

The Blasphemous Sin of Defaming Others, Part 1

Scripture: James 4:11

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Tonight, we're going to be looking at the fourth chapter of James and I want you to open your Bible and I want to call your attention to two verses that we're going to be looking at. At first as I glanced at these two verses that really are a self-contained unit of thought, verses 11 and 12, I read them over, studied a little bit to determine just exactly what the text was saying and what it meant. And I thought, "Well, that's fairly simple, just two simple straight-forward verses, verses 11 and 12."

And over the next couple of hours as I began to pour into this, it opened up for me a vast, vast area of truth. I said to someone tonight, "It's possible that we could spend weeks in these two verses."

There's an area of theology here that is so vast and so basic and so essential that I don't want to...I don't want to belabor the issue but I don't want to rush through it because I think it's at the very heart, the very ground floor, the very foundation of how we perceive sin...which is very important. How we perceive sin has a lot to do with how we perceive righteous and how we perceive obedience and how we perceive ourselves and God and His law, and so many, many ramifications.

And so, as we look at these two verses get ready to plunge a little bit deeper and perhaps go a little bit broader into a region of theology that will hold for us so many wonderful, wonderful insights. Let's look at those two verses, let me read them to you. James 4:11, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren, he that speaks evil of his 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. There is one lawgiver that is able to save and to destroy. Who are you that judges another?" And we'll stop at that point.

Basically, James is talking about the blasphemous sin of defaming others. The dictionary defines "defamation of character," which is a familiar term in our society, as...and I'm quoting..."an attack on the reputation of someone by publishing falsely and maliciously things that slander and injure." Let me say it again, "defamation of character is an attack on the reputation of someone by publishing falsely and maliciously things that slander and injure."

Several key things. Defamation of character has to do with publishing, that is proclaiming something. Secondly, proclaiming something that is false and thirdly, proclaiming something that is false with a malicious intent. That's defamation of character. In our country, in our society, it's against the law. It's against the civil law and you are subject to a civil lawsuit if indeed you defame someone's character.

Even our blighted and benighted society realizes that a person's reputation is his or her most valued asset. It must be protected. Society recognizes that your reputation is your stock and trade. And the courts of this nation are set to do the protecting so that people are not exposed to unfounded and life-damaging lies without recourse.

You can go back in our country's history, and I was reading a little bit about this particular issue in the early days of our nation and I was reading that in New York in the very early and founding years of New York, those who slandered or defamed another person were apprehended and the punishment was to pierce through their tongue with a hot iron and then banish them from New York. Now that would act as a deterrent, I think. But even the society itself recognized that you can't let people running around defaming people's character because you destroy them at the most vital point. And the basis of these kinds of laws and the basis of that kind of protection in our society, the protection from malicious lies really comes from a social conscience born out of heritage of the Word of God...for the dignity of man and the right of a man to have his character preserved and to be free from malicious slander is really based upon the ethics of God's Word. In fact, I found out that in my study this week that the Old Testament denounces the offense of slandering God and slandering man more than any other offense. There are more denunciations in the Old Testament of that defamation of the name of God or the name of another person than any other sin.

In a sense, it is a very destructive sin because while you can't commit every sin just because you can't do it, you're prevented from doing it from circumstances, the one sin that you can commit any time you want is to say things because you're in total control of your own mouth. And so society itself recognizes that at that point you must control people. James then brings to our attention this...this matter of the defamation of others with malicious lies intended to injure them and brings it to the forefront of our attention in a very, very forceful way. These verses are...while they seem to be brief...pungent, to put it mildly.

Now let me give you a little feel for where we are in the text. James has just pointed out that humility is the essential characteristic in one who receives saving grace. Verses 6 and 10, you remember that, verse 6, "He gives grace to the humble," verse 10, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He'll lift you up," and in between he talked about the elements of that kind of humility. He just talked about humility. And we have agreed from that text that he is saying true believers are marked by humility, it is the symbol, the sign, the identifying factor, the mark, the bench mark, if you will, the sign of authenticity of a true believer that is humble.

It is consequently true that those who manifest constant violation of a humble spirit call their own claim to salvation into question. In other words, if the humble are the ones that God saves and a person is continuously proud, then there's reason to question the claim that they may make to be saved. And James then precedes from that discussion of humility to demonstrate one specific way that humility is violated, one specific way that pride is revealed and that is through defaming other

people. That is a non-humble and proud kind of sin. And by the way, it's another test of saving faith...it is another test of saving faith.

