

Sin of Slander Towards ...

There are two places I would like you to mark in your Bible this morning. First, mark James, which comes after Hebrews and before 1 Peter. James is where we find our study passage in chapter 4. Second, mark the Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. Isaiah comes after Song of Solomon and before Jeremiah. Please mark Isaiah chapter 14. Let's begin with prayer.

In Proverbs Solomon wrote, as brother Elijah just read, God hates 7 things and they are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, lying tongue, one who sheds innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, those who embrace evil, false witnesses who lie and one who spreads strife. James takes a narrower focus saying, **“Do not speak evil against one another.”** Solomon addressed those who speak evil in his list as well – lying tongue, false witness and one who spreads strife. James has written to us about the power of the tongue for good or evil. **“How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.”** (James 3:5-6) To speak evil against another is to slander. Noah Webster defined “slander” in his 1828 dictionary as **“a false tale or report maliciously uttered, and tending to injure the reputation of another by lessening him in the esteem of his fellow citizens, by exposing him to impeachment and punishment, or by impairing his means of living.”** God sees slander and speaking evil as a serious sin against him and our fellow humans. Or to say it as Will Rogers did, **“So live that you wouldn't be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.”** Our society by its nature is filled with gossip and slander.

Slander defames another's good name. Proverbs says, "A good name is to be more desired than great wealth." (Proverbs 22:1) I do not remember what I did, I was about 11 or 12 years old, but I do remember the look on my father's face and the words he spoke to me. I thought I was going to get a whipping, but instead my dad sat me down and looked me squarely in the eye. With pain in his face he told me that the only thing of true value he came into life with was his dad's name and that the only thing of lasting value he had to give me was his name. He said the name "Butler" was a name of honor and respected, but I had dishonored his name and my name. The choice was before me – to hold my name in honor or dishonor, to have a name of value to pass to my children or give them a name of little value. He told me I was old enough to begin living life as a man and be held accountable for my decisions and behavior. I would much rather of had a beating than to see the disappointment in my father's eyes. If we call ourselves Christian then we take on a name of the very greatest value. Therefore, how we live and speak is important.

When our society was more strongly influenced by God's Word, it too held truth in high esteem and lying or slander as evil and passed laws allowing those who have been slandered to sue for defamation of character. However, a society models itself after its leaders and their leaders are a reflection of the society that elected them. So today, an honest politician is an oxymoron. If one would were to look up the definition of politician in Webster's and Bill's new modern dictionary the first definition given would be the one word "liar." Because our society has been moving away from God for many years it no longer values the things God values. But even though the world no longer desires the honest and true, and those of the world slander to gain advantage – there will be a terrible penalty to pay in the end. As Hamlet warned Ophelia, "Be thou as chaste as ice, pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny (slander)" To be honest and true in a world that tends towards the

selfish and profane speaks volumes over one's lifetime and is a great witness to the world.

Jesus condemned speaking evil or slander, saying **“Hear and understand: ¹¹ it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person. ... ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person.”** (Matthew 15:10-11 and 19-20) There are many – many sayings and stories concerning the tongue or mouth that speaks evil and slanders recorded in the Bible – God is making a point that people today seem to have forgotten and that it is a grievous sin against both God and others to speak evil or slander. Is not lying and slander the foundation of the first sin in the Bible? Satan told Eve, **“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”** (Genesis 3:1) God's honesty is put into question and doubt into Eve's heart. Satan continues a few verses later to continue speaking evil and slander to get Adam and Eve to sin by eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, he says, **“You will not surely die.”** This is a half-truth, for they would not die physically, at least, immediately, but they would die spiritually and if in continued sin – they would also die eternally. Satan continues, ⁵**“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”** (Genesis 6:4-5) Lies and slander is who Satan is. Satan's common name is the “devil” which is Aramaic meaning “slanderer.” The devil always misrepresents God's character, motives and words. **“Then the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’ ”** (Genesis 3:13) God then pronounces doom because of sin upon both man and the devil who is the serpent.

The Bible clearly teaches that slander or speaking evil against another is sin, but this does not mean we are not to rebuke those who persist in their sins. For those who claim the name of Christ as their Lord and Savior their unrepentant sin is

to be exposed as Matthew 18, verses 15-17 addresses, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

According to both God the Father and the Son, Christians are to take slander, lying and speaking evil very seriously and if one does not repent and is warned privately and still does not repent the matter is to be taken public before the church.

Speaking truth and not evil is just one of the several tests James writes about as the outward sign of the inward man and to know if one has saving faith or not. James guides and warns believers that they need to have control of their tongue and avoid speaking evil. James says we should examine four areas of our thinking and behavior and speech. These are how one acts towards and what we think of others, of the law, of God and of ourselves.

