

XIX. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“True Religion and Relationships”
James 4:11–12
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May 4, 2014 – Morning Sermon

Our study today will be in James 4:11-12 but to refresh on this I want to go back and read from James 1. I want to read the key pivotal text first. James 1:26-27 says *[26] If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. [27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this His Word be preached for you.

There are certain things that resound from childhood and I want to give you one from the text today. To get us ready for James 4:11-12 I want to take you back to my childhood. I remember certain things my mom and dad used to say to me when I was young and I have one for you today that is very appropriate. This usually would come from my dad but my mom was not above uttering it also. He would say “Son, just who do you think you are?” When I heard that I knew that I had done something in my previous moments that I was about to be told who I am or I said something and I was about to find out who I am. “Am” was about to be put in place.

James utters that parental directive today. Just who do you think “you” are? You are going to live with this and Lord willing profitably in the remainder of this study but I had to live with this for three weeks. I can’t wait to tell you so I can move on. I have been under such conviction for the last three weeks but thankfully it has led to some repentance and restructuring because of what James says and how he says it. I’d like to recap a few things before we start into our study.

James is very likely the first book written of the New Testament. It was written fourteen years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and fourteen years before the author himself would be put to death who is the half-brother of Jesus. In this epistle we have the most quoted book of the New Testament because it’s a book of wisdom that gives the fulfillment of the wisdom that is articulated from the books of wisdom in the Old Testament, fulfilled in Christ who is our Wisdom and now the implication for Gospel wisdom for life that is here. The theme of James is the Gospel life is a life of persistent ministry and joyful maturation in a sin-cursed world informed by the God-sent gift of “Wisdom from above.”

We do not live in a Genesis 1 world for we live in a Genesis 3 world. In a Genesis 3 world which has the curse of sin, all of the consequences of sin can fall upon believers except for God’s condemning judgment which fell upon Christ for us. We get sick, die, businesses go under, disappointments and death of loved ones, all happen to believers. In the midst of this sin-cursed world He tells us the way to persist in ministry and embrace this with all joy when we encounter various trials, because the trials of life are under the sovereign hand of God. He makes the trials of life, tests for us to grow in

the grace of God and in Gospel wisdom. In other words, he is writing to believers who have made a profession of faith.

He says if it's true you have a Gospel foundation in Christ and a Gospel motivation where the love of Christ compels you then in a sin-cursed world you need Gospel wisdom to respond with a Gospel life. Therefore these trials of life become tests in God's hands and like any good test that comes in our life they reveal to us what we know, they reveal to us what we don't know and need to know and thirdly they reveal any pockets of strongholds of idolatry that are still working our way into our new hearts so that we can crucify them. You can get this Gospel wisdom that you need from prayer and God's Word. In the midst of these trials He will use them to train you, form you and develop you with Gospel wisdom for Gospel life because of the Gospel foundation and motivation that you have.

James says the result is true religion. I understand what people are meaning when they say Christianity isn't a religion but a relationship and that's not quite accurate. Christianity is not a man-made religion with a man-made God and a man-made way of salvation to God. Christianity is a Gospel promise, grace delivered relationship with God that leads to true religion which is the fruit of this relationship that God has given to us. James puts three marks of the true religion that comes from those who have a grace given, Gospel derived, Gospel promised relationship with Him.

One, true religion is a bridled tongue. Two, is that ministries of mercy to all even the most marginalized which is in this case, the widows and the orphans and then thirdly, is that you have a personal commitment to holiness. You keep yourself unstained from this world. From James 1:26-27 through James 3, 4, and 5 James takes up case study after case study to show where we are faltering with true religion and why we're faltering. Every time he points out our external sin he never stops there for he goes to the heart issue. He doesn't stay with the symptom but he also goes to the heart. Is it discrimination? He goes to the heart. Is it faith without works? He goes to the heart. Is it an untamed tongue? He goes to the heart. He doesn't just point out what we're doing wrong and tells us to go do better but he points out the reason why we are falling short of what God is calling us to be and do and how to stay on the journey of growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ saturated increasingly with Gospel wisdom in this sin-cursed world.

