

# Judge Not, Lest You Be Judged

*Epistle of James*  
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of James, James 4, moving into a new section, the last seven verses of James 4. We're going to focus in actually on James 4:11 and 12 this morning. James 4:11-12. Before we get started, I want to mention one thing. There is a mission trip to South Africa that you may have heard about. It's been in the announcements some or in the bulletin a little while and emails. It's October 12-27. So if you're interested in going, you need to let us know. We're trying to finalize the arrangements by the end of June. It's going to cost somewhere between \$2,000-2,500 per person for the airfare and the expenses while we're there. The reason for the trip, of course, is to work with two of our missionary families, Wayne and Carol Mack, Dr. Wayne Mack and his wife Carol, and also Pastor ?? and his wife Beth. They are in Pretoria and we're going to help out two counseling, biblical counseling conferences that they are having, one in Johannesburg and one in Cape Town, and so a number of the folks are going for the whole 15 days, some are only going for about eight or nine days to work on one side or the other, either Johannesburg or Cape Town. So we ask for you to be praying for us as we prepare for that and you're going to have the opportunity if you would like, if you can't go but you'd like to support even financially, you can give and help out with some of the expenses. Like I said, it's a lot of money that folks are going to be bringing themselves to get over there as well as taking off work for a couple of weeks. So it's really quite a sacrifice. If you'd like to give to that, you can designate at the bottom of your check and Jess will explain all the other ways that you can do it, you know, texting and all that stuff. There are all kinds of ways that they've been figuring out. He and Bethany are a lot hipper than I am. If it was up to me, you know, we'd just pass a plate. That's all I know how to do, or whatever. So anyway, but seriously, we're excited about the opportunity to go and minister with them and to see what God is doing in South Africa so be praying especially for that to be a really fruitful time.

Now, James 4:11. We're moving out of the passage that we've been looking at for a number of weeks on resolving conflict and we come to a passage in verses 11, really 11 to 17 he starts to deal with the issues of the tongue again. This is the third time already that James has dealt with the issues of the tongue. Chapter 1, verse 26, he talked about our speech. Chapter 3, verses 1 to 12, he talked about the danger of the tongue. And here now he comes in verses 11 to 17 and says, "Watch your tongue. You see, your words are a reflection of your heart." So look at what is coming out of your mouth and then trace

that back to what's going on in your heart. He's going to come again in chapter 5, verse 12, he's going to come at it again so this is something that was very strong on the heart of James and he knows that the Christians to whom he wrote needed these exhortations and God in his wisdom put it in the word as we need these exhortations.

The title of the message this morning, James 4:11-12, is "Judge Not Lest You Be Judged." That's essentially I think the theme of these two verses. He's echoing his elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 7:1 where he says the same thing, "Judge not lest you be judged." James is essentially saying the same thing in these two verses. We're going to see that as we work through the passage. Judge not lest you be judged. It's interesting, he has just finished convicting us of our own sin of divisiveness and conflict causing, showing us that our hearts are the problem, urging us to repentance and humility. So he's convicted us of sin, he's called us in a strong way in verses 7 to 10, the previous section, to lowliness. You know, "Submit yourselves to God. Mourn over your sin. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord." He's said that and now he comes back and says essentially, "and stop judging one another." It's that he understands that the temptation of the human heart, even the redeemed heart, because those of us who have been born again by the power of God's Spirit through the glory of the Gospel, we still have an old nature and that old nature, just endemic in our nature is the sin of pride. So he knows that as he's talked about these issues, that our tendency is to think not so much about our tendency to cause conflict but others, and that we have the tendency to look at other people and how they fail, and we have a tendency to talk about them in ways that demean them, damage them, and we have a tendency to talk to them in ways that are demeaning and damaging, and he's going to say in characteristic Jamesian style, "Judge not lest you be judged," and he's going to smack us right in the mouth like he does and he does this in these two verses, James 4:11-12.

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?

That last phrase is really emphatic. Literally in the Greek it says, "But you, who are you?" That's his characteristic style, isn't it? He just really lays it out there and it's interesting to watch the different styles in the Scriptures. The beauty of the Bible, it is every word is breathed out by God, that's what 2 Timothy 3:16 says, every single letter that was written down in the original autographs was breathed out by God, the Spirit of God. Perfect and yet we see the human personalities of these authors, that God in his infinite wisdom uses distinct persons that he has created and he has molded and shaped their lives to give us this perfect word. We see how James writes differently than Paul. We see that throughout the Bible and so we get the blessing of spending time with this brother through this book, and I know it's been helpful to me and very convicting as we work through it.

