

## HOW TO STOP PLAYING GOD

A priest and a rabbi were standing by the side of the road holding up signs. The rabbi's read, "The End is Near!" The priest, held up a sign which read, "Turn before it's too late!" The first driver who went by saw the signs and rolled down his window and yelled "Get a job." The second driver saw the signs and yelled, "Leave us alone you religious freaks!" The rabbi looked over at his companion and said, "Do you think we should try different signs?" The priest replied, "Yes, perhaps something like, 'Bridge Out' might be better"?

Today we are continuing in our series on the book of James.

James 4:11-12 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you -- who are you to judge your neighbor?

In this chapter, James says that sometimes we try to play God by judging other people based on externals. Back in Chapter 2 we talked about favouritism, that is wrong to treat people differently based on externals. This goes a step further to say why judging people is wrong. Anytime I assume things about you or judge you, I am playing God. It is God's responsibility to judge people.

### UNCHRISTIAN

James says here that judging others is unchristian. He starts here by saying;

James 4:11 Brothers, do not slander one another...

Circle the word SLANDER. It is the Greek word KATALALEO which means to speak against. The Bible calls Satan the accuser. The devil's number one activity is going around and putting people down by accusing them, slandering them and destroying their reputation. We are most like the devil when we judge people and talk cruelly about them. When we speak against somebody else (including all kinds of criticism, maligning, judging) we're doing the devil's work for him.

I heard about a guy who came to a pastor one time and said, "I only have one talent." The pastor asked, "What's your talent?" The man said, "I have the gift of criticism." The pastor told him that the gift of criticism does not come from the Holy Spirit but from the devil. The pastor thought about the parable in the Bible and said, "The guy who had only one talent went out and buried it. Maybe that's what you ought to do with yours as well."

### UNLAWFULL

James goes on to say that judging others goes against God's law. He writes;

James 4:11 ...Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

So why is it unlawful to judge other people? Because it breaks God's Royal Law;

James 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

Judging others is unloving. It break's God's command to love one another, so therefore it is also unlawful.

## UNJUSTIFIED

He goes on to say that judging is not your job, it is unjustified.

James 4:12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you -- who are you to judge your neighbor?

Only God has the right to judge because only God is perfect and knows everything. It's in God's job description, not yours. Let me give you today 5 reasons why judging others is a problem;

### 1. Judging Misrepresents my Failures

It is wrong to judge people when we ourselves do the same thing or worse. Remember the woman caught in adultery? What did Jesus say to the Pharisees? "He who is without sin cast the first stone." They all walked away. I don't have any right to judge anyone else if I'm guilty of the same thing. We need to be consistent.

Romans 2:1-3 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. 2 Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. 3 So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

Paul says here that one of the reasons we tend to judge other people is to excuse our own faults. You think by pointing the finger at somebody else, God is going to forget what you've done, or when you point out how somebody else has fallen then you don't look so bad. We try to accuse others and excuse ourselves.

Matthew 7:1-5 Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 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? 4 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? 5 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.

Hebrew humor is humor by exaggeration. The Sermon on the Mount has a number of laugh lines in it. Imagine two guys: one guy has got a microscopic piece of dust in his eye and the other has a telephone pole hanging out of his eye. Jesus is making a point here with humor. He's saying it's wrong to judge others because it overlooks my own faults. If judging you causes me to not look at myself realistically, then it's wrong. We are great speck analyzers, when we have a logjam in our own eye. Isn't it true that the things that often bother us the most about the faults of others is the fact that they are also our own faults? We criticize the actions of others, not recognizing that they are really just a distorted reflection of our own lives.

A man wanted to impress his friends with his eye for art as they went to an art gallery together. However, on the way he lost his glasses and was very nearsighted so he could hardly even see his hand in front of his face. But he figured he could wing it anyways with any abstract comments and observations he wanted to make. So, he approached a frame and began criticizing: "Why would anyone want to paint something so hideously ugly? I mean, it's a true rendering of the object, but why waste time painting such a disgusting subject?" Everyone was laughing by this time as his wife whispered into his ear, "John, it's a mirror!"

## 2. Judging Misreads the Face

We tend to make our impression of people in about the first 15 seconds and most of that is in the way that they look. We judge people based on appearance. We size them up. Their face, clothing, hairdo. If you judge just on the basis of appearance, that's unwise.

John 7:24 Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."

Remember the story when God sends Samuel to choose a new king for Israel?

1 Samuel 16:6-7 When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD." 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Samuel said this when he chose David, the runt of the family to be king of Israel. Others were saying, "Not David! That scrawny kid! He's nothing. The other brothers are the sharp ones!" Samuel said, "God doesn't look at the appearance. God looks at the heart."

In his little book *Illustrations of Bible Truth*, H.A. Ironside pointed out the folly of judging others. He related an incident in the life of a man called Bishop Potter. "He was sailing for Europe on one of the great transatlantic ocean liners. When he went on board, he found that another passenger was to share the cabin with him. After going to see the accommodations, he came up to the purser's desk and inquired if he could leave his gold watch and other valuables in the ship's safe. He explained that ordinarily he never availed himself of that privilege, but he had been to his cabin and had met the man who was to occupy the other berth. Judging from his appearance, he was afraid that he might not be a very trustworthy person. The purser accepted the responsibility for the valuables and remarked, 'It's all right, bishop, I'll be very glad to take care of them for you. The other man has been up here and left his for the same reason!'"

## 3. Judging Misuses the Facts

There are times when we can be in the middle of a situation and think one thing is going on when in fact we have completely misread what is happening around us.

John 7:50-51 Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, 51 Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?

That's a rhetorical question. The obvious answer is "no". It is unwise to make a judgement about somebody before you know all the facts. If you study scripture you'll find that even if your conclusions are right about that person you're still wrong -- because you did it without getting the facts.

