

“Spiritual Maturity: Cleansing from Judging”

Intro: We continue our study of James, chapter 4, and his list of sins from which we must be cleansed in order to grow in spiritual maturity. We have previously studied “Cleansing from Acquiring,” “Cleansing from Compromise” and last week “Cleansing from Priding.” Today: “Cleansing from Judging.”

OUR TEXT: JAMES 4: 11-12

- 11** 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?

A SPIDER METAPHOR

A female spider is often left as a widow for an embarrassing reason: she regularly eats those males who come her way. Likewise flies and other such victims are eaten as well. And yet “eating” for a spider is quite different than for most other animals, since a spider does not have a stomach that can digest food as we can. Rather a spider practices what is called “external digestion.” It pierces its victim with what looks to us much like a tongue, injecting digestive juices. The victim is first paralyzed and then the juices turn the victim’s insides into a “soup” that the spider can drink for nourishment. This practice leaves the victim dead, yet whole in appearance as a hollow casket of its former self.

Quite the macabre picture! – especially to those of us with a touch of arachnophobia.

This is a gruesome, but effective metaphor to describe the power of the toxic tongue. Like the spider, our judgmental tongues can paralyze and digest the heart and spirit of brothers and sisters of Christ who come in our path – leaving them looking the same on the outside, but hurting and wasting away with discouragement and insecurity on the inside. Our verbal assault may be intentional or more often innocent, yet nonetheless our opinionated words of judgment can leave permanent emotional and spiritual scars. Countless lives have been dissolved and sucked empty by another’s words. And God, via James, calls this sin.

WHAT JAMES IS SAYING

Notice, as in all of James, that this sin is addressed to believers, meaning US. V. 11 addresses “brethren.”

Then – “do not speak against one another” (NASV) or “do not slander one another” (NIV)

Literally, the command is “do not speak down on one another.”

Slander is malicious accusation that is untrue – clearly wrong. But this command also forbids speech that is TRUE yet demeans a person's character.

Gossip is passing of inflammatory information about someone that is said "behind his back" – clearly wrong. But this command also forbids sharing such potentially damaging information even with the person present or with the person's consent!

Many times, we use TRUTH or a FACE TO FACE encounter as a license to righteously diminish other's reputations or virtue or accomplishments. Anything said that cuts someone down is forbidden – whether subtly or otherwise.

Sinful reasons:

1. revenge
2. self-righteousness
3. elevation of oneself (perhaps out of poor self-esteem)
4. empty talk

WHAT JAMES IS NOT SAYING?

In v.11 James goes on to condemn he who speaks against a brother or judges his brother"

This might wrongly lead us to think that we should never make a spiritual judgment, such as whether one might be a believer or not, or in sin or not.

Jesus would seem to reinforce this wrong assessment when he says:

Matthew 7:1 Do not judge lest you be judged yourselves.

Yet the Matthew 7 context makes it clear that Jesus is condemning JUDGMENTALISM – making self-righteous judgments when you are full of obvious sin yourself

Matthew 7:5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly enough to take the speck out of y our brother's eye.

It is the Christian DUTY to exercise judgment

Matthew 7:15 "...beware of the false prophets"

Matthew 7 goes on to encourage us to make judgments:

Matthew 7:20 So then, you will know them [false prophets/ non-believers] by their fruits. [behavior]

In John 7:24 Jesus encourages right judging when he says:

John 7:24 Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment

Paul, in Romans 15:14 tells the church:

Romans 12:15 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish [judge] one another.

WHAT JAMES IS NOT SAYING IS THAT WE MUST NOT CONDEMN SIN, OR CORRECT A BROTHER IN LOVE, OR DETERMINE WHETHER A PERSON NEEDS TO BE SAVED.

HE IS CONDEMNING JUDGMENTALISM – A CRITICAL AND CENSORY SPIRIT THAT JUDGES EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING BY HIS OWN PERSONAL OPINIONS

JAMES TWO ARGUMENTS FOR NOT SPEAKING OUT AGAINST A BROTHER

1. It is an infringement against the “royal law” of love

In 4:11 James says that one who speaks against a brother “speaks against the law and judges the law.” He is speaking here of what he referred to earlier in 2:8: “the royal law” which is “to love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18).

In other words, you can’t criticize a brother, even in truth, with a motive to put him down and love him at the same time. This is NOT “speaking the truth in love.”

2. It is an infringement against God, usurping what is His alone

Matthew 10:28 fear God “who can destroy both soul and body”

Job 40:7-14 Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God’s, and can your voice thunder like his? Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at every proud man and bring him low, look at every proud man and humble him, crush the wicked where they stand. Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you.”

