

James 4:11-12

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[0 : 00] And Paul reiterates this entire scheme of church discipline in his first letter to the Corinthians. And lastly, Hebrews 12, 6 tells us that God disciplines those whom he loves.

So biblical church discipline is a very good thing for us, a loving gift from God. And while this isn't necessarily having anything to do with our text this morning, I think it's a temptation to think something not in agreement with that when reading this text, right?

And so I just wanted to say that at the outset, this is not what James is talking about. But like any good doctrine or commandment from the Bible, sinful man has found innumerable ways of twisting, distorting, and corrupting that which was good from God.

God called us to know our brothers by their fruits, to practice church discipline, and to purge the evil from among us. But those who are practicing sin twist this command as well.

And then James is addressing those who judge wrongly. So looking at our text, verse 11, he writes, Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.

[1 : 12] The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge.

There is only one law giver and one judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

So following the flow of our text, I want to start off with our first application. Our first application, do not slander or judge one another with condemnation.

Do not slander or judge one another with condemnation. He says, do not speak evil against one another. Speaking evil, judging one another. At the outset of our text, James gives us this direct application to not do this thing.

And this Greek verb is in the imperative form, so it is a commandment for us all to obey. Somebody actually told me recently, Why don't you just take your applications from the imperative?

[2 : 15] I thought, that's a good idea. So, there you go. This is our only imperative in this text, but I think there are other applications, as we'll see anyways, throughout.

But nonetheless, this is the focal point of our text, right? From an applicational standpoint, this is what James wants us to hear. We ought not speak evil or judge wrongly.

So what is speaking evil? What does that look like? Well, from James' construction of his own words, he seems to be associating this kind of speech with pride.

Okay? Speaking evil comes from a place of pride. In the Greek, the modifier kata is used, which is a way of saying down or against. And you don't have to use this modifier, but James uses it three times, right?

Kata, kata, kata. So you kind of get this picture of somebody who is speaking down on someone, right? Somebody who thinks he's elevated and high up and all the rest of you need to listen, right?

[3 : 18] From below. So he seems to be picturing somebody who views himself highly, right? He's highly in judging those beneath him. And a natural outflow of what I just described is that speaking evil elevates oneself while degrading another.

And this might seem like I'm repeating what I already said, but the nuance here is that it is degrading, right? Obvious and yet clear, right? He's degrading others, this person.

And it feeds further pride, right? He degrades others so that he can build himself up. So it's the sick cycle, an unhealthy cycle.

And then we want to define judging with condemnation or judging wrongly. So what is that? And for starters, it is condemning by nature, right?

James uses a legal term, *prino*, which is a term you would use in court. It's the term you would use in the Bible whenever God talks about judging the sins of the world. So that's the term James is

employing here.

[4 : 26] This person judges with condemnation. So it's not merely that this person is making a statement about somebody else, but that this person thinks this other one deserves eternal torment.

He's judging him in the eternal sense. Which is why James says the one lawgiver is the one who's able to save and destroy. He's got this eternal judgment in mind.

And lastly, and this is where we tie it into our previous text, James 3.14, it seems that this kind of judgment, this kind of speaking evil comes from selfish ambitions and jealousies.

Right? Not from a motivation of love or to restore or to build up or encourage, but from one's own selfish ambitions and jealousies. So obviously then we ought not slander one another.

We ought not speak evil about one another or judge one another condemningly because it is sinful. And that's much easier said than done. But in our text today, James gives us four reasons we ought not speak evil about one another nor judge wrongly.

[5 : 37] Four inspired and errant profitable reasons for our souls. Reasons that we should bring to mind whenever we are tempted to commit such sin. Because these reasons remind us of who we are, who God is, and what is right.

So four reasons we ought not to speak evil. The first reason we ought not speak evil or judge one another is that slanderers and judgmental types assume they are better than others.

So again, we're hitting on that pride piece that defines this type of speech. Right? This ties into the definition. And we already noted the speaking down aspect, that kata, kata, kata.

Another element of this text that indicates pride is present is James' earlier reference to boasting in this section. Again, James 3.14. I'll read it aloud.

He says, but if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast. Right?

There's the pride. Do not boast and be false to the truth. And there's the slander.