In this study we get back to the tongue. He just can't get away from this subject of the tongue. In fact there are 83 verses in the book of James and 23 of them deal with the tongue. This whole matter of wisdom is constantly going to this whole matter of the tongue. I want to bring three things out of this text for this study. Let's look at James 4. James 4:11-12 says *[11] Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. 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. [12] There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*

Here are the three things I want you to see from the text. Remember he is talking to brothers and sisters in the Lord. This is true religion and family talk. How is family talk to be among God's people and then overflow outside to other people but start among God's people? Three times James says do not speak evil against 'one another, brothers.' Don't just one another brothers. This isn't the way brothers and sisters are to act. One of

the great challenges and privileges is to take your family and tell them that this is an 'inside' voice and this is an 'outside' voice. This is permissible and that's not permissible. There are just certain things we don't say about each other. There are certain things that are not allowed in the family at all, certainly not outside the family but not inside the family where we're going to learn.

Don't slander one another. Don't judge one another. That is not allowed in family talk. If that is not allowed in your family bloodline it must not be allowed in the family of God which has the bloodline of Jesus. These are the sins that somehow we've accepted in the body of Christ and we just have to live with it. No! James says don't do it. Slander against one another and judging is not to be there. This is not family talk and it's not to be present. James admonishes us on this. We are right back to the untamed tongue. We want a bridled tongue and tamed tongue, not an unbridled and untamed tongue. That must be seen among the family of God. Twenty three times he talks to us about the tongue and here three times he mentions it in these two verses.' Clearly James is directing us not to the limitation of how we're supposed to speak only within the church, but where it must be completely embraced where we do not allow slander or judgment present.

Notice again he is back to the tongue. James is not inconsistent with Peter or Paul. Peter says do not let malice or slander be named among you. The Apostle Paul in Romans 1 says when before the end of the world comes and God's judgment comes the culture will have descended into this cultural decadence in which there will be sexual immorality, sexual perversion, murder, deceit and slander and all will be approved. Look at the list where he puts slander. Paul tells us in I Corinthians 5 that if there are people who are embracing among the family patterns of behavior of sexual immorality, sexual perversion, thievery and slander then they are to be kept from the Lord's Table until they deal with their sins. They are called to repent of those sins. Look again where slander is listed. Paul tells us to be kind and tender hearted to one another but whatever you do, do not slander one another or revile one another. This isn't to be named and here we are back to a sin of a tongue, slander.

I want to put this carefully. Here is what slander is not. This isn't just telling us not to lie. Slander can be true or a lie. This issue of slander is not content. It is intent. Slander are verbal thrusts to diminish people. Slander are weapons to destroy people. I love the way the ESV translates this. It says do not speak evil against one another. It is language that is evil in its design against someone. We use another word for this and that's backbiting. Every now and then I'll a program on National Geographic and see the 900 ways a lion eats a wildebeest. You'll see it done the same way. Even though the lion is so powerful he never goes face to face with this animal for he comes behind them and then to the haunches he'll go in order to take them down. That is the origin of our word backbiting. It is an attempt with words from behind people to take them down, to diminish them, to destroy them if not physically, emotionally, spiritually and reputationally. It's like gossip for gossip can be something that is true told to the wrong people. Slander can be something that is true but it is told and said to diminish and destroy. Slander's issue is not content but intent. It's intent is to destroy the one about whom we are speaking.

After James identifies the sin of the untamed tongue and unbridled tongue to get us on the journey to the tamed tongue and bridled tongue so that instead of slander and

judgment, there is tenderheartedness, forgiveness, truth, love and graciousness to handle the tough issues of life, he doesn't just say how are we going to talk better. James doesn't do speech therapy but he does heart surgery to handle this. James 4:11-12 says [11] *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. 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. [12] There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*

What is it that gives vent to a slanderous tongue? It is a judgmental heart. The slanderous tongue is inseparably tied to the judgmental heart. I think the ESV does a good translation when it says *The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother*. I think it's interesting that the King James Version uses the word and where the word or is in this verse. These two things are inseparable. Wherever there is slander it is because of a judgmental heart and wherever there is a judgmental heart there will be slander. The tongue reveals the heart and directs lives. What you speak to people effects the direction of their life. What you speak effects the direction of your life. That's why many of us should not become teachers. Our words matter. Words also reveal the heart. If someone talks long enough they will eventually reveal the condition of their heart.

