

James 4.11-12 & 5.19-20

Your attitude: restoring or condemning?

Amington

Sunday 24 June 2018

James: Wholehearted Devotion to Jesus (9)

Showing love

It's usually quite easy to tell when someone starts talking about a person or thing that they love.

Show video.

¶ The way people smile – not only with their mouths, with their eyes as well – shows how much they love someone. The people in the video couldn't help themselves but smile as they talked about their loved ones.

Think about how you show your love for your friends and family – how do you talk about them to other people? Do you buy them presents, spend time with them? Do you do little jobs for them?

For a couple of moments of silence, think about someone you love – do they *know* you love them? How?

Condemning others

¶ Judging others – is it good, or bad? There’s a lot of judging going on in that front page from the Daily Mail – most of it the editors fuelling unnecessary and unfair hysteria – and not a little hypocrisy.

Judging: is it something you *should* do, or something you *shouldn’t* do? *Get some answers... probably most will say ‘shouldn’t’!*

For many of us, our attitude towards judging others is (rightly, and like James) guided by these words of Jesus ¶:

‘Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

¶ ‘Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ¶ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.’

Matthew 7.1-5 (NIV)

Jesus' illustration – that picture – says it all. Often when people are judgemental, they have a superior mindset, they think *they* know what's right, and they are happy to point out others' flaws.

Wait – let me say that again, but more truthfully.

Often when people are judgemental, *we* have a superior mindset, *we* think we know what's right, and *we* are happy to point out others' flaws.

Whether we are Christians or not, judging others is something that – sadly – comes rather naturally to most of us. James has an interesting perspective on it.

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.

James 4.11 (NIV)

Quick question – who said this, where does this command come from: ¶ Love your neighbour as yourself?

Jesus said it – but he was quoting what we call the *Old Testament* – he simply called it 'The Bible' – ¶ Leviticus 19.18.

What does loving our neighbour mean? Two verses earlier it says:

¶ Do not go about spreading slander among your people.

Leviticus 19.16 (NIV)

This is what James has in mind when he says **do not slander one another** (4.11). When we do, *we break the law ourselves*, showing that we are every bit as guilty as the person we are judging.

Or, to put it the way Jesus did – ¶

‘How can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?’

Matthew 7.4 (NIV)

Judging others comes from a deeply unpleasant place within our hearts – the place of self-righteousness. For all of us, whether or not we are willing to admit it, there is a place, deep down in our hearts, that thinks we are (usually) in the right.

It is the place in our hearts where God should sit, where his Word should sit, teaching and guiding us – but too often we put ourselves there, insisting that *we* know what’s best and what’s right. And that leads us to judge and condemn other people – when actually *we* are the ones who need to listen to God’s Word.

You know, I was at Twycross Zoo the other day, and I saw a strange thing: in one of the cages was... a baguette. I know! The sign said it was 'bread' in captivity... That one's from Revd Roger Chamberlain at our Deanery Chapter last week...

What do married bakers give each other on Valentine's Day? Flours... That's from Google.

I'm sorry, these bread jokes are a bit crumby aren't they...

Restoring others

When we **slander**, **speak against** and **judge** other people, James says we are **not keeping** God's law, **but sitting in judgment on it** (4.11). We are ignoring the command to love our neighbour, and are taking God's place – he alone is the **Lawgiver** and **Judge** (4.12)

But there's another way of ignoring God's Word, which is the exact opposite of being judgemental. James put it like this **J**:

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: **whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.**

James 5.19-20 (NIV)

Leviticus puts it like this ¶:

Do not go about spreading slander among your people... Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. **Rebuke your neighbour frankly so you will not share in their guilt.** Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself.

Leviticus 19.16-18 (NIV)

Jesus put it like this ¶:

‘You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, **then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.**’

Matthew 7.5 (NIV)

And, most famously, like this:

Jesus straightened up and asked [the woman caught in adultery], ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’

‘No one, sir,’ she said.

¶ ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now **and leave your life of sin.**’

John 8.10-11 (NIV)

Do you see what I'm getting at?

When we get the message that loving others means not judging them, there is a danger we can go too far in the opposite direction; we minimise the seriousness of sin, we decide things aren't sinful that are, we act as though we know better than God: we **are not keeping** God's Law, but **sitting in judgment on it** (4.11).

And actually, when we minimise sin and fail to warn people of the very real danger they are in – of harming themselves, of harming other people, of the ultimate destination they are heading for – when we minimise sin and fail to warn people of the danger they are in, *we also fail to love them.*

Of course Jesus put it best: **'neither do I condemn you; go now and leave your life of sin'** (John 8.11).

This is the line Jesus walked, and it's the line James calls us to follow. We must not judge or condemn others, *but neither should we act as though everything is ok.* That isn't loving people either.

Our barometer of right and wrong is damaged – which is why God gave us the Scriptures, to help us learn the way of abundant life – which *isn't* 'doing whatever we want'. And he gave us a church family, to walk alongside and help each other to follow Jesus.

Friends, sin is real, it is serious. James tells us to **grieve, mourn and wail** (4.9), because of our sinfulness our pride. And he ends his letter like this: **whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death** (5.20).

Here is where I think the difference is between judging others, and warning them as James encourages us to do. If our motivation in is to feel superior ourselves and to belittle another person – we are acting in God’s place, as judge, and we aren’t very good at it..

But if our motivation is love, a heartfelt and humble warning that someone is in grave danger, as we are ourselves – *then* we aren’t judging someone, we are bringing them back from the brink. Shouting a warning to someone we love who doesn’t know they’re on a cliff-edge isn’t judging them, it’s saving them!

Friends, we need to learn to listen to and take seriously what God says to us in Scripture. We will never be wholehearted or devoted to Jesus, if deep down, we think we know best.

It isn’t easy, and it will challenge things we hold to deeply, things our society takes for granted, and even insists we accept. But we need to learn a new attitude: to restore others, not condemn them – because that, after all, is the way God shows his love for us. **]**