

**Bible Study Lesson: James 4:11-17**  
**July 5, 2020**

This section of James deals with hostility in the Christian community, and James begins by condemning destructive speech.

Read **the first sentence** in **James 4:11** and fill in the blank: "Do not \_\_\_\_\_."

To speak evil literally means "to speak down on" **or** "to put someone down." It indicates speaking about an individual in a malicious way in order to influence the opinion of others against him or her. What do you think motivates a person to speak in this way?

James addresses the motives of the person who is speaking evil because his/her words are being used to spread hostility and to attack the character of a person.

In **the second part** of **verse 11**, what does James say the person who speaks evil against his brother and judges his brother does? \_\_\_\_\_

James reveals the seriousness of this sin in an unforgettable way by stating that a person who speaks evil against his brother puts himself in a position of judging his brother. Moreover, one who judges his brother actually judges or criticizes the law itself as inadequate. James states, that person is not a doer of the word but a \_\_\_\_\_.

What does James say about God in **verse 12**? \_\_\_\_\_

What piercing question does James ask in **verse 12**? \_\_\_\_\_

James' point is that when a person assumes the role of judge, he or she is actually challenging God, the one Lawgiver and Judge. He or she is presuming to fill the role of God by seizing the right of judgment. Most of us would say that we would never want to "play God" or judge others; however, we may have spoken against a brother or sister in Christ in a judgmental way.

Actually, **James 5:19-20** states, "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 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."

In this instance, one believer recognizes that a fellow believer has strayed from the truth, and with the purest of motives; he goes to the one who has strayed to bring him back to the truth.

We might say, one believer judged the other believer's errors. The question is: What were his motives in doing so? \_\_\_\_\_.

Our motives are crucial.

Stephen J. Cole hits the nail on the head when he reminds us, "When **James says (4:11)**, 'Do not speak against one another,' some versions translate it, 'Do not slander one another.' Slander, which means maligning someone or damaging his reputation by sharing false or deliberately misleading information, is always sin. But the word that James uses has a broader meaning that includes any form of criticism or running someone down from selfish motives. In other words, **what you are saying may be true, but the reason you're sharing it is to make yourself look good and to put the other person in a bad light.** If your motive in criticizing someone is jealousy, selfish ambition, rivalry, pride, or hatred, you are judging wrongly."

Often we judge someone wrongly when we assume that we know all of the pertinent facts and motives behind the person's words or actions.

One pastor shared an account about a secretary he had who was often abrasive in the way she dealt with people. He states, "She needed to grow in that area, but many of us would criticize her behind her back rather than help her. One day I asked her to type a story about a little girl whose father suddenly told her that he was leaving her mother. He promised his daughter that she could visit him often. But he walked out of that room and she never saw him again. My secretary told me, 'That's exactly what happened to me.' I sat down and listened to her story, and after that I was much more patient with her shortcomings. I wasn't as judgmental toward her because I now knew more of the facts about her past."

Chuck Swindoll tells a story about a chapel speaker he heard back in his seminary days. The speaker's delivery was so terrible that Chuck and several of his friends were ripping him apart as they were leaving the chapel. A young man grabbed Chuck by the arm and said, "Chuck, you don't know all the facts."

Chuck said, "What do you mean? That was a pitiful message!"

The man responded, "Did you know that two hours before the message his wife called and told him his youngest son had been killed? Did you know that three months ago his wife was diagnosed with terminal cancer? And in spite of all that he still came and delivered his message." (from *Swindoll's Living Insights* by Charles Swindoll, p. 99)

Pause for a moment and think about the last time your motives in speaking about a fellow believer were not pure. It may jog your memory if you can hear yourself saying:

"Now, stop me if I'm wrong, but..."

"Now, I don't mean to be critical, but..."

"Perhaps I shouldn't say this about \_\_\_\_\_, but..."

"I really like \_\_\_\_\_ as a person, but..."

**Heavenly Father**, I confess that my pride gets the better of me, and I have a tendency to judge others. Give me a humble spirit that I may see the good in others....that I may see them as you see them.... that I may not be judgmental in my heart. Help me to submit to You and to Your Word and to obediently seek to love and build up others. Guide me in my quest to maintain harmony in the fellowship of believers. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**To think about:** One of your Christian friends comes to you and confesses that he (she) recognizes that he (she) is overly critical. This friend asks you for advice in battling this sin. What steps would you suggest this friend take in order to battle this sin? List them below:

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James has been addressing the problem of our playing God in the lives of others; then, he turns to playing God over our own lives--as if we have the final authority.

Read William Ernest Henley's poem, "Invictus."

It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate:

I am the captain of my soul. (from *Modern British Poetry*, ed. Louis Untermeyer, p.10)

How is Henley's poem a declaration of self-reliance? \_\_\_\_\_.

To think about: Frank Sinatra's "My Way" is the most popular song played at funerals worldwide, according to U.K.-based writer Emily Mackay.

And now, the end is near;

I've lived a life that's full.

And so I face the final curtain.

I've traveled each and ev'ry highway;

My friend, I'll say it clear,

But more, much more than this,

I'll state my case, of which I'm certain.

I did it **my** way.

James begins **verse 13** with a phrase much like “Now, listen here!” He is speaking to small business people who are industrious and ambitious. They are planning future operations as traveling traders. In **James 4:13**, what 4 things do the speakers propose to do? \_\_\_\_\_

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James is not objecting to their planning or their desire for profit; however, what reminder does James give them in **verse 14**? \_\_\_\_\_

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James reminds us that our lives are as brief as a puff of smoke or steam, and the brevity and insecurity of life should lead us to make our plans with a recognition of our dependence on God.

What advice does James give in **verse 15**? \_\_\_\_\_

James is stressing that we need to be aware of the reality of God and to consider Him in all our deliberations. Devotion to God is not confined to our “religious lives;” rather, we should bring our sense of God’s presence and power into every area of life. We should bring our faith and trust in God into every decision we make. Our plans should be based on the foundations of our faith.

What does **verse 16** say about boasting? \_\_\_\_\_

What does **verse 17** say about doing what is right? \_\_\_\_\_

In summary, faith in Christ does not separate life into sacred and secular. Our faith should be a vital factor in every decision we make.

### **Application:**

In what specific areas of my life do I tend to go it alone? What decisions have I made lately in which I failed to ask for God’s guidance or include God’s perspective? What decisions are on the horizon that I need to set before God, seek His will, and wait upon Him?

### **Prayer:**

Have Thine own way, Lord. Have Thine own way.

Thou art The Potter; I am the clay.

Mold me and make me after Thy will;

While I am waiting, yielded and still. (Lyrics by Adelaide A. Pollard, *Baptist Hymnal*, p.379)