Remember now, all through James he's giving us tests of saving faith, tests of genuine faith. And where you have a person whose life pattern is habitually malicious slander and condemnation of others, they betray an evil nature, not a new nature, not a transformed nature, and not certainly a new creation in Christ Jesus. So again we are at a point where here is a manifestation of pride as over against humility and here is another test of the validity of a claim to salvation. Is the person marked as one who is humble and manifests a good spirit toward others, or is the person malicious and slandering and are they engaged in the defamation of the character of others for their own sake.

Now to begin with, before we look at the text itself, just a general look at what the Bible has to say about this sin, this sin of slander, of saying something false about a person with a malicious intent and publishing it around. You perhaps remember that very, very familiar passage in the sixth chapter of Proverbs, you'll remember it as soon as I read it. "These things does the Lord hate, these six things, yea seven are an abomination to Him; a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaks lies and he that sows discord among brothers." God hates a lying tongue. God hates false witness. God hates that which sows discord. Three out of those six, yea seven things that God hates have to do with how you speak about other people.

In Exodus chapter 23 and verse 1 you have the command of God against this sin, a command that is reiterated with tremendous force in the New Testament in these words, Ephesians 4:31, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and evil speaking...same term is used here...be put away from you with all evil." And what he is talking about there are the sins that destroy personal relationships, one of which is slander, and he says all those sins that destroy personal relationships need to be put away.

In Psalm 50 there are two verses, verses 19 and 20, which basically describe the wicked as characteristically addicted to slander. It is characteristic of wicked people to slander. Jeremiah 6:28 and Jeremiah 9:4 say essentially the same thing, that evil men walk with slander. It is to say that it is for them a way of life. Nothing makes people feel better about themselves than to slander somebody else. In Matthew 15:19 our Lord Jesus associated slander with the violent sins that proceed out of a grossly wicked heart.

Scripture chronicles the devastating affects of this kind of speech, this defaming speech. In Proverbs 16:28 and Proverbs 17:9 the Scripture says it utterly destroys friendships. In Proverbs 18:8 and 26:22 the Scripture says it leaves deep scarring wounds in the soul of the one slandered. In Proverbs 26:20 it reveals how it leads ultimately to conflict. And Proverbs 6:19, as I read to you a moment ago, how it sows discord among the brothers. Scripture makes much of this, as I said, more than any other single

sin in the Old Testament and speaks of its devastation in every dimension of life.

To look at a couple of illustrations, take your Bible to the Old Testament for a moment and the tenth chapter of 2 Samuel, the tenth chapter of 2 Samuel, I want you to be there for a moment cause I'm going to read through this section and you'll find it fascinating, to say the least. "It came to pass after this that the king of the children of Ammon died and Hanun, his son, reigned in his stead. Then said David," and of course the Ammonites, you remember, were of a category of enemies to the people of God, "Then said David, `I will show kindness unto Hanun, the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness unto me." Even though there was a certain sense in which they were enemies, there had been kindness in the way that David had been treated by the father of this new king. And David wanted to return that and show great kindness to this son by the name of Hanun. "And David sent to console him by the hand of his servants for his father." When his father died, David wanted to show a bit of gentleness and sympathy and consolation and he sent that kind of message and perhaps some attending gifts to express his consolation. "And David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon. And the princes of the children of Ammon said to Hanun, their lord, `Do you think that David does honor your father that he has sent comforters unto you?" Are you so stupid as to believe this guy is sincere? "Has not David rather sent his servants unto you to search out the city, to spy it out and overthrow it?" This is a plot.

And so his intimate associates lie to him about David. They maliciously slander the motives and intentions of David who really did want to comfort the guy in the death of his father and wanted to maintain some kind of peaceful coexistence. "But when Hanun heard this, and as any king would be, he was somewhat paranoid. And he took David's servants and shaved off one half of their beards."

You say, "Well, is that so bad?" Well a beard in that time of the world and in the Middle East was the sign of your dignity, was the sign of your manliness. And so it was really a mockery and a somewhat of a human desecration to do that. That wasn't the half of it, shaved off one half of their beards, cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks and sent them away. And that was, of course, even more embarrassing. They have been embarrassed, defamed, dishonored. And, of course, for a Jew to be exposed in that way was a fearful thing. And all of this to guys who came to be nice. And the whole thing was convoluted because of the lying advisors that Hanun had.

