

HOW TO QUIT PLAYING GOD
Developing a Faith That Works - Part 11 of 15
James 4:11-12
Rick Warren

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"Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. 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?" (vs. 11b & 12)

WE'RE PLAYING GOD WHEN WE _____

I. WHY DO WE LIKE TO JUDGE OTHERS?

1. _____

"So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them, and yet do the same thing, do you think you will escape God's judgement?" Romans 2:3

2. _____

"Gossip is so tasty! How we love to swallow it!" Prov. 26:22 (GN)

II. WHY SHOULD I NOT JUDGE OTHERS?

* It is _____

"Brothers do not slander ... anyone who speaks against his brother or judges his brother ... "

* It is _____

"Anyone who ... judges, speaks against the law ..." (vs. 11)

See James 2:8

* It is _____

"There is only one Lawgiver and Judge ... who are you to judge your neighbor?"

III. WHEN IS IT WRONG TO JUDGE OTHERS?

1. _____ (Rom. 2:1-3)
2. _____ (Matt. 7:3-5)
3. _____ (John 7:24)
4. _____ (John 7:51)
5. _____ (Col. 2:16)
6. _____ (James 4:11)
7. _____ (1 Cor. 4:5)

IV. HOW TO BREAK THE HABIT OF JUDGING OTHERS

1. _____
"Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you, for God will judge you in the same way you judge others, and he will apply to you the same rules you apply to others." Matt. 7:1-2
2. _____
"Every one of us, then, will have to give an account of himself to God. So then, let us stop judging one another." Rom. 14:12-13
3. _____
"... Mercy triumphs over judgement." James 2:13

Parable of Unforgiving Servant -- Matt. 18:21-35

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Back in the 1960's there was a famous book written by Eric Burn called Games People Play. A couple of years later another book came out, Games Christians Play. It was an interesting book that dealt with games Christians play in the name of the Lord. I want us to look at the deadliest game -- the game of playing God.

"Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. [When you judge the Law you're not keeping it, but sitting in judgement on it] There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, [God] the one who is able to save and destroy. But you -- who are you to judge your neighbor?" James says that the way we play God is by judging other people. Anytime I judge you, anytime you judge me, we're playing God. It's only God's responsibility to judge other people.

I want us to look at Why we judge other people, Why shouldn't we judge, When is it wrong to judge other people, and How do you break the habit of judging other people. You'll be a lot happier if you learn how to deal with this issue.

Romans 2:3 *"So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them, and yet do the same thing, do you think you will escape God's judgment?"* Paul says that one of the reasons we tend to judge other people is to excuse our own faults. You think by pointing the finger at somebody else, God is going to forget what you've done, or when you point out how somebody else has fallen then you don't look so bad. We use it as an excuse to blame others. We love to accuse others and excuse ourselves.

How do we do that? How do we excuse our sins? We do that by relabeling them... "I'm not a gossip, I'm just sharing a concern," "I'm not lazy, I'm just mellow," "I'm not negative, I'm realistic," "I'm not unreliable, I'm flexible." We have different terminology. We excuse our sins by relabeling them. "I'm not critical, I'm discerning." We all do that.

There is another reason, he says, that we tend to judge other people and that's because it appeals to our pride. Proverbs 26:22 (GN) *"Gossip is so tasty. How we love to swallow it."* It's like we eat it with great relish. Why is it? When somebody is gossiping, usually we are all ears! We just can't wait to hear what's being said. Why? There is a natural innate ability of gossip or slander to capture our curiosity. This is the sin, the sin of judging other people, that the Bible says you'll have to deal with more in your Christian life than almost any other sin. It's a self-righteous attitude of putting other people down, being critical, being judgmental. Jesus condemned it more than almost any other sin. The Bible talks about it. You can find it universally. Everybody has this problem. It comes naturally. Usually when slander is being told we're all ears.

There are many different kinds of slander.

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There's slander in the first degree -- "Do you know what that guy's doing?" You share it -- a statement of judgement on them.

Christians like slander in the second degree -- "I'm sharing this with you so you can pray about it with me." If you're not careful, a prayer chain can turn into a gossip grapevine very quickly. When we hear about how other people have fallen, there's something inside, a little bit of pride..."That goes to show you." The Bible teaches that we often tend to judge other people because we think it's going to put us in a better position, but whenever you point a finger at somebody, you're pointing three fingers back at yourself. The Bible says what we sow, we're going to reap.