There is always more than one side to a story. There are three sides to a story: your side, their side, God's side. Usually we have partial truth.

Chuck Swindoll told of his being at a pastor's conference where he would be speaking. The first day there a man approached him and said how greatly he had looked forward to hearing him speak. That evening Swindoll noticed the man was sound asleep only a few minutes into of the sermon. Swindoll thought to himself that perhaps he was tired after a long day's drive and couldn't help himself - but this continued to happen night after night. Dr. Swindoll soon became very upset in his spirit with this man! On the last night the man's wife came up and apologized for her husband's inattention to the messages. She then explained that he had recently been diagnosed as having terminal cancer and the medication he was taking to ease the pain made him extremely sleepy. But it had been one of his life-long ambitions to hear Dr. Swindoll speak before he died, and now he had fulfilled that goal.

#### 4. Judging Misunderstands the Faith

Sometimes as Christians we judge others based upon our own understanding of what the Bible says.

Colossians 2:16-17 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

Paul is saying it is wrong to judge people, their spirituality, on the basis of externals, religious observances. You can't tell a person's walk with God based on their outward external observances -- by what you eat or drink or if you worship on Saturday or Sunday. These are just a shadow of the things to come. Reality is found in Christ. When I judge somebody on the basis of their outward religious observances, I'm missing the point.

Put the other person first. It's wrong when we judge people on the basis of external observances. Christians disagree on many different things.

An umpire once called Babe Ruth out on strikes. When the crowd booed with sharp disapproval at the call, the legendary Ruth turned to the umpire with disdain and said, "There's 40,000 people here who know that the last pitch was a ball, tomato head." Suspecting that the umpire would erupt with anger, the coaches and players braced themselves for Ruth's ejection. However, the cool-headed umpire replied, "Maybe so Babe, maybe so, but mine is the only opinion that counts." Believers need to realize that God's judgment is the only one that counts and resist the temptation to argue over silly secondary issues.

There are many things that we need to simply agree to disagree on. That does not mean that all issues are secondary or unimportant. We need to stand for truth. Wisdom is understanding issues that concern what God has said vs what culture and the church have said.

#### 5. Judging Misses the Future

It's premature to judge people's motives. Why is it premature? Nobody really knows what's in somebody else's heart. You can guess but you don't know. To judge somebody means we're judging without all the facts. Only God has the right to judge because he can see in the heart. The Bible says that someday when the Lord comes back.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

I have a hard enough time just trying to figure out my own motives about a lot of things, much less making a good guess at yours. So do you. A lot of times we don't know why we do what we do. What makes us think we can figure out what makes other people do what they do? We have a hard time just judging our own selves. But one day it's all going to be brought to light.

The Apostle Paul understood this truth more than most. If you had seen Paul while he was still persecuting and locking up Christians, you would have had a very different picture of him. That was the pre-Jesus Paul. There are a lot of people today that we may look at and write them off thinking they will never change. But maybe all we are seeing is the pre-Jesus version of them.

Please do not misunderstand what I am trying to say here today. I am not saying that we turn a blind eye when it comes to sin. When James says that we should not judge he does not mean, as the world around us is trying to say, that there is not absolute right and wrong. It does not mean that we should not continue to point out sin in the society around us.

What James is saying is that we need to be a people of grace. We need to recognize sin, but start with ourselves. None of us here are perfect and none of should ever claim to be. We are all on a journey and none of us has yet arrived. Just because we are not perfect does not mean that we should not daily seek to be better. The person who aim his arrow at the sun will not hit it, but he will certainly shoot farther than the person who shoots at the ground.

Romans 2:1 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.

This is not a call to either suspend our critical facilities or to renounce all criticism and rebuke of others as illegitimate; rather it is a prohibition of standing in judgment of other people and condemning them, especially when we fail to condemn ourselves first -- John Stott

Remember, none of us is perfect. God sees the heart. Things are not always what they seem and God is not done with any of us yet. Extend the grace of Jesus to everyone, remembering that Jesus first extended that grace to you.

Once a group of young men decided to play a practical joke on a young bachelor executive who worked with them in Dallas. It was the custom each Thanksgiving for the president of the firm to give free turkeys to all employees. The young friend had indicated his displeasure at the idea since, being a young bachelor, he had no idea what he'd do with a whole turkey and furthermore, he had no desire to cook it. His friends, therefore, confiscated his turkey and replaced it with one made out of paper mache, the only remains of the original bird being the neck and the tail which protruded from the paper wrappings. The day before the holidays, the birds were handed out ceremoniously.

The friend, unaware of the switch, tucked his bogus bird under his arm and caught the streetcar for home. As he was sitting there feeling a little self-conscious, a man seated himself on the bench next to him. Since the turkey was an obvious conversation piece they were soon engaged talking about the turkey.

In the course of time, the young man learned his companion was without a job and down on his luck for some time. Therefore, he had dim prospects for a happy Thanksgiving. He was on his way home with a few pounds of hamburger meat tucked in his coat pocket to be the entire Thanksgiving meal for his family.

Our friend had a brilliant idea. Why not swap? The man, of course, was delighted. The generosity was overwhelming. With a great sense of gratitude, they made the exchange. Of course, you can imagine the outcome and the man's thoughts when he removed the wrappings from the turkey and his children crowded around wide-eyed with anticipation. The young man, when he learned what his friends had done, searched for days for that man who he had unwittingly cheated but unfortunately, he was never found. The point is obvious. The poor, defrauded man, from his vantage point, would never understand the young man's actions. To this day, I'm sure the incident stands out in his mind as an example of man's inhumanity to man. Yet from the young man's point of view, his motives were pure.