Do you know why the slander is there? It is because the judgmental heart is there. So James gets us on this journey back to the heart. We don't stay at the symptom for speech therapy but we get to the heart. Either we need a new heart or our new heart has been contaminated with judgmentalism and needs to be cleansed. Does all this sound familiar? It's from Matthew 5 and 7 the Sermon on the Mount. I was amazed at the multiple references that James is making directly from the Sermon on the Mount. James like his other half-brothers did not believe in Jesus. They only came to believe in Jesus after the resurrection. The Bible tells us in John 6 they didn't believe but he must have been listening to a lot of those sermons from his Brother because he is quoting them like crazy. You don't always know how God's Word is getting planted in someone's life or if someone is actually listening when you are talking about it.

In Matthew 7 it tells us not to judge one another. There is one Judge who at the right time will do the condemnation but you be tender hearted, forgiving one another and speaking the truth in love to each other. So here James is developing what Jesus has said. Again let me tell you what he is not saying. He is not saying that Christians don't have to make moral or even theological evaluations about things in life. This is not saying there aren't judgment calls we have to make in life. Most of hear that from people, don't we? They say 'I don't like you Christians because you're so judgmental.' God calls us to make moral evaluations about behavior that is right or wrong or doctrine that is right or wrong.

When someone says to me "You Christians are judgmental for what you said is so wrong" it reveals one or two things to me. One for them to say that it is unbelievably shallow or two it's unbelievably hypocritical because what did they just do to me? They made a moral evaluation and you just said to me that making moral evaluations is wrong. It's morally wrong for you to make a moral evaluation but of course to do that they just made a moral evaluation. I have a duty to hold to what is true as a person and as a pastor. This is right and this is wrong. This is truth and this is deceptive.

Secondly there are sometimes by God's appointment that people are assigned to positions of judgment. Dads and moms are all assigned to positions of judgment. You don't raise your children without making judgment calls. Son, this is right, that's wrong and here's the consequence. Parents are called to make judgments. Some have been elected to the divinely appointed office of judge. There are elders in this church and we have a responsibility to the best of our ability to make a judgment call of whether someone has a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ as they go through our pastor's class to join the church. When someone engages in sinful behavior we go through the steps to attempt to reclaim them even to the point of church discipline and that means judgment calls. Paul gave a judgment call of who could come to the Lord's Table and who could not in I Corinthians 11. That is not what this is saying. We have a duty to make judgment calls on what is right and wrong and some are appointed to positions where we have to make judgments.

This text is saying that all the judgments that we're called to make are all limited by our position, ability and the evidence that we have. None of us are allowed to make a judgment of someone's heart or motive or eternal destination. That's why none of us should ever take God's position and make a blasphemous statement that we consign people with our words to hell. We can warn people that there is a hell to shun, what leads there and how to escape there but we do not send anybody there. We have no ability to know the heart for only God knows the heart. We can expose the symptoms of a diseased heart. We can point to the cure but we cannot declare what is in someone's heart. We do not know it but the judgmental heart will always lead to the slanderous tongue. Our judgments are always limited. We can tell people that there are two destinations and that one is for those who have not repented of their sins called hell and the other is for those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ alone, called heaven.

Slander and judgment are inseparable. Then James says that if slander or judge others you have slandered and judged the law. What does that mean? He could be saying this. What is the summation of the law? The summation of the law is that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. If I attempt to take God's position as judge with slander I did not love the Lord with all my heart, soul and mind. You are also to love your neighbor as yourself. If I'm using words to diminish people and destroy people then I am not doing that which God has called me to do which is to build them up and to speak the truth in love to them.