Let's go the Lord and ask his blessing on the rest of our time in this passage.

*Father, we thank you for the glory of your word. We pray that you would help us to attend to it. We pray that your word right now would be as the author of Hebrews said, that it would be for us living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, that it would pierce the division of joint and marrow, soul and spirit, and would be a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Lord, lay us bare so that you might expose sin that we might repent, you might show us our need of our glorious Savior that we might believe more and trust more in his finished work, and you might be glorified in more obedient lives. We pray this in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.*

Now this essentially is saying, "Judge not lest ye be judged," but we have a tendency, especially in modern society to misunderstand what James is going to say and if we keep reading, he takes care of it. In fact, even the tone with which he gives it to us helps us to avoid this, but we in modern society, modern American society, there is this idea of judge not lest ye be judged and what that means is, nobody can tell you anything. You're your own judge of what is right and wrong. That's essentially what post-modernism is, that everybody has a right to their view of reality and no one has a right to tell you that your view of reality is not right. It's absurd. On its face, it's ridiculous. You can't apply it in any area of life. Apply that in the area of medicine. Hey, your doctor just has a right to give you his opinion. He can be totally wrong. You can die because he misdiagnosed you and who are you to judge him from his diagnosing you? That's what it would really look like if you applied it. No lawsuits. That would actually be a blessing in post-modernism, wouldn't it? It's ridiculous. Make the building however you want it to. Don't make it according to code. Don't make it really support the roof. So you kill hundreds of people because you just did whatever you wanted to do. That was right to you.

Well, how much more, if that's true in the natural realm, how much more is it true in the spiritual realm? Truth is not up to us. We're not to do what is right in our own eyes. So the biblical balance of Scripture is that we are to correct one another. We are to speak the truth to one another. In fact, in Matthew 7 when Jesus says, "Do not judge lest you be judged," he goes on to say in that same passage, he says, "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye and don't get the log out of your own eye?" Right? He's continuing to sort of turn the knife on our pride. We tend to judge, look down on people. We tend to focus. I mean, we have spiritual far-sightedness. That's one of the effects of the fall, we can see really well from a distance. We can see sin in all of its nuances but we're not near-sighted, we can't see it here. We can see it over there. But he doesn't say, "So shut up about their speck." He says, "Get the log out first so you'll see clearly to get the speck out." He's not saying it's not loving. It is loving to correct your brother. The New Testament is filled with "one anothers," like admonish one another, teach one another, provoke one another to love and good works, encourage one another, confess your sins to one another. We're to be speaking the truth to one another. We are to be correcting one another, helping one another.

So the balance of Scripture, here again, it's a nuanced balance as is so often the case. The infinite God as he's revealed himself in his word, what we find is when you read passages, sometimes a passage, so often doctrines, you can see that there's this balance and it's like walking a narrow ledge at the top of a mountain, like if the mountain goes up

and there's this narrow ledge. The biblical balance is that narrow ledge but to stay on that balance you have to keep avoiding falling off one side or the other and Scripture passages tend to emphasize different sides of these sometimes nuanced issues.

Let me give you an example. The sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Biblically there are passages that focus so much on the sovereignty of God that if you just took that passage, you would think it doesn't matter what men do. It's not up to you at all. So it's not up to me, so God is going to have to save me. I'm not going to repent. I'm not going to believe. It's up to him anyway. Well, there are some passages if you took them out of context, that you might be led to think that way, but there are other passages which say things like, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. You have not because you ask not. It is up to you, choose you this day whom you will serve." You see some other passages really focus on human responsibility and so the biblical balance comes when we keep reading all of the Bible and it keeps moving us to that narrow ledge that is where we need to be.

So it is with how are we to speak the truth to one another. We're to speak the truth in love, Ephesians 4. Speak the truth in love. We have to speak the truth to one another but it needs to be in love and so James is helping us and he's coming at the side of it on the side of stop judging. It's about your attitude. It's about your tone. It is about your heart.

So with that in mind, what I want us to see are three points this morning. First, I want us to see an emphatic command. An emphatic command. Verse 11, the first clause in the verse, "Do not speak against one another, brethren." This essentially, I think he's saying, "Stop judging one another, brothers." It's going to unfold. Now it says "stop speaking against one another," right? It doesn't say, "stop judging one another," but the force of it is going to be you're going to see it is, "stop judging one another," because what he's going to say is, "The reason you're speaking against one another is because you've already judged one another." Speaking against one another, as he's going to define it, is the outward evidence of the inward reality of a judgmental heart and so he is exhorting us to stop judging one another.

