

# **James: The Practical Christian**

**Do Not Slander One Another**

*James 4:11-12*

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December 18, 2005

# Do Not Slander One Another

## Scripture

Kathy Plate of Orlando, FL tells the story of the time she visited her neighbor. While there, five-year-old Andrew pulled out his kindergarten class picture and began describing each classmate: “This is Robert; he hits everyone. This is Stephen; he never listens to the teacher. This is Mark; he chases us and is very noisy.”

Then, pointing to his own picture, Andrew commented, “And this is me; I’m just sitting here minding my own business.”<sup>1</sup>

We have such a tendency to slander others, don’t we? We smile when a five-year-old boy does it. We, of course, are much more sophisticated in the way in which we slander others. Nevertheless, it is just as destructive and just as sinful.

In today’s passage, James teaches us how to deal with the issue of slander. So, with that in mind, let us read James 4:11-12:

**<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> There is only one Law-giver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor? (James 4:11-12)**

## Introduction

What is it about slander that is so alluring to us all? *60 Minutes* tried to answer that question not too long ago. They actually sent a news team to report on the remarkable sale of all the cheap grocery store tabloids. They started by interviewing people who were buying the paper at grocery store checkout counters.

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<sup>1</sup> Kathy Plate, Orlando, FL in *Christian Reader*, “Kids of the Kingdom.”

The reporter asked one buyer, “Do you people really believe what you read in this paper?”

The reply came back, “No, but we like to read it anyway.”

Jesus once said, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, *slander*” (Matthew 15:19). Slander is viewed by Jesus as a serious sin.

To read or tell or listen to a slanderous story, especially about a distinguished person, is a fascinating activity for many people. If you have some juicy bit of something you want to share and you want another person’s attention, use it with a name that is honored or respected by others, and you will have his or her fascinated attention for an extended period of time.

## Lesson

The wrong use of words is not a problem limited to the unbelieving, secular world around us. The hard truth is that slander can also be a very serious problem among Christians.

Nor is slander in the church a 20<sup>th</sup> century problem! In fact, it’s as old as the New Testament itself. It goes back at least as far as the first book written in the New Testament—the book of James—written in 45 AD.

James addresses this problem head-on in James 4:11-12. As we study this text today, I want to ask and answer three questions about slander:

1. What exactly is slander?
2. Why is slander such a serious problem?
3. How do you respond to slander?

### I. What Exactly Is Slander? (4:11a)

First, what exactly is slander?

In James 4:11a the brother of Jesus writes, “**Brothers, do not slander one another.**”

The Greek word translated “**slander**” literally means “to talk down.” **Slander** is similar to gossip, which means “to pass on personal facts.” However, **slander** is not only passing on personal facts about another person, it is passing on personal facts in such way that the other person is put down and demeaned. **Slander** refers to the practice of talking down another person. It is impugning someone’s character or reputation by the way you talk about him or her. It is speaking of someone in a way that lowers that person’s reputation in the eyes of others. This practice usually takes place in their absence when they have no opportunity to defend themselves.

It doesn’t mean that what is said must be false. What is said might be absolutely true! It is very easy to talk about others behind their backs and not think it is wrong because what you are saying may be true. However, you can **slander** people by simply sharing true things about them, but with the intention of impugning their character or reputation.

If you are going to lower your listener’s estimate of another person, you have to do it very creatively. You must begin your statements with:

- “Now stop me if I’m wrong, but. . . .”
- Or, “I don’t mean to be critical, but. . . .”
- Or, “Perhaps I shouldn’t say this about her, but. . . .”
- Or, the notorious, “I have a prayer concern about him.”
- Or this devious one, “Let’s just keep this between us.”

Now, I don’t mean to imply that there are never occasions when we speak about someone else. However, on such occasions our goal must be to build up and our motive to glorify God.

Most of us are unaware when we **slander** others. We just don’t see that we are talking others down. We are blinded to this as a problem in our lives. Instead we honestly perceive ourselves to be doing nothing more than analyzing or commenting.

