

James 19 – Wisdom about Judging
Pastor Joe Oakley – GFC – 10/1/23

Have you ever heard someone say when you mention a behavior is a sin – “You’re being judgmental and Jesus said, ‘Judge not, lest you be judged.’ Is saying that something is a sin judgmental? We are going to learn what the Bible says about that as we continue our journey through the James in a series entitled Wisdom for Everyday Life. Today I’m preaching on Wisdom about Judging. Our text is James 4:11-12 Let’s begin with verse 11.

Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters.

The expression speak evil against is sometimes used of speaking against others behind their backs without giving them a chance to defend themselves. It also means to “slander” or “accuse” or “condemn.”

This sin is wrong for two reasons. First, it breaks the royal law that we should love one another. Second, it takes a right of judgment that only God has. Verse 11 continues:

If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law.

I had a challenging time understanding this at first. **How does judging people equate to judging God’s law?** It helped when I looked at other versions. The Living Bible says:

Don't criticize and speak evil about each other, dear brothers. If you do, you will be fighting against God's law of loving one another, declaring it is wrong.

This reminded me of what James called the royal law in James 2:8.

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right.

So, when James says that judging others means you are judging the Law, he means that **when we judge and condemn others, we are breaking the law of love and putting ourselves above God’s authority.** James goes on to say in verses 11-12:

But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?

What James is arguing is this: to judge others is to break the law of love that commands you to love others. Not keeping the law causes you to put yourself above and outside it.

The violator, then, in effect puts himself into the position of being a judge. And to exercise the function of a judge is something forbidden by Jesus.

The most famous passage about not judging was spoken by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 7:1-2 says:

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

This is probably one of the most quoted scriptures of all times. It's also one of the most misunderstood and misquoted scriptures of all time. First of all...many people misinterpret this passage to mean that no one can ever point out their sin. They say things like: "Yeah, I cheated on my wife, but who are you to judge? We're all sinners, right?"

So, this passage is most often misused to condone sinful behavior —frequently by the person having engaged in the behavior in question. What they're really saying is, "I can do whatever I want and if you correct me or disagree with me you're being judgmental." By the way – when they say this that means they are judging you!

But **"Judge not" does not mean we can never point out someone's sin.** We know this because other verses tell us to call people out on their sin. Nathan pointed out David's sin with Bathsheba. Paul pointed out Peter's sin of hypocrisy. Peter pointed out Ananias and Sapphira's sin. Jesus said in Matthew 18:15

If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense.

Obviously, the command to not judge does not mean to not point out sin. **How can we help people overcome sin in their lives if we don't acknowledge the sin in their lives?**

By the way - Matthew 18 tells us how to deal with someone sinning against us in the church. Go to the person first. If they don't listen, take 2 or 3 others with you. If they still don't listen, then tell the leaders of the church.

We don't see much church discipline in churches today because it usually breaks down in step one! I can't tell you how many times people have come to me or Pastor Deb and told us of something someone had done that offended them.

We always say, "Have you talked to them like Matthew 18 says to?" And invariably they say, "Oh no, I couldn't do that." To which we say, "Oh no, you can't obey the Scripture?" What they want is for us to talk to the person and they don't want us to tell them who was offended. So we refuse to do that and we say, **"Don't expect a biblical resolution to this problem if you don't handle it in a**

biblical way.” When it gets to this point – the person who is unwilling to talk to a brother or sister in Christ to work out an issue is the one disobeying God!

By the way, when Jesus says that we are not to judge, He’s not talking about not judging obvious sin. He is talking about is a critical, unloving, "holier than thou" attitude that acts like a court room judge sentencing others to certain punishments. Jesus is saying we’re not the ones who determine someone else’s consequences.

It will help to understand the Greek meaning of the word “judge.” The biblical word for judge is krino; which means:

- To assume the office of a judge
- To undergo the process of a trial
- To pronounce your opinion about right and wrong,
- To decide guilt or innocence,
- To pass a sentence and
- To execute judgment through condemnation and punishment.

