

Judging the Law

James 4:11-12

Introduction

1. After James demonstrated the difference between worldly wisdom and wisdom from above (**James 3:13-18**) he addressed a few matters of consequence concerning the worldly wisdom possessed by some of his readers.
 - a. Internal conflict due to friendliness with the world (**vv. 1-5**).
 - b. Ungodly, presumptuous planning (**vv. 13-17**).
 2. In the middle of these topics, James addressed a kind of judgment which this worldly wisdom effected (**vv. 11-12**).
 3. If we follow earthly wisdom, the way we approach discerning good and evil will be drastically affected. This will inevitably negatively affect our interactions with others, including our brethren, and fundamentally reflects on our view of God and relation to Him.
 4. The content and method of our judgment must never move from the foundation of God's infallible law, else we will be found guilty of judging the law.
- I. The Christian and Judging
- A. Unrighteous Judgment
 - a. Judge not! – the common cry we hear as a blanket condemnation of judgment is foreign to scripture.
 - i. It is also illogical.
 - ii. The claim that judging is wrong requires judgment itself.
 - iii. Usually those who hold this position find no problem passing judgment on the one they accuse of wrongfully judging.
 - b. The scripture does, however, condemn certain forms of judgment:
 - i. Hypocritical – **Matthew 7:1-6** – the judging condemned was based on the condition of the one doing the judging – guilty himself.
 1. **(v. 5)** – the solution to the problem still includes a judgment – indicates judgment is not the problem.
 2. **(v. 6)** – the condemnation follows with instruction requiring judgment – concerning those we attempt to restore.
 3. **(vv. 15-20)** – requirement to discern false teachers by making judgments follows.
 - ii. Self-righteous – **Luke 18:9-14** – Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector
 1. **(v. 11)** – comparing self to others.
 2. **(v. 12)** – going beyond what the law required and claiming goodness because of such.
 3. **(v. 14)** – the condemnation of self-exaltation – pride.
 - iii. Appearance – **James 2:1-4** – judging with partiality based on outward appearance.

1. **(vv. 2-3)** – difference in treatment, not based on any inherent quality, or objective standard, but on appearance.
 2. **(v. 4)** – Judges with evil thoughts.
- B. Righteous Judgment
- a. Jesus spoke of a **“righteous judgment”** – **John 7:24** – i.e. a right way to judge, or judgment according to a correct standard.
 - i. **John 7:21-23** – Jesus addressing their judgments against Him concerning healing a man on the Sabbath.
 - ii. Sabbath law – no work on the Sabbath.
 - iii. Healing a man – work?
 - iv. **(v. 22)** – they had a practice of fulfilling the command of circumcision on the Sabbath. WAS THAT BREAKING THE SABBATH? (Understood it was not)
 - v. **(v. 23)** – Jesus does no wrong, using the same logic, in healing one on the Sabbath (loves neighbor as self).
 - vi. **(v. 24)** – their judgment was superficial, and rash. THEY DID NOT TRULY CONSIDER THE SITUATION THOROUGHLY BUT JUMPED TO FALSE CONCLUSIONS.
 - b. Righteous judgment is based on a righteous standard – **John 5:30** – righteous judgment is of the Father.
- II. The Judging of James 4:11-12
- A. The Text
- a. Prohibition – **(v. 11)** – speaking evil of one another.
 - i. **“Speak evil”** – *katalaleō*; to be a traducer, i.e. to slander. (STRONG)
 1. *Kata* (against) and *laleo* (to speak) – to speak against.
 2. **“Do not speak against one another” (NASB)**
 - ii. Speech intended to defame and injure another.
 - iii. Specifically – **(v. 11b)** – **“and judges his brother”**
 - b. Additional victim – **(v. 11b)** – **“the law”**
 - i. Slander and judge the law.
 - ii. Law of liberty – **James 1:25; 2:12** – the gospel.
 - iii. **“speaks against the law”**
 1. Is judging another’s actions based on what the law says, and in accord with it speaking **“against the law?”** – NO – **James 5:19-20** – this is what would be required in turning a sinner from the error of his way.
 - a. We are called to judge those within – **1 Corinthians 5:3, 12; 6:5**
 2. Is judging another’s actions as evil contrary to what the law reveals speaking **“against the law?”** – YES

- c. Implication of the improper judgment – (v. 11c) – you leave the position of the law’s subject, and usurp the position of the judge, or “Lawgiver” (v. 12).
 - i. What does a doer of the law look like? – James 1:19-27
 - 1. (vv. 19-20) – hearing what the Lawgiver says by hearing His law.
 - 2. (v. 21) – accepting that judgment (decision) in humility – not resisting.
 - 3. (vv. 22-25) – not stopping at hearing but doing/obeying the law.
 - 4. (vv. 26-27) – thus, not involved in vain religion based on your own desires but practicing that which is from God (Lawgiver).
 - 5. 5:19-20 – uses that law to turn people away from violations of it, and back to the obedience of it.
 - ii. What does a judge, or “Lawgiver” do? – (v. 12) – determines on what basis one is saved or destroyed.
 - 1. James 2:10-12 – specific prohibitions.
 - 2. James 4:17 – specific requirements.
 - 3. John 12:48 – Christ’s word – the gospel – is the standard of judgment (cf. Romans 2:16)
 - iii. The offense – making a judgment of another’s actions as sinful in an area where the law does not speak – thus, implying a greater sphere of knowledge than the law.
 - 1. But it thoroughly equips us – 2 Timothy 3:16-17
 - 2. But we must not go beyond what is written – 1 Corinthians 4:6; 2 John 9; 1 Peter 4:11
- d. Admonition – “Who are you to judge another?”
 - i. Do you determine right from wrong?
 - ii. Are you in a position of authority?
 - iii. What right do you have to bind where God has not, or loose where God has not?
 - 1. “whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:19, NASB)
 - 2. Some are guilty of being looser than God is – immorality.
 - 3. However, some are guilty of conflating strictness beyond what the law requires with righteousness – such is Pharisaical.
- e. If we are determining that what another is doing is sinful, and sin is lawlessness (cf. 1 John 3:4), then we must be able to give the book, chapter, and verse which proves such is the case!
- f. Otherwise, we are speaking where God has not spoken, and therefore acting presumptuously.

B. Application

- a. Liberties – matters which God has revealed as lawful but not binding – **Romans 14:1-4** – eating of meats.
 - i. Marriage vs Celibacy
- b. Opinions – matters of subjective judgment concerning the expediency of certain liberties – **Acts 18:1-3** – occupation, Paul was a tentmaker (evidently what he thought best for him to do to support himself)
 - i. Home school vs Public school
- c. Human Traditions – long-established exercise of certain liberties as a matter of preference or expediency – **Matthew 15:1-2** – elders tradition of washing hands.
 - i. Time and Format of Worship

Conclusion

- 1. We must be careful about the judgments we make.
 - a. ***“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7)***
 - b. ***“He who despises the word will be destroyed, but he who fears the commandment will be rewarded.” (Proverbs 13:13)***
 - c. ***“In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride, But the lips of the wise will preserve them.” (Proverbs 14:3)***
- 2. We may not be comfortable with something, or may have a strong opinion, but it is sinful to judge another as erring if such judgment is not based in the Divine standard.
- 3. We have been given the position of subjection to the law. We should only be concerned with determining God’s judgments by honest study and submitting to them.