[6 : 45] Do not boast and be false to the truth. These things are connected in James' mind because they are connected throughout the Bible. Psalm 101, verse 5.

David says, whoever slanders his neighbor secretly, I will destroy. Whoever has a haughty look and arrogant heart, I will not endure. James has already established in chapter 4, verse 6, that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

So God hates the pride and arrogance of man. And one of the themes that James has traced in this section is this idea of humility, this idea of being humble before God.

Nothing new to James' audience. Again, Proverbs. Proverbs 16.5. The Lord detests all the proud of heart.

Be sure of this, they will not go unpunished. Or Proverbs 8.13. To fear the Lord is to hate evil. And this is God speaking. He says, I hate pride and arrogance.

[7 : 50] I hate evil behavior and perverse speech. So this pride, this slanderous speech, this foolish speaking that James has built up in chapter 3, that's surfacing up in our text today, is what he is talking about.

Coming from a long line of tradition in the Jewish wisdom literature. So suffice it to say, there are an abundance of biblical texts that speak to God's hatred of perverse speech and pride, that ties these things together.

They're always accompanying one another. And those who practice pride and perverse slander speech without repenting will be judged and punished by God.

So we do not want to slander lest we be guilty of pride whose way is destruction, the constant warning throughout Scripture. And of course, this can only be evaded by seeking forgiveness in Christ.

But this ties to James' second reason. The second reason we ought not to speak evil or to judge one another is that by slandering or speaking evil, we are not obeying the law.

[9 : 02] He says in the second half of verse 11, But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge. This is kind of a unique word for James to use, a doer of the law that we've seen a few times now.

And if you were to ask me, what is the primary goal of James' epistle? What's the main thing he's hammering time and time again? It would be lordship salvation applied to the church.

The idea that those who are truly saved will obey God. Not perfectly, not constantly, but growingly and continuously and steadily. By we're growing in obedience to God.

You've all heard Nathan, Clay, and myself hit this doctrine in one way or another. And James is hitting that idea yet again in our text this morning. The idea of one who is a doer of the law and proves his faith is genuine, opposed to the self-deceived person who thinks he's in Christ, but has no fruit in his life as evidence of saving faith.

Now James is quoting from Leviticus chapter 19 verse 16, which says, You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor.

[10:16] I am the Lord. So this is the law which is being violated by this slanderer, by this condemning judge. And most of the time there's a law in the Bible, there is a do and a don't associated with that law.

Right? We see the don't very clearly. Don't slander, don't judge. But what is the do? What ought we be about then? And to continue reading from Leviticus 19, we'll find the answer in verses 17 through 18, which says, and this is God speaking, You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him.

And that sounds like James, right? That sounds like James 3, 17. Wisdom from above is peaceable, gentle, and open to reason. But continuing on in verse 18 of Leviticus, he says, You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

I am the Lord. So this is our second application then. Okay? The second application is that we ought to love our neighbor as ourself.

It's not stated directly in our text, but the more you familiarize yourself with this verbiage, with James' wording, with the fact that he's quoting Leviticus 19, it's the clear, underlying, continuous train of thought.

[11:42] We're not loving our neighbors when we judge or speak evilly about them. And so our second application, love our neighbor as ourself.

In fact, New Testament authors often intended for their readers to go back to a section of Scripture that they're quoting and to read beyond the quotation. So he clearly has in mind Leviticus 19 as a whole.

So James is calling us not to slander, but to love our neighbor, which, when you think about it, is extremely antithetical to slanderer's speech. Where you can't love your neighbor and then condemn him to hell in the same moment with your judgments and your preferences and your thoughts on what is right and wrong.

So what are some concrete examples of what loving neighbor looks like? And again, Leviticus 19, if you're not annoyed at me saying that already, is informative, which I don't have time to read in its entirety, but here's a summary, okay, a summary of some of the descriptions of what loving neighbor looks like in that chapter of Scripture.

So one, it looks like sharing with the poor and the foreigner, right? Not being selfish or greedy with your time and your resources, but sharing with the poor and the foreigner, those who are vulnerable, those who are in need of help.

[13:02] Right, another summary would be having compassion, honesty, and practicing justice in all of our interactions with people. That is hit over and over again in Levitical law.

It would also mean not showing impartiality. And again, this all should sound familiar because James has hit all of these things in his epistle. Right, we should not have impartiality.

