

# James

Judging and Planning

April 22, 2012

## I. Introduction

A. **James 4:11-17** . . . Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. [12] There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? [13] Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." [14] Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. [15] Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." [16] But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. [17] Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

## B. Prayer

## II. Criticizing and Judging Other Believers On Non-Moral, Non-Scriptural Issues

A. **James 4:11-12** . . . Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. [12] There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

B. One of the challenges we face when reading the scriptures is deciding what a particular portion means and how it is to be applied. This is especially challenging when we come upon a portion of scripture that is not easily understood, for whatever reason. To gain insight into any portion of scripture, we must decide:

1. if the portion we are examining is the only statement on the subject,
  - a. or if there are other statements on the subject, how the other statements ought to influence our understanding of the statement we are examining,
2. and if the written context and/or the cultural context ought to affect how we are to understand it.

- C. On first read, this portion of James sounds like it is saying we are not to judge our fellow Christians, at all. And if we do judge them:
1. we are willfully disregarding God's directions in His Law/word,
  2. we are pridefully taking God's place as judge of all mankind,
  3. and we are acting as judges of His Law, that is, deciding for God and our fellow man what God's law means and how it is to be applied.
- D. But is God telling us here in **James 4** that we are not to judge our fellow Christians, at all? If this were the only statement in God's word on judging others, such a conclusion would seem natural and right. However, it is not the only statement. So let's look at some of the other scriptures which address the issue of judging others. And we will begin by looking at those which seem to say we should not judge at all.
1. **Matthew 7:1** . . . Do not judge so that you will not be judged.
  2. **Luke 6:37** . . . Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.
  3. **John 8:7b** . . . Jesus said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."
  4. **Romans 14:4, 10-13a** . . . Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. [10] But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. [11] For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." [12] So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. [13] Therefore let us not judge one another anymore.
  5. **Matthew 18:21-22** . . . Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" [22] Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.
- E. But the scripture also has this to say about judging others:
1. **Matthew 7:3-5** . . . Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? [5] You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

2. **Matthew 7:6** . . . Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.
  3. **Matthew 18:15-17** . . . If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. [16] But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. [17] If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.
  4. **Luke 17:3-4** . . . Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. [4] And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him.
  5. **Galatians 6:1** . . . Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.
  6. **I Corinthians 5:9-13** . . . I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; [10] I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. [11] But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. [12] For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? [13] But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.
- F. The point here is that some forms of judging are wrong, and some forms of judging are right, and even commanded for the spiritual health of the individual Christian and the church. In addition, God warns us that the way we judge – be it harsh and unforgiving or gentle and graciously forgiving – determines how we will be judged by God.
- G. Returning to **James 4:11-12**, the question we face is what kind of judging is God forbidding. We see from other scriptures on judging that God cannot be forbidding all judging. So what is He forbidding? The kind of judging spoken against here is similar to the judging spoken against in **Romans 14**.
1. In other words, here in **James 4**, God is speaking against judging other Christians – either face to face or when they are absent –

concerning their beliefs, behaviors, religious practices, or spiritual disciplines which:

- a. are not stated anywhere in the scriptures,
  - b. are not clearly stated in the scriptures,
  - c. are not substantiated by clear inference in one or more places in the scriptures,
  - d. or which a particular group of believers has labeled sin or outside God's will, but your group hasn't because your group does not see convincing scripture support for such a label.
2. Now I want to be clear here, we are talking about not judging our fellow Christians in regard to beliefs, behaviors, religious practices, and spiritual disciplines which are not clearly supported or clearly forbidden in God's word.
- a. Should an individual Christian's or Christian groups unsupported beliefs, behaviors, religious practices, or spiritual disciplines cross the line from morality into immorality, or from holiness into ungodliness, or from revealed truth into heresy, or from the common beliefs and practices of serious minded Christians and the Church down through the ages to something new and different, the NO JUDGMENT command no longer applies.
  - b. But as long as another Christian's or Christian groups beliefs and practices stay within the boundaries of God's word, we are to give them the freedom to do what their conscience compels them to do, or their group's leadership teaches them to do.

H. Let me give you three examples:

1. First, I am convinced it takes a significant amount of time to be a growing, maturing Christian. Therefore, I have strongly believed for years that Christians ought to look for the kind of employment that gives them the most time for spiritual growth and Christian service. But because I know the Bible does not require this or teach this in the way I hold it, I do not teach it as a "must" or "should" in the Sunday teaching time. Nor do I push it on Christians who are not asking or seeking help with such things. Nor do I judge as weak or defective those Christians who live otherwise.
2. Second, consider the frequency of communion. Some churches are committed to sharing in the Lord's Table every time they gather, be it a Sunday or weekday meeting. Some churches are committed to communion every Lord's Day. Some twice a month like us. Some once a month, and so on. Who is right? Who is wrong? The one who is wrong is the one who judges another believer on this matter in

relation to frequency, for there is no clear teaching in the Bible about frequency.

