

<sup>11</sup>**Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law you are not a doer of the law but a judge.** <sup>12</sup>**There is one Lawgiver who is able to save and destroy. Who are you to judge another?**

The main concern in this passage is *how we speak to and about one another in the Church*.

- Of course the way we speak to all people is an important matter for we are called to love our neighbor no matter who that person is.
- But it is especially important to think about how we speak of one another in the church because we are one Body in Christ. Through faith in Jesus Christ we are one family, we are brothers and sisters, we are **members of one another** (Romans 12:5).
- Therefore, we must be especially careful how we talk to and about one another because godly speech builds up the household of Christ and evil speech breaks down the body of Christ.

So James, servant of Jesus Christ, gives us this simple command: **Do not speak evil of one another, brethren.** (James 4:11a)

The use of our tongue is a repeated theme in the book of James.

- In this book God cautions us against speaking too quickly: **Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.** (James 1:19-20)
- The use of the tongue is one of the tests of true Christianity: **If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle 约束 his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.** (James 1:26)
- In James 3 we learn that the tongue is a very small part of our bodies but it has great power to control our lives, like a bridle 缰绳 controls a horse and a rudder 舵 controls a ship. **Every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no man can tame 驯服 the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.** (James 3:7-8) Only the power of Jesus Christ can redeem our tongues from evil speech.

I. In James 4:11-12 the Lord Jesus, through His servant James, warns us against **speaking evil of one another**. What does this mean?

- The word in the Greek means, literally, to speak against one another. It refers to any kind of talking which does damage to a brother or sister and attacks the family relationship we have in Christ.
- James further defines evil speech by saying: **He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law.** (James 4:11) Speaking evil of one another is to speak in such a way as to judge your brother, or to speak in a judgmental way. To judge does not necessarily mean that we declare them to be non-Christians, but that we see them as lower or less valuable Christians and place ourselves above them as

Now we have to be careful not to misunderstand this passage. According to Scripture there are times when it is right and necessary to judge a brother or sister. To judge means to evaluate something and discern whether it is right or wrong. It is our calling to make righteous judgements.

- If I commit sin and you see it or know about it, don't go and spread it to others, but go and tell me my fault. (see Matthew 18:15ff) That is making a judgment. If I don't listen to you, you must find 1 or 2 other people to join you in confronting me for my sin in order to try to bring me to repentance and restore me. If I still don't listen to you, then you must tell it to the church leaders, and in the end I may have to be cut off from the church if I don't repent. Paul calls this work of Christian discipline judging those inside the church (I Corinthians 5:12) This is a careful, proper and necessary form of judging your brother. Its purpose is to save the wandering brother, and to protect and build the church for the glory of Christ.
- It is also necessary to judge a brother when choosing someone for the offices of pastor, elder or deacon in the church. These men must meet certain qualifications and so judgements have to be made about a brother's level of Christian maturity or lack of Christian maturity. These judgements are not made to insult or degrade any brother but in order to follow Christ in the building up of the Church.

James is speaking here of wrong ways of judging one another, ways which involve speaking evil of one another, or speaking against one another so as to degrade and devalue one another, to put them down and to lift yourself up above them. Sometimes we call this way of speaking being judgmental toward one another or the sin of judgmentalism. Let me list a few ways in which the Bible opposes judging one another:

1. We must never judge another person in a hypocritical way. Jesus said: **Judge not that you be not judged...and why do you look at the speck 斑点 in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.** (Matthew 7:1,3-5) We must not judge the sins and faults of others unless and until we first judge our own sins and faults and repent of them before God.
2. Speaking against a brother or sister in a judgmental way also includes criticizing and judging them according to our own human standards and opinions, and not according to Scripture. This was the sin that was troubling the church in Rome when Paul wrote the book of Romans. The church in Rome was divided over issues like whether one kept the special Jewish feast days, or whether you are free to eat all food or vegetables only. Even though the Scripture gives freedom in these matters, people would not allow this freedom and they would judge and despise their brothers and sisters for living in sin or for being lesser Christians. Although it is fine to have personal convictions 信念 in all matters, it is wrong to take

my personal convictions and impose them on others as standards of judgement when the Bible allows liberty in these matters.

