

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: Do you remember the scene in *The Wizard of Oz* where the wizard is found out? Dorothy and her friends have done all that the Wizard required of them and now they want to go home. They appear before this terrifying fiery face, knees shaking, and he tells them to come back tomorrow. Dorothy says, “*If you’re really great and powerful you’d keep your promises.*” And the voice thunders, “*Do you presume to criticize the Great Oz?*” And about that time, her little dog Toto pulls back the green curtain to the side, revealing the actual Great and Powerful Oz to be just a humbug. And Dorothy, shocked, says, “*You’re a very bad man.*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWyCCJ6B2WE> (1 min.)

- B. Prepare yourself. Toto is about to pull on our green curtain. Turn to **James 4**. James tells us again and again that if life’s pressures are to build our faith instead of expose our weakness we have to be humble—and in particular, humble enough to submit ourselves to God. Last week he told us just what that looks like in **Jas.4:7-10...** Repeat v.10 with me, “*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*”

- C. After the sermon on that last Sunday we had Communion and we sang, “*It Is Well with My Soul.*”

“My sin—O the bliss of this glorious thought—

My sin, not in part but the whole,

Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.”

And we went home rejoicing.

But James isn’t quite finished with us yet. With this verse still on our minds he pulls back the green curtain and there we are, pulling levers and blowing smoke, and pretending we are the Great and Powerful Oz. **Actually, he shows how we presume ourselves to be God!**

- D. If we are to humble ourselves, we must be on guard against two common sins of presumption that lurk within us.

Here’s the first: **vv.11-12...**

I. **WE SIN WHEN WE PRESUME WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO SPEAK AGAINST OTHERS (4:11-12)**

- A. My translation uses the word *slander* and then twice uses the phrase, *speak against*. It's actually the same Greek word three times. It carries the idea of **words poisonous with ill will**. Jas. 3:8 says the tongue is “*a restless evil, full of deadly poison*.” **To *speak against* is to sink our fangs into someone else.**

James isn't saying we can't disagree or take someone to task. **The real issue is where these toxic words come from.** When they are the language of our evil heart they hurt people. They don't come from heaven, James says; they are “earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” We have fights and quarrels because our own inner desires to feel good rise up like a vigilante mob within us, armed and dangerous.

The issue isn't whether or not the other person has it coming. **No matter what someone else has done or what they are like, we *never* have permission for toxic words.** Whether our words are angry, snide, mocking, or sickly sweet; whether they're insulting, critical, cutting, or accusing—when they arise from our own “*bitter envy and selfish ambition*”—they are wrong.

We do our worst damage in our homes and in our church. We excuse ourselves because we think our spouse had it coming, or that our parents don't really matter. Or just because “she is impossible!!” In a church, this kind of talk kills. Malicious talk is like a deadly, fast-spreading virus, spread by seemingly innocuous phone calls and whispered chats, disguised with a knowing smile or a chuckle or a black robe of righteous indignation. But this kills!

- B. It is terrible to *speak against one another* but that's not the half of it. **V.11:** “*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.*” What law? Look at **Jas. 2:8**, “*If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your*

neighbor as yourself, you are doing right.” When we speak maliciously to or about other people we are saying that God’s law, “Love your neighbor,” doesn’t cover this situation. As if there were small print, or a footnote reading, *“Except in cases of people who really tick you off or whom you need to take down a peg.”* We might as well just come out and say it: *“Love your neighbor,”* doesn’t necessarily apply to me all the time.

We not only break God’s royal law when we *speak against* others, but in our impunity and pride we think we have every right to. **We take the law into our own hands when we speak maliciously against others.** Remember how in westerns the sheriff would say, *“Son, I **am** the law in this town.”* That’s what we’re saying in God’s jurisdiction. We pin our little tin badge on our vests and put some swagger in our words, tapping our six-shooter tongue to make our point.

- C. James extends his reasoning in **v.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?”* When we speak against others we usurp God’s role and his jurisdiction. We call that **contempt of court**. I know a guy once with a hair-trigger temper. He was in court for his divorce and chewed out the judge. Got three days in jail!

