

A Rush to Judgment

James 4:11-12

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This week I was thinking back on some of the events that have occurred through my life span. I was reminded of the fact that as we're growing up, there are a few historical events that just seem to burn themselves into our consciousness. For me, while I was growing up, when I thought about this, the images that came to my mind were the images of the nightly news, the nightly updates on the Vietnam War, those graphic images of loss of life and war. The other things that came to my mind, those historical events that, sort of, punctuated the years I was growing up, were a series of famous assassinations, of course, the assassination of Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and for most of us who are defined by that era, of course, the greatest one being that of John F. Kennedy, the President of the United States.

For that generation, for my generation, the death of John F. Kennedy was their September 11th. And, of course, if you've done any reading about this issue, you know that still to this day there is a swirl of controversy that exists. A lot of that controversy, by the way, as you may know, comes from a book that was written in 1966, a book written by a man by the name of Mark Lane entitled Rush to Judgment. In the book Lane questions the Warren Commission's conclusions and suggests that there was, in fact, a conspiracy behind the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

It's interesting how that phrase, the title of Lane's book, Rush to Judgment, has become so much a part of our culture. If you do a search on that expression, as I did this week on Google, you come up with a list of ways that it's used in today's contemporary culture, everything from those apparent atrocities that were committed by our soldiers in Iraq, a call not to rush to judgment against them, to sports figures who have committed various crimes, to everyday affairs. This phrase, rush to judgment, is a part of the culture.

And it's a part of the culture because it's understood that there is, within all of us, a tendency to jump to conclusions without sufficient evidence to support those conclusions. Sadly, I think we as Christians are often guilty of a rush to judgment every single day. We are guilty of a rush to judgment when we place ourselves behind the bench of the judge and become the jury, and even

the executioner, of other Christians around us, when we sit in judgment on the lives and actions of others.

Although it's certainly a common part of life, and it's even common for us as Christians, James in his wonderful letter wants us to understand that sitting in judgment on another Christian is not a harmless peccadillo. Instead, it is arrogance on a cosmic scale. Notice how James puts it in James 4 in verses that we want to examine together this morning. James 4:11,

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. 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?

Now James has already driven home the issue of our tongues and their use, time and time again, in this little letter. You remember, we first encountered it in James 1:26 where he says, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious," if any of us have concluded that our religious activity and actions, our spiritual activity, is acceptable to God, "and yet does not bridle his tongue, he deceives his own heart and his religion is worthless." Our tongues are a clear indicator of the reality of our faith.

And then, of course, you come to James 3:1-10, that we looked at, at length. Here James likens the speech, the things that come out of our mouths, to a raging inferno that consumes everything in its path. And he warns us to control it, and to understand that our tongues control us. We looked at that in great detail. So he's already expressed this deep and abiding concern he has for what comes out of our mouths. But now, in chapter 4 verses 11 and 12, he returns again to this crucial theme. The question we need to ask ourselves is, why? You would think after what we studied in chapter 3 verses 1 to 10 that James would need to say nothing more about it; he's really driven home his point already. So why? What's the connection of verses 11 and 12 with what we have recently been studying in the previous verses about our need for grace? How do these verses relate to the fact that God bestows grace on the humble? Well, here's the connection. We need grace. God only gives grace to the humble. And therefore, pride is the enemy of our souls and of what we need.

So in chapter 4 verse 11, running all the way through chapter 5 verse 6, James identifies for us three common examples of arrogance and pride, those things that are the very opposite of the humility that we so much need. Three common displays, if you will, certainly in his day and no less true in our day, of pride, the enemy of the humility that are souls so much need in order to gain God's grace. In chapter 4 verses 11 and 12, he identifies the pride of sinfully judging others. Then in chapter 4 verse 13, running through the end of the chapter, he addresses the pride of presumptuous planning that ignores God's providence. And then in chapter 5 verses 1 through 6 James deals with the pride of sinfully abusing wealth and power.

