

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, September 28, 2016 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

GETTING PRACTICAL WITH YOUR FAITH A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES “The Peril of Playing God” *James 4:11-17*

Approaching the end of the fourth chapter, James deals directly with a common problem among Christians...playing God. Having just exposed our tendency to be self-assertive and quarrelsome (vv.1-10), James goes a step further and shows a couple of the more familiar ways we assert an arrogant spirit. The first had to do with the way we often view others; the second with the way we frequently view ourselves. In verses 11-12, James deals with our tendency to take the place of God in others' lives as we judge and criticize them. In verses 13-16 he addresses our tendency to take the place of God in our own lives as we presume or boast on ourselves. The point of this study is to define the main objective of these two games, familiarize ourselves with each game's rules, and consider God's evaluation of both of them.

I. LAYING THE BIBLICAL GROUNDWORK FOR A PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF JUDGING (Matthew 7:1-5)

“Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” – Matthew 7:1-5

Jesus' command not to judge others could be the most widely quoted of His sayings, even though it is almost invariably quoted in complete disregard of its context. Here is Jesus' statement: *“Judge not, that you be not judged.” (Matthew 7:1)*. Many people use this verse in an attempt to silence their critics, interpreting Jesus' meaning as “You don't have the right to tell me I'm wrong.” Taken in isolation, Jesus' command “Do not judge” does indeed seem to preclude all negative assessments. However, there is much more to the passage than those three words. Before delving into James' words on judging others let's lay some ground word from God's Word on what even Jesus' command is not saying. These are some important Biblical parameters that we lay down so that we fully understand James' teaching on judging.

What the Biblical Command (Jesus' command) to Not Judge Others Doesn't Mean:

1. **It doesn't mean we should not be discerning** - The Bible's command that we not judge others does not mean we cannot show discernment. Immediately after Jesus says, "*Do not judge,*" He says, "*Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs*" (Matthew 7:6). A little later in the same sermon, He says, "*Watch out for false prophets. . . . By their fruit you will recognize them*" (verses 15–16). How are we to discern who are the "dogs" and "pigs" and "false prophets" unless we have the ability to make a judgment call on doctrines and deeds? Jesus is giving us permission to tell right from wrong.
2. **It doesn't mean that truth is relative** - The Bible's command that we not judge others does not mean all actions are equally moral or that truth is relative. The Bible clearly teaches that truth is objective, eternal, and inseparable from God's character. Anything that contradicts the truth is a lie—but, of course, to call something a "lie" is to pass judgment. To call adultery or murder a sin is likewise to pass judgment—but it's also to agree with God. When Jesus said not to judge others, He did not mean that no one can identify sin for what it is, based on God's definition of *sin*.
3. **It doesn't mean that there should not be a way/procedure for dealing with sin** - And the Bible's command that we not judge others does not mean there should be no mechanism for dealing with sin. The Bible has a whole book entitled Judges. The judges in the Old Testament were raised up by God Himself (Judges 2:18). The modern judicial system, including its judges, is a necessary part of society. In saying, "*Do not judge,*" Jesus was not saying, "Anything goes." Elsewhere, Jesus gives a direct command to judge in John 7:24, "*Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly*" or as the New King James puts it, "*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*" While Jesus forbade harsh, censorious judgment that self-righteous legalism promotes, He demanded the exercise of moral and theological discernment.

Interesting! What is Jesus saying in John 7:24 and is this in contradiction with what he said in Matthew 7 and what James is going to tell in James 4? He is telling us how "not" to judge, but isn't he also telling us how to "judge." Here we have a clue as to the right type of judgment versus the wrong type. Taking this verse and some others, we can put together a description of the sinful type of judgment...

5 Sinful Types of Judgment that Are Condemned in Scripture: (in other words, the kind of judgment that Jesus and God's Word condemns and that we ought not to be engaged in... EVER!)

1. **Superficial judgment** - *Superficial* judgment is wrong. Passing judgment on someone based solely on appearances is sinful. Again Jesus said it like this in John 7:24, "*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*" Proverbs 18:13 tell us that it is foolish to jump to conclusions before investigating the facts, "*He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.*"

Example: Simon the Pharisee (Read: Luke 7:36-50 **green)**

- What was Simon the Pharisee's judgment of this woman?
- What was Simon the Pharisee's judgment of Jesus?

