

## Love Not Slander James 4:11-12 (NKJV)

11 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. 12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

James comes back to the topic of the tongue.

Slander seems to be the most used form of political descent in our day.

Slander means to say inflammatory things about others for the purpose of harm.

The purpose is not to help the person or others but injure.

Instead we are to love one another as Christ loved us.

So let us look at this difficult but important passage.

- I. Do not speak evil of one another, brethren.
  - A. Speak Evil is one word in the Greek
    1. The New Testament Greek word Katalaleo is translated "backbiter," and it means one who speaks against another. *Lehman Strauss*,
    2. katalaléo has such senses as "to importune with speeches," "to prattle," "to blurt out," "to accuse," and "to calumniate." In the LXX it is used for hostile speech, especially slander. It does not occur in the ethical lists of the secular world, and is infrequent for malicious gossip even in Psalms and Proverbs. In the NT the main stress is on the malicious nature of the speech; and the importance of resisting this vice, which is a violation of the law (Jms. 4:11) and contrary to the new life in God (1 Pet. 2:3), may be seen from its high placing in lists of vices or its being made the subject of special exhortation (2 Cor. 12:20; Jms. 4:11). Its frequent occurrence in the apostolic fathers shows how seriously it is taken in the early church, but also how rampant it is. [G. KITTEL, IV, 3–5] *Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 495.*
  - B. Speak not evil one of another. The subject of the tongue is resumed. **To speak evil is to make harsh, censorious judgments.** The "royal law" requires love of a brother, and when this law is thus violated by a harsh judgment the law itself is condemned. But when a man sets himself up as a judge of the law he is no longer an humble and faithful doer of the law. *The People's New Testament: With Explanatory Notes (St. Louis, MO: Christian Publishing Company, 1891), Jas*

4:11.

1. The teaching of the Scriptures interposes a prohibition on telling abroad the sins and weaknesses of our brethren in Christ. *Lehman Strauss, Lehman Strauss Commentaries – James, Your Brother: Studies in the Epistle of James, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1967), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 170.*
  2. Leviticus 19:16 (NKJV) 16 You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.
  3. Psalm 101:5 (NKJV) 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.
- C. “‘brothers’ in 4:11. This is not an indication of shift of audience; it simply marks the speech of a pastor reminding his flock that despite his strong rhetoric, he acknowledges them as his siblings in the Lord. And so should they regard one another as brothers and sisters and act accordingly, with concern but not judgment and certainly not slander. *Dan G. McCartney, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*
- D. Slander comes from an attitude of pride and arrogance not from concern or love.
1. Judging, criticizing, or comparing makes one look better at another’s expense. This is an inappropriate use of the tongue. *Robert James Dr. Utley, Jesus’ Half-Brothers Speak: James and Jude, vol. Volume 11, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2000), 59.*
- E. What is our purpose as a Christian, to judge them or to build them up in the Lord and support the weak.
1. Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who [are] spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.
  2. James 5:19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 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.
- II. To do so is to speak evil of the law and to judge the law.
- A. Here he refers to the Royal law from 2:8, the law to love one another.
1. Slander is never done out of love but always against love.
  2. 1 Peter 4:8 (NKJV) 8 And above all things have fervent love for one

another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

3. Ps 140:11 Let not a slanderer be established in the earth; Let evil hunt the violent man to overthrow [him].”
  4. Eph 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.
- B. The “royal law” requires love of a brother, and when this law is thus violated by a harsh judgment the law itself is condemned. But when a man sets himself up as a judge of the law he is no longer an humble and faithful doer of the law. *The People’s New Testament: With Explanatory Notes (St. Louis, MO: Christian Publishing Company, 1891), Jas 4:11.*
1. James 2:8 (NKJV) 8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well;
- C. If we do not keep the greatest of all laws how can we be judges on others.
1. We must also realize that we are all sinners.
  2. Maybe not to the same degree but James has already dealt with that.
    - a. James 2:10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one [point], he is guilty of all.