In other words, **when you judge, you are putting yourself in the roles of judge, jury and executioner.**

There are two possible responses to the command of Christ to not judge. One response is that no one should ever judge anyone else since we’re all sinners. This is a popular opinion in today’s culture, which emphasizes “tolerance” as one of the highest virtues.

The second possibility is that we should all change our own behavior and live properly before judging and helping others to do the same. This is what Jesus is actually saying in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus is warning us to be very careful about how we judge others. Jesus said, “Judge not lest you be judged,” as a gracious warning. If I start playing judge, jury, and executioner to people, I’m going to find myself on the receiving end of my own standard. That’s a frightening prospect.

What Jesus was addressing in the Sermon on the Mount is hypocrisy. Those who go around pointing out other people’s sin without dealing with their own. For example – an unrepentant adulterer cannot judge other people who commit adultery. **Many of us disqualify ourselves from being able to help others.** Jesus shows how we disqualify ourselves in Matthew 7:3-5

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Notice that we have the responsibility to help others remove the specks from their eyes – speaking of the sins in their lives. The point of this Scripture is not that everyone has issues, so we should just ignore them. **The point of this Scripture is to deal with the plank AND the speck.**

Many people have misunderstood this and they remove neither the plank nor the speck. But God wants them both removed. So – it’s not judging others to help others deal with sin in their lives. But here’s the problem. **Jesus said we disqualify ourselves from being able to help others deal with their sin if we don’t deal with ours first.**

It’s so easy for us to see someone else’s faults yet we’re completely oblivious to our own. We tend to justify ourselves but harshly judge others.

We’re just telling the truth – but when others tell us the truth we judge them for being rude.

We’re just being firm – others are being controlling.

We’ve just reconsidered – others have lied.

We’re just explaining – others are gossiping.

We’re just wore out – others are lazy.

We’re just hurt – others are hurtful.

We must first get rid of the plank in our eye before we can see clearly to help our brother with his speck. And here’s the thing...we may not see that big old plank sticking out of our eye, but everyone else sees it. Some of us have planks so big that we’re knocking people over with them. Why would anyone want you to help them with their speck when you haven’t dealt with your plank? They wouldn’t. You know what they’re thinking? Matthew 7:5 says it like this... *“You hypocrite.”*

The word hypocrite implies an actor pretending to be someone else. If people see you walking around with a plank sticking out of your eye...acting all spiritual and self-righteous, trying to be something you’re not...you’re the last person they would trust with the speck in their eye.

Some people think a hypocrite is someone who claims to be a Christian but still does bad things. That’s not true. All of us sin and fall short of the glory of God. A hypocrite is someone who acts like they didn’t sin when they did. They pretend to be something they are not. Then they judge others for doing the very thing they are pretending they didn’t do. That’s why Romans 2:1 says:

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

Husbands have you ever been upset with your wives because she loses her keys or can’t find her cell phone, or misplaces her wallet? Well, have you ever lost something?

Wives have you ever been upset with your husband because he forgot your birthday or anniversary? Well, have you ever forgotten something important?

It's so easy to judge others and excuse ourselves. And here's one reason why...
We judge others by their actions and ourselves by our intentions.

We think it's okay when we mess up because we had good intentions. Well, why not believe the same about others? Why not believe that they had good intentions? Why not give them the benefit of the doubt? And here's a good reason to do so. Matthew 7:2 says:

For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

The way that you treat others when they mess up, is the same way you are going to be treated when you mess up.

How many of you have ever used a boomerang? You throw it and it comes back to you. Your self-righteous judgment has a boomerang effect. So does your kind, patient, accepting and tolerant judgments. Whatever you dish out is what will be dished out to you – good or bad.

Some of us think we're the official speck inspectors of others. But the truth is we really aren't qualified to judge others. **When we make a judgment, we do so with limited information.** We don't see the whole picture. We don't know what's in their heart. Only God does. I Samuel 16:7 says:

Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

You see God looks inside at a person's heart when He judges. We are looking outside at how things appear when we judge.