The point: since God is the only One who can “save and destroy,” only God has the right to judge. Thus, our judgmentalism is not only arrogant but blasphemous! James’ last question: “Who are you to judge your neighbor?” Would we take God’s place?

- 1. Ignorance mars our best judgment.** We can judge external sins to be sins, but only imperfectly. We do not know what is in the heart of another.
- 2. Sin inhibits our best judgment.** William Beveridge (puritan in the 17th century):

**“ I cannot pray, except I sin; I cannot preach, but I sin;
I cannot administer, nor receive the holy sacrament, but I sin.
My very repentance needs to be repented of;
And the tears I shed need washing in the blood of Christ.”**

THE POSTIVE LESSON OF THE SPIDER

When a famine comes to the mother spider and her offspring with no flies to eat, the mother does a remarkable thing unique among the living. To save her babies she releases the juices that digest into her own body. They run through her body until she turns her own innards into a soup and she dies, giving her offspring food on which to live. She becomes the stomach for her children, and she herself their food.

There is, of course, no morality in this – only instinct.

It is however a beautiful picture of what Christ did for us on the cross when

God made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21)

To put it in spider terms: Jesus cooked on the cross in the juices of our sins!

The resurrected Christ is the spiritual food for our souls. His death is our life.

John 6:53-54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.

1 Corinthians 11:24-25 This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me ... This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.

WHEN WE FEEL LIKE CRITICIZING OR REBUKING

1. ENTRUST OURSELVES “to God who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23)

2. CHANNEL LOVE instead

JAMES, Chapter 1 (My Paraphrase)

1. To my Jewish brothers of all twelve tribes, wherever you might be after having been forced out of your homeland – this letter is from James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, by calling and by choice. Dear brothers:

Confidence in Trials

2-4. Take a different perspective at the many trials you face, seeing the positive in them, rather than the negative. One, your faith is being proven and strengthened.

And two, you are

But is not an academic lesson, but is profoundly PRACTICAL – teaching us the “how to” in making Godly DECISIONS.

WISDOM is not the ability to understand circumstances - God may or may not reveal the “why” of why developing endurance for the long haul of life. Don’t balk at being tested, but hang in there, letting the tests accomplish their Godly purpose: your maturity, that you may be spiritually “buff” without flabbiness or weakness of character.

5. Remember, if you need wisdom (and who doesn’t?), just ask God, who gives it abundantly and without making you feel bad for asking. Just ask, and Godly wisdom will indeed be given to you.

6-8. But you have to ask really believing the answer will come. No doubting allowed! Because if you doubt, you are acting just like the waves of the sea blown around by

the wind – up one minute with your belief and down the next with your doubts. This kind of supposed “faith” won’t get you anything from God. He doesn’t accept on-again, off-again faith, which by the way, indicates instability in other areas of life.

Confidence in Status

9-10. Hey believing brother - how about this for God’s “upside down” perspective on wisdom? If your earthly status is on the “humble” side, be proud that you are standing rich and tall in God’s spiritual kingdom. And if your earthly status is on the “well off” side, be proud that in God’s kingdom you are just a spiritual beggar. After all, your earthly status is about as secure as flowering grass in the heat of the sun.

11. See the picture? Just like the sun rises, so does your status. Then comes the “Santa Annas” of life – and just like the grass withers and the flower falls, so does your status wither and fall. What once appeared beautiful is no more. Our status, and the futile pursuits of achieving it, will soon fade away.

12. So what’s worth achieving? - persevering through the trials of life and proving your Godly character through it all. This is how you will receive the true “crown of life” – God’s heavenly reward – which He promises to each one of His lovers.

Confidence in Temptation

13-16. I don’t ever want to hear you saying, “I am being tempted by God.” One, evil can never tempt a perfect God. And two, a perfect God could never lower Himself to tempt any one. Rather, it’s really you that brings on temptation by your own luring lustfulness. Sin comes when you give in to temptation by acting on your lust. And when that sin gets full sway in your life it kills your relationship with God. My dear, believing friends whom I love - don’t be sucked in by temptation!

17. Everything that is good is a perfect gift, especially given to you from God. “Good” is never by accident. The Giver is always our Heavenly Father, and like a bright light he never wavers or compromises in His delivery of good.

18. God exercised His Divine prerogative when He chose to pull us into truth by the power of His Word. This was so that we Jewish believers could be considered as the first ones to receive His special blessing of spiritual victory.

