

James 4:11-17

Who was James addressing when he talked about slandering/judging/criticizing (v. 11)? Brothers..... Fellow Christians.

What are some examples of how we wrongfully slander or judge or criticize other Christians? On the basis of denominational differences, preference of Bible translation, worship practices, maturity levels, appearance.

According to James, why is it wrong to slander or judge or criticize another Christian (vv. 11-12)? To criticize or judge another, a person must conclude that he himself is right, and the person he is criticizing is wrong. This is passing judgment, taking the role of a courtroom judge, something that we have no authority to do. We set ourselves up as being superior to the law rather than subject to it. Only God can judge because only God is superior to the Law. He is the one who gave it and the One who judges by it.....He is both the Executive and Judicial branches of the divine government. To have the audacity to elevate ourselves and usurp the place of God and judge another person is the height of pride and arrogance.

It is wrong because we're not qualified to judge! We can't know other people's hearts, motives, or intentions. We can't know their eternal destiny. We are being prideful and arrogant when we judge these things. God will judge us with the same severity with which we have judged one another (Matthew 7:1-5).

James says "Don't judge." Jesus says, "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (John 7:24)? How can we reconcile those two positions. 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. That's the kind of judging that John was talking about when he referred to "right judgment."

Christians must not be afraid to confront one another and to call a sin a sin. Jesus set that example in Matthew 23:28 when He confronted the Pharisees saying, "*....on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.*"

There are too many texts that make it clear that we are our brother's keeper. Church discipline guidelines are outlined in Matthew 18:15-17. It is acceptable to judge right from wrong, sinful behavior, and moral matters -- based on what the Word of God tells us—not on our own value system. If the Word of God doesn't specifically address a particular behavior, we should default to the position of showing grace.

What's missing from this picture of business planning (vv. 13-14)? God!

What is the message (vv. 13-17)? James rebuked the kind of heart that lives and makes plans apart from a constant awareness of the sovereignty of God while at the same time overestimating his own capabilities. The problem is not planning but leaving God out of our plans. The problem is not planning but boasting about it. Paul, on his second missionary journey, planned to go into the province of Asia, but God changed his plans and diverted him to Troas (Acts 16:6-7). The lesson is....Hold loosely to your plans and give God the authority to change them.

James rebukes anyone who would be so arrogant as to presume upon the future. He reminds us of the brevity and uncertainty of life. Life is a very delicate thing, just a puff of smoke, just a vapor. The man's plans were not wrong in and of themselves. The problem is what the merchant did not consider: his complete dependence on God (Luke 12:18-20; John 15:5).

A vivid picture of the Jewish merchant James tried to correct is a go-getter salesman out drumming up business for the bottom-line objective: "Make money!"¹

Is James saying that there is no point in planning for the future because you don't know what's going to happen (13-14)? No. He is saying it is wrong to plan as if tomorrow was certain. 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.

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."*

Is it Biblically acceptable to plan based on vv. 13-17? Yes

- 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.*

Who are examples of some planners in the Bible that were approved by God?

- 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
- Paul's missionary journeys in Acts 13-28

What was James' proposed way of conducting business (v. 15)? The merchant should have planned with a conscious dependence on God, recognizing His sovereign control over his life (Acts 18:21; 1 Corinthians 4:19, 16:7; Philippians 2:19, 24).

What is James' message (v. 16)? James rebuked his readers who were living with this God-neglecting attitude, feeling that they controlled their own destiny. Here is the picture of the "self-made man" taking credit for what God has given him ("*you boast and brag*"). Boasting betrays an attitude that puts man in God's place and it "*is evil*."

What kind of sin is James talking about (v. 17)? The sin of omission (vs. commission). 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. Think of them as "missed opportunities."

Perhaps the most frightening example of sins of omission is found in Matthew 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'*" (Matthew 25:41-43).

Application: As we plan for the future, what kinds of things wrongly motivate us? Best job available, desirable lifestyle, geographical location, money.

What are some of the things that should motivate us as we plan for the future? Discerning the sovereign plan of God. What Kingdom work is available? Where can I exercise my spiritual gifts? Are there legacy issues to consider? There are only two things in our lives that are eternal: the souls of men and the Word of God (Isaiah 40:8). That fact should help us to shape our thinking and determine our priorities as we plan our future.

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? Have you surrendered your will/ career/ desires to Him? Have you given Him permission to pick your husband/wife.....in His time? 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.

¹ J. Ronald Blue, "James," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 831.