Steven Covey tells a story that happened to him on a subway. The trip was very calm and peaceful until a man and his children boarded the train. The children were loud and yelling and throwing things but the man just sat down next to him and did nothing to quiet the children.

Of course Steven was irritated. He couldn't believe that this man could be so rude and let his children run wild like that. It was obvious everyone was being disturbed.

So finally, he turned to the man and said, "Sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you couldn't control them a little more?"

"The man looked at him as though he was suddenly conscious of the situation and said softly, "Oh, you're right. I guess I should do something about it. We just

came from the hospital where their mother just died. I don't know what to think, and I guess they don't either.'

Steven says at that moment he had a major paradigm shift. He suddenly saw things differently, he felt differently, he behaved differently. His irritation vanished. His heart was filled with this man's pain. He felt sympathetic and compassionate. He told the man how sorry he was for his loss. He asked him if he wanted to talk about it. His whole perspective changed in an instant. You see that's what happens when we see what's in a person's heart. Suddenly we're not so quick to judge.

We all need a paradigm shift. **A paradigm shift is a radical change in our basic assumptions about or approach to something.** That rude waitress – maybe her husband just walked out on her. The stranger that took your parking spot – maybe they didn't see you. I'm not excusing people's behavior. I'm just saying we can't see the whole picture. If we did we wouldn't be so quick to judge. In John 7:24, Jesus said,

Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.

Righteous judgment means to make a right judgment. Not to make a judgment based on a first impression which usually is based on our prejudices. Instead, believe the best about others as long as you have no proof to the contrary. Romans 14:4 says it like this:

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

You see only God determines who stands and who falls. If judging were up to us we'd make a mess of things. But when we trust God to judge, we can be sure justice will be done. Hebrews 10:30 says:

It is mine to avenge; I will repay, and again, The Lord will judge His people.

This is what Jesus was cautioning against when He said, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." This passage is condemning judgmentalism. However it's not condoning being permissive. Some people – for fear of being judgmental - have swung to the opposite extreme of being permissive. They will never condemn a practice as sin or a doctrine as false because to them that is being judgmental. They accept sin in the name of love and acceptance.

Both judgmentalism and being permissive are extremes. We need to be careful not to become harshly judgmental, but neither are we to overlook sin. We need to be able to recognize sin for what it is. Any attempt to overlook or justify sin is itself sinful.

The command not to judge doesn't mean we don't call sin - sin. It doesn't mean we don't make certain judgments.

In I John 4:1 John tells us not to believe every preacher that comes along but to judge whether they are of God. In I Corinthians 5:11 Paul tells us not to associate with someone who claims to be a believer yet who commits sexual sin, or greed, or idolatry, or slander, or drunkenness, or who cheats people. That requires making a judgment. I Corinthians 5:12 Paul says...

It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning.

We should not judge unbelievers for thinking and acting like unbelievers! For example – I've seen many Christians get into Facebook arguments with people over issues and they end up tearing each other apart. We need to be more discerning over what we say and to whom we say it. This verse tells us to judge those who are in sin in the Church. Why? So we can help them. Galatians 6:1 says:

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.

The goal of righteous judgment is to restore the person. If that is not your goal, don't judge!

In fact, next time you are tempted to judge, remember there's a stark difference between judging arrogantly and judging with humility.

Arrogant judgment says, "What a despicable, vile, weak person."

Humble judgment says, "We are all sinners in need of God's grace."

Arrogant judgment says, "I would never do something like that."

Humble judgment says, "Though I may not struggle like they do, I sin in 10,000 other ways."

Arrogant judgment says, "I'm better than them."

Humble judgment says, "We both need Christ."

Next time you are tempted to judge...

Remember, Do not judge, or you too will be judged.

Remember, to remove the log in your eye and then help your brother remove the speck in his eye.

Remember, The same way you judge others, you will be judged.

Remember not to judge based on outward appearances.

Remember, you have no idea what someone is going through.

Remember, God has unlimited knowledge and that is why He alone can judge totally righteously.