When they told it to David, he said to meet them because the men were greatly ashamed. I mean, they were out in a bush somewhere, they wouldn't even come into town. So he sent somebody out to help them. "And the king said, `Tarry at Jericho until your beards grow.'" Obviously their clothing wouldn't grow so they had to get new clothing, but their beards would grow. They wouldn't come into town without their beards. That was very, very much a part of their male identity. Stay at Jericho until your beards grow, it's got to be...I don't know how long it takes to grow a beard, I tried it once...but it was a while.

"And when the children of Ammon saw that they had become odious before David..." Boy, David was upset. "The children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob and the Syrians of Zobah, 20,000 foot men and King Maacah, a thousand men, and of Tob, 12,000 men." They went out and got a bunch of mercenaries getting ready to fight because they figured David was so mad they were going to have a war.

"And the children of Ammon came out and put the battle in array at the entrance of the gate and the Assyrians of Zobah and Rehob and Tob and Maacah were by themselves in the field." And here comes this army and nothing has happened. David was being nice. He was being gentle. Some lying, slanderous people falsified his attitude and it created here an armed war.

"And Joab, who is the captain of David's army, saw the front of the battle was against him before and behind." Now they're at war, they're at war over absolutely nothing. They're at war because of slander. And so they had...he says he took them choice men of Israel and put them in array against the Syrians. "And the rest of the people he delivered into the hand of Abishai his brother that he might put them in array against the children of Ammon." So now he's got the Syrians who are the mercenaries, the Ammonites who are the ones that cut off the beards and cut off the clothes. And he's got his two generals, as it were, on the one hand Joab, on the other hand Abishai and they've got their troops and off they go.

"He said if the Syrians are too strong for you...for me, then you'll help me. If the children of Ammon are too strong for you, I'll come and help you. Be of good courage, let's play the men for our people..." in other words, let's be men and go to battle. "And for the cities of our god and the Lord do that which seemeth to him good." This is bizarre. I mean, it's all for nothing, nothing happened. David didn't want a war. The Ammonites didn't want a war. And they got a war because some people slandered David.

"Joab drew near, the people who were with him unto the battle against Syrians and they fled before him. And when the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fled, they fled...then fled they also before Abishai and entered into the city. So Joab returned from the children of Ammon, he came to Jerusalem. And when the Syrians saw they were smitten before Israel, they gathered themselves together and Hadarezer sent out and brought the Syrians who were beyond the river and they came to Helam; and Shobach," and all these names will be on the quiz, "the captain of the host of Hadarezer and went before them. And it was told David, he gathered all Israel together, passed over the Jordan, came to Helam and the Assyrians set themselves in array against David and fought with him."

Now get this. The Syrians haven't got anything to do with this. They didn't do anything. And now they're in war with David, Ammonites have split. "And the Syrians fled before Israel. David slew seven hundred chariots of the Syrians and forty thousand horsemen." This is a massacre. "And smote

Shobach." That will teach him to take his Shobach and stay where he was. "The captain of the host and he died there." Well, everybody's entitled to a few.

"And when all the kings who were servants to Hadarezer saw that they were smitten before Israel, they made peace with Israel." Yeah, peace with Israel after nearly 50,000 people are dead because some people lied about the motives of David.

Chapter 11 starts, "And it came to pass after the year was ended at the time when kings go forth to battle that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel and they destroyed the children of Ammon." They wiped out the Syrians. And they wiped out the Ammonites. Why? Because somebody lied. Some stupid people said things that were not true and tens of thousands of people were massacred. Incredible.

First Kings 21...1 Kings 21, verse 13, "There came in two fellows, two men, worthless fellows, base fellows...we would call them criminal types...sat before him and the worthless men witnessed against him, even against Naboth in the presence of the people saying, `Naboth did blaspheme God and the king and then they carried him forth out of the city and stoned him with stones so that he died."

You remember the story? Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard and so these men came in and lied about Naboth, slandered him and he was murdered. He was stoned, verse 14 says, and he's dead. "Go tell Jezebel she can give the vineyard to her wimpy husband."

You can read Ezra chapter 4, chapter 5 and it would record for you the account of the lying slander of the enemies of the Jews, the lying slander reported to Artaxerxes and later on to Darius and both times the lies given to Artaxerxes and Darius were given to the enemies of God's people because they wanted to stop them from rebuilding their city and their temple.