Suppose one person is twenty million dollars in debt and you're only ten million dollars in debt. Just because someone else is more in debt than you are does that lessen your debt? No. But we think that's true. The Bible says, we tend to judge others first to excuse our own errors and then also we have the natural ability to eat it up because it appeals to our pride, it makes us feel good, it gives us an ego boost.

WHY SHOULD I NOT JUDGE OTHERS

James gives us three reasons why we shouldn't judge other people.

1. It's unchristian

v. 11 *"Brothers, do not slander one another... anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law."* Actually when it says "judges him" it mentions the word "brother" again. "Brother" is used three times in this passage. Why? In the first place we shouldn't judge one another because we're all part of the same family. We're brothers. When I see another Christian stumble or fall or have a tough time, I shouldn't rejoice in that because they're family. I should be concerned about it. I think a lot of times we get a little bit of glee out of it.

I heard about a guy who came to a pastor one time and said, "I don't have but one talent." The pastor asked, "What's your talent?" The man said, "I have the gift of criticism." The gift of criticism does not come from the Holy Spirit but from the devil. The pastor was wise and thought about the parable in the Bible and said, "The guy who had only one talent went out and buried it. Maybe that's what you ought to do with yours."

Notice it says, *"Brothers, do not slander..."* Circle "slander". The word "slander" and the word "devil" are the same word. The word "devil" means slander. The Bible calls Satan the accuser of Christians. He's the slanderer of Christians. What does this mean? The devil's number one activity is going around and putting people down, to slander them and put them down, malign them. We are most like the devil when we slander. When we speak against somebody else (including all kinds of criticism, maligning, judging) we're doing the devil's work for him. That's what the devil's job description is. John 8:44 says, *"The devil is the father of lies."* Revelation says he's the "accuser of brothers." It's unchristian to judge other people.

2. It's unloving

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We shouldn't judge others because it's unloving. *"...who judges speaks against the Law..."* Is it illegal? Is there a law against judging in the United States? He's talking about the Royal Law. James 2:8 *"Whenever I judge you, I'm breaking the Law."* What law is it I'm breaking? He's mentioned it earlier. He mentions it two or three times in the book. James 2:8 *"If you really keep the Royal Law found in Scripture love your neighbor as yourself."* James says if you do this you're doing right. When I judge you, I'm breaking the Royal Law -- the law of love -- *"Love your neighbor as yourself."*

We say, "It's just words and people will forget them." People don't forget words. You always remember them. It's unchristian and unloving.

3. It's unjustified

"There's only one lawgiver and one judge." The word "lawgiver" is used six times in the Old Testament and only once in the New Testament. The six times in the Old Testament it refers to God. The same thing here -- it's referring to God. Only God has the right to judge. It's in God's job description. It's not in your job description to judge people. He has not commissioned you to talk to everybody about everybody else.

One of the greatest weaknesses in people is we tend to generalize people by just one mistake. If they make one mistake we write off their whole personality. If a guy makes a foolish mistake, we say, "He's a fool." Not necessarily. Maybe he just made a foolish mistake in one particular area.

We tend to judge in other people things we dislike in ourselves. Psychologists have known that for a long time. When you see someone who reacts violently to a particular sin usually in their heart it means they have a hang up with it. It doesn't mean they're involved in it. It might just mean they have a fear that they will be involved in it. We always tend to react to our weaknesses in others. What we see is usually just a mirror of self.

III. WHEN IS IT WRONG TO JUDGE OTHERS?

There are seven places in Scripture where it says it is wrong to judge. The Scripture does say in some places that we are to judge certain things. We're to judge ourselves, and we're to judge certain matters. But there's seven times it says, don't do this.

1. Romans 2:1-3 *"You therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else. For at whatever point you judge others you're condemning yourself for you who pass judgement do the same thing. Now we know that God's judgement on those who do such things is based on truth, so when you a mere man pass judgement on them and yet you do the same thing, do you think you'll escape God's judgement?"* The time when **it's wrong to judge other people is when I'm practicing the same sin.** I don't have any right to speak up, if I lack the personal integrity, I'm guilty too.

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Remember the woman caught in adultery? What did Jesus say to the Pharisees? *"He who is without sin cast the first stone."* They all walked away.

That's what God is saying here. I don't have any right to judge anyone else if I'm guilty of the same thing. We need to be consistent.