I am not fulfilling the summation of the law and in particular my slander and judgmental spirit is a violation of the sixth commandment which says you shall not murder. Slander from a judgmental heart is not a subset of 'don't bear false witness.' Slander is a subset of murder. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 Jesus says [21] *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'* [22] *But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."* When you call your brother a fool you are guilty of murder. Slander is a subset of murder because its intent is destruction and diminishing of others.

Then James says it's not your prerogative for you can't be the judge unless you're the lawgiver. James 4:11b-12 says [11b] *But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of*

the law but a judge. [12] There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

That means in the context of Christianity there is something about doing the law. The law is not antithetical to the Gospel for there is a Gospel use of the law. Number one the law shows you that you are a sinner and that you need a Savior and you can't save yourself. That is the Gospel evangelistic use of the law. Number two, those of us who know and love Christ then this is how you love the Lord God and how you love those made in His image. They are love directives from our Groom as to what love is. So it's a sanctification use. It has no power but it guides us in how to love the Lord and one another. Number three when we embrace it, it restrains sin in society. It doesn't redeem anyone but it restrains sin. That's what the law does, it restrains sin in society.

Clearly he expects us out of love to Christ, not in an effort to earn salvation, but to be doers of the law but if you're slandering and judging you're not doing the law, you're slandering and judging the law. How can you do that when you're not the lawgiver? As James said, 'who are you to judge your neighbor?' The only one who has the right to condemn has the ability to save. The true Judge and only Judge is the one who has the ability to save.

I'd like to leave you with five takeaways. What about slander, judgment and family talk? The first takeaway is slander and judgment are incompatible in the Christian life and in the Christian church but not impossible. Why does James say not to judge and slander if it wasn't going on at the church in Jerusalem or if we're not able to do it? Slander and judgment among God's people is inconsistent, incongruous but it is not impossible. It had occurred at Jerusalem. It has occurred at Briarwood. It has occurred in church after church and it can occur and is likely to occur. He wouldn't address it if it wasn't. Just because a slanderous tongue and a judgmental heart are possible they should never become acceptable.

Number two is a slanderous tongue and a judgmental heart. They are inseparably tied. A slanderous tongue reveals a judgmental heart. The slanderous tongue is the symptom not the disease. The disease is the judgmental heart. A judgmental heart will inevitably produce a slanderous tongue. Have you been watching the news about a certain NBA owner? What did all that slander of an entire race reveal? It revealed a judgmental heart. Then I began to wonder how many of my conversations might be taped. Then I remembered that the Lord tells me that I give an account for every word. So God please, I don't need speech therapy for I need heart cleansing because that's where the issue is. The heart of the problem is the problem with the heart. The heart of the sin problem is the sin in the heart. That is where the tongue is speaking from.

What is it that makes a judgmental heart? I want to give you two thoughts on this. A judgmental heart is there because of a sense of personal or spiritual or moral inferiority. Whenever you feel personally, spiritually or morally inferior then you're intimidated and your next work is to diminish the people who intimidate you. We'll find a way to diminish them. It won't be hard to find something and you'll even find something true about them but the intent is to diminish them because you need to, to feel better about yourself. Or the judgmental heart reveals moral superiority, a work religion. Look, where I am and where I came from and how come you can't get there. So it reveals moral, personal or spiritual superiority. So the judgmental heart either takes place

out of intimidation because of a sense of inferiority or the one that is an act of condemnation because of a sense of superiority.

How do I know if I have this judgmental heart? Here are two ways to know. One do you slander? If you have a judgmental heart it will show up in slander. Particularly in southern Christianity we can hide slander by calling it a prayer request or that famous southern Christian colloquialism, 'bless his heart' or half handed compliments. "He's a pretty good preacher among preachers, but not like me." This comes from superiority. If it comes from inferiority you'll diminish that person. If from superiority you'll tear down and give condemnation. Another way to know if you have this heart is do you like to hear slander? If you like to hear slander I want to give you two warnings. One is that it is just a matter of time until you start doing it. Secondly the person that came to you talking slander about someone, as soon as they left you did the same thing to you. So do I do it or do I like to listen to it because of my sense of inferiority or superiority? That shows me the relationship that is there within me.