You could go to Esther and read the whole story of Haman. Haman was the agent of Satan to try to wipe out the Jewish people who at that particular time were captive in Persia, the Medo-Persian Empire. And you remember Haman got the king to put out a decree that all of those Jews were to be killed. And he slandered them with an intent of wiping out the whole race. However, by the intervention of the providence of God, the murder of the Jews was stopped and Haman was hanged on his own gallows. But he would have intended by his slander and his malicious lies to have massacred an immense portion of the whole Jewish race.

You come into the New Testament and nothing hits you harder if you read the gospel record than the way the Lord Jesus Christ was slandered. In fact, in Matthew 11:19 they said of Him, "Behold, a man gluttonous and a wine bibber...an alcoholic..., a friend of tax collectors and sinners." That's what they said about Jesus. A sinner, a friend of tax collectors, a drunk, a glutton...slanderer.

Finally it came to pass that He faced His own execution and all they could bring into the court to testify against Him were lies. Matthew 26:59, "The chief priests, the elders, all the councils sought false witnesses against Jesus to put Him to death." They went out and found malicious liars but they found none, yea though many false witnesses came, they found none. At last came two false witnesses and said this fellow said I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.

In other words, the whole execution of Jesus Christ was predicated on the fact that some people lied. They lied about the intent of the words of our Lord. That's got to be the worse case of all.

Where does all this come from? Simply boiled down, John 8:44, "Jesus said to the leaders of Israel, 'You are of your father...whom?...the devil. And the devil is a murderer from the beginning and the father of...what?...of lies.'" He is called diabolos, the word "devil" is the Greek word diabolos, it translate to the English word "slanderer." He is the slanderer. Revelation 12 says he is the accuser of the brethren.

So, slander is basically satanic. It is characteristic of those children of Satan, those who are driven, guided...as Paul says in Ephesians 2...by the prince of the power of the air, whose lives are dominated by the rulers of darkness. Those are the people that lie and slander. It is spawned then by Satan in the wicked hearts of sinners whose character it reveals. It is released through hate. It comes out in venomous hate.

So many illustrations. I was looking in the Old Testament, Psalm 41:7, "All who hate me whisper together against Me, against Me do they devise My hurt." It's spawned out of satanic energy, as it were, in the wicked fallen nature of man through the emotion of hate...of hate. Jesus, it says, "They hated Me without a cause." And behind the hate is envy...behind the hate is jealousy. That's usually the emotion that's there. And behind that is pride from the human viewpoint.

Satan then, as it were, the father of the fallen, the father of the unregenerate, in their wicked nature and the satanic influence coming together produces pride. Out of pride comes envy. Out of envy comes hate. Out of hate comes slander. And it's always in some way or another to enhance the slanderer's person or position.

Think about it right back at the very beginning. The most graphic evil example of satanic involvement in slander is in Genesis chapter 3 where we have the fall of man. Can I remind you of it? Chapter 3, just the first six verses. "The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Yes, has God said you shall not eat of every tree of the garden, did God really say that?'" Did He say that? The implication is questioning God, questioning whether God was sincere. Did He really mean that? "And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the

fruit of the trees of the Garden but of the fruit of the tree which in the midst of the Garden, God said you shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it lest you die." And, of course, God didn't say the touch part, she just invented that. But somehow Satan had convinced her that God was insincere, that God had selfish motives, that God lacked integrity.

"You see, God knows that in the day you eat...verse 5...your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God and He doesn't want that." You see, God's trying to protect His territory, God doesn't want you invading, God doesn't want you to be like Him. God is selfish, God is insincere. God has no integrity.

And so he lied about God. He lied about the nature of God. He lied about the motives of God. He lied about the character of God. And as a result she's suckered in on the thing and bought it. People who hate will buy the lie. I've found that in my own life that when somebody picks up some slanderous thing and passes it on about someone, some malicious gossip, it's comfortable to those who have been looking for something evil to say about that person. You see, a wicked heart is proud. A wicked heart is self-serving. A wicked heart is always jealous, always envious. And Satan was jealous of God. He seethes with jealousy. That's why he said, "I will, I will, I will be like the Most High, I will be like the Most High." He couldn't stand being the highest created being in heaven, he had to be God, and it was spawned out of his pride and jealousy, the hate came and then the malicious and on-going onslaught of slanders against God and against Christ and against God's servants. So pride and jealousy and envy move the mouth with hate and out comes malicious condemning defamation that really reveals the kind of character in the person.

