

James 4:11-17

Slander and Boasting

James already talked about control of the tongue. In 4:11-12 he addresses the tongue again.

What is the difference between slander and constructive criticism? They serve a different purpose—to bring down versus to build up. They come out of different hearts. Slander is spoken behind your back versus to your face. A friend is someone who stabs you in the front.

Applicable verses:

“Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” —Proverbs 27:5-6

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” —Ephesians 4:29

Whom is James addressing when he talks about slandering? Christians.

What are some examples of how we wrongly judge other Christians? Denomination, alignment to certain Bible translations, worship practices, maturity levels, appearance.

Application: Slander closely relates to gossip. What do you do if a Christian starts slandering another Christian in your presence? A non-Christian?

We can't know other people's hearts, motives, or intentions. We are being prideful and arrogant when we judge another human being. To criticize/slander another, one must conclude that he is right and the person he is criticizing is wrong. This is passing judgment. Christians are called to love one another and submit to one another.

To slander or judge a brother is to criticize and judge God's law (v. 11). Why is this wrong according to James? Only God can judge because only God is superior to the Law. We are subject to the law not superior to it. He is the One who gave it and the One who judges by it—both the Executive and Judicial branches of the divine government. To have the audacity to usurp the place of God and judge another person is the height of pride and arrogance. It is not okay to judge people's eternal destiny. That is God's job.

In 4:12 James was speaking of judging other people without divine authorization to do so. Obviously God has delegated the responsibility of judging civil acts to human governments, church conduct to elders, and the behavior of children to their parents. Christians who are walking by the Spirit who observe other Christians overtaken by some fault should seek to restore them, not ignore them.

The issue here is judging. Jesus said we are not to judge in Matthew 7:1-5. “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. 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 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.”

How can we reconcile that with Jesus saying, “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment” in John 7:24? What are some things that are right to judge? Right from wrong (i.e. Truth versus cults), obvious sinful behavior, and moral matters based on Scripture—not on my own value system. If the Word of God doesn't specifically address it, let it go, be gracious.

On the other hand, Christians aren't to be afraid to confront one another and to call a sin a sin. Jesus set that example in Matthew 23 when He confronted the Pharisees. In verse 28 He said, “on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Verses 13-17

Is it okay to plan?

Applicable verses:

Proverbs 20:18 “Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance.”

Isaiah 32:8 “But the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands.”

Are there examples of planners in Bible? Yes! Abraham sought a wife for Isaac in Genesis 24, Joseph stored and dispersed grain in Genesis 41, Solomon built God's temple in 1 Kings 5-7, Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah 1-6, and Paul's missionary journeys in Acts 13-28.

In James 4:13 The businessman makes a great plan. Notice the details. He thought about the time (today or tomorrow), the personnel (we), the place (such and such a city), the duration (spend a year), the activity (carry on business), and the anticipated result (make money). **What's missing from this picture?** God! It's wrong to make plans apart from a constant awareness of the sovereignty of God while overestimating our own capabilities. The problem is not planning but leaving God out of your plans. The problem is not planning but boasting about it.

The Christians James is addressing were priding themselves on their boastful plans for the future. They were arrogant in their confidence that nothing would interfere with their time schedule. They acted as if they were the masters of their own fate. We can't control the future or predict the future, how can we boast about it?

Satan is the classic example of planning without God and boasting about it.

Isaiah 14:13-14 "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

I will...I will...I will equals self-confident planning independent of God. It is the epitome of pride and arrogance. God created us to be dependent on Him, not independent. He delights when we acknowledge our dependence on Him. This is one purpose of prayer.

Application: As you plan for the future, what kinds of wrong things motivate you? Best job available, desirable lifestyle, location, money (obsession with saving for future)

What are some of the things that should motivate you as you plan for the future? Sovereign plan of God. Where we can be used.

Have you given God the right to direct your plans? Have you surrendered your will/ career/ desires to Him?

Bottom line questions: When it comes to making plans for the future, have you invited God to participate? Have you acknowledged your total dependence on Him? Have you given God the right to direct your plans? Select your platform? Pick your next duty station? Pick your husband/wife? Have you told Him, "Not my will but Yours?" and meant it?

Much of our thinking and behavior is shaped by what we can see of present circumstances or past events. Yet Scripture speaks forcefully of Christ's return as a fact that should be directing how we live now. As we plan, Christians are to be motivated by the certainty of this future event. Our focus should be not on the immediate but on the future—on eternity.

Verse 17

What kind of sin is James talking about here? Omission. We cannot take refuge in the plea that we have done nothing wrong because Scripture makes abundantly clear that sins of omission are as real and serious as sins of commission. They are a big deal to God.

Perhaps the most frightening example of sins of omission is found in Matthew 25:41-45 when Jesus talks about eternal judgment. "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison, and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'"

MEMORIZE: James 4:12