That's all from Leviticus 19. He goes on, another way to love your neighbor is refusing to gossip and slander, which we're hitting today in our text. Leviticus 19 adds, No stubborn grudges in your heart against anyone.

And being careful never to put another's life in danger is another way to love your neighbor. Seems obvious, but again, it had to be written down in Levitical law. Right, and this is why the Old Testament includes laws like how you should build your house, because God was concerned that if a house is poorly built, it might collapse and kill somebody.

Okay, so we want to be careful. We want to be intentional in how we do things, how we build things, what we're doing with our time, how we drive our cars, right, to not unintentionally put our neighbor in danger.

[14:13] You love your neighbor by obeying speed limits, even if it's a dumb speed limit, right? So who is our neighbor then? Who am I supposed to apply all this to?

Well, there's a whole section of scripture that answers that. Somebody asked Jesus that question. I'll give you the short of it. Everyone in the world is your neighbor. And Pakistan and China and Europe and Russia, wherever you can think, that's your neighbor.

So we're called to love each and every one of them in this way. And these are, again, just some examples. There's so many more I could give from scripture on how to love your neighbor well. But again, James seems to really be thinking about Leviticus 19 in particular. He really seems to be considering these specific ways. So we want to be mindful of that.

And also, I mention all these things to say two things about loving neighbor, just what it looks like in a broad sense rather than a specific sense. So loving neighbor rightly means that we value them above ourselves.

[15:18] We value our neighbor above ourselves. And two, loving neighbor requires a lot of forethought, a lot of intentionality, and personal sacrifice.

A lot of people will talk about the forethought and the intentionality. We don't like talking about personal sacrifice. But in the Bible, that is biblical love. Love for neighbor is personally sacrificial. Whether it's time, money, energy, what have you. We want to sacrifice these things, be willing to deny ourselves to love our neighbor well. But getting back to our second reason then, to be a doer of the law means we are practicing these things.

We are putting in this work. And the whole of the law, by the way, is summarized by Christ as loving God and loving neighbor in Mark 12, 29 through 31.

So this is no small matter that James is circling. But looking back at verse 12, the first half of verse 12 in James chapter 4, we see a third reason we ought not slander.

[16:28] James says, there is only one lawgiver and one judge who is able to save and to destroy. So the third reason we ought not speak evil or judge our neighbor condemnably is because there is only one judge and one lawgiver.

God is the rightful judge. So every time we speak evil and judge in a condemning manner, we are transgressing God's law, as I said, but we are also usurping his throne.

We are pretending to be God. We're playing God in our prideful hearts. Again, this is all so interconnected. God is the one judge and the one lawgiver whom James is referring to.

He alone is the one who can save and destroy. Anyway, Isaiah 33, verse 22 says, For the Lord is our judge.

The Lord is our lawgiver. The Lord is our king. He will save us. No one else. No one else is judge. No one else is Lord. No one else is lawgiver. No one else is our savior.

[17:36] And it makes too much sense that God should be the only one fit for this role. As the sole creator of the universe, he should get to decide how things ought to be, whether it's morality, teleology, philosophy, the physics of the universe.

You name it, everything should be measured, weighed, and determined by him, the one sole creator. Isaiah 45, 7. God essentially says as much.

He's defending this right. He says, I, again, God speaking, I form light and create darkness. I make well-being and create calamity. I am the Lord who does all these things.

Emphasis on all these things. Later on in that same chapter, verse 12, he says, I made the earth and created man on it. It was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their hosts.

So God doesn't want anybody thinking that they have a right to rule or a right to say anything about anything. Because he's the sole creator. God has created everything.

[18:42] He has measured everything. He has established everything. So who better to judge everything? And Job, Job comes to mind when I think of this.

In Job chapter 40, God questions Job. And contextually, God has been asking Job questions for about four chapters as a whole. And those questions are all in the vein of, where were you when I created everything?

Or, can you do and be what I do and who I am? Are you like me, Job, that we should compare each other? And obviously the rhetorical point is, you're nothing like me, Job.

And so just a foretaste of this, right? Because he's telling him, no, of course you're not who I am, nor can you do what I do. But just to give a taste of this, because again, I think this is in James' mind here, as we'll see in chapter 5 in the coming weeks.