- When I was younger I believed that every church which does not have a worship service on Christmas Day is a church living in sin and not to be trusted as a faithful church. That was a judgmental attitude because the Bible does not require a worship service on December 25 (unless it happens to be the Lord's Day), nor does it demand that we celebrate the custom of Christmas (though it does require that we rejoice in the birth of Jesus Christ).
  - Other Christians drive around with bumper stickers that say "Jesus wouldn't drive an SUV," suggesting that if you drive an SUV you're living in sin. Or: if you dress in jeans to church you are being irreverent 无礼 toward God. Or: if you use a guitar in church to help the congregation sing, your church is wandering from the faith. Or: if you smoke cigars or drink alcohol, your Christianity is questionable. While we certainly may have convictions on all these matters and defend them, we must not speak evil of one another and judge one another by these standards.
3. Another form of evil speech James is addressing here is speaking to and about one another with a harsh, critical, or fault-finding spirit. We can be very quick to see the faults and weaknesses in others, and so slow to see them in ourselves! And when we see real faults in others (which need to be addressed in a godly way for that person's wellbeing and for the good of the whole church) we often discuss those weaknesses with other people (through gossip and backbiting) rather than with the person himself. Or we pounce 扑 on those weaknesses with a harsh word that stirs up anger (see Proverbs 15:1).
- We can especially do this to our closest brothers and sisters in Christ – our own spouse and children! It is easy to be hyper-critical, sarcastic 讽刺 insulting 侮辱 and impatient with our loved ones and allow a spirit of judgmentalism to fill our homes. Paul addresses this when he says: **Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter** (or: *harsh*) **toward them** (Colossians 3:19) and: **Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged** (Colossians 3:21)
4. Closely related to this is another form of speaking evil of your brother and judging him in a wrong way: speaking against others out of envy and selfish ambition 意愿, rather than seeking to build them in Christ. This seems to be one of the primary concerns of the book of James.
- **But if you bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth...For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy 假意, 表里不一.** (James 3:14, 16-17)
  - **Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?** (James 4:1)
  - **My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality 偏心 among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?** (James 2:1-4)

From these passages we get a picture of the kind of sin that was attacking the early church: the sin of partiality or discrimination toward one another. A spirit of envy and self-centred jealousy was settling upon the congregations. The rich were favoured and the poor were put down. An *unbrotherly spirit* was invading the church. This produced quarrels 争吵 and conflicts among the brothers and sisters. Obviously they were speaking evil of one another.

- What James is forbidding here is *any form of criticism or running someone down from selfish motives*. This is done by slander 诽谤 (making up and spreading false stories, or revised stories or exaggerated stories about someone) or by gossip (taking a true story or rumour where it should not go). It involves putting people down because a) you don't like them, b) you are jealous of their gifts or good reputation or wisdom, or c) they get in the way of your own selfish goals.
- We must put away form of speaking and dealing with our brothers and sisters in Christ that pushes them away from ourselves, elevates ourselves above them, or in any way treats them as inferior Christians and lesser members of the body of Christ. All our speech must be aimed at building one another up in love and drawing them closer to Christ and to ourselves.

## II. James goes on to state two reasons we should not speak evil of one another in the Body of Christ.

**He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law you are not a doer of the law but a judge.** (James 4:11)

a. The first reason we should not speak evil of one another is that then you **speak evil of the law and judge the law**. Why? Because when you speak evil of one another, you *go against* God's law. What law is this referring to? We don't have to guess which law because James has already named that law in chapter 2:8.

- In chapter 2 James is addressing the issue of discriminating 排斥 against the poor in favour of the rich. In that context he says: **If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well, but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.** (James 2:8)

- Here James is quoting the Old Testament, Leviticus 19:18, which says: **You shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.**

So if we speak evil against a brother, we are not only fighting against a brother for whom Christ died, we are fighting against the very law of God. We are declaring war on the law of God. We are belittling the law. We are standing over the law in judgement, saying that this law of God is of little or no value!

- Not that any one in the congregation – then or now – would want to *say* that, but that is actually what is happening. The Lord Jesus wants us to think through our behaviour consistently. We can say we have a high view of the authority of Scripture, but any point where we live *against* the Scripture, at that point we declare Scripture to be of no value, to be null and void. So what will do? Be judged by Scripture's law of love and repent of our evil speech? Or continue in our evil speech and judge the Scriptures' law of love? Our temptation is to do this very thing: make excuses for our sinful speech and declare the law of love not to apply to our situation. We might say: He had it coming! He deserved it! He annoys me so much. She's so hard to get along with! I call a spade a spade 直言不讳 and that's just the way I am. And there are many, many more excuses we make.

**But**, James adds, **if you judge the law you are not a doer of the law but a judge!** (James 4:11b) We might be very careful about keeping the law when it comes to right doctrine, and to tithing 什一奉獻 and going to church, and staying pure. But if we are not obeying the law of love, if we are not showing mercy to another in our speech, then we are hearers of the word only, not doers of the word and are deceiving ourselves, just as James has already described false religion in chapter 1. We are no better than liberal theologians who deny the resurrection of Christ. they deny the law of the resurrection; we deny the law of love. It really is no different in the sight of God. We are judging Scripture, and that is a cardinal sin!

b. The second reason we should not speak evil of and wrongly judge another is given in James 4:12 - **There is one Lawgiver who is able to save and destroy. Who are you to judge another?**

- By making up our own rules by which we judge people, we attempt to play God the only true Lawgiver. We try to supplement His law where we think his law is inadequate for our lives and the lives of others.
- By being judgmental, we are attempting to take to ourselves that which belongs to God alone: the office of Supreme Lawgiver and Judge of all men. By evil speech and improper judging we attempt to exercise control over people We are seeking to bring men into submission to us rather than God. We see ourselves as lords instead of brothers. Instead of lowering ourselves to serve others, we exalt ourselves over others to have them serve our pride and selfish desires.
- When it is proper and necessary for us to confront 面对 people for their good and make judgements about their doctrine and life, then what our aim is not to subject them to us, lord it over their lives, and gain power and prestige 声誉 for ourselves. Instead what we are doing is using the Word of God alone to bring people before God Himself who alone is the judge of all men, and has both the power to save body and soul from damnation 诅咒 and also power to destroy body and soul in hell (see Matthew 10:28). Our aim as brothers who love one another is that we all learn to stand before the judgement seat of God *now*, before it is too late.
- Speaking *against* another and *wrongly* judging a brother actually drives him away from the one true Lawgiver, Jesus Christ. But faithful speech is speech that fervently 热切地 desires to bring a person closer to Word of God, and to the Lawgiver who is able to save them. This is what we read in James 5:19-20 – **Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.** How sweet is such speech that is for the salvation of a brother! **Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.** (Proverbs 16:24)

As we stand before this word of Christ in James 4:11-12, it is necessary that we let the law judge us and convict us of our many sins of evil speech. How often we speak in a way that serves ourselves – our pride, our lusts, our impatience, and our own pleasures – and does harm to others! Instead of judging the law, let the law judge you today. Let it bring you before God, the **one Lawgiver** and Judge **who is able to save you.**

- **He gives more grace**, says James 4:6. **More grace** actually means **greater grace**. The power of God's grace is greater than the power of our sin. The power of His grace is greater than the power of the poison in our tongue. **God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.** (James 4:6). In other words, no matter how hard it is for us to keep a reign on our tongues, when we humble ourselves before the Lord for the sin in our tongues, when we submit to God and draw near to God, He will give us grace and He will lift us up. (Note that James 4:7-10 give us 10 commands that teach us how to humble ourselves before the Lord.
- He will give us the grace of *forgiveness*. This grace is found in Jesus Christ alone. **The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.** (1 John 1:6) As often as we sin with the tongue, so often may we come to Jesus Christ, God's Son, and find renewed forgiveness. His one sacrifice on the cross is a perfect payment for sin that keeps covering our sin as often as we come to Him in faith with sorrow for our sin.
- He will also give us the grace of *holiness*. This grace too is found in Jesus Christ alone. His Holy Spirit and Word live in us by faith! And by these God gives us the power to put our sins to death more and more, and live according to God's commandments more and more. As often as we humble ourselves before Him because of our sins and call upon Him for more grace to destroy the poison in our tongues and to empower our tongues for gentle, loving service, so often will He visit us in grace and enable us more and more not to be hearers of the word only, but doers also!

May God, through His Son, Jesus Christ give us every grace to keep this commandment: **Do not speak evil of one another, brethren!**