Confidence in Reactions

19-20. Now I’m going to tell you something you already know, but you must apply it to your reactions. One, be quick to listen to others and especially to God. Two, be slow to voice your opinion. And three, put any tendency to anger on a slow fuse. Pleasing God and getting angry never go well together. The short version: open your ears, close your mouth and chill your anger.

21. You know all that leftover filth of the old life that’s still seeps out? Dump it in the spiritual trash can. You know God’s Word that He has planted deep inside of you? Humbly receive its wisdom and let it save you from drowning in your own foolish reactions.

Confidence in Religion

22. It is delusional to think that you are religious by merely hearing the Word, believing it, and participating in a few religious activities. Rather, you prove and demonstrate your true religion by living out the Word actively in every area of your life.

23-24. Hearing the Word and not doing it is like looking at yourself in a mirror and not fixing what needs fixing. Why even look if you just go away unchanged and oblivious to the need?

25. God's Word is the perfect rulebook for life, with rules to set you free, not tie you down, and therefore worthy of a long and hard look. If you let them sink in, and turn your thinking into meaningful action and change, your life will surely be blessed for it.

26. Do you think that your religion is healthy? Then put it to the test by whether you can control your tongue. If you can't, not only is your religion worthless but you're deceiving yourself into thinking your religion is OK. It's not.

27. I'll tell you what real religion is about. It's about practicing love and care for those with special needs – like children without parents or women who have lost their husbands. Bottom line, true religion is keeping yourself pure from the wickedness of the world!

JAMES, Chapter 2 (My Paraphrase)

Conviction in Equality

1. Don't you dare call yourself a believer in our amazing Lord and Chosen One, Jesus, if you treat people differently based on their appearance or background.

2-4. Here's a test. If one person walks into to your church service looking like "a million" and another comes in looking like a "bum," will you treat them the same? Or will you give special attention or seating to the one looking great and ignore the other, even making him or her sit in a place where they might not so easily draw attention. If you'd honestly treat them differently, you fail the test. You would be making an ungodly judgment based on unfair distinctions.

5-7. As my brothers in the Lord, I really do love you. So, listen up. Don't we read that God so often has chosen the poor in wealth to be rich in faith and receive His kingdom inheritance? This is exactly what God promises to all who love Him. It doesn't make sense to dishonor the poor person. More often than not, it's the rich one who will give you a hard time, even pulling you into court or using your precious Lord's name in vain.

8-9. The highest law of God's kingdom is this: "Love others as you would want to be loved." If you do this, you're right on. But if you love people differently based on externals, you're practicing sin and guilty of breaking God's #1 law.

10-11. Here's the hard fact. Even if you were to keep all of God's law perfectly, one sin (like favoritism) makes you guilty of all in God's eyes. God forbids adultery, just like he forbids murder. But if you are clean regarding adultery, yet commit murder – you're guilty of adultery, and all the other laws as well. Ouch!

12-13. Now don't be frozen with fear in your words and actions toward others – God's royal law of love is meant to motivate and free you, not condemn you. If you show no mercy, then mercy won't come your way. But if you learn to show mercy in your assessment of others, that demonstration of mercy will trump any judgment that is due you.

Conviction in Works

14. Tell me, fellow Christians, what is "saving faith?" If someone claims to be a Christian by their faith, and yet there is little visible sign of that faith in their actions, it seems to me that kind of faith is useless faith – not "saving faith."

15-16. For example, if a believing brother lacks some basic necessity such as clothing or food and you essentially tell him "blessings on you, I hope you'll be okay!" and don't make an effort to meet his need, I say your supposed faith is a sham.

17. The principle is this: Faith, if it isn't backed up by action, is dead faith.

18. Now, I can just hear someone say, "Some Christians are more private, and some are more outgoing in expressing their faith." Well, if you're one of those "private in your faith" types, I dare you to prove your faith without any action, while I prove my faith to others by living it out in action.

19-20. You believe that God is one? That's good, but think of this: the demons, as they shudder, believe the same (and they're not believers!). Can't you admit that believing alone without actions to back it up means nothing?

21-23 After all, haven't we heard Father Abraham was "justified by faith" when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? His faith and works "teamed up" so that his behavior proved his belief to be authentic. This was the fulfillment of the Scripture that says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Remember, this faith matched with action resulted in Abraham being called the friend of God.

24. So here's the principle said another way: A man is made right with God by action that demonstrates inward faith, and not by action less faith.

25. Another example would be Rahab, who was once a harlot. But she too was justified, (that is, made right with God) by her works. Remember, she received and hid the spies (Joshua and Caleb) and then let them exit by a safe way.