But quoting from Job chapter 40, verse 2, God says to Job, And later on in verse 8, God says, Will you even put me in the wrong?

[20 : 02] Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? That you may be the one who establishes right and wrong. That you may be the one who drags me to court. And later on in verses 10 through 14, God issues another challenge.

He says to Job, Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity. Clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Right? Things that only God can do. Clothing himself with glory, majesty, dignity. And he continues on. He says, Pour out the overflowings of your anger and look on everyone who is proud and abase him. Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low. And tread down the wicked where they stand.

Hide them all in the dust. That's creation language. Out of dust man came. He says, Hold them all in the dust together. Bind their faces in the world below. Then will I also acknowledge to you that your right hand can save you.

So God's point to Job is, You don't have the ability. You don't have the intelligence. You don't have the morality. You don't have diddly squat to judge anything. To execute the law.

[21 : 08] To uphold justice. You're powerless and weak to do an ounce of it. Is God's point to Job. So God makes it unambiguous as to what his right to rule is.

He is the sovereign, omnipotent, omnipresent creator. Righteous God who upholds all things in the palm of his hand. So likewise, God's right to be the sole lawgiver and the sole judge of all things is these very same attributes.

And there are other attributes and other reasons we could list as to why he has this sole right to this authority. But I think we all get the picture. So if you find yourself judging God like Job or judging your neighbor like James' audience, then I would exhort you to repent.

Right? And that is the third application. Right? To repent. If you're saying nasty things about people out of jealousy and selfish ambitions, then you have sinned not only against that person but God. Right? You've usurped his throne. And you have to seek forgiveness from both the offended person and God. And just some thoughts here.

[22 : 23] If you struggle with how you speak about people, I would encourage two things. Two things that when I'm at my best, these are things I reflect on. And one is speaking, encouraging, uplifting, and loving things to those and about those you would otherwise speak evil against.

So it's easy to say nice things about, you know, your best friend. Or if your parents are great, it's easy to say great things. But what about that guy who's really annoying? Or maybe your parents weren't that great.

Or whatever relationship. Right? Those people are hard to speak good and honorable things about because of our flesh. But that's our calling nonetheless.

So restrict yourself. Be careful with how you talk about that person. How much you talk about that person. And when you do, be sure to make sure it is uplifting, loving, encouraging.

To think about the lovely things. Right? Philippians 4.8. Whatever is honorable. Whatever is pure. Whatever is just. Surely there's something by God's common grace in that person that is praiseworthy.

[23 : 26] Right? Despite their sin. And secondly, pray for yourself and that person. That you would enjoy peace, harmony, and love between the two of you.

That there would be reconciliation. That God would set a guard over your mouth to prevent further sin and strife. So paraphrasing the words of Job's repentance in Job 42.

Right? After God's given him this list of questions. After God has made him feel very small and rightly so. Job says, and this is the paraphrase. And this is what we can pray.

Right? So I'll put it in the plural. This is what we can pray. He says, we have uttered what we did not understand. Right? That is something we should confess. But now we see God for who he is and despise ourselves and repent in dust and ash.

So we should recognize our place. Recognize our sinfulness. Recognize our need for God's mercy and grace. And repent. So let that be our prayer when we are guilty of such sin.

[24 : 31] So God's point to Job is that Job is not the one judge. Or excuse me. Job is not the one to judge God nor judge the matters of the universe.

Because Job did not create all those things. God is essentially asking Job, who do you think you are? Right? And this takes us to our final reason we ought not speak evil or judge our brothers and

neighbors.

Because James is making a very similar argument. Right? James says in the second half, verse 12, But who are you to judge your neighbor?

So the final reason we don't judge, the final reason we don't slander, is because we are not in a position to do so. Okay? And when I was prepping, I almost tied this in with the third reason. Just had three reasons. But I think this is worth drawing out. I think there's a distinction here. Right? Our last reason draws out who God is and why that's cause alone for us not to judge one another. [25 : 35] This is meant to make us think more about who we are and why we are in no position to do such a thing. Okay? So the rhetorical point of James' question, again, is that we are nobody to do these things.

Right? Are we loved by God? Yes. Are we specialists, His chosen image bearers among creation? Yes. Do we have value? Yes. Yes. We are still a part of creation and need to know that we ought to bow the knee with the rest of creation at the name of Jesus Christ.

