

James: Taming the Critic

James 4:11-12 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?

Ever noticed that anyone driving slower than you is an idiot, but everyone going faster than you is a maniac?

Or that the best football players in the world aren't scoring out on the field but sitting in the stalls yelling, "Hey, ya shoulda done this! Ya shoulda done that!"

A woman was known in her church for being very critical. One day she was asked what she thought of Sue, a woman she hardly knew. "I don't like her," she replied. "She keeps changing her mind. Every time I ask her the time, she gives me a different answer."

Our message today is entitled Taming The Critic, and so relevant because there's a critic inside each one of us.

We're going to see how James gives such practical advice on this issue, so let's take a look at what he says.

1. The command

These verses begin with the command not to speak evil or to judge a brother in Christ and ends with another command not to judge anyone.

In Australia, we are a nation of knockers.

We love to knock what anyone else does; we love to criticise.

We suffer from a good dose of Tall Poppy Syndrome.

Anyone who excels, anyone who gets ahead, anyone who's starting to look just a little bit too good, we know exactly how to cut them down to size.

James says that this kind of attitude should not exist in the church.

Jesus said that to judge another Christian is to judge Him.

Matthew 25:40

Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.

Paul says to speak evil of no one. (Titus 3:2)

Even politicians!

What's wrong with our Prime Minister? Can't he see that her policies are up the creek? He's a complete idiot!

What's wrong with the Leader of the Opposition? Can't he see that his policies are pathetic? The guy is a moron!

James says that this is not the kind of speech expected of a Christian.

You can disagree with or criticise a government policy, but you cannot criticise the person who promotes that policy.

That kind of speech is unchristian speech.

2. The first reason

So why can't we criticise another person? What exactly is wrong with that?

We're going to look at some reasons.

The first reason is that the person who judges another is actually judging the Law, God's Law.

Now you might be thinking, "Say that again! I can't see the connection."

So let's take a look at how that works.

The Law said (in Lev 19:18), "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

According to Jesus, this is the second greatest commandment.

But criticising isn't loving others; it's the direct opposite of love.

So the person who criticises is saying that the second greatest commandment of all does not apply to them.

Which means that they are criticising that commandment, and therefore criticising the Law.

ILLUS – Next time you open your mouth to say something like, "I can't believe so-and-so is wearing a dress like that." Or, "Have you seen that ridiculous looking tie the pastor is wearing?" Remember, you're actually criticising God's Law.

3. The second reason

The second reason we should not judge or criticise others is the balance of grace and truth.

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus was the perfect embodiment of grace and truth.

He wasn't just grace, and He wasn't just truth.

If you have truth but no grace, then you become brutal and legalistic.

If you have grace but no truth, then you end up thinking that anything goes and that there are no consequences.

Jesus was the perfect balance.

It seems to me that we Christians are so often so much better at defending the truth than defending grace.

The vitriol, the hatred, with which some Christians attack those with a different viewpoint is appalling.

What's your response when people start talking about Muslims, or gays?

Is it anger?

We have to understand that God didn't call us just to use the truth as a weapon against others.

They're not the enemy; the devil is.

Ephesians 6:12

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Philip Yancey, who for many years was a racist Christian, said in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, said that he "cloaked [himself] in gospel while living anti-gospel.

Is that what we do? Do we preach grace but live ungrace?

Our gospel is the gospel of grace. (Acts 20:24)

When we criticise and judge, we no longer have a message.

Notice how Jesus dealt with sinners.

He didn't write off the Samaritan woman because she wasn't Jewish.

He didn't deal harshly with the woman who was caught in adultery.

He didn't reject Matthew or Zacchaeus because they were tax collectors.

He didn't ignore the woman who was haemorrhaging because she was unclean.

Jesus dealt with each of these people graciously.

4. The third reason

Only God looks on heart.

We judge by externals: way a person looks, dresses, talks.

If you'd seen me at nineteen years old, tripping out, with really long hair, wearing a chain dog collar, would you have judged me as a no-hoper, or would you have seen potential?

When God sent Samuel to choose the next king of Israel, he saw Eliab, Jesse's oldest son, and he thought, "Very impressive. This is definitely the guy."

But this is what the Lord said to him:

1 Samuel 16:7

For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

God doesn't judge like we do.

He sees right into the heart, something we're very often not very good at.

5. The fourth reason

The damage.

Parents and those of you with unsaved partners be very careful what you say in front of children or your partner.

How many Christians have roast pastor for lunch?

Or they criticise the worship leader, or anyone else they choose to criticise.

Proverbs 18:8

The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body.

Words have a powerful effect on people; they can heal or create damage.

Proverbs 18:21

Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

Criticism or judgmentalism is sign of a life or a church that's turned inwards.

And that is a clear sign that a church is going backwards.

There are only two possible solutions for judgmental, critical people: repentance or removal.

Titus 3:10-11

Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

Of course, the preferred option is repentance.

Better that a person repents and is restored to where they should be, than they continue on in sin and suffer the consequences.

But if a critical person will not repent, you are better off without them in your church; they will only cause damage.