Remember God coming down to deliver his Law on Mt. Sinai. Darkness, thunder, lightning, earth-shaking, tablets carved on stone by the finger of God. Or do you remember Rev. 20 envisioning the End, *“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and heavens fled from his presence... And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.”* So when we impose our verbal abuse on others we say to our Lawgiver and Judge, *“I’ll take it from here. I can handle this.”* And God says, *“Who are you to judge your neighbor?! You’re in contempt of court!”*

- D. Consider the God-blessed alternative. Back to **Jas 1:2**, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.”* Many kinds of trials come

from people who make our lives difficult but James says there's a silver lining—*pure joy*, in fact! *“Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”* Managing our tongues with humility when we faced with the trials of difficult people is a test of faith. Will we trust God enough to obey his royal law, *“Love your neighbor as yourself,”* or will we be faithless and take the law into our own hands. **Will we trust God enough to keep our mouths shut?** *“Quick to listen. Slow to speak. Slow to become angry.”* When we humbly do what is right, again and again, and when we repent for doing what is wrong, James says we will become *“mature and complete, not lacking anything.”* That is now Christians grow.

Look at **Jas 2:12-13**, *“Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, [which is the royal law, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’—a law that requires us to show mercy] because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”* When we show mercy through the things we say the God-given pay-off is that we will receive mercy. *“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”*

Now it seems like an abrupt change of subject but James is uncovering another **sin of presumption** frantically working the levers behind the green curtain. **Vv.13-16...**

II. WE SIN WHEN WE PRESUME THAT WE MAKE OUR OWN SUCCESS (4:13-16)

- A. Do you think James is condemning planning or goal-setting? No. It is an attitude and he points it out clearly in v.13: “You boast in your arrogant schemes.” The issue is presuming that “I am the master of my fate.” Look again at what that statement: *“Today or tomorrow [when I decide] we will go to this city [I will go where I want], spend a year there [on my timetable], carry on business [do as I wish] and make money [be a success].”* That's pretty much the American ideal! There's a person with confidence,

assertiveness, the entrepreneurial spirit. There's a successful salesman, or a student who's going places.

- B. That person is a fish-eyed fool, a gullible blind speculator, the poorest of business thinkers. *Especially* if such a person claims Christ. They should know better. It's funny how this con artist can blind us even to the obvious: "*Why, you don't even know what will happen tomorrow!*" And you're planning your whole life?! "*You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*" You're not exactly a safe investment!

Remember Jesus' story about the successful man who was going to build more barns and then take life easy? "*But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'*" Then Jesus said, "*This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.*" [Luke 12:20-21]

- C. Our God-blessed alternative is to rest in the Lord's will – v.15... These are Christian magic words—"*if it is the Lord's will.*" **Illus.:** We occasionally go to plays and one of my pet peeves is when an actor carries something like a suitcase or a box that obviously doesn't have in it what they're pretending it has. This phrase can be like that. For me to say about some plan, *if it is God's will*, **means that God's will matters to me.** It means I'm **willing to be his servant**; even to **suffer**. This is what Jesus said when facing the cross. It means **I've thought and prayed about my plans** to set up business in another city, that I've been **open to godly counsel**, and that my goal is not merely my own success but that which will **please the Lord**. Then when we say, "*If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that,*" well, there's some heft and that trust.
- D. Think of the security such trust brings to your life. Rather than presuming on God's will you are resting in it. God's will is *to keep you in all your ways* and to make your paths straight. God's will is to give you peace, to make you a

light, to make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. Illus.: Not long ago, when Dave Hesselgrave was emailing me about Gertrude's recovery, he wrote, "*We miss VCL very much and hope to be able to attend services before too long, D.V.*" I confess I didn't know what D.V. means so I asked someone and learned it is from the Latin, *Deo Volente. God willing.* That's the way to go through life.

Conclusion

Beware the man madly pulling levers behind the green curtain. That man may be you trying to play God, presuming you are have jurisdiction to break God's law, "*Love your neighbor,*" or presuming your times are in your hands.

James concludes in **v.17**, "*If anyone, then knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*"