

The World According to Jim “Nixing the Critical Spirit” James 4:11-12

Introduction

- Have you ever been on the receiving end of some so called constructive criticism? It’s a wonderful feeling isn’t it? Sometimes it’s helpful other times its not constructive criticism it’s just destructive criticism? I want to show you a cartoon. Being a fisherman I love this cartoon. [Slide#1] Said the trout to the fly fisherman. “Pardon me, I couldn’t help but notice your rod is falling below the one o’clock position during your backcast, your wrist is not straight, and you’re dropping the rod tip too early on the forward cast which can result in not only wind knots, but also—say, you don’t mind me telling you this, do you?”¹
- James 4:11-12 is now the third time James has focused his attention on speech. If you’ll remember the first. James 1:26. *If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.* In other words, religion God really cares about is controlling the tongue. True faith controls the tongue.² A couple of weeks ago from James 3. *We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.*
- Here in James 4:11-12 the focus is on critical speech. Speech that judges. Faultfinding speech. By the way, comedian [Steve Martin](#) gave some good advice about criticizing other people. He said, "Before you criticize a man, walk a mile in his shoes. That way, when you do criticize him, you'll be a mile away and have his shoes."³

Transition

Seriously, the big idea of James 4:11-12? [Slide #2]...

Proposition

- **Don’t badmouth other people**
- Before I say any more I want to clarify what James is actually prohibiting here. James says in [verse 11](#), *brothers, do not slander one another.* The prohibition? Slander. Except that slander is probably not the best word to use here. To slander someone is to make false charges against them—make comments that damage someone’s reputation. The word James uses here is broader than that. It’s a word that means to talk against, to defame, to speak evil of someone. Translations like the English Standard Version capture the broad nature of the kind of speech James is prohibiting here. *Do not speak evil against one another.* Or the New Living Translation. *Don’t speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters.* [The Message](#), I think, gets it perfectly. *Don’t bad-mouth each other, friends.* So the word James uses here certainly can include slander but it also includes any form of speaking against another person. James says this kind of speech in particular is unacceptable.

Transition

¹ Cartoon from John Troy, [Lunkers](#), The Lyons Press: New York, 2000.

² Daniel M. Doriani, [Putting the Truth to Work](#), p. 290.

³ "Monday Morning Insight," [www.ChurchStaffing.com](#) (4-25-05)

There are...[Slide #3]

Organizational Sentence

- **Two consequences of badmouthing others**

Transition

Look at verse 11 for the **first consequence**. [Slide #4] James says when we badmouth others we become judges. And that's not a compliment. *Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.*

Main Points

- Our boys love to play dress up. Cowboys. Football players. You name it. [Slide #5] That's Ethan and Micah right after their birthdays a month ago. Two superheroes showing off their superhero moves. James says when we bad mouth others—especially those in the body of Christ, *brothers and sisters*, we are playing dress up. We play Judge. The reason badmouthing others is a problem is because it makes us judges—something we're unqualified to do. **Verse 11**. *Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it.*
- [Slide #6] James actually equates badmouthing with judging. Isn't that interesting? James doesn't say those who badmouth others become lawbreakers—a term he used for those showing partiality and favoritism back in 2:8-9. Remember? *If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.* It's actually worse. He says those who badmouth others become judges—of the person talked about and of the law itself.
- As in chapter 2 where James says favoritism breaks the royal law of scripture *love your neighbor as yourself*. Badmouthing them breaks the same love command. The Law says love your neighbor. And when you badmouth someone you are in a sense making an unloving, critical, unfair judgment. You're judging them—something you're not qualified to do.
- But even worse, you judge the law. When you badmouth someone you place yourself in authority over the royal law which says to love others. In other words, failing to do the law, to love one's neighbor by badmouthing them, means denying the law's authority, which in turn makes you a judge of the law which is worse than just breaking the law.⁴
- Passages like this are more difficult to get a handle on than the in your face passage from last week because we just don't realize what we sound like when we talk. Just this week Miriam was sitting at the computer in our office at home. I walked in, peered over her shoulder to see what she was doing. A person's name was mentioned and words flew out of my mouth. And Miriam looked at me shocked at how I had spoken about another person. I would venture that a vast majority of us would say badmouthing others is not a problem for us.
- We're just like five-year-old Andrew. While visiting a neighbor, five-year-old Andrew pulled out his kindergarten class picture and immediately began describing each classmate. "This is Robert; he hits everyone. This is Stephen. He never listens to the teacher. This is

⁴ Moo, p. 199.