So when we come to these two verses that I read for you just a moment ago, James 4:11-12, understand James' point. It's simply this, if you and I come to our God in true repentance and in true humility, as is described in verses 7 through 10, it will change how we think about and speak about other Christians. Let me say that again. If we truly have humbled ourselves before God, as we're called to do in the first 10 verses, if we've truly come to Him in humility, casting ourselves, as it were, at the very feet of God, saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" If we grieve about our sin and have humbled our souls, then it's impossible to be proud toward other Christians. It will change the reality of how we think about and how we speak about other believers.

Now to fully grasp what we need to learn from this passage, I want us to examine this morning, in the brief time that we have, three factors in this issue of sitting in judgment, or rushing to judgment. Three factors. James begins with this simple factor, the simple prohibition. Notice verse 11, "Do not speak against one another, brethren." Now the Greek word that's translated "speak against" literally means just that. If you were to take, it's a compound word of two Greek words stuck together, as we often do in English as well, and one of those words means simply to speak, and the other word simply means against. Or it can also mean down, to speak down to, very similar to our English expression, "running someone down with our mouths." This word "speak against" is a word that can be used to describe many different kinds of sinful speech. And yet, when it occurs in the New Testament, it is most often translated as slander. You can see that in Romans 1:30, 2 Corinthians 12:20, 1 Peter 2:1, and so forth.

Slander, what is slander? Well, Noah Webster, in his 1828 edition, defines slander in this way, “As a false tale or report maliciously uttered, and tending to injure the reputation of another by lessening him in the esteem of his fellow citizens.” That’s slander. And that is certainly included in this word. However, when you examine, as I had the opportunity to do this week, all of the uses of this Greek word in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, you discover that this word can also include a variety of other sins of speech, like questioning the authority that’s over you, the legitimate authority over you; telling lies about someone in secret. It can include making false accusations, or even speaking the truth to someone, but with the intent to hurt them or to harm them. So this word covers a variety of uses.

You see, the primary issue behind this word “speak against” is not the content of what you say. Let me say that again. The primary issue is not the content or what you say, it’s not primarily dealing with whether what you say is true or not. Instead, this word deals with motive, what’s going on in your heart? Not what did you say or to whom did you say it, but why did you say it? One Greek lexicon makes the point that the real evil that this word has in it lies in the preposition against. It is speaking with an attitude of hostility. The real problem is the speaker’s hostile intention, to tear down, to damage, the reputation or position of another. D. Edmund Hebert, in his commentary on James, says, “It denotes critical, derogatory speech that is maliciously,” and here’s the key word, “intended to influence others against the person being spoken against.”

You see, to speak against someone else doesn’t necessarily violate the command against lying, but the command against love; it is a violation of humility. As Motyer, one commentary on James, says, “If we are really low before God,” remember, we just studied “humble yourself before God,” “bow before God,” literally, “cast yourself before God,” he says, “If we’re really low before God, we have no altitude left from which to talk down to anyone.” That’s James’ point.

Now, even though this is a terrible sin, it is common because of our depravity. Scripture takes it for granted, by the way, that unbelievers will do this. Paul includes this sin in his list at the end of Romans 1, when he’s talking about all the sins of humanity he includes this sin, speaking against others with the intent of hurting them. We can speak, when we use this word, when you

look at how it's used in Scripture, we learned that we can speak against God, and sometimes we do this. Psalm 78:19, speaking of the children of Israel in the wilderness, "They spoke against God; they said, 'Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?'" Even God can't provide for us here. How often are we tempted to speak against God in lack of trust, lack of confidence, in His goodness or His provision?

We can speak against legitimate human authority that God has put in our lives. In Numbers 12:8, God is rebuking, to their face, Miriam and Aaron, because they have spoken against Moses, and He says this to them, "'Listen, I speak with Moses mouth to mouth, openly, not in dark sayings, he even beholds the form of the LORD,'" some visible manifestation of God, "'Why then,'" Moses and Aaron, I'm sorry, Miriam and Aaron, "'Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?'" We can sin against God this way, we can sin against the leadership this way, or we can sin against other peers this way. Listen to Psalm 101:5, "Whoever secretly speaks against his neighbor, him," God says, "I will destroy." It's a terrible sin to speak against, to use words intended to harm another person, either to their face or to their back.