It certainly doesn't belong in the mouth of a Christian. Certainly has no place with the believer and obviously James is intending us to understand that. "Speak not evil one another," verse 11 says, "brethren." This is not for you to do, we should never indulge in this. In fact, the Scripture says Jesus Christ when He was reviled, reviled not again. We should never even retaliate to that. But on the other hand, Matthew 5:11 says, "Bless those that...what?...curse you." The Bible says do good to those that spitefully use you, those that speak evil against you, those that slander you. Return good for their evil.

We've all had that happen in our life. I suppose I've had it happen as much as I would like to have it happen. I've had about all that I need of that. But you have to go back to the source. When people speak lies against you, malicious slanderous lies, you realize that the source of all of this is pride, satanic temptation, envy, jealousy, hate that ultimately winds up in slander.

The sum of this brief consideration is just to give you the sense that God hates this sin. It's a despicable sin. And the people who live like this and who talk like this I think are in great danger.

In Deuteronomy 19, I mean I don't think I have to take care of vengeance, I think God does that, don't you? I don't need to retaliate to that. Deuteronomy 19:16, "If a false witness rise up against any man

to testify against him that which is wrong," in other words, to lie, "then both the men between whom the controversy is shall stand before the Lord, before the priests, the judges who shall be in those days." You see, a man just couldn't do that, even then. That's why I say in America our concern about defamation of character has a biblical base, Deuteronomy 19. "You bring the men before the judges and the judges make a diligent inquiry and behold, if the man is a false witness..." in other words, if he's a lying slanderer, "and has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he has thought to have done to his brother, so you shall put the evil away from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear and henceforth commit no more any such evil among you and your eyes shall not pity but life shall go for life, and eye for eye and tooth for tooth and hand for hand and foot for foot."

In other words, you in the structure of your country bring together judges who mete out retribution on a level that is equal to the crime planned. Very serious.

In Psalm 52 verse 1, "Why are you boasting yourself in your mischief, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually. Your tongue devises mischief like a sharp razor working deceitfully. You love evil more than good and lying rather than to speak righteousness. You love all devouring words, O you deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy you forever. He shall take you away and pluck you out of your dwelling place and root you out of the land of the living. The righteous shall see and fear and laugh." Pretty serious.

So a slanderous disposition reveals, I believe, an evil heart. And then we say this is another test of saving faith.

Now with that background we approach the text itself. Let's go to James again in case you've wandered somewhere else. The command is very clear in verse 11. "Speak not evil one of another, brethren." Do not speak evil one of another. Now listen very carefully to what I say. This does not mean we are forbidden to hate sin. It does not we are forbidden to expose sin. It does not mean we are forbidden to name sinners who will not repent. Quite the contrary. In the Scripture such discernment and exposure is commanded.

Matthew 7, you remember the text on the false prophets, the lying men who are trying to lure people on to the broad road? "Beware of false prophets." We have to be discerning. We have to be wary. We have to assess their fruits and be certain that they're legitimate.

In Matthew chapter 18 Jesus said if your brother sins you go to him. If he doesn't listen, you take two or three witnesses. And if he still doesn't listen, you tell it to...whom?...to the church...to the church.

In Acts chapter 8, that deceitful lying Simon who would have bought the Holy Spirit with money simply because he wanted the power, Peter publicly said, "Repent therefore of this your wickedness and

pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you, for I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness and you are in the bond of iniquity." And he flatly and flagrantly and openly called him a sinner to his face.

First Corinthians chapter 5, you know it very well, tells us that in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ when you are gathered together as a church with My Spirit and the power of our Lord Jesus, you deliver that immoral person over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. In other words, that's a public deliverance of a person who is living a deceitful life, masquerading as if they belonged to Christ while betraying Him in their life. And so it goes in the Scripture.

Galatians 1, Paul says I don't care if an angel comes from heaven and preaches another gospel, let him be anathema, cursed. Paul writing the second epistle to the Thessalonians says, "Mark those who aren't walking the way they ought to walk and have absolutely nothing to do with them." Titus 3:10 essentially calls for the same kind of treatment when it says rebuke a heretic. After the first and second admonition and then do...what?...reject him.

Now granted, when a person repents of sin we want to cover that. First Peter 4:18, "Love covers a multitude of...4:8 rather...love covers a multitude of sins." Galatians 6:1, "If a brother is overtaken in a fault, restore him in love considering yourself, lest you also be tempted." Where there's repentance there's covering. But where there is no repentance and sin is open and flagrant, it is to be publicly rebuked.

