
Into Thy Word Bible Study in James

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James 4:11-12: Do Not Judge!

General Idea: (This is a harsh but true passage that we all need to hear and heed. I have tried to put all the love in it while remaining true to the integrity of the text—there is no intention to put anyone down, just as the passage commands.) If you are a person who is up to no good and you do not want to be found out, you can attack those who are good with false allegations, gossip, and slander. This works well and covers your “rotten butt” by taking the focus off yourself and putting it on someone else.

Some people love to put down those who do good things. This is a fear of conviction thing. They may see others as good and themselves as not good, so they think, *I will point the dogs to them so they do not chase me.* Or, perhaps, they just use a well placed, crafted *put down* or word play to make themselves look better. Yet, what these behaviors really do is grieve the Spirit, bring disrepute to the church, and cause the person involved to forfeit any learning or growing. Therefore, he or she remains in sin and then he or she dies in condemnation.

The wake they leave is a church of dysfunction and strife, putting disease into God’s family, hurting people, and creating disillusioned saints who, striving to serve and do good, are thwarted by those who are evil and malevolent. This is exactly what James was dealing with in his church; so, he is telling us not to expose the sin in others to cover our trail of misdeeds. We are not to gossip, slander, or judge falsely (Matt. 7:1-27). Why? Because God is a God of truth and wants us to act out, in truth, in all our relationships as well as in the managing of His Bride, His Church. We are to be His witnesses—not His accusers (2 Cor. 5:20)!

Vs. 11: James is examining, through his experience as a church leader, how Christians can quickly resort to judging and chastising one another. We tend to do this over all the other “one another” passages we are called to do, such as “love one another.” James is also dealing with the violent speeches of the early Christians against the Romans as well as Jewish militants killing fellow Jews who were aristocrats. James is seeking a way to bring peace (James 3:1-12). Thus, he lays it out as simply and as eloquently as possible. Do not speak evil, because when you do, the reflection in the mirror shows your true self and how sinful and fallen you are. We end up criticizing God’s law, plan, and purpose in the other person while elevating ourselves to a position we cannot fit in or maintain. We are plainly called to obey, to take care of ourselves, and not “play” Holy Spirit in one another’s lives!

- *Speak evil/against/slander* means to talk down to others—as in being condescending. This refers to slander out of envy and reflects the work of Satan whose name means *slanderer* (Rev. 12:10). It breaks God’s royal law (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:36-40; Rom. 13:8-10; James 2:8), destroys fellowship, and keeps non-believers away from the church. It also devalues those who are also precious in His sight, as slander has no concern for truth or the view from the other side (Ex. 20:16; Psalm 15:3; 50:19-20; Prov. 6:16, 19).
- *Brothers* here means fellow-Jews. At this point, most, if not all the early Christians were Jews. However, the rest of us have been grafted in, so it now also refers to all those in Christ (Rom. 11:17-24).
- *Judges* here refers mostly to slander. Jewish wisdom opposed slander too, and they knew this well! It also refers to condemning the faults in others to cover up our own faults, especially the ones we refuse to see in ourselves. He also is condemning the practice of verbally attacking other, which will only bring condemnation on us (Deut. 19: 16-21; 22:13-19; 1 Sam. 24:9; Psalm 34:13; 50:20; 52:4; 101:5; 109:3; Prov. 10:18; 11:9; Matt. 26:60; Luke 6:45; 1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 4:31; 1 Tim. 3:11; 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:1, 12; 3:10, 16; 4:4).
- *Law* refers to God’s love and care—not to rules and regulations. As God declared His love for Israel, He also does so with us; because He loves us, we can respond in gratitude and keep His precepts. Thus, to slander a fellow-Jew was to place oneself above the law and actually slander God. The same goes to slandering a fellow-Christian—and this certainly does not give license to slander non-Christians!
- Do not hide your sin by exposing the sin in others—whether true or false! Gossip and slander do more to damage the church than any fire or false doctrine could ever do! Refuse to compare yourself with others! Remember the need for prayer! Remember the need for love!

Vs. 12: Only God alone is capable, qualified, and in a position to judge. Only He can save or condemn! We do not know all that there is to know or how everyone is intertwined; we do not see His plan or purpose, nor do we have the power to carry out a judgment. We have no right whatsoever to judge another human being. When we do this, we place ourselves in His seat where He is to be the only occupant!

- *One Lawgiver* means there is only one God and you are not He; God is supreme (Col. 1:18)! When we judge others we are saying *I am a better judge than God!* We seek to punish those whom God has deemed not to be punished, and pardon those whom God has deemed the need to be punished! We do not have the facts or the aptitude to judge! The logical notion to this is we will judge God Himself from our extremely limited

knowledge and experience! Are you wiser than God? If not, then do not judge others!

- *Who are you* is a personal pronoun here; in the Greek syntax, it means LOOK AT THIS! It is a spotlight shining on the darkness in us and asking, *can you be a better judge than God?* Beware, lest your judgments of others boomerang back on you (Rom. 2:17-24).
- The problem with this is we then ignore our own sin and rationalize we are OK because someone is worse than we are, or we think we are better when, in fact, we are not.
- The ultimate judgment is to come! So, are you preparing yourself for that day when the Lord will judge you (John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:10)?

