

“Speak in Love”

James 4:11-12

***<sup>11</sup> Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. 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. <sup>12</sup> There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?***

James is going to connect his discussion on fights and quarrels among people in the church with his warnings about the dangers of the tongue in our text this morning. James’ warning about the tongue occupies a large amount of his epistle, thus demonstrating just how serious this subject is to James and to the Lord. In our text we will find a discussion regarding speaking evil against other professing members of the church with the tongue.

Before we look at that topic in detail I want to first discuss a big picture topic or idea that not only James alludes too in today’s passage but all of the Bible deals with this throughout. It is the topic of how the church is to relate to and in the world. There are many erroneous views on this, such as,

- God makes no distinction, we are all brothers and sisters as he is the universal father of all humanity
- We are only supposed to love the church because all unbelievers are evil and God hates them
- Who cares, love everyone the same

Today we will see that James is directing the command not to speak evil against one another to the brothers and sisters, or to those who profess to be among the church. Why did he not apply it to how we speak to all people in the world? Are we allowed to slander and condemn the world, just not the church? No, but why did he and every epistle writer in the New Testament address the church on how to think and behave within the church context and not just paint life with a broad stroke and teach us how to live in the world? If you look at the content in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, you will find that little is

spoken on how we are to live in the world amongst unbelievers and much is taught about how we are to live within the community of believers. Why is that?

First, we need to look at some basic passages that deal with this. We will look at the summation of all the Law today where Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.<sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment.<sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Mt. 22:37-40). Neighbor here is a reference to all humanity, lost and found. Therefore, not only are we commanded to love people in the world, but that command is the summation of the Law. We love God first and people second. However, there is also Scriptural reasons to believe there is a very distinct love that Christians are commanded to have for one another that differs in some ways than the general love for all humanity. John 13:34-35<sup>34</sup> *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*<sup>35</sup> *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" We are never specifically told to lay down our lives for people in general but we are told in 1 John 3:16 *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers (and sisters).* We are called to be in the world but not of the world (Jn. 17), but we are expected to in and of the church (1 Jn. 2:19). We are told to love our enemies (Mt. 5:43-48), yet hate the world and the things of the world (1 Jn. 2:15). How do we synthesize all of this information and form a correct understanding of how we relate to the world?

First, we need to understand that the Bible understands different types of love and we typically do not. God has a general benevolent love that bestows on all humanity, including the lost and found. Matthew 5:45 says, "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." He also possesses a very specific salvific love for all the elect. Romans 8 describes the *ordo salutis* (order or process of our salvation) and then concludes by assuring believers that nothing in all of creation can separate us from the saving love of God in Christ Jesus. I am convinced the Bible is teaching us to imitate the love of God in that way. We are called to love all but sacrificially love the body of Christ. Why? In the world we are forced to make distinctions among people. There are those we can love and trust more safely than others. There are those we deem as evil beyond the norm like Hitler or child predators. Though we

can and should pity their souls, we are not expected to sacrificially love them. This is not supposed to be the case in the church. James has already taught us that we are not to make distinctions within the church (2:1). Jesus loved everyone whom he saved with the same gracious sacrificial love and we are commanded and expected to reciprocate that love to other Christians.

The point to all of this is to say that God prepares us to love properly in the world by first teaching us how to love each other in his kingdom first. We gather not only to receive instructions on how to love, but we are called to practice together. We are called to live in community because that is where we rehearse and perfect our skills. Let this be a charge to challenge your views and commitments to the church body. The rest of the sermon will certainly help with that. Let's get back to our text.

*Katalaletei* is the Greek word translated "speak evil against" and can be understood as either slander or negatively criticizing or judging. Slander is defined as "the action or crime of making a false spoken statement damaging to a person's reputation". John MacArthur points out that slander does not "rank very high on any contemporary list of serious sins," because "it is so widespread we scarcely notice it." That is frightening considering just how destructive a sin this can be. Slander does rank very high as a serious sin in the Bible. Lev. 19:16 says, "You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord." Psalm 15:3 says that it is the mark of a righteous person "who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend". On the other hand, slander is a characteristic of the wicked. Psalm 50:19-20 says, "You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son."

It can also be understood as negatively criticizing or un-lovingly judging others. James is most likely refereeing to both of these meanings as he refers to speaking evil against a brother and/or judging them. It is important to note here that James is not forbidding lovingly critiquing heresies or calling out sin. Jesus gave us a specific method for doing that in Matthew 18. What James is referring to is criticizing with the intent to condemn others.