So this command here, "Speak not evil one of another brethren," has nothing to do...please note this...nothing to do with exposing sin with righteous intent. It has to do with lying with malicious intent. That's a big difference, big difference. The verb hear, "speaking evil," is katalaleo, it's an onomatopoeic word. That is to say onomatopoeia, you remember that Old English word, means a word which the definition of which sounds like what it is. For example, we say bees buzz, that's an onomatopoeic word because the word itself sounds like what it's describing. And so the word katalalia or katalaleo sounds like backbiting slanderous double talk...katalalia, la la la la la, blah blah blah blah blah, see. It's onomatopoeic in that sense. Stop your katalalalee. Stop the wagging of your tongue in slanderous and malicious talk.

Katalaleo, laleo is a very interesting word in the Greek. There are two words that will often be translated for speaking or saying. One is lego from which we get the word logos which is the noun form. And the other is laleo. Now lego we connect words like logic or ology, those are all connected to the root lego...logic, ology, logical. But laleo is different. Lego means to say something and it implies that it is logical. It speaks of something that presupposes thought. Whereas laleo simply describes sound and has nothing to say about thought. It can be used where there is thought, but that's not what it intends to convey. It would be the word used, for example, of the noise an animal makes, a farm animal would be laleo, not lego because they're not saying things or producing sounds that have

reason logic and presupposed thought.

So laleo is the word that would be used to express something that was mindless, that was thoughtless, that was empty-headed, that was careless, that was just noise, just sound. Shakespeare said it, "Sound and fury signifying nothing." And when you take the preposition kata which means "down," it means basically to speak down about someone, or to speak against someone, hence to defame, slander, denigrate and has the idea of evil speaking. It is often translated "backbiting" because katalaleo implies the absence of the person being spoken against, which always fascinates me...always fascinates me.

So what he is forbidding under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is the careless babble that runs people down, critical, derogatory, slanderous and untrue. And usually defaming a person who isn't there to defend himself...hence the term "backbiting...backbiting." You're biting them in the back, they can't even see what's going on, they're not even able to defend themselves.

In Romans 1:30 it describes the unregenerate, ungodly world as backbiters...haters of God, insolent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents. So it's in a sort of an ugly catalogue of evil. In 2 Corinthians 12:20 Paul says, "I fear lest when I come I'll not find you such as I would and I'll be found unto you as such as you would not lest there be debates and envyings, wrath, strife, backbitings, whisperings, conceit, disorders." And you see it there in a pile of words that have to do with mistreatment of people.

Recently I had an interesting phone conversation. There was a conference of pastors and I...someone told me that they were going to discuss me and that they were going to present the things that are wrong with me, and so forth. And so I asked what church this was going to take place in and I called the pastor on the phone. He answered the phone and I said, "This is John MacArthur, I understand that this evening you're going to have a discussion of me." And it got kind of silent on the other end, I confess, but I said to him, "I just want you to know that I'd be more than happy to be there and answer any question that anybody would have. I certainly would be more than willing to just stand there at a microphone and let anyone ask anything they wanted and do the best I could to answer truthfully what's really in my heart and what I really believe. If that would help you come to some meaningful conclusion about me, I would be more than happy to do that."

His reply to me was, "Absolutely not. We could never allow that."

See that would spoil the party because the thing thrives on the absence of the person being slandered. And that's what James is talking about. And few sins are as damaging as this. People can and do say anything, any lying thing that they want to say. And so what James says, and he uses a present tense continuous verb, "do not go on speaking evil of one another, brothers." Very basic. Don't do that.

And then he says this, "He that speaks evil of his brother and judges his brother..." and he goes on. Now let me just pick up those two thoughts. "He that speaks evil and he that judges." And I want to consider those two terms before we go any further. Both of those are habitual action verbs...he that goes on continually speaking evil...he that goes on continually judging. Now this describes the kind of evil speaking he's talking about. He repeats the verb for evil speaking and then he adds the thought of judging, that's the word krino, it means to condemn someone. It's not...it's not evaluation, it's condemnation. It's saying somebody is wicked. It's damning someone, as I heard about recently someone said that I was described in Hebrews 10:29 as one who trod under foot the blood of the covenant and counted it an unholy thing and I was an apostate who was living on the edge of hell fire. Now that's the kind of condemnation that Peter has in...that James has in mind. That is the added factor of slander. Slander is to speak evil and then you go one step further and you actually become God and you sentence people to judgment. You see, that's the thing Jesus condemned.