26. To say the principle a final way: Just like a body without a spirit is lifeless, so also faith without demonstrative action is lifeless.

JAMES, Chapter 3 (My Paraphrase)

Control of Giftedness

1-2. Think long and hard about whether God has called you to be a teacher of His Holy Word. Why? First of all, God will give teachers a stricter judgment when it comes to handling His Word. Secondly, we are all sinners. (And this implies that a teacher will be rightly held to a higher standard by his students, as well.) And thirdly,

teaching uses many words and therefore leads to certain stumbling. Only a perfectly controlled tongue could give a perfectly controlled teacher.

Control of Tongue

3-4. A little bit in a horse's mouth brings its whole body to obedience. Note too that great ships can hold their course in a strong wind when directed by just a small rudder controlled by the will of the captain.

5-6. Likewise, our little tongue boasts of grandiose things. It's like a tiny spark starting a huge, out of control forest fire. Our tongue is like a fire in many ways, a showcase for evil as it burns and ignites. Just like raging fire defiles all in its path, the tongue's out of control wagging defiles our entire person. Like flames, our words can chart a fiery course, fueled by the very fires of hell.

7-8. Every kind of dangerous and poisonous wild animal, whether beast, bird, reptile or sea creature, can be and has been tamed to some degree. But no one can tame his tongue from danger and poison. It just won't stop wagging and making trouble.

9-10. Think of the inconsistency. Out of the tongue comes both blessing of our Lord Heavenly Father and cursing of men, made in God's image. What hypocrisy that the same mouth both blesses and curses. Fellow Christians, this is plain wrong!

11-12. A fountain can't give both fresh and bitter water. Neither can a fig tree produce olives, or a vine give figs. And the ocean will never give us fresh water. Think about it!

Control of Wisdom

13. Come on, be smarter than that! Do you want to be considered wise? Then let your behavior show your wisdom and let your gentle consideration of others prove your wisdom.

14-16. The two biggest opponents to Godly wisdom are bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. If these two creep into your heart don't be arrogant and call them what they're not. They only bring the wisdom of this world, wisdom of your natural self and wisdom of the demon world. Where you find jealousy and selfish ambition you will find disorder and evil cropping up everywhere.

17. Here are the sure signs of Godly wisdom: first and foremost, it is always uncontaminated in its morally purity. A Godly decision then fosters healthy relationships, is considerate of the implications to others, makes good sense, is accompanied by additional blessings, shows consistency and impartiality in its implementation and rings true in its authenticity. It just plain acts and feels right.

18. Long and short, if you plant seeds of consideration for God and others you will eventually reap a harvest of what is right in the eyes of God and others. Now that's how to control wisdom!

JAMES, Chapter 4 (My Paraphrase)

Cleansing of Acquiring

1. Where do you think all our bickering and infighting comes from? It comes from the fight within ourselves – the fight between wanting to please God and wanting to please our own selfish desires.

2-3. Here's the predictable pattern: You really want something you don't or can't have, so you do whatever it takes to get it – sometimes even murder! You get envious of others who have it. You still can't get it, so you bicker and quarrel. You don't even think to ask God for it. And if you do ask Him, you don't get what you're asking for because your motives are all wrong, asking out of selfishness.

Cleansing of Compromising

4. You might as well be called what you are: spiritual adulteresses! Don't you realize that when you "play around" with this sinful world that you are being unfaithful to God and rousing His anger? Simply put, to be a friend of this world is to make God your enemy.

5. God pulls no punches in the Scripture when He says that He is the jealous lover who will tolerate no rival to the Holy Spirit He has put within us.

Cleansing of Priding

6. The great news: God gives grace, and more grace. The only stopper to this grace is pride, since God only gives grace to the humble of heart.

7. So here are the 3 keys to God's grace and humility of heart: #1: Let God control your life. This means you must resist the devil's every attempt to usurp that control. Firmly tell him "no" and he will leave you alone.

8-9 #2: Develop a close relationship with God. If you do this, God will make His nearness known to you. Remember, since you are sinners by nature, be sure to let Him "clean up your act." And since you are hypocrites by nature be sure to let Him clean up your hearts as well. Sin is no joke – so grieve over your sin with sincere sorrow and even tears, repenting from your sin so you can be close to God.

10. #3: Change your attitude from self-serving to others-serving. If you humble yourself in this way before God, he will surely raise you up to new heights of spiritual maturity.

Cleansing of Judging

11.

Cleansing of Determining

13.