That's the command. "Do not speak against one another, brethren." The first thing to note is this is, he's saying this is an ongoing problem in the lives of the people to whom he writes and I would suggest that he wants us to consider is this not an ongoing problem in my life, in your life. One of the ways he makes this clear is that the tense of the verb, the imperative command, "do not speak against," is actually the Greek present tense imperative. It's a command. That's what imperative means. That's the mood, right? But the tense is present tense and remember, Greek present doesn't so much refer to the time of action, you know, present, past, future, like English present tense does. It refers to that but it refers more specifically to the kind of action. Tense in Greek is more about the kind of action, not the time so that Greek present is continuous, ongoing action.

This stands out even more when you consider, if you remember, verses 7 to 10, we noted that there were 10 imperatives in the preceding four verses. Verses 7 to 10 have 10 commands. All 10 of those commands are aorist imperatives. That's the past tense which

really refers again not to time, kind. It's punctiliar. It's the idea of, "Do it now." Boom. "Do this. Humble yourself." That's the force of it. When he says in the Greek present, "do not speak against," the idea is it's an ongoing reality. "You are speaking against one another. You are doing it. Stop it." That's the force of the Greek negative imperative. "You're doing it. Stop it. Stop it immediately," he's saying. "Stop doing what you're already doing. You're speaking against one another."

Now what does this mean? What does the word "speak against" mean? The different translations translate it differently: slander, speak evil against the ESV says and the King James. Literally the Greek word means, it's made up of two words, the preposition which means "down or against" is a prefix to a word which means "to speak." So literally it means "to speak down or to speak against." This idea of then speaking evil of kind of flows out of that. It's sometimes translated slander. It basically means "demeaning or degrading speech; speech that takes someone down; or speech that is speaking down to someone."

So he's saying, "Stop speaking and demeaning and degrading one another, brothers. You're doing this. Stop it." The idea is you're doing it habitually. You're saying things about other people. Now think about that, how we can do this. We see someone else's flaws, we see their sin, we sometimes see things we just don't like or disagree with, sometimes they're not even sin, sometimes they're preference issues but they don't do the things that we wish they would do. This is something that is really such that the tendency of pride is so great in our hearts. It's natural to judge. Part of that is because God has made us in his image. He's the judge. And he makes us to think about critically and evaluating but we have to remember we're not the judge, though. We're like him but we're to really apply that to ourselves.

So we look at others and we see that maybe they don't do something the way we do it. Maybe they, you know, the way they are raising their children we think is just not right. They're sending their children to Christian school or they're sending their children to public school or they are homeschooling their children. Whatever they're doing, you disagree with and so in your mind the tendency is to degrade them in your mind and then to speak that way about them to someone else, to gossip about them. Or if you want to go and talk to them, to go and speak to them in such a way that you're degrading them in the way you talk to them. You know like, "How in the world can you do such a thing?" Even if we don't say it quite that way, usually we're a little more, as we get older we get better at covering our disdain, but it comes through in our emotions where we're saying, in a sense, "What is wrong with you that you do this?" Rather than, "Hey," even when it's something legitimate like a real sin issue. He's saying we have a tendency where they are really sinning now, it's not a preference issue, it's sin. We see a brother or sister sinning, we have a tendency to judge them in a way that we are over them and we're looking down on them and when we go to them, we are condemning them in our hearts. James says, "Stop that. Stop it immediately. Stop speaking about others in a demeaning way. Stop speaking to others in a demeaning way." That's the force of the command.

Now think about that. Think about your own life, your words, what you talked about yesterday with your spouse or your friend, who you talked about, what you said, and ask the Lord to search you, "What was my heart? Was there this kind of condemnation that you're talking about here, Lord?" The emphatic command is, "Stop judging." He's saying and what I would encourage you to do is to pray and ask the Lord to start showing you how you're doing this. Start showing us how we're doing this. "Lord, I'm not aware of the things that I'm doing this way. Show me." And make it a matter of regular prayer so that the Spirit will prompt you. This is what's happening to me so much through James. I'm finding this all the time. Like I'm preaching on something and then I'm finding it all over my life. Have you had that problem? It's been a painful book and so ask him to continue the pain because it's so good to allow the Lord to show us our sin so that we can repent and we can trust him and we can become more like him.