Go back to Matthew chapter 7 for a moment. In Matthew chapter 7 verse 1, do you remember this verse? "Judge not that you be not judged." I've heard people throw that around. You know, you say, "Oh, you know that person shouldn't live like that." "Oh, judge not lest you be judged." You know, shouldn't say that. That's not what that means. That's that word krino again, that means...that means don't condemn people. And he's talking to Pharisees who thought it was their deal to assign people to divine judgment. You can't do that. You can't run the inquisition. You can't say who is to be eternally damned. Verse 5 he says, "You hypocrite. Get the two-by-four out of your own eye before you mess with a toothpick in somebody else's." So that's essentially the same kind of thing.

Jesus reminds the scribes and Pharisees that they're not God, they're not the final court. They're not the judge of all the earth. So we have no right to slander someone. And worse, to assign to them condemnation as if God was operating through us. We might examine. We might try to discern. We don't play God.

But people feel free to do that when they feel superior or when they have enough hate, enough venom to do that. The very nature of self-righteousness says Jesus is to justify itself and damn other people...to play God. So let's go back to James and what he is saying is evil speaking and judging flows out of an evil heart. It is a sin of pagans, Romans 1:30. It is alien to Christians. And in Matthew 15 it's there, I just need to mention that to you, Matthew 15:18 and 19 where Jesus is talking about the things that come out of a man defiling him, not the things that go into him. And he says, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, theft, false witness, blasphemies." They come out of the heart.

So a pure heart and a renewed mind and the love of God shut this sin off. So James says do not continue to do this. In fact, the Greek text could just as well be translated "stop doing this," implying that some were even doing it. Don't slander and don't play God and condemn people as if you were

the judge.

Now to enforce this, and here's where we get into some tremendously rich theology. James directs his words at four areas of thought and they are very, very profound. First of all, if you want to control your tongue and your heart in this way it starts with what we think about others. That's the first point. What we think about others. And this is a simple but not simplistic line of reasoning. What we think about others.

What do I mean by that? Look at verse 11. What word do you see used three times in one form or another in the first four lines. What word? "Brethren, brother, brother." Obviously James is using that three times in one brief sentence for some impact. And what he is saying is this, I just am reminding you of your relationship to each other. You're going to get a grip on this sin of slander and malicious gossip when you think properly about each other. And what he is saying here is, you are all...what?...brothers, in the family. How can you say this of each other? He that speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother...and he throws that personal pronoun in that sort of emphasize the intimate relationship that exists among Christians. He's writing to a Christian church. He's writing to an assembly of people who are linked in common life. Some are true believers, some are not. But they're all linked in common life. They're all a family. And he says "slander," or as it used to be called calumny, defamation, denigration of character, malicious lying against another in the family is unexpected, it's absolutely unacceptable. You don't do that in a brotherhood. You don't do that among family, you protect each other. But as Galatians 5:15 says...verse 14 says you're to love your neighbor as yourself, verse 15, "But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you don't be consumed by one another."

We might expect that from people on the outside. But not on the inside. And yet somebody said the Christian army is the only one that shoots its own wounded. We really are after our own. We tend to slander ourselves. It's a serious sin. That kind of offense is very serious. Look again at Matthew 18, let me show you how serious it is, and we'll just cover this first point for tonight. But in Matthew 18 verse 7, well actually verse 6, "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones..." remember, the little ones here are not babies, but Christians, little ones who are children in the spiritual sense...who have become like little children, verse 3 and therefore entered the Kingdom, who have humbled themselves, verse 4, and he's talking about spiritual believers, children of God, not babies. "Whoever offends one of these little ones, it would be better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea." He simply says you'd be better off to die a tragic and frightening death than to ever do anything to offend one of my children. What he is saying is, you better be careful how you treat other Christians. Got that? Because to offend another Christian is so serious, you'd be better off...what?...dead...dead. Then in verse 7 he says woe to the world because of offenses. "It must needs be that offenses come but woe to the man by whom the offense comes." In other words, we expect the world to offend us, but we don't expect to do that to each other. And if you're doing it and your hand is doing it, cut it off, verse 8, and if your foot is doing it, cut it off. Verse

9, and if your eye is doing it, pluck it out.

In other words, take drastic action to make sure you're not doing anything to offend another believer. Don't look down on another one, verse 10. Despise means "to think down," kataphroneo, don't think down on one of these little ones. Why? Because the heavenly angels are looking at the face of the Father and the Father is watching them and when He shows concern for them, the angels pick up that concern. All of the heavenly hosts are greatly concerned with how they're being treated, you better be careful how you treat them or you're going to have all heaven against you. That's the issue here. You better be careful how you treat other Christians.