... Others

James begins our passage in verse 11 with, “Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother...” Words are repeated to give emphasis and here we have brothers, brother and brother. This threefold repetition brings to mind that those we call Christian are brothers and sisters and are family. The beloved in Christ are to be a closer family than our blood relatives who are not believers. Slander has no place in God’s family – a family supports and protects each other for there is a foundation of divine love in each person. As Jesus loved you and gave his life for you so too you should love your family in Christ. Keeping our thoughts, behavior and speech right towards each other is a powerful witness to the world. Peter wrote, “Keep your conduct among

the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:12)

Slander within the church is wrong and sinful, and it damages the church and those within the Church. This is why Paul quoted the second of the two great commandments given by Christ in the New Testament in his letter to the Galatians, “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.” (Galatians 5:14-15)

Slander in his church was of such great concern to Christ, the living Head of God’s church, that he dealt with it in Matthew chapter 18 as we examined a few minutes ago, Jesus began with, “If your brother sins against you...” He gave the church and the family members within the church a framework and process for dealing with sin and slander properly. Before we open our mouth and make a rude or slanderous comments we should take pause and remember what Christ said earlier in chapter 18 of Matthew, “...whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6) As I read this afresh it certainly made me pause as I considered the things I have said from bitterness, frustration, envy, meanness and just outright insensitivity. My Lord and your Lord says, it would be better to die a horrible death than to slander someone you call brother or sister in Christ. So serious was the concern of Christ for the pain inflicted on each other within his family and our temptation to sin, two verses later he says, “If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.”⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.” (Matthew 18:8-9) I know by being part of the church - all of us have been

hurt and at times we were unjustly hurt by those within the church, it was especially hurtful when leadership fails to protect, but this is not what God desires or commands. We must not judge God by the behavior of people. We need to stay engaged in the church and work to be part of the solution and healing and not be part of the problem.

... The Law

As we continue to examine James' instruction I again read verse 11, "The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge." Let me unpack what this means. To love one another is to fulfill the law. Paul instructed, "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." (Romans 13:8) What we see here is Paul echoing what James had written earlier and most probably Paul had read, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well." (James 2:8) As Paul echoed James they both echoed their Lord Jesus who gave his law or great commandment to his church and his follow heirs of the kingdom of God, saying, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31) Jesus condenses the 10 Commandments into 2 based in love. This is consistent because the foundation of the ten is love; beginning with Exodus 20, verse 3, to "have no other gods before Me" is based on our love of the God who created us. If you examine the other 9 commandments this week, I believe you will see they are all founded in love and by that love God's law is fulfilled. Since slander is a violation of the law of love then slander is not only speaking unjustly against someone but it also violates the law and condemns the law of God. Therefore to have victory over the sin of slander and

gossip requires one to place their self under the law of love's authority and do so out of love of God the Father and our Savior the Son.

... God

As James marches on to verse 12 it focuses on God, saying, “**There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy.**” Following the logic of James instruction if one slanders they do not exhibit love for their brother and they place themselves above the law and by this behavior they then attempt to place themselves above God. When we place ourselves first whether because of selfish ambition, lusts, seeking power or a desire for revenge we place ourselves on the same level as Satan. Please turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 14. As I read from Isaiah 14, beginning at verse 13 count the number of “I wills” Satan used. Here we go, “**You, Satan, said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’**” How many “I wills” did you count? Right, there were five. We can easily look at Satan and say, “Wow what an ego and he greatly sinned against God.” Satan gets what he deserves – eternal damnation. We on the other hand are given grace, because we must realize that every sin; my sin and your sin, at its essence is a desire to elevate ourselves and violate God's law; which means we desire to elevate ourselves above God, to be in control, instead of surrendering to our Creator. James makes clear “**There is only one lawgiver and judge**” and it is not me, not you and not we - it is God. Only God is able to give the law and judge by his law because God is the only One who knows the hearts of people and can therefore perfectly apply his law.

James continues saying only God, “**the one lawgiver**” ... “**is able to save and to destroy.**” Satan did not put his trust and faith in God the Father and he tried to

destroy the Son of God for he loved himself and not God. But, but for those who place their faith in Christ, to allow Christ to give the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit and give themselves to the process of slaying themselves and living for God's glory they demonstrate their love of God the Father and Jesus Christ, God the Son. Make no mistake the Scripture teaches that those who love themselves and are unrepentive sinners will join Satan in the Lake of Fire for eternity for this is God's law.

The sin of slander, according to James and much of Scripture, is a serious sin and it exhibits a treasonous heart against God and his law of love. To control the sin of slander we must love God more than our own lives and we must love others more than we love ourselves. We must submit to Jesus' 2nd great command, **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** The supreme lawgiver and judge offers grace to those who have a repentive heart because of love.

... Ourselves

As James finished this train of thought he brings the focus back to us, you and me. He writes, **“But who are you to judge your neighbor?”** As a fallen sinner one has by nature an exaggerated view of their importance. We live in a fallen society where most everyone says, “it is all about me.” It is not hard to find this attitude in the church. Have you ever heard someone say, “If you were the only person to ever live, Christ would have come and given his life just for you.” Believers must fight our nature to be self-absorbed by spending time in prayer and study of the Word of God for this will take one out of the center, out of the spotlight. Like James, Paul also recognized this “me-ism” as a problem. Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, **“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”** Humbling oneself before

God brings obedience to his calling in your life and recognizing just as he sent his Son to serve and save others, so too, we are to live a life of service. Continuing in verse 4, “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (Romans 12:3-5) Judging and slandering others is the direct opposite of humility that James is telling the people of Christ, people of the church to live. The Body of Christ is more important than an individual.

We mature through spending time with God in prayer and the study of his Word. As we mature we are able to sin less and no longer be as rash with our tongue. Paul wrote, “When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.” (1 Corinthians 13:11) As my grandmother use to say, “Son you were given 2 ears and 1 mouth – listen twice and think before you speak once.”

Let us leave here today with a renewed effort to speak kindness and love of others. Here is a little formula that might help.

T--is it true?

H--is it helpful?

I--is it inspiring?

N--is it necessary?

K--is it kind?

If what we are about to say does not meet these requirements may we learn to remain quite. May our lives – the way we live and speak and treat others bringing glory to God our first love. May we live in God’s community of his church in peace by love. Amen!