2. Matthew 7:3-5 *"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 there's a plank in your own eye. You hypocrite! First take the plank out of your own eye and then you can see clearly to remove the speck in your brother's eye."* Jesus is talking here in His famous Sermon on the Mount.

This is a good example of the fact that Jesus told jokes. Hebrew humor is humor by exaggeration. If you read through the Sermon on the Mount it has a number of laugh lines in it, this being one of them. He said this in exaggeration and I'm sure the disciples got a big laugh. Imagine two guys: one guy has got some sawdust in his eye and the other has a telephone pole hanging out of his eye. Later on He says, "Just imagine: it's easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than somebody with a lot of money to make it into heaven just on his own money." That's Hebrew humor -- humor by exaggeration.

Jesus is making a point here with humor. He's saying **it's wrong to judge when it blinds me to my own faults**. If judging you causes me to not look at myself realistically, then it's wrong. We are great speck analyzers, nitpicking specks when we have a logjam in our own eye.

The inevitable result of being a judgmental person is in v. 2 *"In the same way you judge others, you'll be judged."* If you are critical to other people, you'll be criticized.

So it's wrong when you practice the same sin. It's wrong when it blinds you to your own faults.

3. John 7:24 gives us the third time in scripture when it's wrong to judge other people. *"Jesus says, 'Stop judging by mere appearance and make a right judgement.'" **It's wrong to judge others when you draw conclusions based on outward appearance.*** We tend to make our impression of people in about the first 15 seconds and most of that is in the way that they look. We judge people, we size them up. Their face, clothing, hairdo. If you judge just on the basis of appearance, that's unwise.

I Samuel 16:7. Samuel said this when he chose David, the runt of the family to be king of Israel. Others were saying, "Not David! That scrawny kid! He's nothing. The other brothers are the sharp ones!" Samuel said, "God doesn't look at the appearance. God looks at the heart."

4. John 7:51 *"Nicodemus who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number asked (talking to the Sanhedrin) 'Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?'"* That's a rhetorical question. The obvious answer is "no". **It's wrong to**

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judge when you condemn somebody before you hear the facts. It is unwise to make a judgement about somebody before you know all the facts. If you study scripture you'll find that even if your conclusions are right about that person you're still wrong -- because you did it without getting the facts. There is always more than one side to a story. There are three sides to a story: your side, their side, God's side. Usually we have partial truth.

5. Colossians 2:16 *"Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat, drink, or regard to religious festivals, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the thing to come. Reality, however, is found in Christ."* Paul is saying it is wrong to judge people, their spirituality, on the basis of externals, religious observances. You can't tell a person's walk with God based on their outward external observances -- by what you eat or drink or if you worship on Saturday or Sunday. These are just a shadow of the things to come. Reality is found in Christ. When I judge somebody on the basis of their outward religious observances I'm missing the point.

This is what Romans 14 is all about. They had a church where some people were judging each other because they looked at certain habits and said "You couldn't be a Christian and do that!" Many times people say, "Can I be a Christian and ...?" and then they name their pet habit. It's like "How close to the cliff can I get and not fall off?" or "How close to the fire can I get and not get burned." "Can I do this and still call myself a believer?" Paul says this is what is happening. You're judging each other and calling each other weak or strong. You're fighting back and forth. He says there are three things that cause a lot of conflict: drink, diet, days. What you drink, what you eat, and when you worship. *"Accept him who is weak in the faith without passing judgement on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything. But another whose faith is weak eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not. The man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does for God has accepted him."*

Two guys are at the "I Love My Church" banquet. One guy is enjoying a wonderful turkey dinner. The other says "I'm a vegetarian." "You're kidding? I thought only kooks were vegetarians!" "I thought only kooks ate turkey!" And they start fighting over whether they're going to eat meat or not. That's unwise. God has accepted both. v. 13 *"Therefore let us stop passing judgement on one another. Instead make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way."* There are principles here: Whatever you do have a clear conscience about it. Don't offend other people. Don't judge each other.

