

Faith Does Not Judge

Lesson for Sunday, December 17, 2023

Introduction:

- ⇒ Discuss: What are the biggest “social sins” in our world today?
 - You may need to illustrate for the class. An example may be to violate someone’s chosen pronouns. (Avoid getting into a complaining-fest with this!)
 - Here is what you are aiming for: The majority of social sins in today’s culture are all related to one common theme: Don’t judge me!
- ⇒ Point out that the #1 criticism of Christians by the world is that Christians are judgmental.
- ⇒ Would it surprise you that God is not in favor of a judgmental attitude any more than the world is! God hates all sin, but there are a few sins that are constantly and strongly condemned by Scripture.
- ⇒ Judging others condemning, criticizing, backbiting, gossiping, speaking evil, and talking about others is one of the sins that Scripture never lets up on.
- ⇒ In the middle of James making practical applications of his book, he inserts two verses that address the judgmental person.

Bible Study:

1. Judging others is slander (vs. 11).
 - a. Note three significant points in this verse.
 - b. First, understand the scene.
 - i. In the Greek, “speaking evil” means to criticize, judge, backbite, gossip, condemn and grumble against another person. The word usually means to talk about a person behind his back.
 - ii. Notice the context is speaking about a “brother” – a fellow Christian.
 - c. Second, understand it is sin.
 - i. Note what the Scripture says: this is evil speaking.
 - ii. The person who judges in their speech is guilty. Refer to 3:9.
 - d. Third, the exhortation is strong.
 - i. James begins emphatically, “Speak not!”
 - ii. Christian believers are not to judge and speak evil of one another.
 - iii. Jesus was clear about this in His last instructions to His disciples before being crucified in John 13:35.
 - iv. When we speak evil of other Christians our testimony before a watching world is damaged.
 - e. Discuss: Why do we so often judge and criticize others? Consider in your discussion:
 - i. Criticism boosts our own self-image.
 - ii. Criticism is simply enjoyed. There is a tendency in human nature to take pleasure in hearing and sharing bad news about others.
 - iii. Criticism makes us feel that our own lives (morality and behavior) are better than the person who failed.
 - iv. Criticism helps us justify the decisions we have made and the things we have done throughout our lives.
 - v. Criticism can be an outlet for hurt and revenge.
2. Judging others violates the law of God (vs. 11).
 - a. Note exactly what Scripture says: “He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law.”
 - b. This is a shocking statement: talking about and slandering a brother is speaking evil of the law. When a person talks about and condemns others, he is violating the greatest of all laws, the royal law of love to love our neighbors as ourselves (2:8).

- c. The criticizer is speaking evil of the law; that is, he is condemning another person while he himself is standing there breaking the law. He is saying that the law of love is not all that important; it can be sometimes ignored.
 - d. Once again, Jesus was quite clear. Read Matthew 7:1-5.
 - e. Discuss: How does Matthew 7:1-5 help us delineate between proper judgment and being judgmental (which is what James is condemning).
3. Judging others sets oneself up as judge (vs. 11).
- a. Again, note exactly what the Scripture says: "He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother...judgeth the law" (vs. 11).
 - b. How is this? When we criticize a brother, we are saying that the law he has broken is important - so important that he should not have broken it - but the law of love is not important enough to keep us from criticizing him.
 - c. No matter what the law is, we judge the law when we pick and choose, and we set ourselves up above the law of God. We make ourselves the judge of the law; we make ourselves lawgivers. And note: this is not our function.
 - d. Scripture declares plainly that our duty is to obey the law, not to be a judge of the law. This is exactly what the end of 4:11 says: "If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge."
 - e. Discuss: this is a common practice of people. We choose which law should be kept and which can be occasionally broken. It may be the laws governing gluttony, anger, worship, sex, controlling what we look at and desire, drunkenness, covetousness, etc. How do we keep from doing this?
4. Judging others usurps God's right and authority (vs. 12).
- a. This verse is clear and forceful; it is a very strong warning to the criticizer and backbiter. "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?" God alone is the great Lawgiver. He and He alone has given the laws that are to judge and condemn our neighbors.
 - b. Note closely: when we judge, criticize, and backbite our brothers, we are setting ourselves up in the place of God, making ourselves God—claiming the right to sit in judgment upon our brother.
 - c. Judgment and condemnation—criticizing, talking about, and picking out the shortcomings and failures of any brother—is God's right and His alone.
 - d. Note one other fact as well: judging, condemning and criticizing destroys the person. This is exactly what this verse says. There is only one Person who is *able to save and destroy* and that Person is God.
 - e. Discuss: What reasons can we think of why we should never criticize another?
 - i. All the circumstances and all the facts are never known.
 - ii. All people—religious as well as non-religious—come short, fail, and fall. When we criticize and judge, we have a problem: we forget that we are sinners. When we acknowledge our own true condition, we act with care and compassion toward all as they come short.
 - iii. Judging others usurps God's authority.

DISCUSSION:

- ⇒ The main discussion questions are contained in each of the points in the outline.
- ⇒ One last thing to discuss is: What does the Bible say we are to do when we see a brother or sister in Christ sin? Use Matthew 18:15-20 as your guide.