



SERIES: FEBRUARY – MARCH FAITH IN REAL LIFE

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Scripture: James 4:11-12

TITLE: Help or Hurt?

While flipping through TV channels, I came upon some show where federal agents were deciding if a passport was legitimate or not. There was this careful process and criteria that helped the agents determine if the passport was official or counterfeit.

Many of us try to play salvation agents for people today. But should we? Here is what James says about judging others' salvation in James 4:11-12 (CSB).

Don't criticize one another, brothers and sisters. Anyone who defames or judges a fellow believer defames and judges the law. If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

The topic of criticism and judging is a timeless discussion. Many people struggle with a critical spirit and the unhelpful judgment of others. But it's important to understand what James is not saying here.

According to Theologian Douglas Moo, "James is not prohibiting the proper, and necessary, discrimination that every Christian should exercise. Nor is he forbidding the right of the community to exclude from its fellowship those it deems to be in flagrant disobedience to the standards of the faith, or to determine right and wrong among its members."¹

So he's not saying we shouldn't call out ungodly behavior. He's not saying we shouldn't rebuke or hold brothers or sisters accountable as the Bible prescribes. He qualifies this clearly in verse 12. He says, "there is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and destroy." This is a judgment and criticism of one's relationship with God. Yes, it's true. James has been clear that there are marks or evidence of true salvation. But sometimes, we judge or play judge based on preferences rather than essential Christian doctrine. For example, perhaps a believer has a hard time understanding a literal six-day creation account, but that person totally believes in the exclusive nature of Christ's atoning death by grace through faith. It's improper to judge this person's salvation.

Now, if a person denies something like John 14:6, where Jesus said that He is the only way to God, now we have some work to do with that person. But it's not our duty to criticize and slander that person in the body of Christ.

¹ Moo, D. J. (2000). [The letter of James](#) (p. 199). Eerdmans; Apollos.

James is so serious about the power of our words. Yes, God's Word is there, convict and save. But our words are not meant to cut and destroy.

So here's my challenge for you today: heal a damaged relationship. Words can be healing ointment or salt in a wound. We can easily fall into a gossip trap or critical spirit. I've done it. I've been impacted by it. It's no fun. So we as redeemed people should apologize, confess, and begin to make things right again.

God knows the heart. When we see sin, yes, we call it out in love the right way. But destroying a person is never okay. So today, use your words to heal and move people closer to Jesus.

When we do this, friend, we will win the day.