But it is a common problem we desperately need to recognize! The reason we need to recognize it as a problem is because its consequences are so serious.

Several years ago Dr. Albert H. Cantril, a professor at Princeton University, conducted a series of experiments to demonstrate how quickly rumors spread. He called six students to his office and in “strict confidence” informed them that the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were planning to attend the university dance. Within a week, that completely fictitious story had reached nearly every student on campus. Eventually city officials called up the university, demanding to know why they had not been informed. Press agencies were frantically telephoning for details.

Dr. Cantril later wrote: “This was a pleasant rumor. A slanderous one travels even faster.”<sup>2</sup>

No wonder Mark Twain, who was perhaps quoting the great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once said, “A lie can travel half way around the world while truth is still lacing up her boots.”<sup>3</sup>

Bernard Joseph Saurin said, “Slander is a vice that strikes a double blow; wounding both him that commits it, and him against whom it is committed.”<sup>4</sup>

Tyron Edwards noted, “The slanderer and the assassin differ only in the weapon they use; with the one it is the dagger, with the other the tongue. The former is worse than the latter, for the last only kills the body, while the other murders the reputation.”<sup>5</sup>

So, to slander is “to talk down,” and it is a serious problem.

## II. Why Is Slander Such a Serious Problem? (4:11b-12)

But, second, why is slander such a serious problem?

James answers that question in verse 11b, **“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.”**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://64.233.187.104/search?q=cache:Xn77KKwAS1kJ:www.ccbiblestudy.org/Topics/95Daily%2520Walk/95ZS19.htm+Albert+H.+Cantril+gossip&hl=en>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.twainquotes.com/Lies.html>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/9711.html>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/9708.html>.

What **law** is James talking about here? If you will look at the end of verse 12 you'll notice that James uses the word "neighbor." That word "neighbor" seems to confirm that the **law** James is speaking of in verse 11 is that great commandment of God set before us in the Old Testament and quoted by Jesus in the New Testament to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39).

To slander someone is to violate that perfect law of love James referred to earlier in James 1:25. Jesus set this law before us in the *Sermon on the Mount* when he said, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 5:14-15: "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."

James does not mean that you are never to hold any opinions about people. James also does not mean that you should entirely suspend your critical evaluations of people or their beliefs, or that you should refuse to discern between truth and error. The very nature of man as created in the image of God includes the ability to make value-judgments. What James is saying here is that in your judgments of people be very careful not to violate law of love by putting them down before others.

In verse 12 James goes on to write, "**There is only one Law-giver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?**" His point here is that when you slander someone you violate the law of love by setting yourself in the place of God. James is saying that there is only one who is qualified to judge! And that is the one who is able to save and destroy.

Is there anyone here today who is "**able to save and destroy**"? Not one! No one has ever lived who can say that—except for Jesus Christ. And James says here, "**But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?**" In the Greek text that little pronoun "**you**"

appears first in the sentence as if to say, “Who are you, the one least qualified, to be judging your neighbor in this way?”

Because we cannot read each other’s hearts or assess each other’s true motives, we must be very careful not to judge one another merely on what we know. In order to judge someone rightly you must know *all* there is to know about that person. In other words, James is saying you need to be God. And that is just the problem. We are not God. No man knows what is in another man’s heart. In Matthew 7:1-5 Jesus said, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 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? 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? 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.”

If you are going to slander and talk down other people, you must ignore their strong points and deal only with those few weak areas that you are inevitably able to find because they are human. And, of course, you must overlook the plank in your own eye. Jesus’ point is that you who are looking for specks in the eyes of others have missed the fact that you have a plank in your own eye. Our goal as believers is meant to be the building up of one another in love—not the tearing down of one another in criticism.