So James is saying isn't this kind of backbiting, gossiping slandering stuff not only a breach of humility, as we saw from verse 6 to 10, but isn't it a breach of love? Isn't it a breach of love to maliciously attack and maliciously slander without truth, without evidence for the fulfillment of some evil intent? That's severe sin and it reveals a most basic flaw. Now Christians can do it, but I'll tell you, if it's a pattern then it calls into question their spiritual condition...it calls into question their spiritual condition. And they may say they're Christians but this is how they behave all the time, that kind of Christianity is questionable.

On what basis? First John 2:8, "Again, a new commandment I write unto you which thing is true in him and in you because the darkness is past and the true light now shines, he that says he is in the light and hates his brother is in...what?...darkness. He that loves his brother abides in the light, there's no occasion of stumbling in him, but he that hates his brother is in darkness, walks in darkness, doesn't know where he's going because darkness has blinded his eyes." John 4:20 (should be 1 John), "If a man says I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he's not seen. And this commandment have we from him that he who loves God loves his brother also."

So you show me a person whose life pattern is one of hatred and slander and venom toward others in the family of God, and you have every reason to call into question that person's salvation. If the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts it's going to manifest itself. And again John says in 1 John 5, "Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God and everyone that loves him that begot loves him also that is begotten of him. By this we know we love the children of God when we love God and keep His commandments." In other words, if you love God you'll love whom God begets, you'll love His children.

So what we think about others is basic to the thoughts that deny a place to defamation. And if your heart is right before God, you're going to see other believers as brothers. Again I say, it doesn't mean you don't point out sin when sin is there. It doesn't mean you don't discipline when discipline is called for. What it does mean is you don't lie, and you don't gossip, and you don't backbite and you don't slander and you defame their character maliciously. And if you, there's every reason...if that's the

pattern of your life...to question whether your salvation is real because the ones who love God love the ones God loves.

If I see my fellow Christians as God's beloved children for whom the Savior died and for whom He really has planned eternity, if I see my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as those who are eternally the loved ones of Jesus Christ and the beloved of God, if I see them as my brothers and sisters, as my fellow Christians to be protected and forgiven and nurtured and cared for, that's going to control how I talk about them. You understand that? So I control slander not by keeping my lips sealed, I control slander by keeping my thoughts right. And the first thing to be considered is what do I think about others...do

I see them as children of God? If I do, I will never say anything about my own dear brothers and sisters that is not true and that does not in some way half to be said for the sake of the purity of the church. I certainly will not maliciously lie and slander and if I do as a pattern of life, there's every reason to question the legitimacy of my claim to salvation.

So, the first controlling factor then in controlling your lips in regard to backbiting or gossip or slander is the recognition that you see others in the family as brothers and sisters. You wouldn't do that to your own whom you love, why would you do that to those in the family of God?

The good part is still ahead of us. The next couple of points are so deep and so rich that I just don't want you to miss next week. In fact, if you miss next week, the Lord will do something to you (laughter). In fact, I saw a cartoon in the paper that said, a pastor got up in the congregation and said, "The Lord has told me that if I don't get a million dollars in two weeks, the Lord is going to strike our church organist dead." Well I'm not going to say the Lord's going to do anything to you, but I just want you to get what He's got for us in this incredible section of Scripture. And we haven't really touched the surface of the depth of the doctrine that's here, but I know you've received the message that the Spirit had for us tonight. And let our speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt for the purpose of building up. Let's pray together.

It's so hard, Lord, to control the tongue all the time. It is a restless, restless member with great potential for evil. It can set the whole world on fire, James said in chapter 3. And indeed we have seen it do that. Help us to know the power of the Holy Spirit in that area where we manifest our Christianity perhaps as clearly, genuinely as any other way, through sanctified and virtuous and godly speech. Lord, keep our tongues from anything that would be considered as malicious, anything that would be generated by hate, pride, envy, jealousy, anything that would not be the truth. Teach our mouths to speak the truth and nothing but the truth.

And, Lord, when those times come when sin must be confronted and sinners must be rebuked, may we do that because we are obedient to Your truth. But may it be that we do that because it is the truth

and it is for the sake of the purity of the body. And all other times, Lord, help us to speak words of gentleness, grace, love and meekness. Give us that strength in Christ's name. Amen.

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