So an emphatic command, "Stop judging." You see, the way that you can see that he's saying that, he says, "He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks against the law and judges the law." He's saying when you speak against someone, you have to be judging. You wouldn't be condemning if you weren't already critically evaluating them. In fact, the word "judge," the Greek word that's used here six times in the passage, the emphasis of that word "judging, judge, judge, judge," over and over. Law, law, law. Judge, law. That we are putting ourselves in the place of the judge and the judge is someone who, actually the Greek word "krino" means "to separate; to distinguish." It means "to weigh; to look at carefully; to examine." But the purpose for which you are weighing and examining is to render a verdict. It's to form an opinion and render a verdict and he says if you're speaking against someone, it shows that you are judging them, and if you're judging them, then you are in a position you're not supposed to be, so stop judging.

Now, the second. That's an emphatic command, "Stop judging. Stop speaking against by judging." Secondly, a compelling argument. We considered an emphatic command now a compelling argument. He graciously, the Spirit of God gives us two reasons, two reason why we should stop judging. He doesn't just tell us what to do, he tells us why to do it. God is so good to do this so much in his word. He wouldn't have to do that, he could just say, "Stop doing it because I don't like it," but he tells us why we ought not like it.

Compelling argument. There are two reasons, the first is in verse 11, the second half of verse 11 when he makes the connection, "He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law." The first reason that we should stop judging is that if you are speaking, you're speaking about someone in a negative way and your heart is not loving and you're speaking to someone, a third person that's not involved in the solution, you're definitely wrong, and that means you've judged, and what you are doing, he says, as you do that, as you slander this person, is you are slandering the law of God. Now that is counterintuitive. It doesn't seem like that. You're looking at the law, you're looking at their life, you see that it's not matching up and you talk about it, and he says in doing that you're slandering the law of God. Well, I don't think so. I'm talking about the law of God is right and their life is not right, but he says you are speaking against the law.

That's a surprising indictment but he explains what he means. How is it that I'm speaking against the law when I'm just calling a spade a spade? He says, "He who speaks against a brother," verse 11, "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." This is how you are speaking against the law, you have put yourself, if you're judging another brother in a way that you have an attitude toward them that's looking down upon them. Now, realize we're going to say that you can really confront sin and if you love someone, you must. You understand that. We're not getting away from that. We're going to see the biblical balance. But he's saying that if your attitude is condemning and you're looking down on someone, you have put yourself in the position of judge over them, you're looking at the law, you're looking at their life, you're pronouncing and forming an opinion, you're weighing the arguments and you're judging them and a judge is someone who is not under the law but up with the law. What you're saying is, "I don't need the law myself. I'm above the law."

That's how you're speaking against the law. You're saying the law's unnecessary for your life. "I don't need it, he does. He really needs it. He's really a mess. Look at him." In doing that, James says, "I am condemning the law when I speak like that. I'm saying I'm not under God's law, I don't need God's law, it's unnecessary for me. It is worthless to me." I'm saying that about the law of God, the 10 Commandments, all of the teachings of the word which the Bible tells us really even though we're not under the law, we walk in the Spirit, but when you walk in the Spirit, you fulfill the law. That's what Romans 8:1-4 says. When you're born-again and you walk in the truth and you walk by the power of the Spirit, you will obey and fulfill the law. That's what God is intending. His law is beautiful and good. In fact, James is a person who clearly wants us to have a love for the law. If you think back even to what he said earlier in chapter 2, verse 8, he said, "we must be fulfilling the royal law." He called it "the royal law," according to Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This law is the royal law. It's the King's law. It's our King's law, it's King Jesus' law. Why would you or I speak against King Jesus' law? Why would we slander his law? He says, "That's what you're doing if you have a condemning judgmental heart and you're speaking that way. You are condemning his law."

Not only does James say it's a royal law, earlier in chapter 1, verse 25, he said the law is the perfect law. The law of God is exactly what it ought to be. It is the perfect law. You know, this is one of the most beautiful things in all of life and this is so counterintuitive because the world is telling us the opposite every day, our flesh is telling us the opposite every day, but the most wonderful place to be, the happiest place to be, the place you were created to be is in obedience to every command of God's law. Every single one. So you feel like you need to, you're thinking about leaving your spouse. You think the grass is greener over there. You become miserable in your marriage. I'm telling you on the authority of God's word that the very happiest place in the world for you to be is in obedience to God, submitting to God, continuing to build your marriage, and you will find misery if you go outside. Our God is a God of grace and you may break things up and later he'll help you rebuild it, but it will be a lesser glory than what you could have right now if you rebuild right now.

