on everyone who is proud, and bring him low... Then I will also confess to you That your own right hand can save you.'* i.e., I am God and you are not!

James 4:12 says God alone has power to save and to destroy, who are you?

But don't miss that language of power to save. The Judge and Lawgiver is also the Savior with power to destroy in hell or power to deliver to heaven.

So back to v. 10: *Humble yourself before the Lord*. He'll lift up the humble sinner. v. 6 says He's opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.

v. 7 says *Submit to God*. You say 'I surrender all.' You repent, as v. 8 says

God is not a Judge you want to mess with, He is a Judge you need mercy from. Judges must punish sin. Our natural position stands condemned at His bar of justice, so how dare we presume the position of condemning others with words! Jesus taught *'on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned'* (Mt 12:37-38). Our only hope is to look to Him who never said a mumblin' word. When reviled Jesus didn't revile in return. They slandered Him but He opened not His mouth and He died for their sin of pride. As they spoke evil of Him He died for that sin.

And He rose, conquering sin and death for all who confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord and believe that in their heart. Rom 10 says *'with the mouth one confesses and is saved'* (v. 9-10). God speaks grace to us, we need to speak with grace of others. By grace be humble in your Savior.

¹ This illustration is indebted to Sinclair Ferguson in his excellent sermon on James 3.

² "Taming the Tongue," by Steve Hereford, sermon dated 2/14/1999 at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=12300052755>

³ Job 38:2, 4, 40:8-9, 38:34-35, 12, 11, 40:11-14 NKJV