James could have just said, know your place, oh man. But I actually think the rhetorical question kind of punches a little harder. Right? He really wants us to feel small.

And we are when compared to our Creator. And this is not a unique argument by James. We saw this argument by God in the book of Job.

Another example is in Romans 9, verse 20. Paul is defending God's election of Israel and the grafting in of Gentiles. And while the point that Paul is making is different from James' point, notice they use the same foundational truth and form the same foundational argument.

[26 : 50] Paul says in Romans 9, 20, But who are you, oh man, to answer back to God? Well, what is molded? Say to its molder, why have you made me like this?

So who is man to judge and weigh and balance the things of the universe? In each of these cases, Job, Paul, or James, the argument is all the same.

We ought to know our place and be quiet. And I think it's significant that often when someone encounters God in the Bible, they cover their mouths.

Or they comment on their perverse and slanderous speech like Job. Or Isaiah who cries, I am a man of unclean lips. Curse me, oh God.

These men were humbled by the appearance of God and understood this creator-creature distinction immediately. Which is our fourth application.

[27 : 50] Be humble. And I've included this as an application, I think, two or three times now through our series of James. It's not because I'm lazy, or at least I don't think I am.

But because it's an undercurrent throughout the whole book of James, right? It's wisdom literature. And being wise entails being humble. The Lord teaches the humble in what is right.

As James says in our section from the prior weeks, in chapter 3, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. So humility is the key posture we must have if we are to cast off evil speaking and evil judgment.

And a great mental exercise, right, that I like to employ that often humbles me is this. I try to imagine what work would look like if I was the one who had to balance the scales of the universe, right?

If I were the one tasked with weighing and measuring the sin of the world and then making it all right. And it quickly becomes apparent to me that I can't do that work, right?

[29 : 06] I don't know all the wrongs going on in the world right now. Just Ukraine alone, I'm thinking, how many war crimes, how many horrible things are going on? I don't know those things.

I don't know what sin is happening in the rest of Europe or Africa, Asia, the Americas, wherever. And even if I had an all-knowing brain, if I had a way to count all these things, to keep a record of wrongs, so to speak, I don't have any power to do anything about it.

I might be able to affect some local things a little bit here and there in my little world, but ultimately it really doesn't even compare to the weight of the universe, to the weight of sin, to the weight of all that is wrong.

And I'm powerless. And honestly, it becomes even more apparent that I cannot do these things when I consider just my own heart, right? Paul in Romans 7, I do the very thing I hate.

How often that is true of me. How often that is true of all of us. I can't even keep track of all my sin, let alone deal with it and make it all right.

[30 : 12] Right. So I don't know the full extent of my sin, nor am I able to right the wrongs or save myself. Again, Isaiah, one judge, one lawgiver, one sater, one king.

So running through this train of thought reminds me how small I really am, how little I really can do, and how great my need is, right?

How great my need is for the one judge and the one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. I praise God that he is all-powerful, that he is all-knowing, that he is just, righteous, and able to save our souls.

To use what we intended for evil for good. And not only this, but when I consider our utter need for him in these things and beyond, right?

Alongside our smallness and our extreme limitations, I'm amazed all the more at the gospel. That God, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, 27-31, right?

[31 : 19] Paul says, God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. So God chose you and me, guess what? We're all foolish according to the Bible.

And God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

So we're all weak. And I feel that, right? I feel that. And so that's gospel hope to me. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. He goes on. God chose what is low and despised in the world.

Even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are. So that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him, you are in Christ Jesus.

Who became to us wisdom from God. God chose what is righteousness and sanctification and redemption. So that, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

[32 : 21] So the rhetorical punch of James really knocks you down as it ought. It really brings you to your knees. Who am I that I should judge these things? That I should speak such things?

And when it's read by itself, at least in my sinful heart, I can read it and often be tempted to think I'm not good enough. I can't make it. And I'm not. I'm not.

But how then can I be reconciled to God? How then can things be made right? And again, the answers in the text. The one able to save. The one who chooses these people despite themselves. The one who, while we were yet sinners, sent his son to die for us. So we should look away from ourselves and stop playing God by making these wrong judgments.

But with all humility, consider him who is greater and boast of him alone. Right? The Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray.