

Did You Hear About...? James 4:11-12

One day the first mate of a sailing vessel yielded to temptation and became drunk. He had never been drunk before, but the captain entered into the logbook of the ship for the day that the first mate was drunk. When the mate read the entry, he implored the captain to remove it from the ship record on account that it was his first offense, and he didn't want to lose his position when the owners read the log. But the captain refused to remove it because it was a fact.

Several days later, the mate was keeping the logbook and after giving the latitude and longitude along with other bearings of their location, made an additional entry. He wrote that the captain was sober today. The indignant captain protested when he read the record declaring that it would leave an altogether false impression in the minds of the ship owners, as if it were an unusual thing for him to be sober. But the mate insisted that it would remain in the entry because it was a fact.

The illustration serves to show how the accuracy of a statement, though misrepresented by the circumstances, can injure the reputation of another.

In **chapter 3**, James addressed the issue of the tongue, even though it is small like horse's bit or the ship's rudder, it is a challenge for the person to tame. He likens the destructive force of the tongue when unleashed to that of a forest fire. It may start from a small spark, but it can quickly spread and destroy large areas of land, like we are seeing in California. He continues by noting that the untamed tongue can corrupt the whole body, set the course of one's life by what it says, and even calls it a **"restless evil, full of poison"**.

James returns to that vein of thought in our passage today as he once again addresses the tongue by speaking about slander and judgmentalism. How easy it is to fall into the trap of speaking against others whether we think we know all the facts or not. He concludes by saying that such speech is a violation of God's law. **How, then, are we to**

respond either as someone who slanders someone else or as someone who is the recipient of such a brutal verbal assault?

These verses ask us to assess how, even why, we talk about others. **What is our motivation for speaking about someone in a such a way? Would how we talk about others be taken as gossip, slander or being judgmental?** The conclusion James comes to might surprise you, which gives us reason to pause and think before we speak about someone.

The first thing we need to consider from the passage is the rule about slander and judgment.

I. THE RULE ABOUT SLANDER AND JUDGMENT – v. 11

Notice that James is speaking to believers. He refers to them as brothers. There is that family relationship that exists through a common faith in Christ. We're all part of the same family. What he has to say is in condemnation of how these believers were treating each other. As members of the body of Christ, their conduct was inappropriate and even appalling. Fellow Christians shouldn't talk about each other in the way he will now address with them.

One of the greatest indictments of believers by non-believers is the widespread argument that Christians are judgmental. That criticism is often because they view us as hypocritical in nature. We say we're loving and kind and so on, but then tear each other down. When it comes to slander and being judgmental, we notice first that such conduct demeans other people.

A. It Demeans Other People – v. 11a

It is simply not true that sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me. To one degree or another, we all know full well the impact words can have on us whether they are true or not, especially those who have been slandered.

I read a story this week about a loving family in a small town. It was a happy home. Every day the wife met her husband at the gate after work. There was an undeniable affection between the two that

was visible. Every night after dinner, the father could be seen romping with his two children in the backyard as they played and laughed. Another neighbor was beside herself with envy so one day she started a rumor that the husband had an affair with another woman. Word of the affair eventually reached the ears of the wife who was distraught over the possibility that her husband had been unfaithful. The once happy home had turned sour. The husband came home one day and instead of finding his wife and children eagerly waiting for him at the gate, he found them in the basement where she had taken the lives of the two children and then her own. Days later the truth of the slander was known.

Slanderous words can have a destructive impact. Slander is making a false verbal statement about someone that damages their reputation. It is done maliciously and intentionally in order to hurt the other person. The term used in the KJV puts it in proper perspective by referring to such speech as evil. In other words, slander is wicked, cutting, depraved, immoral, and sinful.

When someone else comes to you and speaks evil of another person, knowing that what they are saying is false, their intention is to lower your opinion of that person and elevate your estimation of the one bearing the news. In order to make it not sound like they are slandering, they might couch it in terms like this:

“Now, I don’t mean to be critical about so and so, but...”

“Stop me if I’m wrong, but...”

“I really like so and so as a person, but...”

“We need to pray for so and so. Did you hear...?”

Often times the slanderer slanders out of spite, for revenge, in bitterness, anger or malice. It is with evil intent that they slander. Their motives are evil.

When it comes right down to it, slander is nothing more than lying about another person. You are casting false information with the intent of defaming someone’s character and reputation.

It happens in politics.

It happens in business.

It happens in neighborhoods.

It happens in schools.

It happens in families.

It happens in churches as is obvious by James’s need to address it here.

Because it was evident to him, even though he doesn’t cite any examples, he issues a command: stop slandering others.

Since slander is a form of lying, let’s keep in mind that God hates lying.

Leviticus 19:11 “You shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie to one another.”

Proverbs 12:22 “The Lord detests lying lips.”

Among the sins listed in **Proverbs 6:16-19**, lying is included. God is truth, so anything that is not true is against His nature. So serious is God about lying, He included it in the 10 commandments.

Exodus 20:16 “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” That includes slander because bearing false witness spreads something that is not true. Slander takes gossip to a new low. Where gossip tells secrets about a person by passing them on, slander makes up something and passes it on wherever it will do the most harm.

The Bible has some things to say about slander.

Leviticus 19:16 “Do not go about spreading slander among your friends. Do not do anything that endangers their life, I am the Lord.”

Psalms 101:5 “Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence.”

Proverbs 10:18 “He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.”

Proverbs 11:9 “With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor.”

Romans 1:28-32 says that slander is a part of a depraved mind (v. 30).

Lest we think we’re somehow off the hook because we don’t practice slander by speaking evil against someone else, there is another term we need to be

aware of. Where slander is spoken, libel is the same thing but in written form. Both have the intention of spreading false information for the purpose of demeaning and defaming someone else. We see both in the news all the time regarding this politician or that celebrity or some athlete. They have won lawsuits for falsely alleging an affair, a drug addiction, or gambling debt.

Jesus said in **Matthew 15:18** that **“the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and those things make a man unclean.”**

Potiphar’s wife slandered Joseph because he refused her adulterous advances.

Ziba, who was a servant of Mephibosheth, the son of Johnathan, slandered him before King David in order to secure land belonging the family of Saul.

Jezebel had two men slander Naboth claiming that he blasphemed God, which condemned him by stoning so that Ahab could gain control of a vineyard without being contested.

The Pharisees slandered Jesus calling him drunk and a lowlife for hanging out with the same.

Jews slandered Paul saying he spoke against the law and the Temple.

Notice that in these and other examples we might consider that slander comes from a malicious heart intent on evil. Slander is always with the purpose of demeaning and damaging someone else’s character. Once the slanderous word is out there, it can never be taken back. It can’t be undone no matter how hard we try.

One day a peasant slandered a friend only to find out later that what he said was not true. His conscience troubled him, so he went to seek the advice of a monk. The monk told him that if he wanted to make peace with his heart, he needed to fill a bag with feathers and place a feather on each door in the town. The peasant did just as the monk had instructed and returned announcing that he had paid his penance for his sin of slander. The monk replied that the peasant wasn’t done yet. He needed

to go back to every house and retrieve all the feathers. The peasant complained that the task would be impossible because the feathers would be blown all over. The monk answered that it is the same with gossip and slander. We can easily drop words, but no matter how hard we try, we can never get them all back again.

Consider again from the verses I read what Scripture has to say about a slanderer. The Bible says that person who slanders is a fool with hatred in his heart, those words come from an unclean heart, they endanger the lives of friends, a slanderer is godless, has a depraved mind and will be silenced by God. God is against such a person. And if we could put it in context with **verse 8**, the slanderer will find it difficult to draw near to God since the slanderer has not cleansed his hands, purified his heart or mourned over sin.

In effect, the slanderer has become a judge. When we judge someone, we are playing God, believing that we are somehow better than the other person and we want to hurt them with our judgment of them. We believe we have the right to put them down. Chuck Swindoll comments that it’s taking the role of God and therefore making us a self-appointed qualified critic where we assume authority over that person who we deem to be inferior to us.

Judging others puts us above the law.

Walvoord and Zuck conclude that “to judge others is a judgment against the law.”

Jobs three friends judged him without mercy, falsely accusing him of committing some sin. They believed only sinners receive the kind of judgment he was experiencing.

Being judgmental demeans the other person. Now let me be clear here because sometimes we hear the argument falsely claimed from Scripture that **Matthew 7:1** says we shouldn’t judge or else we will be judged. We have our list of do’s and don’ts from Scripture and look at someone and judge them for behaviors we may think Scripture speaks

against. If it is true that we aren't to judge others, then Moses was wrong for taking the advice of his father-in-law to set up judges to hear cases. Jesus was certainly guilty of judging others because He regularly called out the Pharisees.

Matthew 7:1 isn't saying we don't have a right to judge others, it's saying that we shouldn't judge someone hypocritically for the very same thing we ourselves are guilty of. That passage continues by saying that before we so quickly cast judgment, we need to first do an assessment of our own life to see if we are guilty of the same thing or something else. In effect, Jesus is saying that we shouldn't be self-righteous, we shouldn't have a holier than thou attitude toward others.

How do we judge others or what are some of the things we judge others on, especially when we don't know all the facts or perhaps take Scripture out of context?

We look at someone standing on a street corner with a homeless sign and judge them.

We see someone with a tattoo or lots of tattoos and piercings and judge them.

We judge people who eat in restaurants that serve alcohol.

There was a day we judged people for playing pool, cards or going to the movies.

We judge people by the clothes they wear, the car they drive, the home they live in, the education they have or don't have, how they talk.

And then we talk about them to other people.

The warning isn't against every kind of judging, but hypocritical judging. We must judge or discern what is right and wrong. It's not so we can find fault but so we can guard our own heart against sin.

Galatians 6:1 says that the spiritual believer, the person who is walking with God, has the opportunity to rightly judge the sinful behavior of another person for the purpose of spiritual restoration by helping that person return to Christ. It continues by saying that we should consider our own selves so that we don't fall into the same sin.

By slandering and judging others incorrectly, we

demean them by damaging their reputation. But James says something else about slander and judging. It denies God's authority.

B. It Denies God's Authority – v. 11b

To recap, when we slander or judge a person, James says we are, in effect, speaking against the law and judging the law. He continues by saying that by judging the law, we aren't keeping the law.

So what law is James talking about that we aren't keeping when we slander or judge hypocritically?
Turn back to **2:8**.

James is not referring to the law of Moses. He is not referring to the additional laws of Judaism passed on through tradition by the Pharisees. The law he is referring to is the royal law, the law that says to **"love your neighbor as yourself."** By slandering or judging someone we claim to be superior and are not practicing the royal law of loving them. Instead of judging himself, he judges others.

When we put ourselves above the law and in the place of God, we are no different than Lucifer who tried to usurp the throne of God by declaring himself to be equal to or above God (**Isaiah 14:12-14**). Essentially, when we slander someone or judge someone, we are saying we know better than God.

John MacArthur writes "Since slander is a violation of the law of love, a slanderer speaks against the law and condemns the law, thus showing utter disregard for the divine standard. And if you place yourself above God's law, warns James, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it."

If we are to have victory over slander and a judgmental attitude we must be under the authority of the law of love and live by it in humility. **How can we say we love God and love others if we slander maliciously or judge unfairly?**

If we want to draw near to God, we must keep the law of love: loving God first, and then loving others as ourselves.

John 13:34-35

John 14:21

I John 4:7-12

As believers, when we choose to slander and judge others, the world will see a hypocrite. When we love others, we will be called a disciple. When we slander and judge others, we demean them and deny God's authority, we sin against the fellow believer and against God. That's the rule about slander and judgment. **How about the result of slander and judgment?**

II. THE RESULT OF SLANDER AND JUDGEMENT – v. 12

Whereas in **verse 11** we saw that such conduct denies God's authority, in **verse 12** we see that such behavior dethrones God.

A. God Is Dethroned – v. 12a

The word Lawgiver is a compound word literally meaning to lay down the law. A Lawmaker is the person who puts laws in place. He makes the law. The word Judge means a person who applies or upholds the law.

God, because He is God, is both the Lawgiver and Judge and James says that God is the only Lawgiver and Judge. He is the only one by His law that can save or destroy. His law says that we are all sinners and must pay a penalty for our sin. That penalty is death. But if we meet the conditions of the law we can be saved. Since no one can meet those conditions, which is absolute perfection, He offers us another way to be saved. It is by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ who paid the debt of our sin and rose again from the dead. His resurrection affirms to us that God the Father accepted His Son's atoning sacrifice therefore making it possible for us to be saved. If we do not, then as Lawgiver and Judge, God has the right to destroy or bring to bear on that person a guilty verdict by which the person will then suffer eternal separation from God. This is not annihilation but eternal destruction.

As the One Lawgiver and Judge, only God in His omniscience knows all things and knows the hearts and motivations of His people and judges rightly.

When we slander and judge others, we attempt to

dethrone God and strip Him of His law making and judging.

There is one more result James notes in **verse 12**. The slanderer is defamed.

B. The Slanderer Is Defamed – v. 12b

“But you, who are you to judge your neighbor?”

Phillips – **“How can you then be so silly as to imagine that you are your neighbor's judge?”**

Amplified – **“Who are you to [hypocritically or self-righteously] pass judgment on your neighbor?”**

The Message – **“Who do you think you are to meddle in the destiny of others?”**

In other words, who do you think you are to think you have a right to judge someone else when done hypocritically? Who are you to judge or who made you judge? It is an exaggerated view of self and when we judge in a prideful or hypocritical way we defame ourselves by ruining our own reputation. What James has to say is a rebuke on these believers for having a high and mighty attitude.

What should be our response to slander and judgment? What if someone comes to us with some juicy news about someone else?

III. THE RESPONSE TO SLANDER AND JUDGMENT

Hannah More had a unique way of handling such talebearers. Whenever she was told something derogatory about someone else she asked the person to accompany her to go and talk with the person being slandered to get the details and determine if the news was true. The effect was sometimes painful as the slanderer stammered to clarify or asked her to forget the whole matter as if she never heard anything. But Hannah More insisted and they went to ask about the matter hand. You can well imagine that no one dared tell Hannah More a second time something false.

James gives us some ways to respond.

In **verse 10** he tells us to humble ourselves before the Lord and when we do that, the Lord will lift us up. He knows the truth about you. He will give you the grace to bear the slander.

Romans 12:20-21 “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

If someone slanders you, speak well of them.
If someone wrongly judges you, speak words of kindness about them.

Ephesians 4:32 gives us some admonitions to consider when someone slanders us or some words of advice if we think about slandering someone else. That verse tells us to “**be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**”

In other words, treat them in the same way God has treated you. Don't be resentful, bitter, angry, filled with hatred, malice or revenge.

Obey the royal law to love others.

Paul admonishes believers in **I Thessalonians 5:11** to encourage and build up one another. Are our words building up or are they tearing down? Keep in mind that every word will one day be judged.

We have also noted from **verse 11** the command to not speak evil about someone else. Again, if we are loving others as ourselves, we won't slander them.

Peter gives this advice in **I Peter 2:1** “**Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.**”

As believers, we are commanded to put slander and judgmentalism out of our lives. Let Scripture be true of you: see how they loved one another.

Even if the matter is true, when we repeat it, we are not practicing the law of love. Listen to the wise words of Henry Durbanville.

If you are tempted to reveal
A tale by someone told

About another, make it pass,
Before you speak, three gates of gold.

Three narrow gates: first, Is it true?
Then, Is it needful? In your mind
Give truthful answer. And the next
Is last and narrowest – Is it kind?

And if to reach your lips at last,
It passes through these gateways three,
Then you may tell the tale, nor fear
What the results of speech may be.

Is it true?

Is it necessary?

Is it kind?

If it doesn't pass the test of any of those three gates,
keep the matter to yourself.

If we would draw near to God, we shouldn't speak
evil about others.

Walvoord and Zuck write “A humble attitude and
just actions are essential for spiritual growth.”

How does the world hear us talk about others?