His law is the perfect law and James said it's the perfect law of liberty, chapter 1, verse 25. The perfect law, the law of liberty, it's the law that sets you free. This is what you were made to do. You and I were made if we get married to be one man and one woman for life. This is what we were made for. The world says, "No, you should have many partners. You should enjoy life. You should sow your wild oats and then maybe later get married and then, of course, after a few years divorced because you're no longer in love and find somebody else to love, and just keep doing that throughout your life." And Satan says that's the way to live and the world says that's the way to live. God says that's not the way to live. "That's not the way I made you. I made you as a man, as a woman, if I give you the gift of marriage," and sometimes he gives us gifts of singleness and when he gives you the gift of singleness, that's the very best place in the world to be. But he gives you the gift of marriage, he says, "This is the place I've made you and as you learn, I know you can find misery because you're a sinner and you live with a sinner and life is hard, it's not easy, but by the power of my grace and the power of my word, the way I have made you and wired you is to live in the law, the perfect law of liberty." And you need to be submitting yourself by the power of the Spirit. You can't do it in your strength, in your own strength, but depending upon the Lord, looking at the law, seeing it as James said in chapter 1, seeing where my life is out of line with it and then looking to Christ to give me the strength, the forgiveness of my sins and now the strength to walk in it. This is life.

When you or I are condemning someone, we are saying that law is worthless. Now do you want to say that about God's law? James says that's what you're doing if you have a condemning heart to your brother. Now this means even when someone is genuinely wrong, when they're wrong, when they're in doctrinal error, he's saying that you can call out doctrinal error in such a way that you condemn the law of God because you're judging and you're putting yourself above another believer. When you call out sin, genuine sin, when you go to someone and you tell them what you were just talking about, this person wants to leave their spouse and you go and you say, "Listen, brother, you can't do this. The word of God is clear. You're not going to find life outside. It's not more beautiful over there. Satan packages sin in such a way that it looks better but it's death. The lips of an adulteress drip honey." Listen to this, Proverbs 5:3, "The lips of an adulteress drip honey, smoother than oil is her speech; But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. Her steps go down to death, Her feet take hold of Sheol." So if you follow her, you walk into the grave. So you go to a brother and you tell him that, he's saying you can even go with the words of life and yet by your attitude deny what you're saying. "I'm telling you the truth but I'm denying it because I have a judgmental heart and I'm looking down on you." What should be happening is if we're rightly related to God and rightly related to them, we go to them with an earnestness, we proclaim the truth but there's a sense in which we haven't made ourselves a judge. We also are under the law. That's the key.

So the first compelling reason, the compelling argument, the first reason is if you are judging others, you are condemning, you are demeaning God's law. So stop it. The second argument in the second point, compelling argument, this is 2B basically, point 2, a



compelling argument for stopping judging, reason 1, you're demeaning God's law; reason 2, this one is even more amazing, you are seeking to dethrone God himself. That's what he says, verse 12. You are trying to tell God to get off his throne so that you can judge the world. James 4:12, "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?" He says, "Look, there is one person who has given the law, there is one being who has given the law, that is the one true God, the Triune God. He's the lawgiver. He is the only judge. He's the only lawgiver, he's the only judge. Who are you judging?"

It is an audacious, ugly crime when we have a critical spirit that doesn't love someone. It doesn't mean, now a critical spirit doesn't mean you don't call sin sin. Yes, you call sin sin, but you do it in the right way, and if you're doing it from up above someone, in this way you are taking the very prerogatives of God for yourself and in that case, that's why, do you see why Jesus says it's a log and a speck? I see you have a problem. You're about to commit adultery and leave your spouse and that's a speck compared to the fact I'm trying to overthrow God's rule over the universe right now. Get the log out, then you can get the speck. That's something to meditate on. This is one to think about. When I find myself condemning, this is what God says about that. I'm demeaning the law and I'm trying to dethrone God. How can I do that?

So we looked at an emphatic command, a compelling argument, now let's try to think about careful application. Careful application. What does this look like? What does he want us to do with this? First of all, there are three subpoints on this third point. Thoughtful application, that we need to think about three, and there are three P's or subpoints. The first is position. What is your position as you think about, you see a believer, a brother, sister with an issue, check your position. Now the Bible is clear, you have to go to them. If you love them, you'll go to them. In fact, it's really interesting, I encourage you to read Leviticus 19:16-18 later. We don't have time to turn to it today but look at it later, 19:18 is where we have the second command that Jesus, remember when he's asked the greatest command, the greatest commandment? You know, there are 613 commandments in the Old Testament and the scribe asked him, "What's the greatest commandment," and he says, "The greatest commandment," they were probably expecting one of the top 10, the 10 Commandments, but he says, "The greatest commandment," Deuteronomy 6:5, "is that you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength." And he gives a bonus, they didn't ask him for the second, "And the second is like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." That's Leviticus 19:18 and if you get these two right, you get all 613 with it. Upon these two commandments the whole law and prophets, they hang on those two commandments: love God and love your neighbor.

Love your neighbor, Leviticus 19:19. When you read the context, what you see is that he takes about that you have to judge, when you judge, judge correctly. So there is no judging. Yeah, there's judging, but when you judge, don't slander. He talks about that you are not to slander, you are not to demean. That's in verse 17. And he also says in verse 17, "You shall surely reprove your neighbor." You've got to go and correct them and if you don't, you don't love your neighbor as yourself. Love your neighbor as yourself, verse 18.

So loving means correcting. Loving means going. But what that means is we have to go with the right position, back to point 3. Thoughtful application, position. What's your position? Are you coming from above? Then you're wrong. If you're coming and looking down on that other person, then you are demeaning the law of God and you are dethroning God. You are standing in their way in the way of their repentance. You don't come from above, you come alongside, beside them.

You know, one of the beautiful words in the New Testament is the word "parakaleo" which means "to exhort; to encourage." "Kaleo" means "to call." "Para" means "alongside." "Parakaleo, called to one side or to go to one side, to call them then to walk with you." You go to someone and you put your arm around them and you walk with them and you lead them out.

We're called to do that to one another and so reproving ought to have that element, that we're coming alongside someone who's in need. We're not coming above them. You know, God is the one who is above them, right? He's the only one that's above them. That's why when we come from above, it's like they need to see God but I'm in the way. Do you see that? Here they are, here I am coming to reprove them and I'm wanting, "Hey, you need to look at God," and I'm right there in the way. I'm like blocking the way for them seeing God. I come alongside them and I say, "Friend, I've got a concern. We need to look at him. We both need to look at him." That's where the power comes.

God is the one who stands as judge and this is amazing, you know, Jesus in John 14:16, he promises the gift of the Holy Spirit, this is when he's telling the disciples he's going away, it's the last night before his crucifixion and he says in John 14:16, "Don't be discouraged, I will ask the Father and he will send another Comforter," another paraclete, parakaleo, paraclatos, the noun form. "He will send another Comforter." The Holy Spirit is a paraclete. He comes alongside. Now he's God, he can come from above but he comes alongside. This is the nature of our God.

I love this, though, he says "another Comforter." Why did he say "another"? He's saying, "I am the first paraclete. I'm Lord over all that is and yet I came alongside you to help you out of the misery that you're in. I didn't come lording it over you. The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many." He is the paraclete that comes alongside and so he's saying, "If we're going to help one another, we have to humble ourselves and have the right position, a lowliness of mind that says that I come alongside you to help you just as I would want you to do for me."

So check your position. Now, this means that we're to be an advocate. If you think about that, when I go to talk to someone about a sin, if they've offended me, I should be getting over my offendedness so that I'm not trying to take revenge, "Lord, help me not to want to take revenge. That's not why I'm going. I want to help this brother or sister deal with this issue. Help me have a right heart." And I'm coming not as a judge, I'm coming as an advocate. That's actually a word that is, advocate, comforter, these are different ways the different translations translate "parakletos, paraclete." Sometimes you'll see in the

English, paraclete, that's just a transliteration of the Greek word, but sometimes you'll comforter, counselor, advocate. Counselor, like a lawyer that comes alongside you and helps you. Here's the judge, you're before the judge and here's your lawyer standing beside you helping you, arguing for you. It's a good thing to have a good lawyer, especially in our day. It's like the legal system can chew people up, right? You've got to have a lawyer. You wouldn't think you would have to in some situations but you pretty well better. You need that advocate. So when you and I go to a brother or sister, we should go with the mindset of, "I'm coming to truly help you deal with our Judge. I'm not coming as a judge."

Now there's a balance. We're not the public defender that's going to come and defend you and help you get off even if you're still in sin. You know, that's what our system is so messed up, of course, that, I mean, it's a fallen world so some lawyers have to defend somebody they know is guilty because they are required to by law and that's the way the system works. It's a fallen world. Well, we don't have to do that. We come representing King Jesus alongside and we say, "I want to help you. I'm here as an advocate for you. I'm for you. I'm mostly for Jesus and by being mostly for Jesus, that's the very best thing I can do for you." If I'm not for Jesus fully, I'm not for you at all. I may be saying it but I'm really not because I can't love my neighbor as myself if I'm not loving God with all my heart.