Games are great for sports and activities, but one game that is a favorite among a lot of Christians is crafting the well placed *put down*. This game is not new; perhaps the serpent in the garden with Eve was the first to use it. This was my favorite game for many years and I was very good at it! But, we have to see this as evil and perverse, and not how God wants us to be to one another. Why is it so perverse? Because; when we judge, we are playing God. This is ultimate contempt to God, as we seek to usurp His authority. Being judgmental, exercising gossip, and putting others down destroys a church more completely than anything else. No government crack down, persecution, or ordinance can remove or split a church better than when we seek to “play” God.

In Matthew 7, Jesus tells us, simply put, DO NOT JUDGE! That means we are not to be critical or to compare anyone else! A Christian who is critical and condescending is a terribly destructive force to the Kingdom of God as he or she exhibits the direct opposite behavior of what a Christian should be. It is the role of the Holy Spirit to give a critique, and He will work with you way before using you to work with someone else! Every wrong thought you may observe in others already exists in you, and if you are unwilling to deal with it, while pointing it out in others, you would be as Proverbs so eloquently puts it, A FOOL! The chief characteristic of a Christian should be humility! Remember, if God judged you correctly and righteously, you would go straight to hell, as you deserve neither grace nor His love. But, because of His grace, you have heaven—and Him—for eternity!

Do you think, *hey! I do not play games or judge!* Really? Have you ever said *I do not mean to gossip but...or I do not mean to be critical but...or have you heard?* I know I have! Whether your intention is to be critical or the excitement of the news is too overwhelming to keep under wraps, whether you start it or repeat it, it is all the same; it is SIN (Matt. 7:1-6)! A judgment can be anything from straight out condemnation to manipulating people and situations to make you look good. In the context of this passage, the call is to draw near to God and not

to the devil. Nevertheless, such things do draw us very hard and fast to the devil's ways and far away from God and the humility He asks of us in order that we might grow and mature. When we are being mature, we will not play destructive games with one another.

There are differences between judgment and discernment. We are called to be discerning, not allowing harm to come to us or others in our care, and to be sensitive to potential trouble, attempting to prevent the bad actions of others. We are also called to be discerning of what is right and wrong because the Bible gives us clear absolutes; the *relativism* that the world teaches is evil and wrong. We must clearly and lovingly proclaim moral and doctrinal standards that are biblical and unambiguous (Acts 5:3-4; Rom. 14:1-12; Gal. 3:1; 1 Thess. 5:21). This means that we are not to allow immorality and false teachings to come about, or allow such things to attack the church from the outside.

This is also exercising church discipline (Matt. 7:1-6; John 7:24; 1 Cor. 5:9-13; Gal. 6:1; 1 John 4:1). We are called to judge (as in discernment) and evaluate the spiritual such as sin versus virtue and mental health of others. At the same time, we are not to judge one another's beliefs in regard to non-essentials such as baptism or church order. Discernment and righteous judgment are always to be done in the character of the Fruit of the Spirit and with mercy and love (Luke 6:36-37; Gal. 5:22-23; James 2:13).

The judgment that Jesus and James warn about is condemnation, being critical, self-righteousness, condescension, or having a measuring stick for "our" standards and ideas (Prov. 19:17; Matt. 5:7; 6:14-15). For a Christian to judge someone is totally absurd in God's Kingdom. By judging, we are superimposing ourselves to His sovereign role with our extremely limited insights and lack of understanding, mercy, or the ability to chastise or judge righteously. The fact is that we are sinners setting ourselves up to judge other sinners. We are neither qualified nor able to perform such a task! We are never to set ourselves up in something we are not called or gifted to do. The right way to help someone with faults is to go to them privately, with constructive criticism in love, and offer gentle, humble criticism and help that would uplift them (Matt. 10:12-15; Acts 13:42-46; 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

May God keep us all from such judging and enable us to be more useful in helping others with their problems! Be the person who seeks peace and reconciliation. Allow His love working in you to flow to others around you!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions, see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?

3. What is God telling me? How am I encouraged and strengthened?
4. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
5. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
6. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
7. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
8. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Have you ever used a well placed, crafted *put-down* or word play to make yourself look better? How did it work? What would Jesus think?
2. Have you either executed or been a victim of an attack of gossip, slander, or condescending remarks? How did you feel? What did it do to you? What did you learn? How can you protect yourself from intended hurt by others while exhibiting the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)?
3. What do false allegations, gossip, and slander do to the church? How is this attractive to other Christians or to non-Christians? What do these behaviors really do to the Kingdom of God?
4. What is the fall-out from a church that has dysfunction and strife as its focus or function?
5. Why and how do some Christians quickly resort to judgment and chastisement of one another over all the other “one another” passages we are called to do, such as “love one another?”
6. Read one of these passages: Matt. 22:36-40; Rom. 13:8-10; James 2:8. How does the slanderer break God’s “royal law?”
7. Could you better control your desire to judge wrongly, gossip, or slander if you could see others as precious in His sight, too? How, and why? What about by knowing deeply that He loves us, we then can then respond in gratitude and keep His precepts? How, and why?
8. Only God alone is capable, qualified, and is in a position to judge. So, what happens when we place ourselves in His seat?

9. How have your judgments of others boomeranged back on you?
10. Have you ever considered that when we gossip, we are putting disease in God's family, hurting people, and creating disillusioned saints who, having strived to serve God and others and to do good, have been thwarted by those who are evil and malevolent? What can you and the church do about this?
11. What can you do to help prevent yourself from being judgmental, critical, comparing others to you or your ideas, gossiping, or crafting the well placed *put down*?
12. What would be the right way to help someone with faults? How can you go to someone privately with constructive criticism in love, and offer gentle, humble criticism and help that would uplift them?

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (Eph 4:31-32).