- What was Jesus judgment of this woman?
- What was Jesus judgment of Simon the Pharisee?
- Was Simon’s judgment based on appearances or righteousness?
- Was Jesus’ judgment based on appearances of righteousness?

Simon the Pharisee passed judgment on a woman based on her appearance and reputation, but he could not see that the woman had been forgiven; Simon thus drew Jesus’ rebuke for his unrighteous judgment (Luke 7:36–50).

2. **Hypocritical judgment** – *Hypocritical* judgment is wrong. Jesus’ command not to judge others in Matthew 7:1 that we looked at a moment ago is actually preceded by comparisons to hypocrites.

Example: Hypocrites (READ: Matthew 6:1-5, 16 [v.2, 5, 16], Matthew 7:3-5 **red*)

- Why does Jesus say it is hypocritical to draw attention to our charitable deeds?
- What did Jesus say was hypocritical praying? Why?
- What did Jesus say was hypocritical fasting? Why?
- Why did Jesus choose these three to address what is hypocritical (charitable giving, praying, fasting)?
- What is “hypocritical judgement” according to these verses? How might you define?

In Matthew 6:2, 5, 16 we have Jesus identifying what is “hypocritical” and followed by a warning against hypocrisy in Matthew 7:3–5. When we point out the sin of others while we ourselves commit the same sin, we condemn ourselves (Romans 2:1).

3. **Harsh and Unforgiving judgment** - *Harsh, unforgiving* judgment is wrong. We are “*always to be gentle toward everyone*” (Titus 3:2). It is the merciful who will be shown mercy (Matthew 5:7), and, as Jesus warned, “*In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you*” (Matthew 7:2). A good example of this is Jesus’ story/parable of the unmerciful or unforgiving servant.

Example: The Unforgiving Servant: (READ: Matthew 18:21-35 **gold*)

- Why does a harsh and unforgiving spirit toward others have to do with being judgmental?
- In the parable Jesus told, was the King’s “judgment” toward the servant correct? What was the King’s reaction toward the servant?
- In the parable was the servant’s judgement toward the his fellow servant correct? Where did his judgement go off the tracks?
- Why is a harsh and unforgiving judgement always wrong?
- What is Jesus’ teaching/warning toward us concerning harsh and/or unforgiving judgment based on these verses?

4. **Self-righteous judgement** - *Self-righteous* judgment is wrong. We are called to humility, and **"God opposes the proud"** (James 4:6).

Example: The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: (READ: Luke 18:9-14 *blue**)**

- **What was the Pharisee's assessment/judgment of himself? Others?**
- **What was the Tax Collector's assessment/judgment of himself?**
- **What might his assessment/judgment of others have been (though we are not told)? Why do you think this?**
- **What is "self-righteous judgment" and how does this parable help us define it?**

The Pharisee in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector was confident in his own righteousness and from that proud position judged the publican; however, God sees the heart and refused to forgive the Pharisee's sin (Luke 18:9–14).

5. **Untrue judgment** - *Untrue* judgment is wrong. The Bible clearly forbids bearing false witness (Proverbs 19:5). "Slander no one" (Titus 3:2).

Example: Jesus on Trial: (READ: Matthew 26:57-68 *violet**)**

- **This one speaks for itself, but what is "untrue" judgment?**
- **How does it feel to have "untrue" judgment made of us and what should this teach us about making them of others?**
- **Jesus was the recipient of "untrue" judgment, and it ultimately cost Him his life. What does this teach us about making "untrue" judgments of other?**

Christians are often accused of "judging" or intolerance when they speak out against sin. But opposing sin is not wrong. Holding aloft the standard of righteousness naturally defines unrighteousness and draws the slings and arrows of those who choose sin over godliness. John the Baptist incurred the ire of Herodias when he spoke out against her adultery with Herod (Mark 6:18–19). She eventually silenced John, but she could not silence the truth (Isaiah 40:8).

Believers are warned against judging others unfairly or unrighteously, but Jesus commends "right judgment" (John 7:24, ESV). We are to be discerning (Colossians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). We are to preach the whole counsel of God, including the Bible's teaching on sin (Acts 20:27; 2 Timothy 4:2). We are to gently confront erring brothers or sisters in Christ (Galatians 6:1). We are to practice church discipline (Matthew 18:15–17). We are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

II. WHEN PLAYING GOD WITH OTHERS (James 4:11-12)

Beginning this portion of his letter, James says, **"¹¹ Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of 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 one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?"** Let's take a look at this game...

