

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Book of James - Session 13

April 21, 2002

READ James 4:11-12

11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

Verse 11 says we are not to slander one another. The KJV translation says we are to speak not evil of one another, and the NASB says to "speak not against one another".

To help us better understand this command from James, let's look closer at the definitions of some words.

What does the word *slander* mean? The Greek word is *katalaleo*, which literally means "to speak against one, to criminate, traduce".

What does the word *criminate* mean? It means "To accuse of a crime or other wrongful act" or "To cause to appear guilty of a crime or fault; implicate"

What does the word *traduce* mean? It means "To cause humiliation or disgrace to by making malicious and false statements."

Inherent in the word slander is motive. The intent of a slanderous remark is to cause harm. It is an accusation made to place a person's action or character in a negative light. It is intended to implicate that person as guilty before others. It is intended to bring the other person down. Many times slander is only based on partial truth, or even totally false information. It often has malicious intent.

Now, let's take a look at the word "judgment". The last part of verse 11 says that if we speak against our brother, we are judging him.

What does the word "judgment" mean? The Greek word is *krino*, and the root meaning is to separate, select, or choose. The derived meaning is to determine, which implies to judge, or pronounce judgment. It carries the idea of giving approval or disapproval, to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong in another person's life.

By looking at these definitions, and applying them to verse 11, we understand that we are not to pronounce judgment on each other based on our personal assessment. Why is that?

First, it is because we also stand guilty. When we condemn others, we bring that same condemnation on ourselves. Look at Romans 2:1-4

Rom 2: You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ² Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³ So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴ Or

do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

When we judge others, we are showing contempt for God's law which teaches us to show kindness, patience, and mercy towards others. Instead of obeying the law, which commands us to love our neighbor and show him mercy, we have placed ourselves in a superior position, in a position that only rightfully belongs to God, who is the One who gave the law, and is the only true and righteous judge. We are not only judging the person we are speaking against, we have elevated ourselves above the law by making ourselves judge.

Second, it is because we are not righteous judges. We do not have complete knowledge. We do not know the thoughts and motives of men's hearts.

1 Cor 4: So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. ² Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. ³ I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

When we slander a person, we are sowing seeds of evil thoughts towards a person in others minds, based solely on our judgment and assessment of that person. Our knowledge is limited, and our motives can likely be tainted and impure.

Finally, we should not judge because only the sovereign Lord has the right to accept or reject individuals, for only He knows the heart and only He has the power to execute that judgment. When we speak against our neighbor, we have in essence usurped the position of God.

Isaiah 33:22 says *"for the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king, it is he who will save us.*

Rom 14: ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Rom 14:¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." ¹² So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. ¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

What is the root cause of slander and the other sins addressed in James 4?

Psalm 101:5 Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy; The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, Him I will not endure.

A proud heart is the root cause for all of the sins being addressed in James 4. Last week we saw that fighting and quarreling were results of unfulfilled desires. Those desires are there because we seek to satisfy them in our own way apart from God and His will. We don't ask God for what we want, or when we do ask, we ask for selfish reasons. James says that we need to turn away from such attitudes, and humble ourselves before

God, and submit ourselves fully to Him. This sin of slander is a sin of pride against our brother and against God. We see ourselves as better than others, and superior than them, and in a position to pass judgment on their actions and person. We presume to take the place of God in their lives, and make ourselves their judge, and act as though they have to answer to us for their actions. In the verses that conclude chapter 4, James addresses the person that is self-directed and boasts of his abilities, talents, and confidence to direct his life into success. In his arrogance and pride, he fails to see his frailty and utter dependence on God for the very breath that he breathes.

So with all of that established and understood, is there ever a time that we need to address sins and faults in one another's lives? The answer is yes. We are not to slander, or take the place of judge in other's lives, but we are called to minister to one another and help one another to overcome our faults, sins, and shortcomings. Look at Matthew 18:15-17:

Mt 18: 15 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 17 "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Look carefully at our Lord's instructions in verse 15. It does not say, if your brother sins, that you should ignore it. It also doesn't say, if your brother sins, that you should judge or condemn him, nor does it say, that you should go talk to someone else about it. Jesus says that you are to go to your brother and show him his fault in private, with the motive and desire to win him, or restore him. If he refuses to listen, then it becomes appropriate to involve others, but not for the purpose of passing judgment or defaming or harming the person. It is for the purpose of healing and restoration. Let's look at another classic passage on judging:

Mt 7: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³ "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

The message here is very clear. Before we would ever approach another person concerning their fault or sin, we should be examining ourselves first. This is especially critical when the fault or sin of another has directly affected us. We should always approach others with an attitude and demeanor of mercy, grace, patience, longsuffering, and forgiveness. We should always treat others the way we want to be treated by God. Note carefully in this passage that once we have examined ourselves and our motives, and repented from any known fault or sin of our own, we need to go and help our brother get rid of the "speck" in his eye. We are not supposed to go talk to everyone else about the speck, but rather help remove the speck.

So let's bring this all together. How should we respond if we see a brother in sin?

- We should not talk to others about it.
- We should go to him privately to restore him, only after we have examined ourselves.
- We should only involve others if he refuses to listen and respond.
- We should not pass judgment or condemn.
- We should always be merciful, longsuffering, loving, gentle, and kind realizing that we are also a sinner in need of forgiveness, grace and mercy from God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How has the passage in Matthew 7 been misapplied? What is Matthew 7:1-5 not teaching?

2. Is it ever appropriate to talk to others about someone's faults or weaknesses? How would you apply this teaching to addressing the faults of your children? Of your spouse? Of church members?

3. If we find ourselves thinking about and talking about other's mistakes, faults, and sins, it could well be an indication that we have a problem. What should we be looking for in our hearts that may need to be corrected if we tend to be critical and judgmental of others?