But as bad as this sin is, by itself, it is only a sin of speech. So if James stopped there, we might all breathe a little sigh of relief this morning. But he doesn't. As is so typical with James, he doesn't stop there, he goes beyond the mouth to the heart. He wants us to understand the sin in our hearts that motivates us to speak against others. Notice the next phrase in verse 11, "He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother." Now by using that conjunction "or" James is not pointing to some new and different sin, I was talking about your speech and now I'm going to talk about judging. Instead, he's taking the sin of using our mouths to injure others to the level of the heart. You see, before we speak against someone, we have made a judgment against them in our hearts. When we speak against others, what's really going on in our hearts is that we are sitting in judgment of them.

Now, the word judge here is a frequent New Testament word. It simply means, at its most basic level, to distinguish or to make a distinction. It's used throughout Old and New Testament. It can refer either to God's role as judge, in a forensic, legal sense. It can refer to man's role as a legitimate judge, as in a judge sitting in judgment over a criminal. But it can also refer to the

sinful judging of others, finding fault with various things in other people. This is the sense that James has in mind here. In this sense, the word to judge really means to condemn, to find guilty of something.

And, of course, our Lord was very strong in forbidding us from doing this. I think James is calling to mind what our Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount. Turned back with me to Matthew 7. You remember this key passage in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus addresses this very issue. To His followers, He says, “Do not judge,” this is Matthew 7:1,

“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”

Now, what does that mean? What is Christ telling us is forbidden? Well, you have to, as with all of Scripture, look at this verse, these verses, in their context. Look at the next thing Jesus says, this helps inform our understanding of what He means,

“Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your eye? 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? 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.”

So when Jesus says, “judge not that you not be judged,” what He is saying is this, there is inherent in the human heart an ability to cut ourselves too much slack and to cut others too little; there is a tendency to evaluate ourselves as perfectly fine and to be quick to judge others more harshly. And He’s saying, that is what I’m forbidding you to do. You’ve first got to deal with your own sin, and then you’re in a position to help someone else.

This is a problem for unbelievers as well, not just for believers. Turn to Romans 2. In verse 1, excuse me, in verse 30 of chapter 1 he’s used the word, it’s translated slanderers there, that’s our word to speak against, those who speak against. But then in chapter 2 he comes to principles of God’s judgment. He’s indicting all of mankind and he wants us to understand the principles on which God judges. And he says, “Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge

practice the same things.” He’s saying the same thing as Jesus was saying, but he’s saying it to unbelievers. He’s saying, we all have a tendency as human beings to pronounce judgment on others, when we ourselves are doing the same things, and yet we excuse it in ourselves. Verse 2,

And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?

How often have we, in our minds or in our speech, passed judgment on others for doing the very things that, if we were honest with ourselves, we do also? That’s what our Lord was saying. It’s what Paul is saying in Romans 2.

Now, back to James 4. James here is prohibiting then, not only using our mouths with a hostile attitude and a desire to hurt others, but he’s also addressing the sin of the heart that lies behind it, and that is, sitting in judgment on others, in our minds, in our hearts, coming to conclusions about the guilt of others. And since James adds, notice at the end of this paragraph, the end of verse 12, he adds, or I should say, he ends, with the concept of judging. It’s most likely that the real focus of these two verses is not so much on what leaves our mouths, but the judging that goes on in our hearts. So, the simple prohibition is this, don’t speak against, from your mouth, and don’t judge, which is where that speaking against comes from, in your heart. That’s the simple prohibition.

But there’s a second factor that we really need to understand in this issue. Not only the simple prohibition, but secondly, the common manifestations. I want us to examine the common ways that this sin of judging others in our hearts shows itself. But stick with me a moment, because before we can do that there’s something else we need to do. I need to make sure that none of us have bought into an extremely common misunderstanding of what James is saying here, and of what our Lord said in Matthew 7, that they are forbidding something that they are not, in fact, forbidding.

You see, dozens, perhaps hundreds of times, I have heard people, both Christians and non-Christians, quote the words of our Lord in Matthew 7, “judge not that ye be not judged,” and here’s what they usually mean. They usually mean, it is un-Christian for you or anybody else to say that my attitudes, my words, my behavior, is wrong, regardless of what that behavior, what those attitudes, what those words, might be. It’s just wrong for you to say that I’m wrong. The way many interpret Matthew 7, it’s wrong to ever, under any circumstances, think or say anything negative about another person.