The fact is at our church we have people here that drink alcoholic beverages. We have people who think that is absolutely wrong but others say they have a clear conscience on that. We have both in our church. Depending on which verses you select you could make a case either way. Which side do you want to prove and I'll prove it to you. There are a lot of Scriptures in the Bible to prove either way.

v. 22 *"So whatever you believe about these things, keep them between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves."* Happy is the guy who's got a clear conscience. You've got freedom on areas that are not clearly spelled out in scripture. There's freedom. If you can't do it in faith, he says, *"The man who has doubts is condemned if he eats because his eating is not from faith and everything that does not come from faith is sin."* If

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you can't do it in faith, it's wrong. Even if it's OK for everyone else in the world. Whatever it is. If you can't watch TV in faith, you better not watch it. Whatever is not of faith is sin. Keep it between you and the Lord, don't flaunt it. Enjoy the liberty you have but you don't flaunt it. You don't judge each other and don't use it to be a stumbling block.

v. 20 *"Don't destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean but it's wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It's better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else to cause your brother to fall."* Put the other person first.

It's wrong when we judge people on the basis of external observances. Christians disagree on many different things.

6. James 4:11 *"Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it."* If I judge you and the law has already said, "Don't do it," I'm saying I'm more important than the law. I'm putting myself above the law. I'm making myself the law. I'm the creator and judge of all things. **It's wrong to judge when it causes you to speak evil about another Christian.** Anything that causes me to speak evil about another Christian, maybe to ruin their reputation, is wrong. We are to hate wrong but we're to love people even when they are doing wrong. Ephesians 4:29 says we're always to speak positively, speak only those things that build up and encourage. Christians ought to be known for their encouragement not their criticism. We don't need nagging; we need encouragement. We know what's right, we just need encouragement to do it. I would like to be known as an encourager. I think that's what God wants us to be.

7. I Corinthians 4:5 *"Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time. [Circle "nothing"] Wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts."* To understand this you have to understand the verses around it. What is Paul talking about? He's talking about motives. Everywhere Paul went his motives were constantly being challenged, questioned. He is saying **we have no right to judge other people's motives and question why they do what they do.** He says, *"wait until the Lord comes."* It's premature to judge people's motives. Why is it premature? Nobody really knows what's in somebody else's heart. You can guess but you don't know. To judge somebody means we're judging without all the facts. Only God has the right to judge because he can see in the heart. The Bible says that someday when the Lord comes back, *"he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's heart."* I have a hard enough time just trying to figure out my own motives about a lot of things, much less making a good guess at yours. So do you. A lot of times we don't know why we do what we do. What makes us think we can figure out what makes other people do what they do? We have a hard time just judging our own selves. But one day it's all going to be brought to light.

Story from a book by David Roper: Once a group of young men decided to play a practical joke on a young bachelor executive who worked with them in Dallas. It was the custom each Thanksgiving for the president of the firm to give free turkeys to all employees. The young friend had indicated his displeasure at the idea since, being a young bachelor, he had no idea what he'd do with a whole turkey and furthermore, he had no desire to cook it. His friends, therefore, confiscated his turkey and replaced

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it with one made out of paper mache, the only remains of the original bird being the neck and the tail which protruded from the paper wrappings. The day before the holidays, the birds were handed out ceremoniously. Our friend, unaware of the switch, tucked his bogus bird under his arm and caught the streetcar for home. As he was setting there feeling a little self-conscious, a man seated himself on the bench next to him. Since the turkey was an obvious conversation piece they were soon engaged talking about the turkey. In the course of time, the young man learned his companion was without a job and down on his luck for some time. Therefore he had dim prospects for a happy Thanksgiving. He was on his way home with a few pounds of hamburger meat tucked in his coat pocket to be the entire Thanksgiving meal for his family. Our friend had a brilliant idea. Why not swap? The man, of course, was delighted. The generosity was overwhelming. With a great sense of gratitude they made the exchange. Of course, you can imagine the outcome and the man's thoughts when he removed the wrappings from the turkey and his children crowded around wide-eyed with anticipation. The young man, when he learned what his friends had done, searched for days for that man who he had unwittingly cheated but unfortunately he was never found. The point is obvious. The poor, defrauded man, from his vantage point, would never understand the young man's actions. To this day, I'm sure the incident stands out in his mind as an example of man's inhumanity to man. Yet from the young man's point of view, his motives were pure.

You can never judge anybody's motives, what they're doing. You don't know what's going on.

HOW DO YOU BREAK THE HABIT OF JUDGING OTHERS

1. Remember that I'll be judged by the same standards that I use to judge other people.

If you want something to help you be a little more considerate, look at Matthew 7:1-2 *"Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you, for God will judge you in the same way you judge others, and he will apply to you the same rules you apply to others."* I'm in trouble! The way we judge others -- the same measure we mete out is the same measure we get back. If you want something to help you break the habit of talking critically about other people, remember that. What you dish out will be dished back to you. What you sow you're going to reap.