3 Part to the Game of Playing God with Others:

1. **The Objective** – It is to imagine oneself as superior to other Christians, then put them down in various ways.
2. **The Rules** – There are two rules.

2 Rules When We Are Playing God with Others:

- (1) **You must speak against your brother or sister** – The Greek word translated here as “speak evil of” come from a combination of two words meaning “to talk down.” We observe this rule when we talk about one person to another, lowering that person’s estimate of the other’s worth. We speak without hard facts and, of course, creatively disguise our motives with such statements as “Now stop me if I’m wrong, but...” or “Perhaps I should not say this about him (or her), but...” The God-player’s power play is to take a juicy bit of information and link it with some honored or respected person in order to hold his listener’s attention and fascination.
- (2) **You must judge your brother or sister** – The word “judge” means “to pronounce condemnation of someone.” In doing so, we allow a critical, petty spirit to run free where it can wreak havoc in others’ lives. This is not to say that we are to be non-discerning and gullible. There are times when the child of God must exercise careful judgment and discernment. But our problem is that by nature we are selfish and negative, so our judgment fades into condemnation. The only way anyone can rightly judge another is to know all the facts about that person. However, as humans we’re incapable of judging others. Only God can look upon the total man. Jesus addressed this in his sermon on the mount when he said in **Matthew 7:1-5**, *“¹Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? ⁵Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”*

Timely Words

We learn from James that when we judge others, in reality we engage in judging the law (i.e. the law of love, of acceptance, of grace, and of Christian kindness). Our major goal as Christians is to build up one another in love, not tear one another down with criticism. James also informs us “judges” that “there is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy” (v.12a). The moment we engage in the judgment of others, we’ve overstepped out boundaries before God and encroached on His territory. In other words we’ve played God in the lives of others.

3. **The Evaluation** – Through James’ comments, we see the reasons why this game is so wrong from God’s point of view and has no place in our relationships

3 Reasons Playing God with Others Is Wrong: (God's Point of View)

- (1) It places us in the position of God –
- (2) It ignores our own failures and tends to excuse them –
- (3) It assaults love, rendering it inoperative -

3 WHEN PLAYING GOD WITH OURSELVES (James 4:13-16)

Listen to James' words in verses 13-16, *"¹³ Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.' ¹⁶ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."* Perhaps this is the most self-deluding of all our games.

3Part to the Game of Playing God with Ourselves:

1. **The Objective** – It is to imagine ourselves as the final authority over our lives and then live as if this were true. Do we ever do this? How (cite an example of how we live as if we have the final authority/say over our lives).
2. **The Rules** – By reading James' text carefully, we can pinpoint the rules of this game. There are five of them...

5 Rules When We Are Playing God with Ourselves:

- (1) **Rule one: Choose your own time and schedule** –
- (2) **Rule two: Select your own location... one that pleases you** -
- (3) **Rule three: Limit your stay to please yourself** -
- (4) **Rule four: Arrange your activities so that they work primarily for your own benefit and pleasure** -
- (5) **Rule five: Predict your profit and boast about it** –

Yes, we are to plan ahead, but God wants our planning to be done with His will in mind. We are to allow space for Him to step in and interrupt or alter the plan... should it be His wish to do so. But woven into our heart's fabric is the desire to have full charge... to call the shots.

3. **The Evaluation** – Again, James lay before us God's reasons why this game is unacceptable.

3 Reasons Playing God with Ourselves Is Wrong: (God's Point of View)

- (1) **We have no knowledge of tomorrow** –
- (2) **We have no assurance of a long life** –
- (3) **We have no right to ignore God's will** -

4. WHEN WE DECIDE TO STOP PLAYING GOD (James 4:17)

Pulling out of God-playing games requires implementation of new patterns and adoption of new rules. These rules spring from the words, *"Therefore, to him who know to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (v.17)*. Here are the rules:

Rules:

1. **Rule one: We must know the right thing to do** – This means you and I must evaluate our various life patterns to see if they conform to God's Word rather than human habits and traditions.
2. **Rule two: We must start doing the right thing** – The God-player is as seriously entrenched in sin as the person living in adultery, or some other form of compromise. The counsel of Scripture could not be simpler... if you're trying to occupy God's spot, stop! You're living in sin.