

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK! (James 4:11, 12)

INTRODUCTION:

A pastor was once invited to dinner. During the meal he was astonished to hear the younger daughter of the family state that a person must be very brave to go to church these days. "Why do you say that?" asked the pastor. "Because," she answered, "I heard Dad tell Mom last Sunday that the preacher butchered the English, the choir murdered the anthem, and the organist drowned everybody!"

We have to be careful what we say about other people. It may be taken the wrong way. But what about intentionally saying something evil about another? This is what James seems to have in mind when he writes 4:11,12. Let me read it again but in the NIV version:

(James 4:11-12 NIV) 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 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?

We may not say bad things about people, but we have a tendency to listen to others say slanderous things. We have all seen those tabloid papers you find at the checkout line at the grocery stores, aren't you? What is their fascination? The headlines are usually eye catchers. "Dolly Parton gives birth to an Alien.:" "Eddie Murphy exposed as having 23 wives." We don't believe them, but yet they sell millions of copies. Why? These magazines hold a great attraction to the populace because they report what is known as gossip and most of it is false and slanderous.

As we look at our text today, I want to answer three questions about speaking evil of another or to slander another.

WHAT TYPE OF SPEECH IS BEING WARNED AGAINST?

The first question is, "What type of speech is being warned against?" "What is speaking evil of someone or to slander someone?" The Greek word translated here is "To speak against" comes from a combination of two Greek

words (**kata + laleo**) literally meaning - "To talk down." The English Bible also translates it "backbiter."

This word refers to the practice of talking down another person, behind their backs. Impugning someone's character or reputation by the way you talk about them.

Since many Bible scholars believe that James is writing to a predominately Jewish church, based on how he addresses his letter in 1:1 to the twelve tribes dispersed. You can imagine that a Jewish Christian may look down upon Gentiles Christians in their midst. The Gentiles had a different culture, they didn't do the things the Jewish people did. This would suggest that one type of 'evil speaking' is the general tendency to speak down about people that are different from us, different color, different customs, etc. This is not right!

This speaking against others certain includes just plain gossip. We hear something someone supposedly has done which is a moral failure and we have the tendency to pass it along to our friends. Speaking of gossip the book of Proverbs tell us that:

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts. (Prov 18:8 NIV)

This is speaking evil of another or slandering another, or impugning their character or reputation. It doesn't mean that what is said must be false. What is said might be absolutely true! In fact the thought in the passage assumes that the person being slandered probably has sinned, failed, or faltered.

The type of speech that James seems to have in mind primarily is judging other people behind their back. It is passing judgment on others without having all the facts.

It was F. B. Meyer, who once said that when we see a brother or sister falter, fail and even sin, there are two things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. We also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances.

It's very easy to talk about someone behind their back and not think it's wrong because what you are saying may very well be absolutely true. Now most of us don't see ourselves as slandering others or speaking evil against another. We don't see our problem. We may be like the man who went to the doctor to see how he could convince his wife she needed a hearing aid.

Speaking with his doctor he asked, "How can I get my wife to admit that she needs a hearing aid?"

"I'll tell you what you need to do," his doctor replied. When you get home peek your head through the door and ask, "Honey, what's for dinner?" "If she doesn't answer, go into the living room and say, "Honey, what's for dinner," Then walk into the kitchen and ask, "Honey, what's for dinner?" "If she still doesn't answer walk right up behind her and say, "Honey, what's for dinner? Then you will be able to convince her that she needs a hearing aid.

"Great! I think that will work."

So he repeats the question as he goes through the house. No answer any of the times. Then he walked right up behind his wife and spoke directly into her ear. "Honey, what's for dinner?"

She turned around in a huff and resolutely replied, "For the fourth time, I said WE WERE HAVING SPAGHETTI!!!"

Most of us don't see that we are the ones who have the problem!

WHY GOD CALLS SLANDERS, GOSSIPERS, AND EVIL SPEAKERS A GROSS SIN

So the second question we must answer from our text is, "Why does God call slanderers, or gossipers, or evil speakers such a gross sin. James answers that question in verse 11b:

Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him 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 is James talking about here? If you'll look at the end of verse 12 in several translations, you'll notice that James uses the word, "Neighbor." That word "Neighbor" seems to confirm that the Law James is speaking of in verse 11

is that great commandment of God set before us in the Old Testament and quoted by Jesus in the New Testament to , **"Love your neighbor as yourself."**

To slander someone is to violate that perfect law of Love James referred to earlier in James 1:25.

He is saying that the law of love is not all that important; it can be sometimes ignored, neglected, abused, and violated. The person who talks about others is guilty of double sin: he not only violates the law of love, he talks about and criticizes others for breaking some commandment or for coming short and failing in some area of life. He is a double hypocrite: he is guilty of slandering others and of using the law to slander them. He is, as Scripture says, speaking evil of the law. His speaking evil against his brother does not uphold the law of love; it speaks evil and tears down the love of love.

When you act as the judge of your neighbor by speaking evil of them, then you are not keeping the law of love, but saying that God's law of love is not worthy of you keeping it. **"When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it."** This is serious in God's eyes. He says in verse 12: **"There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?"**

When we criticize another, we are saying that the law he has broken is important, very important—so important that he should not have broken it—but the law of love is not important enough to keep us from criticizing him. We judge the law he has broken as important and the law of love as not so important. When we pick and choose, we set ourselves up above the law of God. We make ourselves the judge of the law; we make ourselves lawgivers.

The bible doesn't tell us this is a serious sin – it tells us that this one of the worst of all...

HOW THEN SHOULD I DO TO KEEP ME FROM THIS SIN?

OK. I agree that I am not to gossip, slander, or harp on someone falling into sin. What then should I do to keep me from this sin? Let me share a series of Scriptures that will prove helpful if we seek to follow them.

First, realize that every word spoken in secret to someone will be revealed in the day of judgment. Listen to these two sobering sayings of Jesus:

(Luke 12:3 NKJV) "Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

When will they be proclaimed? I believe at the judgment:

(Mat 12:36-37 NKJV) "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. {37} "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Secondly, Repent and make a personal commitment not to speak evil of anyone.

(Eph 4:31 NKJV) Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

(1 Pet 2:1-2 NKJV) Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, {2} as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

Realize that it is part of spiritual maturity to overcome this bad habit. Therefore grow spiritually by exercising the means of grace, prayer, Scripture reading, and being in service of the Lord.

Finally on the positive, do these things:

(Phil 4:8 NKJV) Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things.

And again in Colossians

(Col 4:6 NKJV) Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

And some advice from my godly grandmother: “If you can’t say something good about somebody, don’t say anything at all.”

And how a group of pastors sought to curb their speaking badly about others:

Pastor Alan Redpath spoke about a code of conversation that he and some colleagues adopted for their discussions. It was based on the word THINK.

T – is it true?

H - is it helpful?

I - is it inspiring?

N – is it necessary?

K – is it kind?

We need to THINK before we speak. Is it true? Helpful? Inspiring? Necessary? Kind?

So let’s give heed to James’ admonishment. **(James 4:11 NKJV) Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.**

Amen? Amen!