Is that what it means? Absolutely not. You see, that interpretation fails to acknowledge, or to deal straightforwardly with, dozens of passages that command us to do just that. So before we look at the sin of judging, let’s ask ourselves this question: Biblically, when is it right to judge? Number one, it’s right for civil government to judge criminals. Now that’s an obvious one and very few would dispute that, but biblically that is included. Romans 13 says that it is the job of government to punish evil doers and to reward those who do good. Now, for the government to determine those who are evil doers, and those who do good, they have to do what? They have to make a judgment. They have to judge. So it is absolutely legitimate and right for civil government to judge criminal behavior.

Number two, when else is it right to judge? It is right for all believers to judge the sinful attitudes, words, and actions of other Christians, if it’s in the process, the biblical process, of church discipline; the goal, of course, being to restore and to keep the church pure. It is legitimate to judge when another believer is in sin, if you’re following the process that our Lord outlined. Matthew 18, you’re familiar with it, of course, but in Matthew 18 Jesus says this, verse 15, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private.” Now, stop there a minute, what does that require? What have we already needed to do to conclude that a brother has sinned and that he has a fault? We have come to what? A judgment, about our brother.

Here’s the standard, the Word of God, and this is the only thing that we can confront a brother or sister about, is what’s here in the Scripture. And when that’s clear, and when they have violated that, then we have a responsibility to judge, to say, they have violated that, and to go to them privately. It goes on to say, in verse 16, the same thing that happens with two or three witnesses that go, if step two is required. Eventually, verse 17, you tell it to the whole church.

All of this, this process, requires judgment to be made about whether or not this individual Christian has sinned. That's perfectly legitimate.

By the way, you see an example of this in 1 Corinthians 5. You remember, in 1 Corinthians 5 there's the man in Corinth who claimed to be Christian and yet was involved in incest, and so he needs to be disciplined, he needs to be dealt with, just as our Lord laid out in Matthew 18. So in 1 Corinthians 5:12, Paul says,

what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

So Paul is saying that absolutely, when it comes to the process, the biblical process of church discipline, that it is right to judge.

Number three. It's also right to judge when the church's leadership is judging disputes and disagreements between believers within the church, disputes and disagreements between believers within the context of the church. First Corinthians 6, of course, makes this point. Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for taking disputes that they have into the court system, the secular court system. And he says, what are you thinking, verse 2, "do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is to be judged by you, aren't you competent to deal with whatever disagreements are going on right now?" Verse 3, "Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the matters of this life?" Verse 5,

I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

He's saying, listen, it's right for the leadership of the church to sit in judgment when there is a dispute and a disagreement between two brothers, that would normally take them to a secular court. It's acceptable to judge in that context.

Number four. It's also right to judge, for all believers to judge the doctrine of teachers against the Scripture. Back in Matthew 7, in that same chapter where our Lord says, "'judge not that you be not judged,'" in verse 15 He says,

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits."

What are their fruits? Well, their words, what they say, their actions, 2 Peter and Jude make a big deal of the lifestyle of false teachers, by their fruit in the sense of the converts that they produced. Do they follow a path of holiness? Do they follow the Scripture? So look at their fruit. What does that call for folks? Judgment, an evaluation of whether this person is teaching the truth or not. And the way to determine that is to measure it against the Word of God.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul urges us to do the same thing. First Thessalonians 5:20, "do not despise prophetic utterances." In the early church, before the closing of the canon, before we had all of God's revelation that we needed, God gave prophets to the church who would speak revelation from God. But they weren't a law unto themselves. Verse 20 says, "don't despise prophetic utterances. But," verse 21, "examine everything carefully;" judge everything they say against the Scripture, "and hold fast to that which is good; and abstain from every form of evil" in their teaching.

