

*James – Life after Faith*

**James 4:11-12**

**“Watching What You Say and Where You Sit”**

- 1. YOU ARE DAMAGING THE FAMILY**
  - A. We should recognize our relationship to one another
  - B. We should respect our relationship to one another
- 2. YOU ARE DISPUTING THE FAITH**
  - A. The principle we break
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- 3. YOU ARE DISPLACING THE FATHER**
  - A. There is a bench you can not fill
  - B. There is a bar you must not forget

1. A couple of years ago, a conservative talk-radio host and lawyer by the name of Mark Levin, published a book entitled *Men in Black: How the Supreme Court is destroying America*.

2. In the book Levin contends that through judicial activism, the men and women serving as judges in the nation’s highest court are actually doing more harm than good.

3. In James 4:11-12, Bro. James makes a very stern warning to judgmental Christians who criticize and condemn their brothers and sisters.

4. In a very sobering way, the Word of God reminds us that we have no right to don the robe of judge, and hand down critical sentences upon one another.

5. James says in verse 11, “*Speak not evil one of another, brethren...*” That phrase, “speak not evil”, is translated from one word, and it literally means “to speak against”.

6. The idea is of criticizing someone, and speaking about them in a way that is meant to belittle them or hurt them.

7. James goes on this verse to equate this kind of speech with judging someone. He says, “*...He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother...*”

8. The issue being dealt with in this text is the practice of criticizing someone and being judgmental about someone else’s life.

9. As we study this text, it will become clear that everyone of us ought to be very careful about what we say and where we sit. You don’t want to be the critic, and you can’t sit as the judge.

10. Notice why we must not criticize and judge one another. James gives us three good reasons. First of all, when you criticize and judge:

## I. YOU ARE DAMAGING THE FAMILY

1. It is true that we should not speak evil of anybody. However, it is not just anybody that James has in mind in this verse.
2. James says in verse 11, *“Speak not evil one of another, brethren...”* This is James’ favorite title for his readers. He writes to his “brethren”.
3. In it, he reminds us as Christians of our familial relationship with one another. We are connected to other Christians by the genetics of the gospel. The blood of Jesus is now our family bloodline.
4. I want you to notice how this ought to affect what we say to and about one another. First of all:

### A. We should recognize our relationship to one another

1. The Bible uses the language of family to describe those who have believed the gospel of Jesus Christ. God is our Father, and we have become the “children of God.”
2. Most common among this family language is the use of sibling terms. All throughout Scripture you find saved folks referring to one another as “brother” and “sister”.
3. In the little New Testament book of Philemon, Paul writes on behalf of a run-away slave who had been saved.
4. He writes to his former master, a Christian named Philemon, and asks him to receive back his former slave, but not as a slave again.
5. He says in Philemon verse 16, *“Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?”*
6. We need to recognize that all this “brother” and “sister” talk is not just religious rhetoric. We don’t call ourselves a family just because it sounds nice and quaint.
7. Those of us who have been saved call one another brother and sister because we really, truly are! We have been born again into a new family – the family of God.
8. With that being said, before we start to say something critical about another believer, we ought to stop and recognize our relationship to them.

9. I would say something else about this family relationship. Not only should we recognize our relationship to one another, but also further:

**B. We should respect our relationship with one another**

1. Understanding that there is a legitimate family connection between believers, there ought to be a unique respect for that relationship.

2. Paul seems to touch on this in Galatians 6:10, where he says, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, **especially unto them who are of the household of faith.**”

3. Why is it that James singles out speaking evil against our brethren? It is because if there is anyone about whom we ought to watch what we say it is those who share with us the family name of Christ.

4. Bernie Madoff is serving a 150-year prison sentence for swindling investors out of billions of dollars in one of the biggest Ponzi schemes in history.

5. On February 25, Stephanie Madoff, Bernie’s daughter-in-law, filed papers to have her last name legally changed to Morgan in order to avoid what she called “additional humiliation.”<sup>i</sup>

6. As believers, our family name is Christian – the followers of Christ. It is a family name of which we can and should be proud.

7. We ought to do nothing as a family that would bring reproach or damage to our family name. Yet, when we criticize and speak evil of one another that is exactly what we do!

8. We need to watch what we say and where we sit, because when you criticize and when you judge you are damaging the family.

9. Notice what else you are doing when you criticize and judge. You are not only *damaging the family*, but also:

**II. YOU ARE DISPUTING THE FAITH**

1. Look again at verse 11. James says, “Don’t criticize your brothers and sisters, and sit in judgment of them.”

2. Then he goes on to describe what we are actually doing when we *do* criticize and judge. He says, “*He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.*”

3. This is a very interesting verse. Essentially, James says that to be critical and judgmental of your fellow believers is to put yourself at odds with the very things you claim to believe.

4. Let me show you what I mean. Notice a couple of things about this particular statement in verse 11. First of all, notice:

#### **A. The principle we break**

1. James says that to speak evil and judgmentally about a brother is to do the same thing to “the law.”

2. It is important that we understand what James is talking about when he mentions “the law”. It is not the Ten Commandments that James has in mind here.

3. Look back in chapter 2, and notice verse 8. There Bro. James says, *“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.”*

4. In light of that verse, it becomes clear what James is saying in verse 11 of chapter 4. By criticizing and being judgmental, we are breaking the command to love one another as we do ourselves.