Where do I want to get? I want to get to the third takeaway which is truth and love. Paul says In Ephesians 4:29, [29] *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.* Our words and speech are to be a means of grace to the hearer and not a means of destruction. So we are to have no unwholesome words but only good words for edification even if you have to deal with sin for you go win them. What if they don't listen to you? Matthew 16 says to take one or two people who are more spiritual than you and if they don't listen then you bring the elders of the church but you are not there to diminish them for you are there to win them to the Lord.

So we have this call from our heart to speak truth in love. A Puritan divine said this 30 years ago "Truth without love is barbarity, love without truth is cruelty." It's not you're a truth tell but you don't give any love. I'm a love person but I compromise truth in the name of love. Could we have Christians who were one hundred percent uncompromised in truth and one hundred percent unstoppable with love? How do you do that? That is called Gospel wisdom that we need for the Lord to shower down upon us so that we can have this kind of family talk where we are speaking the truth in love to one another.

The fourth takeaway is that every time we decide to slander which reveals our judgmental heart, here is the question that James would say 'Who are you?' Just who do you think you are? Are you the Creator that has the ability to know the hearts of men? Are you the Lawgiver? Are you able to save? Are you able to destroy? Our Savior said to fear not those who are able to kill the body but fear Him who can kill both body and soul in hell. I don't have the ability to destroy ultimately and eternally or to know the heart. Good judges don't render judgment until all the evidence is in. I can never get the evidence in of the heart. I can't save or destroy but I can point people to the Savior that they will not come under His destroying verdict. Just who are you, Harry? I love James' stout heartedness and his stark honesty. Who do you think you are? For you to slander from a judgmental heart that is blasphemous for you just took God's place as if you belong to it. You just took the bench of judgment. Who are you to do that?

That brings me to the fifth and final takeaway which is the bench and the cross. Perhaps you are being convicted right now. So what do I do? Come to the One who is able to save you. It is Jesus. He will give Gospel forgiveness. There is only one

unpardonable sin of slander and that's when you reject the call of the Holy Spirit to come to Jesus. All other sins He has paid for. He freely paid for them and His shed blood forgives us. His righteousness clothes us and see what that does with the judgmental heart. I don't need to be spiritually inferior for I'm in Christ and Christ is in me. I'm a joint heir with Christ. It's not my performance that gets me to heaven. I'm doing what I'm doing on the way to heaven. It is what Christ has done for me and in Christ I'm a child of the King. I'm forgiven and I don't need to feel inferior and out of intimidation diminish others. Nor do I feel superior because the only reason I'm in Christ is that I am what I am by the grace of God.

Now he goes to the heart so that the tongue will now reflect the heart of saving grace in Jesus Christ, a transformed heart, a heart that shows the majesty of our Savior's work on our behalf. Come to the One who is able to destroy and who is also able to save. Who are you Harry? I will tell you who I am not. I am not the Creator. I'm not able to save. I'm not able to destroy. I'm not the lawgiver. Here is what I can do with truth and love. Because of unstoppable love that God can increasingly develop in my heart and grasp of truth that God gives to me I know enough to build up and if necessary shake up. I do not know enough truth to put away, to diminish and to put down because I don't know the heart. In other words, I can't go to the bench of God's judgment because I can't go to the cross to save them but I do know One who could have come to bear judgment and go to the bench, but He didn't.

Christ didn't come to go to the bench. He went to the cross to save us. The next time He comes He sits on the bench but until that time I'll point to Him who went to the cross and I'll ask Him 'Don't let me go to the bench for I don't belong there. Help me take up my cross and follow You.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father for the uncompromising clarity and please forgive this preacher for any way he has confused it and go beyond it. Father, take this Your Word to our hearts. Father, could we see Christians equipped who hold fully to truth and in the name of love do not compromise but who love fully and in the name of truth do not diminish and destroy? Help us Father, with faithfulness to Christ, declare the majesty of the cross while we warn people of the bench and may our words when necessary shake up to build up and may they always be purposed to build up by pointing people up to Christ the Lord of glory for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.