We're commanded to do this. We must judge the doctrine of teachers against the Scripture. For example, this week, it was with a very heavy heart that I read my latest edition of Newsweek, perhaps some of you have read it and seen it. It contained a lengthy cover article about Billy Graham. In the article in Newsweek, Billy Graham denies that the Bible is without error. He allows that Muslims and Buddhists and others who have never believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will be in heaven. Now folks, I believe Billy Graham is a brother in Christ. I think that we'll see him and enjoy his fellowship in heaven. I disagree with some of his theology, but I think God has used him to see many come to genuine faith in Jesus Christ. But it is not judging Billy Graham for me to measure what he said in a public article against the Scripture and say he's dead wrong, and that's even false teaching. Okay? You have to understand that's not violating the command of our Lord. We are urged to do that in other places in Scripture.

Number five. It's right to judge our own thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions. Turn to 1 Corinthians 11. Paul is dealing with the issue of the Lord's table and he makes this point very clearly, 1 Corinthians 11:28, he's just said that "if you drink of the cup and you eat of the bread in an unworthy way, you'll be guilty of the body and blood of Christ." Verse 28,

But a man must examine himself, [*judge yourself*] and in so doing he is to eat the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason [*because you haven't judged yourself and dealt with your sin*] many among you are weak and sick, and some have even died. [Verse 31] But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged [*by God*].

It is right that we would judge our thoughts, our attitudes, our words, our actions, and even the reality of our faith against the Scripture.

So, with that understanding, those are the things that Scripture commands us to judge, with that understanding we're now ready to examine how sinful judging most commonly shows up in our lives. When is it wrong to judge? Let me give you a brief biblical list of how this sin shows up. It is wrong to judge, number one, the genuineness of the faith of others if, and this is a big if, if they understand and embrace a truly biblical gospel. In other words, if you're talking to a Mormon then you know that it's right to question that person's salvation, regardless of what they claim, because the gospel they embrace isn't the biblical gospel. But if the person claims and professes the true biblical gospel, it is wrong for us to judge the genuineness of our faith. Now, don't get me wrong. It's not wrong, and I do this all the time, to go to a brother or sister, or someone who claims to be in Christ and say: You need to examine your heart, look at how you're living. You're living like an unbeliever. You're living like a pagan. You may not be a Christian. That's one thing. It's another to say, there's no way you're a Christian. Those are two totally different things. We are not to judge the genuineness of another's faith.

Jesus makes this point in Matthew 13, as He's going through the kingdom parables. I've shown you this before, but turn to Matthew 13:24, the parable of the tares among the wheat. Matthew 13:24,

Jesus presented another parable to them saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. [*A worthless plant that looks something like wheat in the early stages, but you don’t want to eat it, you can’t do anything with it, it’s worthless. Verse 26,*] when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.

What you have here is a picture, as Jesus goes on to describe down in verse 36 and following, that the gospel is the seed, ““and the good seed,”” the wheat, are ““the sons of the kingdom,”” those that are truly believers, ““and the tares are the sons of the evil one.”” In other words, in the church, and I hate to say this, but even here this morning, sitting among us, there are wheat, that is, there are those who are true believers in Jesus Christ, and there are tares, worthless weeds that looked somewhat like the real thing, but aren’t.

Now, we want to deal with that, don’t we? We have this desire to deal with it. So did these servants, go back to verse 27,

“The slaves of the landowner came to him and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ And he said, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves said to him, [*now here’s our solution*] ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ [*Do you want us to go pull the false, those who claim to be Christians but aren’t, out of the church, out of the kingdom? Verse 29,*] he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the harvest I’ll say to the reapers, [*and he explains later it’s the angels*] “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but then gather the wheat into my barn.”””

God says, leave it to Me. I’m not going to make any mistakes. No tares will be in heaven. And no wheat will end up in hell. I can sort this out. Leave it to Me. It’s wrong for us to judge the genuineness of the faith of others. Again, it’s not wrong for us to call them to examine their hearts. But if they say they embrace the true biblical gospel, it’s wrong to judge the genuineness of their faith.