5. Think about it! You don’t go around criticizing and belittling yourself. You don’t want people being judgmental of you.

6. The command of Christ is that whatever we would do for ourselves we should do for our neighbor as well.

7. Too many people are like the man who was granted one wish, but on the condition that whatever he got, his worst enemy would get double of the same thing.

8. The man thought long and hard about his decision, and finally wished that he would be blind in *one* eye.

9. We break the principle of loving one another as we do ourselves when we criticize and judge. Notice something further James says in verse 11. Notice not only the principle we break, but notice also:

#### **B. The position we take**

1. Look again at verse 11. James says, *“...He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.”*

2. Think about this. James contends that by not obeying the law to love one another as we do ourselves, we have actually set ourselves up as critics and judges of that law.
3. In other words, by not obeying that principle, and by criticizing rather than caring for our neighbors, we have actually taken the position that we disagree with the law Christ has given us.
4. When you let some critical remark out about a brother, and when you pass judgment on a sister, you are in essence saying, "I know what Jesus said, but I think I am above that law. I know better than He does what is right."
5. The point is, when you criticize a fellow believer, and when you sit in judgment of those around you, you are disputing the very the faith you claim to believe!
6. You cannot cry for mercy for yourself and judgment for everyone else. You cannot ask God to cover your sins and condemn those of others.
7. I remember in seminary, I was in a particular class where the teacher divided us into two groups, and ask us to debate two sides of a particular theological argument.
8. Fortunately for me, I was on the side with which I agreed. However, one student in the class was not. Rather than argue for something they did not believe, they left the class.
9. James says that if you are not careful, your critical and judgmental spirit may place you in the position of disputing what you really believe.
10. Watch what you say and where you sit, because when you are critical and judgmental, *you are damaging the family, you are disputing the faith*, and notice also finally that:

### **III. YOU ARE DISPLACING THE FATHER**

1. If the arguments of verse 11 were not enough to keep your mouth from criticism and harsh judgments, verse 12 should certainly do it.
2. James says, "*There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?*"
3. To criticize and to pass judgment on our brothers and sisters is hurtful to the family, and it is contrary to the faith.

4. Even more than that, however, it is the height of arrogance, because it means we assume for ourselves a role that belongs only to God.

5. Look at what James tells us in verse 12, and notice a couple of truths we take from that verse. First of all, the Holy Spirit says to us through James:

**A. There is a bench you can not fill**

1. James asks in verse 12, “...*who art thou that judgest another?*”

2. We may at times try to put on the judge’s robe, and climb to the judge’s bench, but we have no right to do so.

3. The way the words are ordered in the original language, James literally says, “You? Who are *you* to judge someone else?”

4. One writer calls this “sanctified sarcasm”<sup>ii</sup>. James describes God in his glory as Law-giver and Judge, and then says, “You think you can fill His seat?”

5. The truth is; we have no business trying to sit on the judge’s bench where only God is adequate.

6. We don’t have *the information* we need to judge correctly. We don’t know all the facts of everyone’s case. We can’t tell all that is going on in their life.

7. Likewise, we don’t have *the integrity* we need to judge correctly. We have our own issues that need judgment. We have our own faults and failures that could be indicted.

8. You can’t displace God! His seat as Judge is not up for reelection, and even if it was, you aren’t fit to fill it!

9. Looking at verse 12, notice not only that there is a bench you can not fill, but notice also that:

**B. There is a bar you must not forget**

1. Far from filling the bench as judge, every one of us is going to stand at the bar of judgment. We may want to hand down sentences, but we are instead going to have enter a plea.

2. James says, “*There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy...*” God is the only one who is in a position to judge, and judge He will!

3. We need to spend less time filing charges against everyone else, and more time worrying about our own case.

4. God has the power to either save or destroy us. All men will stand before Him one day and give an account for their lives.

5. The only hope any of us have is to get the right attorney to plead our case before the Judge.

6. Fortunately, as I John 2:1 says, “...we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:”

7. You will stand before the Lawgiver and Judge of all the earth. Yet that Judge loved you so much that He sent His Son to pay for all your crimes.

8. That Son rose from the dead and is now willing to stand before the Judge (who also happens to be His Father), and plead for your salvation.

9. I saw a funny t-shirt recently that said, “99% of lawyers give the rest a bad name.” Not all lawyers are bad, however.

10. When you stand at the bar of judgment, you will be thankful that Jesus is your advocate.

1. James writes to Christians in the first century about an issue that is just as real in the twenty-first century.

2. Too often we criticize and judge one another, speaking evil of our brethren, and contradicting the very things we claim to believe.

3. May God deal with our hearts, and shut our mouths from any critical statements and judgmental spirits that damage the family, dispute the faith, and worst of all displace the Father.

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<sup>i</sup> Madoff's In-Law Files Papers to Change Her Last Name, 2/25/10, *NY1 News*, accessed 3/4/10, [http://www.ny1.com/5-manhattan-news-content/top\\_stories/114304/madoff-s-in-law-files-papers-to-change-her-last-name](http://www.ny1.com/5-manhattan-news-content/top_stories/114304/madoff-s-in-law-files-papers-to-change-her-last-name)

<sup>ii</sup> Blanchard, John, Truth for Life, (Evangelical Press, Darlington, England, 1986), p. 307