

# Who's the Judge?

*James 4:11-12*



## “Do Not ...”

1. James begins, “Do not slander (speak against) one another” (4:11a). In general, what are some reasons why people speak against other people, even people in their own group?<sup>1</sup>

2. Read James 4:11-12.<sup>2</sup> According to these verses, why must we *not* speak against one another?<sup>3</sup>



3. In verse 11, James connects “speaking against” with “judging.” Read Matthew 7:1-5. What warning does Jesus give concerning “judging?”<sup>4</sup>

4. Is it okay to speak against someone as long as we are sure it is the truth?<sup>5</sup> Why or why not?

## Personal Application

➤ Recall the last time you “spoke against” or “judged” another person. If you haven’t already done so, confess your sin and ask God for the grace to change. Watch for times this week when you speak against others. Remember the above verses, and realize that only God gives the grace to change. If you haven’t received Christ as Lord and Savior, that is the first step.

<sup>1</sup> Reasons might include self-righteousness; pride; envy; selfish ambition; ignorance; prejudice (partiality); revenge (vindictiveness); low “self-esteem” – thus trying to raise oneself by lowering others

<sup>2</sup> “judge” (κρίνω) has a wide range of meaning, including “discern,” “evaluate,” & “make a just decision.” However, in this context, the word means to “pass an unfavorable judgment upon, criticize, find fault with, condemn” (BAGD, p. 452). This type of “judging” reveals a critical or condemning attitude; “the law” – the Law as interpreted and fulfilled by Jesus; summed up in the commandments to love God and love our neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40)

<sup>3</sup> If we speak against others, we “speak against the law.” If we judge others, we “judge the law.” In 2:8, James mentions the “royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love you neighbor as yourself.’” To judge others is to violate the law of love. When we willingly violate the law, we deny its authority in our lives – we “sit in judgment on it.” When we judge others, we usurp (assume without right) God’s role. God is the only rightful authority in judging people.

<sup>4</sup> If we judge others (in the negative sense), God will judge us for judging. Jesus warns us about hypocrisy. We have a tendency to see others’ faults, but not our own. Sometimes we see our own faults in others, and by judging them we maintain our self-righteousness without the pain of repentance and change. Before we make any judgments about others, we better make sure we have examined our own lives first.

<sup>5</sup> This question and some of the other questions and applications were adapted from *LifeChange Series: James* (NavPress, Colorado Springs CO, 1998), pp. 91, 92. If our speech is negative and destructive, it is not okay, even if it is truthful. That doesn’t mean that we never make critical remarks, but there should be some positive reason for them (that is, “positive” as defined by God). See Ephesians 4:29.

5. What should you do if someone speaks against another person in your presence?<sup>6</sup>

### **Good Judgment?**

6. Do you think that James 4:11-12 and Matthew 7:1-5 prohibit making any kind of judgments<sup>7</sup> about other people? Explain. (Consider Matthew 7:5, 7:6,<sup>8</sup> and 7:15-20.)<sup>9</sup>

7. How is “constructive criticism” by the Christian different from “speaking against” or “judging?” What are some specific examples?<sup>10</sup>

📖 *“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.” (Galatians 6:1)*

📖 *“Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you.” (Proverbs 9:8)*



### **Personal Reflection & Application:**

- Recall the last time you attempted to offer “constructive criticism.” Were your motivations purely constructive? If not, ask for God’s grace to change your motivations. Ask God for wisdom and sensitivity.
- Recall a time when someone attempted to offer *you* constructive criticism. How did you feel? Why? Begin allowing God to use others (particularly His children) to rebuke and correct you, as much as it’s consistent with God’s word. Do not judge those who sincerely want to help you grow in your knowledge of God - the ultimate Judge.

<sup>6</sup> If we indicate agreement (by smiling, nodding, or perhaps saying nothing), it is like we are guilty of speaking against another person. If possible, we should respond in a way that promotes mercy and humility in consideration of others, hopefully helping the person to see his/her own pride and lack of love.

<sup>7</sup> “judgment” – range of meaning includes evaluation and discernment (that is, a positive use of our critical faculties). On one occasion, Jesus told his opponents, “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment” (John 7:24).

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 7:6 requires that we make a judgment about people. If we are to obey this command, we have to *discern* whom the “dogs” and “pigs” are. The “dogs” were wild, dirty scavengers. Pigs were considered unclean animals. Jesus is saying, “Don’t share the richest parts of spiritual truth with persons who are persistently vicious, irresponsible, and unappreciative.” This doesn’t necessarily mean we ignore them, but discernment is needed.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 7:1 is well known but frequently misapplied. Jesus does not say, “Mind your own business” or “Cease from moral and theological discernment.” Matthew 7:1-6 prohibits “judging” (in a negative sense), but obeying the passage actually requires that we make judgments. We are *not* told that we shouldn’t remove the speck of sawdust from our brother’s eye. We are told to remove the plank in our eye first, and *then* we can remove the speck in our brother’s eye. Note the following passages with regard to rebuking, correcting, disciplining, and/or restoring a fellow “Christian:” Matthew 18:15-17, Luke 17:3, 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, and Galatians 6:1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Judging is wrong for the reasons given earlier. “Constructive criticism” is motivated by love – first of all, love for God, and also, love for others. It is done in humility and gentleness, and has a redemptive purpose.