Number two, it's wrong to judge the motives of others' hearts. First Corinthians 4, Paul says that he's a steward, he's been given a responsibility by Christ. In verse 3 he says, "it's a small thing to me that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I don't even judge or examine myself." This is not, by the way, a contradiction of what he just said, that we're to examine ourselves; he'll explain what he means in the next verse. He says, I'm not really an adequate judge of my own heart. "For I am conscious of nothing against myself." In other words, he says, I don't know of any pattern of sin in my life. I don't know of any unrepentant sin. I don't know of any wrong motives in my service, in my stewardship of service to Christ. But that doesn't mean I'm innocent.

I am not by this acquitted; [*he says*] but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore, [*here's the conclusion for all of us*] do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

He says, stop passing judgment on the motives of others and the intentions behind their service and what they're doing in the church and all of their spiritual activity. Stop judging their motives. God can take care of that.

Now, I hate to complicate the issue, but there is an exception. If actions make motives clear, then it's acceptable to judge them. There are a number of biblical examples. Let me give you two. In 2 Timothy 4:10, Paul says, "Demas has deserted me." Then he makes this statement, "having loved this present world." Now, what's Paul doing there? He's determining Demas' motives. The same thing in 3 John 9, John the Apostle says, "Diotrephes loves to be first." He's making a statement about what motivates Diotrephes. How could they do that? It's because their actions were so clear that it was okay to judge their motives. We're not to try to read people's minds, but if their actions make their motives clear, it's not judging to identify that motive.

But can I add a pastoral warning here? Very practically, I'm not Paul, and I'm not John, as you know very well, and neither are you. Far better for us then, even if someone's actions seem to make their motives pretty clear, it's better to raise that as a possibility with them rather than an

accusation. I know what your motives are! No, far better to say, is it possible that your motive is. Far better to be careful not to violate the clear teaching of 1 Corinthians 4.

Third reason it's wrong to judge, number three. It's wrong for us to judge the decisions of others regarding doubtful things or issues of conscience. It's wrong for us to judge the decisions others make about doubtful things or issues of conscience. In other words, there are some issues clearly addressed by Scripture, you can turn to chapter and verse. You know adultery is wrong. You know using your tongue to hurt another person is wrong. You know that lying is wrong. But then there is this category, this large category of things, that we just don't know. They are doubtful things. They are issues of conscience. There's an entire chapter, in fact there are three chapters in the Scripture, devoted to dealing with how to approach doubtful things. It's wrong for us to judge the decision another believer makes about those doubtful things.

Let me give you one example, and a very volatile one, styles of music. I just made lunch today in some conversations, I can tell you. Styles of music, the Bible does not tell you that a certain style of music is right and a certain style of music is wrong. It does tell you to be careful of the words, the lyrics, they can't dishonor God, they can't violate His truth. But the style of music in and of itself isn't something the Scripture addresses. So how do we deal with that? Each brother and sister makes the decision before the Lord, what they will and will not allow. But it's wrong then for us to judge others by the decisions we've made.

Turn to Romans 14. At some point we'll look at this passage in great detail. Today, let me just highlight a couple of verses. Romans 14:3, "The one who eats," now Paul here is using a couple of examples from the first century church, eating meats, particularly meat sacrificed to idols, keeping certain days, those were the issues debated in the early church, not so much music styles, but you've got to translate it into our culture, okay, the things we debate. He says, verse 3,

The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. 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.

Notice verse 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 Christ.” Here’s the context of the judgement seat of Christ. Listen, God is capable of making this decision, and it’s not yours to make. Verse 12, “So then each of us will give an account of himself,” not to you, not to me, “to God,” in this area of doubtful things, of issues of conscience. Verse 13, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine not to cause someone else to sin.”

So, it’s wrong to judge the genuineness of the faith of others, the motives of their hearts, and the decisions regarding doubtful things. And of course, there’s a large category of judgments we make outside of that, that are sinful. We just decide, they meant to hurt us. And again, this goes really to the issue of motive, but there are all kinds of ways we demonstrate this wrong kind of judging, assigning to others, bad motives, evil intent, etcetera.

So, we have examined the simple prohibition, the common manifestations, finally let’s look back to James for one last factor, the biblical justification. James gives us four reasons that we should not judge others in our hearts or speak against them with our mouths. Reason number one, it hurts our brothers. Notice verse 11, “Do not speak against one another, brethren.” And then later, “brother,” and then not just a brother, but later in the same verse, “his brother.” This is James’ favorite title for Christians. It’s all very personal. James wants to remind us of the relationship we have with those we are speaking against, and those we are judging, they are family, they are brothers and sisters who’ve also been adopted by God. Think of the family before you do that.

