

# Speak No Evil

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James 4:10-12  
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**Sermon Theme:** Humble yourselves and speak the truth in love to one another, as is fitting for building up.

- To speak evil against another is to share something about another person that puts them in a bad light.
- To gossip means to share information that may or may not be true, but that puts another person in a negative light.
- Gossip is particularly enticing by feeding our inner ego, because by its nature it will put another in a negative light and by contrast us in a positive light, since we are the ones pointing it out.
- To slander is bearing false witness against another – telling things that aren't true, again with a desire to tear down.
- Slander is a bit more cut and dried, because slander always contains untruth, whereas gossip can be more challenging to discern, because sometimes what we are communicating is actually true, but damaging, unhelpful.
- These are sins of the tongue that God needed to address with clarity in Old Testament times, for the good of building up His covenant people:

“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.” Leviticus 19:16,18

- The Lord intended to preserve unity among His people.
- Therefore He called for the presence of truthfulness and the absence of slander.
- We slander others when we falsely judge motives, when we misrepresent other's positions on things, when we exaggerate the truth, which is lying – bearing false witness.
- And the sins of “speaking evil against one another” don't stop there, because it includes other things such as: lying, uncharitable or critical speech, harsh words, insults, sarcasm, and ridicule – any speech that tears down another person.
- The book of Proverbs likens these kinds of speech to “delicious morsels” (Prov. 18:8, 26:22), an enticing form of speech that falsely promises delight to those who yield to it.
- Not only were these issues in the OT day, they were real issues in James's day

“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander” – 1 Peter 2:1

- It's a universal temptation to speaking evil of one another because we want to look better in each other's eyes.
- We're tempted to denigrate someone else, even just a little bit, so that we can appear better than them.
- Sometimes we want to engage in a slight and subtle form of revenge.

- Maybe someone hurt us recently, and so we can share something in a way that puts them in a negative light, but do it just ever so slightly.
- Far too often we think its ok to pass on information about someone else provided that its actually true. But its not ok, especially when it puts that other person in a negative light.
- Regardless of the motive, evil talk should not come out of our mouths.
- Gossip, at its core, puts people down, diminishes others, makes people think less of the person we are talking about.

If we're speaking evil or making sinful judgments against our brother we're doing two things:

*#1 – we're sitting in contempt of God's law and being its judge*

*#2 – we're setting ourselves up in the place of God*

### **Application:**

#### **1. Let us humble ourselves and pay attention to our hearts**

- Since all of the words that we speak – whether good or evil – flow from the abundance of what's in our hearts, we must pay attention to our hearts (see Matthew 12:33-37).
- Ask yourself questions such as: “Why am I saying this?” “Is the intent of my words to love the person I'm talking about?”
- When in doubt, don't speak it. If you're about to share something with another person about a third person, and you have a hesitation within you, don't! Withhold sharing something that could put another in a negative light. If you have a concern for the person, go to that person. Share your concern by asking a clarifying question. Speak to them kindly, with love, and directly.

#### **2. Speaking evil is partnering with the enemy**

- Just a few verses prior James says – “resist the devil and he will flee from you” – James 4:7. This infers that the temptation of the devil is always close at hand. We need to resist. We should be aware, when we give in, when we speak evil of our brother, we are in that moment partnering with the enemy in his evil intentions. We're no longer participating in God's good intentions for His people. We're participating in the enemy's design for the destruction of the church.
- The scriptures assure us that we will give an account for every careless word we speak – Matthew 12:36

#### **3. Speaking evil divides what Christ died to bring together**

- The unity of the body is precious to the Lord. We are family!
- Christ died to forgive our sins, but not only that He died to make us One, as His bride.
- If we flippantly speak, if we pass on gossip or slander about a brother or sister, even in a small way, we will be tearing down what God has paid such a price to purchase.
- I don't want to be participating in tearing down what cost the Lord so much! I want to use my mouth to build up, to encourage, to strengthen.

#### **4. Speaking the truth, in love, builds God's Kingdom**

- We reflect the character of God when we speak to one another in love and in truth. This doesn't mean we'll always agree. We can sharpen one another with conversation, with challenge.
- But the way we'll speak will be in love. And in so doing, we'll be building the church up, making an even more authentic, truthful fellowship.

Q. What is the aim of the ninth commandment?

A. That I never give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor join in condemning anyone rashly or without a hearing. Rather, in court and everywhere else, I should avoid lying and deceit of every kind; these are the devices the devil uses...I should love the truth, speak it candidly, and openly acknowledge it. And I should do what I can to guard and advance my neighbor's good name. Heidelberg Catechism, 1562 AD

### **Questions for Discussion/Application**

- Re-read the text, James 4:10-12. What initial insights and observations do you have from reading this passage?
- Re-read the points about gossip and slander at the beginning of the Sermon Recap. Take a few moments to discuss -- "What is gossip?" "What is slander?" "In what ways can we as believers be guilty of these sins?"
- Why can we as people be so tempted at times to gossip?
- How can we guard against the sins of gossip and slander?
- If someone is in the process of sharing negative information with us about another person that we have no biblical reason to be hearing - how should we respond?
- Matthew 18:15-16 says, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." How should these words of Jesus inform how we do life together in the context of the church? How can obeying this verse reduce the temptation to gossip ?
- Where do you see yourself as wanting to grow in the area of biblical speech?
- Review the four points of application above. Which one of them resonates with you the most. Why?
- How does this passage point to our need for the gospel?
- Consider taking time to pray, asking God to help each us to grow in the area of biblical speech for the unity of the church and the glory of His name.