James already told us that the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things (3:5). There is no better way to destroy a church body than by spreading false rumors or un-lovingly criticizing other brothers or sisters. James is still challenging the faith of his readers; including ours. The test here relates to how we are talking about others in the church family. Are we slandering them, criticizing them, judging them, or speaking well of them to others? James will give us 4 logical truisms that can and will sanctify our speech within the church if we will submit to the Holy Spirit's guidance. First, it is how we view our brothers and sisters that will influence how we speak of them.

### **1. How we View the Church**

Doctrine dictates deeds. What and how we think about each other will determine how we speak about one another. We need to begin by accurately interpreting the context of the letter we are interpreting. It is addressed to the twelve tribes in the dispersion. It was most likely written to predominantly Jewish Christian house churches outside of Palestine. It is important that we understand this because it is the familial relationship that Christians share that affects how they think of one another and subsequently how they speak of one another. James addresses them as brothers (and sisters) three times in verse 11. There is no doubt that James is attempting to stress their familial relationship. John MacArthur says, "Slander is the antithesis of what is expected and acceptable in a family, whose members are to love, support, and protect each other."

Neither are those of a family expected to judge one another. The word for judge is *krino*, which does not refer to evaluation but condemnation. This is what Jesus meant when he said in Matthew 7:1-5 "*Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup> For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. <sup>3</sup> Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.*" Here, Jesus distinguishes between lovingly evaluating other's sin and pronouncing hypocritical judgment upon them. Condemning is not loving.

Speaking rightly of others begins with thinking rightly about others. James is addressing people who profess to be followers of Jesus just like you and me. We must understand that we are a family. Jesus died for each one of us because he loved us even when we hated him. Not one of us were worthy or deserving of that death but we received it by grace. Therefore, we must love one another regardless of whether we are deserving of such love and respect. We love each other in grace. If we love Jesus we will love our brothers and sisters.

## 2. How We View the Law of God

Not only does our speech about one another reveal what we truly think about each other, it also reveals what we truly think about God's law. James says, ***"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."*** What did Jesus say when he was asked what was the greatest of all commandments? He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."<sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment.<sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.<sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Mt. 22:37-40). Love is the law. Love God, love your neighbor. James calls this summation the "royal law" (2:8). And Paul says in Romans 13:8 "the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

To slander or judge another brother or sister is to fail to keep the law of God. Speaking ill of another is a violation of God's law and it is by that law that the wicked will be judged. Thus Jesus' warning, *"For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you."* James would say it like this, "Be careful if you are the one judging others, your faith may prove to be void of the saving power of the Lord Jesus. Remember, he is striving to authentic the faith of his hearers.

## 3. How We View God

***But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.***  
<sup>12</sup> ***There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy.***

To judge others is to judge God's law. It is to declare that you do not believe we need to love one another with all of our heart, strength, soul, and might. It is an act of defiance against the law of God. You cannot claim to keep the law and yet fail in this part. What does James say in 2:10? For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. According to James' inspired logic, if you judge the law in this way, you are also judging the Lawgiver. You are judging the Judge, which is God. It is to say, "I don't like your law of love. I will reinterpret it. I do not think it is the best way to live, so I will choose another. I will choose whom I will love and to what degree I will love them. You do not know best, I do."

Who else has attempted to usurp God's throne like this? Satan. Listen to his "I will" declaration in Isaiah 14:13-14.

*'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;  
<sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High.'*

#### **4. How We View Ourselves**

##### ***But who are you to judge your neighbor?***

James finishes this argument with a challenge for self-evaluation. Who are you to think you are better than others, the law of God, and God himself? Paul exhorts his Roman readers, "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" (12:3). A true Christian cannot continue in such rebellion. This is no small matter. This is no harmless little sin. It is destructive to body of people that God sent his only Son to die for in order that they may live and love together for His glory.

## CG Discussion Questions

1. What are some ways we speak evil against each other? **Slander, gossip, criticism, judgment, etc..**
2. What are some of the ways we justify speaking inappropriately about one another? **We think if its true we can say it. We think if we say it to close friends we trust than its okay. We sometimes think it's okay if the other person has offended us first. Sometimes we think it's okay if we speak it politely and disguise it with "concern".**
3. How does our thinking regarding one another affect the way we speak about each other?
4. Did James' comparisons of a person's views of the church, the Law of God, God himself, and themselves challenge you, and if so, in what ways?
5. Do you think James is over reacting and being too extreme on this issue? Why or why not?
6. Can you think of a time where someone's tongue created a fire that burned out of control and caused a lot of damage to a church body?
7. Is there anyone in this group that was convicted this morning and could use prayer? As a CG leader take some time to pray for those who raised their hand. Pray that God would protect our church from this sin.