

Pastor's Corner: 3-2-2019 – Judging and Boasting

James 4:11-17

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 neighbor?

13 Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. 17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.

There are several points from these verses that jump out at me that I feel like we should take seriously.

First, there is the council to be careful not to slander or speak against brothers and sisters in Christ. Slander is whenever we speak falsehoods against someone that results in damaging their reputation. The purpose of slander is to tear someone else down, to hurt or to wound. Such behavior is out of harmony with the character of Christ.

Now, I am of the opinion that Christians should not only avoid slander (spreading lies about others) but also avoid sharing truths that are damaging to a person’s reputation. This second kind of communication falls under the umbrella of gossip. I’ve seen people try to get around the Biblical prohibitions about gossip by stating that they are only sharing what is true, as if that makes a difference. If your words (true or not) are designed to tear down someone for who Christ died, you are in the wrong – plain and simple. This is why James continues and says, “anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them.” He gives us a rather broad spectrum of conversation that we should avoid.

Here’s a simple rule that I think we should all strive to follow. If you don’t have something nice to say about someone... don’t say anything at all. We all learned this as children, yet somehow we seem to forget it as adults.

The next statement that jumps out at me is from verses 13 and 14. James reminds us that none of us are guaranteed a tomorrow. When we plan out our future (and I think we should still plan for the future) we should do it in such a way that we are able to turn those plans over to God at any moment. The Christian doesn’t dive forward with their own agenda, fully determined to accomplish their goals at any cost. Instead, we set goals, make plans and move forward, constantly checking in with God to see if we are moving in the right direction.

The final statement that speaks to me is verse 17. If God presents an opportunity for you to serve him, or to serve someone else, and you flake out on that opportunity – God considers that to be sin. On the one hand, this statement kind of freaks me out. I can think of far too many instances when I didn’t do the good thing that God said I should do. This means I’m even more sinful than I thought I was. On the other hand, this statement causes me to marvel a little bit. The Bible says that Jesus was without sin. That means that he not only avoided breaking any of God’s laws, but he also always did the good that God put before him. To neglect even the smallest kindness or good work would have been a sin. This is why Jesus spoke with the untouchables of society, it’s why he healed lepers and blessed prostitutes, it’s why he ran himself ragged serving the needs of people. Jesus lived to serve and to do good. He asks us to do the same.

As usual, James homes in on real life, practical issues. He tells us to be careful what we say about other people, he tells us to consult God when we make our plans and allow him to change our course as necessary, and he reminds us to be aware of (and do) the good deeds God puts in our path.

What part of these verses speaks to you? What lesson does God want you to understand?

Happy Sabbath
Pastor Tyler