You know, we use this same argument in our own earthly families, don’t we? If there’s a sibling who is causing problems in the family, we say, please stop doing that. Think what? Think of the family. Think of the sake of the family. That’s what James is saying. Remember who it is you are sinning against? It hurts our own brothers.

There’s a second reason he gives us, and that is, it undermines the law’s authority. Verse 11, “He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law.” James is referring here back, undoubtedly, to chapter 2 verse 8, the royal law, that is, the law of commandment to love others as we love ourselves, quoting Leviticus 19:18, “You shall

love your neighbor as yourself.” And when we speak against, or judge, our brothers, we are judging the law that commands us to love them. How? Well, we’re rendering our own decision about the value of that law and the validity of it, the law to love. We’re saying, it’s not really that important. I think I know what’s really going on here, I can make this decision. And that undermines the authority of God’s law and sets us up as the authority. That’s what he’s saying.

Now there’s a third reason not to speak against or to judge, also in verse 11, because it violates the law’s command, it’s simply disobedience. Verse 11, “if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.” Notice how black and white James is here. He says, listen, you either keep the law to love your neighbor as yourself, or you’re judging it. You’re judging it simply by refusing to do it. You’re saying it’s not that important. As Douglas Moo writes in his commentary, “However high and orthodox our view of God’s law might be, a failure to actually do it says to the world that we do not, in fact, put much store by it.” So he urges us not to judge so that we don’t violate God’s law to love others.

There’s a final reason not to judge others, verse 12, it’s because it usurps God’s prerogatives. Verse 12, “There is only one Lawgiver and Judge,” literally, “one is Lawgiver and Judge.” “Lawgiver,” God’s the one who establishes law, “and Judge,” He’s the one who evaluates us against that law that He has given. It’s God’s prerogative to determine the standard. And it’s His prerogative to determine whether or not we meet the standard. And when we pass judgment on other human beings, it is a serious infringement on the unique right of God to judge. As one commentator says, “To take up the position of judge is to elbow God off of His throne.”

Notice how this God, our God, is described at the end of verse 12, “the One who is able to save and to destroy.” It brings back memories of Jesus’ words in Matthew 10, you remember, ““Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.”” You see folks, when we stop to think about who God really is, it naturally leads us to the question that he ends verse 12 with, “who are you to judge your neighbor?”

Let me ask you, did you find yourself rushing to judgment about the genuineness of another Christian’s faith? Do you find yourself rushing to judgment about the motives of others in your life, rushing to judgment about the decisions other Christians make about those doubtful things,

those issues of conscience? James says it's sin, it's sin, and our words flow out of that sinful heart of judging against others.

I love the way Kent Hughes, in his commentary, drives home this passage using a lesson about spiders. You may not know this, but a female spider has no stomach, so she cannot digest anything inside of her. So instead, when she captures a fly in her web, she makes a series of tiny punctures in the body of the fly and injects into the fly her digestive juices, until the insides of the fly are broken down and turn into a kind of soup. And then she drinks it. When you see that fly in the web, what's left is the illusion of wholeness, but in reality, that fly has become his own hollow coffin or casket. Walter Wangerin writes, whom Hughes was quoting, "This soup she swills, even as most of us swill the souls of one another. And some among us are so skilled with the hypodermic Word that our dear ones continue to sit up and to smile quite as though they were still alive." James says, "Brethren, don't speak against one another, and don't judge in your hearts, others." May God help us, in Jesus' name. Let's pray together.

Father, we are such sinners, and we acknowledge to You that these things are too much a part of our mouths and our hearts. Lord, forgive us, help us to live in conformity with Your work, give us the grace, even as we have humbled ourselves before You, give us the grace to guard our mouths and our hearts, to remember that You are the lawgiver and You are the judge, and that is not our prerogative in these sinful ways of judging that we've talked about this morning. Lord, I pray that You would give us the grace to do it. In Jesus' name, amen.