III. We are not to be a judge of the law but a doer of the law.

- A. When we obey the law we recognize its righteousness and divine sovereignty over us, but when we willfully violate it, we actually condemn it. *Lehman Strauss, Lehman Strauss Commentaries – James, Your Brother: Studies in the Epistle of James, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1967), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 171.*
- B. “But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge; if thou not only judgest thy brother, and therein invadest the law’s office, (whose part it is to judge him), but judgest him for what the law doth not forbid him, and therein judgest the law itself, as insufficient, and not strict enough; thou dost cast off the law’s government, disown its superiority, exempt thyself from any subjection to it, and make thyself merely a judge of it. *Poole*

IV. There is one lawgiver and judge.

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“Here James is not concerned with how the community as a whole may deal with a member who has trouble with some sin, but in 5:19–20 he does recognize a place for correcting a fellow believer. Rebuking and correcting someone because of love is quite different from slandering and judging, which are generated by different motives, usually jealousy or ambition. *Dan G. McCartney, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*

“This does not mean that one should never denounce sin or criticize fellow believers (cf. Moo 2000: 198)—here James himself is doing so—but that one should not spread abroad accusations, cast aspersions, or defame or denigrate persons or their motives.” *Dan G. McCartney, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament – James, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 220.*

James 5:19-20 (NKJV)

19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 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.

But how is slandering a fellow believer slandering the law? It does what the law specifically prohibits. To set one’s own judgments over the law is implicitly a denigration of the law. This should be a sobering thought because those within the church who slander their brothers and sisters often see themselves as upholding and safeguarding the word of God. *Dan G. McCartney, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament – James, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 221.*

James was not forbidding us to use discrimination or even to evaluate people. Christians need to have discernment (Phil. 1:9–10), but they must not act like God in passing judgment. We must first examine our own lives, and then try to help others (Matt. 7:1–5). We never know all the facts in a case, and we certainly never know the motives that are at work in men’s hearts. To speak evil of a brother and to judge a brother on the basis of partial evidence and (probably) unkind motives is to sin against him and against God. We are not called to be judges; God is the only Judge. He is patient and understanding; His judgments are just and holy; we can leave the matter with Him. *Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 367.*

James is not discounting the need for honest discussion and constructive criticism within the body of believers. It may be that he would applaud a removal from the congregation of those who deliberately lead astray the flock with their destructive tongues. The point is, however, that jealous and contemptible language has no place in the church, as James emphasizes in the closing words of 4:12: *Ralph P. Martin, James, vol. 48, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1988), 164.*

All men have their shortcomings, their failures, and their sins; do not let us dwell on them; and, if we must write of them, let us write as our Saviour did in the dust. The Jews, it is true, often made no distinction between the moral, legal, and ritual codes. All were to them of like importance. They did not recognize the very necessary distinction between things that are forbidden because they are wrong, and things that are wrong because they are forbidden. *H. Maynard Smith, The Epistle of S. James: Lectures (Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, 1914), 252.*

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Ver. 11. **Speak not evil one of another, brethren, &c.]** The apostle here returns to his former subject, concerning the vices of the tongue, he had been upon in the preceding chapter, **#Jas 3:6-10**, and here mentions one, which professors of religion were too much guilty of, and that is,

speaking evil one of another;

which is done either by raising false reports,

and bringing false charges;

or by aggravating failings and infirmities;

or by lessening and depreciating characters,

and endeavouring to bring others into discredit and disesteem among men:

this is a very great evil, and what the men of the world do, and from them it is expected; but for the saints to speak evil one of another, to sit and speak against a brother, and slander an own mother's son, is barbarous and unnatural.

**He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law;** he that is a talebearer and backbites his brother, his fellow member, and detracts from his good name and character, and takes upon him to judge his heart, and his state, as well as, to condemn his actions, he speaks evil of the law; and judges and condemns that, as if that forbid a thing that was lawful, even tale bearing and detraction, **#Le 19:16**, or by speaking evil of him for a good thing he does, he blames and condemns the law, as though it commanded a thing that was evil; and by passing sentence upon his brother, he takes upon him the province of the law, which is to accuse, charge, convince, pronounce guilty, and condemn:

**but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law;** as is a duty, and would best become:

**but a judge;** and so such a person not only infringes the right of the law, but assumes the place of the Judge and lawgiver himself; whereas, as follows,