So check your position. Are you coming alongside or are you coming from above? Check, secondly, your perspective. So first, position. Thoughtful application here, what's your position? Secondly, what's your perspective? What we want to bring is God's perspective on the situation. It's not my opinion that matters. It's not my taste. I don't like what you're doing. That's irrelevant. What matters? What Jesus thinks about the situation. What our Father thinks about the situation. That is all that matters so we bring the perspective of God's view and that's the only thing that matters.

An example of this is interesting, a parallel passage to this is Romans 14:4. You know, I mentioned how it says in James 4:12 when he says, "but who are you who judge your neighbor," really it says, "but you, who are you who judge your neighbor." But you, who are you? The same kind of structure is in Romans 14:4 when Paul says, "But you, who are you to judge another man's servant?" Now it's interesting in Romans 14, he's talking about the issue of gray areas in the Christian life. Some people eat meat, some people eat vegetables only. Some people observe the Sabbath, some people observe every day alike. Some people, you know, drink, some people don't. So the issue is let each one be convinced in his own mind and what he's saying is everyone is to obey their Master in all of these areas and their Master is not me, their Master is Jesus.

This is why when we preach, we try not to be prescribing into the gray areas what you should do. I don't say things like, "You should never watch an R rated movie." I think there's a lot of wisdom in really considering carefully whether you should watch an R rated movie but I'm not going to get into that because I'm going to tell you this, it is much more powerful to say this, "Whatever you do, can you do it to the glory of Jesus Christ? Can you do it with the confidence that he's pleased that you're participating in this event

right now?" That is a much higher standard than meeting my standard and my standard is only going to bring death.

So the issue is perspective. You answer to your Master, I answer to my Master. We happen to have the same Master and so this is why we come alongside because we want to say, "What does Jesus have to say to you and what does he have to say to me in this situation? And let's together follow him." That's the perspective we're to have.

Now there are going to be black and white issues in our issues of conscience. Like I said earlier, a man thinks he can divorce his wife, a woman thinks she can divorce her husband and go and live with another man. Well, now, the issue, we come again the same way alongside and we say, "Listen, I want to follow Jesus and I want you to follow Jesus and I'm concerned that you may not be following Jesus. Is it true that you're leaving your spouse? Is it true that you think that you can do that?" I've had this conversation with people a number of times in the pastoral ministry, "Listen, God's word is clear, you can't do this. The grass is not greener over here." And they said to me, "I prayed about it," as if that settled it. "I prayed about it. God's good with me. He wants me to be happy." Well, a god who wants you to be happy, I can't argue that maybe you had a prayer and you felt a little peace or whatever, but a god who wants you to be happy is not the Jesus of the Bible in this situation. You have a different god because the Jesus who speaks in his word says one man and one woman for life, and there are only two grounds for divorce and remarriage, that is infidelity on the part of one of the spouses or the abandonment by an unbeliever. Everything else, no. And even in those cases, don't hurry and get remarried. Try to rebuild. God may bring that person back to repentance and you may be able to rebuild for his glory.

But we take the word. I mean, "You say you love Jesus and Jesus is telling me I can do this." Well, Jesus says in John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." So you say you love Jesus but you're not keeping his commandments. We can be that direct. We come alongside and we say, "Look, I know I'm imperfect too and I'm tempted in ways that I'm not looking down on you but I'm telling you that you can't love Jesus and violate this commandment right now. If you love him, obey him. I'm praying that you will receive his grace to obey him because this is going to be death." He says also in verses 23 and 24, "He who loves Me will keep My word." So we have an objective standard we can appeal to and we say, "Look, this is what loving Jesus looks like," but we still say it alongside them so that they can look directly at Christ as the one that they're disobeying.

So position, perspective. We're trying to apply these things. We look at our position, we check our perspective and, thirdly, we look at our purpose. What is the purpose that we're going for? Why are we going to this person? The purpose ought to be, now sometimes the purpose is because, "I'm mad and I want you to know it. I'm offended and I don't think you realize how much you offended me and I think you need to know and I want to let you have it." Now I don't say that, I mean, most of us are smart enough to know that's not the right way, right? But we can have that in our hearts, can't we? "I'm really telling you because I just want to let you know how much you hurt me." Well, that's not biblical,

that's not godly. That's revenge. I'm wanting to give you pain. If I get my heart right, I can go to that person and say, "Look, I'm very concerned about what I think happened." And it's always good to be tentative. "This is how I see what happened. Am I wrong?" Be open because a lot of times our perspective is wrong. We misunderstand something so don't imply certainty because there's only one Judge. Why is there only one Judge? Because there's only one person or there's only one who has perfect knowledge. I don't know what happened perfectly. I don't know your heart perfectly. I don't know anything perfectly so I'm coming tentatively knowing that God does know and this is why I want to point you to him because you can fool me, you can't fool him and I can't fool him and I'm so glad we can't.