Mark. He chases us and is very noisy." Pointing to his own picture, Andrew commented, "And this is me. I'm just sitting here minding my own business."⁵ In the World According to Jim there's no place for critical, judgmental speech against another person. Badmouthing others is unacceptable.

- **Gordon MacDonald** is an author, speaker, and teacher. Maybe you've heard his name before. He pastored for more than forty years. For three years MacDonald was president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. He's written a dozen books, some of them award winners. MacDonald tells this story.
- "One time, twenty or so years ago, I was in Japan on a speaking tour with a close personal friend. He was a number of years older than I was. As we walked down the street in Yokohama, Japan, the name of a common friend came up, and I said something unkind about that person. It was sarcastic. It was cynical. It was a put-down. My older friend stopped, turned, and faced me until his face was right in front of mine. With deep, slow words he said, "Gordon, a man who says he loves God would not say a thing like that about a friend."
- He could have put a knife into my ribs, and the pain would not have been any less. He did what a prophet does. But you know something? There have been ten thousand times in the last twenty years that I have been saved from making a jerk of myself. When I've been tempted to say something unkind about a brother or sister, I hear my friend's voice say, "Gordon, a man who says he loves God would not speak in such a way about a friend."
- Prophets do that. They remind us of the truth and where we are falling short. If you avoid prophets—and a lot of people do—you do so at the peril of your spiritual journey. You and I need prophets."⁶ We need other to lovingly, politely, kindly tell us when we're badmouthing others and we need to receive with deep gratitude their words of rebuke.
- In the same way, if you hear someone badmouthing someone else you have a responsibility as part of the body of Christ to lovingly, politely ask them to stop. "Insert name, a man who says he loves God would not say a thing like that about a friend." "Insert, name, a woman who says she loves God would not say a thing like that about a friend." And end it there.

Transition

Look at verse 12 for the **second consequence**. Listen. *There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?* [Slide #7] More than making us judges, James says when we badmouth others we infringe on God as Supreme Judge and Lawgiver. We play God.

- The movie *Rudy* is the true story of a young man's dream to play football for Notre Dame. In one of the most memorable lines in the movie, Father Cavanaugh with much love and care says this to Rudy: "Son, in 35 years of religious study, I have only come up with two hard incontrovertible facts: there is a God, and I'm not Him."
- Badmouthing others makes us judges. Makes us usurpers. God alone is judge. There is only one Lawgiver. There is only one Supreme Judge. When we pass judgment on another person by badmouthing them we play God. Only God has the power to save. Only God has

⁵ Kathy Plate, Orlando, Florida. Christian Reader, "Kids of the Kingdom."

⁶ Gordon MacDonald, in the sermon "Feeling As God Feels," Preaching Today audio (#196)

the power to destroy. *But you--who are you to judge your neighbor.* Who are we to think that we can sit in judgment over our neighbor by badmouthing them?

- Let me pause for a second and say a word about judging others. One of the most abused passages in all of the Bible is Matthew 7. The plank eye passage. *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged.* You usually just hear these words in defense of something, usually to justify a particular behavior. For example. Suppose someone you know is cheating on her husband. You go to her and you tell her she shouldn't be doing what she's doing. She quickly quotes Matthew 7:1. *Do not judge, or you too will be judged.* And then with scathing anger adds "Who are you to judge me?"
- Is this what James is talking about when he says in [verse 12](#) *But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?* Certainly when our words are directed toward someone else in a hypocritical and self-righteous manner we shouldn't judge them. But that's not what James is driving at. As one commentator puts it, "James is not prohibiting the proper, and necessary, discrimination that every Christian should exercise. Nor is he forbidding the right of the community to exclude from its fellowship those it deems to be in flagrant disobedience to the standards of the faith, or to determine right and wrong among its members (1 Cor. 5 and 6). James rebukes jealous, censorious speech by which we condemn others as being wrong in the sight of God."⁷
- James is against what Paul gets at in Romans 14:9-10. *For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.* It's the badmouthing others in which we become the authority and look down on the person we're talking about. That's what James is against. He's against the speaking evil of another person. He's against the biting remarks that cut people down to size either to their face or behind their back. He's against the critical spirit that has nothing good to say. He's against the faultfinding. Not speech that lovingly points out the waywardness of another.
- *Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you--who are you to judge your neighbor?*

Conclusion

- The challenge for us this week is to love each other with our words.

⁷ Moo, p. 199.