3. Third, the Elders of the Apostolic Christian Church made a rule that the membership should not watch TV or attend sporting events, because such things dull their spiritual senses and distract them from a life devoted to God and the care of others. So instead of spending time watching TV or attending sporting events, they said the members were to read the scriptures, pray, visit the sick and needy, and fellowship with each other. Now there is no clear teaching on this rule in the scriptures, yet it does stay within the boundaries of scripture. Therefore, we are not to judge them for commanding this or living according to the command.

- I. And this is what **James 4:11-12** is teaching us. God gives us some freedom to make religiously oriented, life affecting decisions within God's established boundaries.

1. Such decisions include styles of worship, hymns or choruses, how we do evangelism, how to care for the poor, living in community or in your own home, building churches or meeting in homes, church dress codes, which Bible translation to use, observing or not observing Lent, Sunday School or no Sunday School, youth groups or no youth groups, what simple living looks like, and how we use our leisure time – to name a few.
2. What is important is that we do not judge as necessary or wrong what the Bible does not say or at least clearly indicate the will of God for His people – as long as what other Christians do remains within the boundaries of God's Word and will.
3. If we do judge other Christians on issues where we ought not to judge, we are acting as a Law-giver – which is only God's prerogative, and we are deciding for God how God's people are to put His law into practice.

### III. Acting As If The Certainty Of Future Plans Were In Your Hands

- A. **James 4:13-17** . . . Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." [14] Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. [15] Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." [16] But as it is, you boast in your arrogance;

all such boasting is evil. [17] Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

B. The problem God is addressing here is another manifestation of pride. From the first chapter of James until these verses, He has called our attention to pride –

1. in relation to thinking we are wiser than God – **James 1:5-9**,
2. in relation to trusting in riches, which fade away and are useless in eternity – **James 1:9-11**,
3. in relation to thinking of ourselves as more godly than we are – **James 1:26-27**,
4. in relation to thinking we are special to God, for example, thinking that you are one of His favorite children – **James 2:1**,
5. in relation to showing favoritism or partiality in how we deal with other Christians – **James 2:2-13**,
6. in relation to thinking to have godly wisdom while failing to live accordingly – **James 3:13-18**,
7. in relation to how we treat God and deal with others when caught in a conflict – **James 4:1-10**,

C. And now here in **James 4:13-17** – where God warns us against the pride, or even arrogance, of thinking our lives and our plans are in our hands rather than God’s hands.

1. Some Christian’s commonly say: “If the Lord wills . . . .”
  - a. Now without question, saying this phrase is a helpful reminder that our lives and our plans are in God’s hands.
  - b. And saying this in public is a testimony to unbelievers of what we believe and who we put our trust in.
  - c. However, more important than saying “If the Lord wills” is living this way, so that our thoughts, our attitudes, our desires, our plans, and our hopes for the future are always conditioned by the humble recognition that without God we can do nothing. And should God wish to change our plans – for His good or our good, or should God choose to resist our plans – for the sake of disciplining us or testing us or building our faith, He can and will.
2. Take the example of a hard working farmer: Though he expends all his efforts in working the field with the expectation of a harvest, still he cannot attribute the produce of his fields, or even the abundance of the yield to his own hard work. Consider, his toil would be useless without adequate rainfall, or if damaging winds, hail, or flooding had damaged the crop. These things are outside the farmer’s control, but they are not outside God’s control. Therefore, all the farmer’s hard

work will bring forth a profitable harvest if his work is not assisted by the Lord's mercy. And only a prideful, arrogant farmer thinks he, alone, brings forth a good crop from his labors.

- a. Again, consider that the diligent, hard-working farmer can live so sinfully as to set the Lord against himself. When he does this, the scripture says that the heavens becomes brass and the earth iron (Deuteronomy 28:23). The swarming locusts eat what the cutting locusts leave behind, and the caterpillar devours what the swarming locust leave, and the blight consumes what the caterpillar has left (Joel 1:4).
  - b. Now if God assists the hard working farmer with the weather, the soil and the insects, bear in mind that it only takes a single debilitating accident to keep him from harvesting his crop.
- D. The point here is much larger than adding the words, "If the Lord wills" to our future plans. This is about genuine humility in relation to recognizing that our lives and our plans are in the hands of God, and we are fools to think and live otherwise. In fact, God ends this portion with a general truth specifically applied to this portion – if we know the truth but do not live according to the truth we know, it is sin.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. On judging: do not judge what God does not judge and what is not clearly stated or inferred in the scriptures.
- B. On plans and future expectations: take a humble attitude toward the future, recognizing that God is the One in charge, not you or the government or the insurance company or the banking system or your health or anything else that is confined to this earth.