2. Remember that each of us is accountable to God.

"Every one of us, then, will have to give an account of himself to God. So then, let us stop judging one another."

You're not accountable to me in the ultimate sense of every area of your life. I don't have to report to you. But one day we're all going to stand before God and then God is going to know our motives. How's God going to judge? He's going to judge honestly, fairly, truthfully. It won't be based on heresy, rumors, third hand passed down stuff, but based on the facts. He will judge impartially. In the court system it seems some people get off lighter than others. Sometimes it just doesn't seem fair. That's true. The Bible never said that the world would be fair. But one day God is going to settle the score. Why is it that people who do all kinds of evil things get away with it at times? Why is that? Is it fair that Hitler

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could ruin so many lives and then just take his own life? The Bible says that on the other side, God settles the score. One day we'll all be judged by the Lord and we'll give an account to Him.

3. Remember how much God has been merciful to me.

James 2:13 *"Mercy triumphs over judgement."* There is a principle greater than criticism. It's the principle of forgiveness. The principle of mercy. Jesus said, *"Blessed are the merciful."* Matthew 18 is the story of the unforgiving servant. He owed \$50,000 to his master. His master forgave him. He went out and found the guy that owed him \$5 and strangled the guy because he wouldn't pay him. When the master heard about it he took the servant and said, "If that's the way you want to play the game, OK. You're unforgiving, it will be unforgiven of you." The Bible says we're to be merciful because God has given us so much mercy. The reason why I have to be patient with you is because God is patient with me. The reason you have to be patient with me is because God is patient with you. That's the way it goes. None of us get what we deserve. If we did we wouldn't be here. It's all by God's grace.

We take advantage of God's grace. We forget how good it is. When you first become a Christian you understand how much you're forgiven. It's the most thrilling experience and you're really grateful for it. The longer you're a Christian, the more you take it for granted. Kind of like the boss who gives everybody in the company a \$350 Christmas bonus. Everybody praises the boss. The second year he decides to do it again -- a second \$350. By the third Christmas you've already spent the money and thinking "What is he going to do this year?" If he didn't give it you'd be upset. We become conditioned to be ungrateful. If God's been gracious with us we need to be gracious with others. The most forgiving person is the most forgiven person. Some of the people I feel closest to in our church are people who have fallen the hardest. They aren't trying to pretend they are somebody they're not. Once you've fallen, made mistakes, realized it and faced up to it, you're a lot more sympathetic, open and forgiving, kind and loving with other people.

Poem I read this week called "The Wrecking Crew"

I stood on the street of a busy town
Watching men tearing a building down
With a ho heave ho and a lusty yell
They swung a beam and a side wall fell

I asked the foreman of the crew
"Are those men as skilled
As those you'd hire if you'd wanted to build?
Ah, no, no indeed,
Just common laborers are all I need
I can tear down as much in a day or two
As would take skilled men a year to do

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And then I thought as I went my way
Just which of these two roles am I trying to play?
Have I walked life's road with care,
Measuring each deed with rule and square?
Or am I one of those who roam the town
Content with the labor of tearing down?

Prayer:

This is an area that every one of us have to deal with -- a critical attitude, being judgmental. If you want to find some fault in somebody you can. Everybody is imperfect. It's all in what you decide to look at. If you choose to make friends in life one of the things you have to do is overlook their faults. Love the good parts in them and overlook the bad parts. If you want to have a successful marriage you have to learn to stop criticizing and questioning your mate's motives. Look at the good parts in their life. Why do we spend an entire session just on this? Because it's one of the most common problems. James says it's really playing God. Only God has the right to judge, evaluate and criticize someone. He's got all the facts. He's impartial. We're not. It's not our place. It will be a liberating experience when you realize that God has not called you to judge other people but He's called you to be accountable to Him.

Would you pray a prayer like this in your heart, "Lord, help me to quit playing God. Help me this week to not be critical and judgmental, to watch my mouth and not gossip and pass on damaging information, but to build up others and to share only those things that encourage and lift up. Lord, thank You for your grace in my life. Thank You that You don't give me what I deserve but You give me what I need. Help me to do that to others, to pass on to them what they need. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen."