



## *Study Series*

James: Week Nine

## *Bible*

James 4:11-12 (NIV)

### **Submit Yourselves to God**

**11** Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them 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 neighbour?

## *Sermon Summary*

You may want to consider this section as pre-reading.

This week we conclude a long section in James where the author has been addressing internal divisions that have crippled the community of faith in their mission to share the

good news of Jesus. In this last section – 4:11-12 – James speaks once more to this community to demonstrate the disconnect between their professed faith and their actions.

Once again James starts with their language and challenges them about “speaking against” one another. James describes, that to speak against one another is to judge them and, therefore, to judge the law, which amounts to trying to take God’s position. I don’t know about you, but that seemed to escalate quickly.

To “speak against” one another is to speak falsely in order to tarnish a reputation and is often translated as “slander”. This sort of slanderous speech in the community faith, especially when used to promote rivalry and selfish ambition, can only lead to internal division. The link with slander may lie in Leviticus 19:15-18. This section of the law has come up before in James. Leviticus 19:18 contains the command to love your neighbour, one half of what Jesus said summarised the whole law. What is interesting is that in Leviticus 19:15-18 there are a number of commands given that fit with what James is getting at. There are prohibitions against partiality, slander, hating another in one’s heart, and holding a grudge – all of which precede the command to love their neighbour. This may be the law that James has in mind when he refers to keeping the law in verse 11. When we sit in judgment over the law we stop feeling it is for us but for others, and we begin to use it to bring others in line rather than to allow it to bring us in line. When we do this we place ourselves in the place of God; the only one who is above the law and for whom the law is not necessary. This is not our place.

What James is calling for is unity under God as we seek to do what God has called us to. This doesn’t mean that we never judge or discern what is going on around us. On the contrary, we invite God by His Holy Spirit to examine all of us, as we are all under the law, and as God’s people, all being perfected by Him.

For what is at stake – if you haven’t heard James’ point yet – is the effectiveness of the church to do what the church has been called to do; to live faith out loud, and to share the good news of the gospel.

## *Questions*

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don’t feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Even appropriate criticism or correction can be challenging to receive, how well do we receive correction, and what internal emotions or external factors make it harder or easier to receive? Be honest, and take some time to share your reflections with the group.
2. Read James chapter 4:11-12, you might want to do this a couple of times, with the second time slower than the first. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that 'jump out at you'. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain **why** it jumped out – this is about creating space for often familiar passages to say something new to us, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word or phrase. Share what you've been lead to.
3. What are we called to judge as God's people? What challenges does this raise for us?
4. James is clearly challenging the church to which he is writing, how can we effectively challenge each other, whilst not elevating ourselves above the law? How might we foster humility in our interactions with each other?
5. Slander, gossip, or speaking in ways that make us look good and others look less so, is sadly common. What are helpful checks for identifying when we have slipped into using this sort of language, as we seek to invite God to bring change in our behaviour?

## Prayer

Psalms 139:23-24 in the Message version says: ***'Investigate my life, O God, find out everything about me; Cross-examine and test me, get a clear picture of what I'm about; See for yourself whether I've done anything wrong - then guide me on the road to eternal life.'***

James points to infighting within the church as a crippling factor for the sharing of the gospel. Often infighting originates from the sinful attitudes and behaviours at the heart of believers. Create some extended space to pray through Psalm 139:23-24 individually.

Invite the Holy Spirit to examine your heart, particularly revealing attitudes and behaviours that may have caused conflict between you and other believers.

Take some time to write down what God might say to you, or remind you of.

Remember this is not about condemnation - Romans 8:1 reminds us there is none of that for believers - but about allowing God to remove any obstacles from us walking into the fullness of life right now, and to sharing the good news of the gospel with others.

Join together to pray for unity within the church to close.