So the purpose is not to tell you how much you hurt me or whatever, the purpose should be to serve the Lord, to serve our King, our Master, and to serve my brother or sister. "This is why I'm coming. I'm coming alongside you as a servant to you." And it's a difficult conversation. You don't want me to come and have this conversation. You don't want to hear from me and I know, when I'm in sin, I don't want to be reprov'd either and I know this is hard, and our biggest problem for most of us is we don't have these conversations. We sit and think about it, in our minds we have conversations about it, we talk to ourselves about how much we hate what someone's doing but we don't go and talk to them. That has got to stop. We have to go. We have to get our hearts ready and go correctly, though. And we can't ever be perfectly prepared, you just pray and then you go and you do the best you can and if you mess up, you confess it and you humble yourself and you keep on trying and we keep helping each other get better at it.

That's what we're supposed to do, but when we go, we go to serve. I want to be a blessing to this person. I think I'm seeing something and I go and I ask tentatively, "Is this right? Is this why? Help me understand why you're doing what you're doing or maybe I'm seeing it wrong. Is this correct? I see that. Well, how do you reconcile that with what the Lord says here? You want to follow Jesus, right? Well, help me understand how this is following Jesus. I know that we can be tentative like this but you can't do this." But when we come with the right heart, we're not in the way and they can hear from the Lord. There's power in it, his power.

I mean, there's something that Jesus, the example that he gave, I mentioned some of the words I've quoted are from John 14, the last night of Jesus' earthly life before his death and resurrection. He spends it with his disciples in the Upper Room but the first thing he did in that evening was he washed their feet. This is what John recorded. He washed their feet, remember? They come in. You know, in that day, they were basically walking with sandals or their feet were exposed. They didn't have sewer systems so that trash would be, they didn't have garbage pickup like we do today and so trash would be in the street, you'd walk through different things, you stepped in nasty stuff all day. Now you sit down to eat and the way they sat down to eat, you were reclining at a table and your feet were within just a couple of feet of somebody else's nose. So those nasty feet all around the table and we're about to eat. This is why every good dinner party had a servant ready to wash the feet and so the water is there, the towel is there but nobody has taken the place of washing the feet but Jesus, the greatest, gets up and he takes the towel and the bowl

and he washes their feet. Remember, Peter doesn't want him to wash the feet because Peter, you know, is always out there first and Jesus says, "No, I've got to wash you," and he says, "Well, wash my head, my hands." "No, you've already been washed but you need your feet washed. If you've been washed, you need only to wash your feet." The idea is if you've been born-again, if you've been saved, all you need is your feet washed.

So the regular part of Christian life of loving one another is washing each other's feet. This is a picture of how we deal with sin. Dealing with another person's sin is washing their feet. To do that, you have to be the most lowly and humble person and you'll go and you'll go in the spirit of Jesus and that humility will soften the heart and help the message to get through unimpeded, unobstructed. That's what we're called to do. James says, "Stop judging one another. Stop speaking against one another. Start serving one another." And when you and I learn how to do this and it's going to take, like I said we have to start now. We can't wait. We're going to keep working at it, keep thinking about this for three years and now I'm going to start reproofing people three years from now and I think I'll be ready then. No, start today and let's help each other learn how to do it.

This is what God wills for us. Even the part when I come and wash your feet and I'm messing it up, then you have to then turn around and wash my feet. Maybe you really had a big deal that I needed to help you with but then my attitude was wrong and now you're washing my feet. We're just washing, we're all washing each other's feet all the time, spiritually, metaphorically, not literally, thankfully. But is to the glory of God, the wisdom of God, the way he's made the body of Christ. This is how we help one another follow him all the days of our life, loving each other, humbly serving each other, helping each other, pulling for each other, helping each other get home. May God help us do that.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we rejoice in your kindness, your faithfulness. We marvel at your own meekness and humility that you showed in the ministry and life of Jesus, meekness and majesty together. We pray that you would help us to repent of our prideful hearts, to turn away from our judgmental spirits. When we feel ourselves condemning, that we would repent, we would get off the position of judging and get under your truth, we'd run to Christ and we'd follow him along the path of lowliness and loving service. And help us be more like our Savior every day. Help us help each other to be more and more holy even as we're more and more humble. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*