Years ago Sid Gilman served as the Head Coach and General Manager of the NFL team, the Houston Oilers. Gilman took the team in the early part of the season when they had a 1 and 5 record. That’s 1 win and 5 losses. At the time of an interview their record had become 6 and 6. The Press wanted to know how in the last 6 games he was able to win 5 of them. How did he turn the team around from being a loser to being a winner and cause himself now to be up for NFL’s “Coach of the Year” award? His answer was classic: “We do not allow any negative or petty spirits on this team. None whatsoever. We build each other up. We love each

other. We praise one another's abilities. We encourage one another in the game of football.”

He went on to say that he spent most of his time with his men, not pointing out all their flaws but building into the minds of his men that they could play the game and win the game.

And do you know what happened? They started winning!

Interesting, isn't it? It is amazing how a petty and critical spirit can ruin an entire organization. There is nothing more contagious and ruining—not only in a football team but also in a church, a business, a student body, a staff team, an organization or a home—than a negative, petty spirit. That is why God pulls no punches when he evaluates that particular spirit of slander.

Slander is such a serious problem because it tears others down rather than builds them up. It destroys rather than builds.

### **III. How Do You Respond to Slander?**

So, third, how do you respond to slander?

What do you do when someone begins to slander another person in your presence? What do you do when someone belittles or demeans another person to you?

It's really simple: *Get up and leave, or denounce it boldly as slander.*

Some of our most deadly sins are the sins of omission. It's not that you are slandering, but it is failing to correct those around you that do slander. It is allowing people to put others down in your presence and not confronting such people with the seriousness of that sin.

Why do we not confront people with their slander? Because in the core of our being we long to be accepted and loved. And if we confront such a person, they might not accept us. They may even reject us. If we don't agree with them, maybe they'll even talk about us that way with others. So we allow them to spew out their venom all over us and others as we passively stand by in guilty silence.

Parents, in your home, when you detect a negative attitude, be very careful not to just let it pass by. Call it a negative attitude and deal with it. And deal with it immediately and decisively.

But what about our own tendency to slander? James told us in 3:8 that no man can tame the tongue. But the good news is that what man cannot do, God can! God can enable you to stop the sin of slander! How does he do it? By dealing with the root problem which lies behind the tongue.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:18 that the real problem is not the tongue but the heart. He said, “The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’” According to Jesus, the tongue is simply a neutral messenger boy that carries the words from the heart. It is the bucket that goes down to the well, dips into what is there and then dumps out of the mouth what it picks up.

Slander is not just a sin of the tongue, but a sin that is deep in our hearts. It is vital that you and I learn to say, “I have a slandering heart. And the reason I have a slandering heart is because I have a judging heart. And the reason I have a judging heart is because I am a fragile person. I desperately need to protect myself. I desperately need acceptance and love. Slander is a wonderful offensive weapon I use to protect myself.”

The person who slanders is an insecure person. By putting people down he is then able to bring himself up in the eyes of others. Slander is part of a very intricate strategy that feeds our deep desire to be approved and accepted by our listeners, and to somehow be better than the person we are slandering. To slander someone, you must first imagine yourself as superior to him. You must view yourself as qualified to be a critic—only then you can put him down.

But sooner or later it backfires. People who slander are destined to be empty, shallow people. They are people who really don't know the power or the presence of God in their lives.

So what is the antidote to slander? *It is the gospel.* Stop looking to man and look to Christ alone for approval and acceptance.

The more you discover that your security and significance is in Christ, the more your problem with slander will diminish.

If you ground your life in the truths of the gospel, and that in Christ you are completely and totally accepted by the only one who really counts, then, when you discover certain faults in someone or when someone has hurt you, instead of falling back into your old patterns of judgment and slander, you will then be able to go to that person in private according to Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18 and talk with him or her about how you have been hurt or the concerns you have.

Before, you would never have done that! Why? Because you feared that person's response. Your life was in bondage to the approval of man. Were you to go to that person, he or she might even reject or hurt you more. Or you might not get anywhere. So you violated the law of love and withdrew to the world of silent judgment or, worse, slander.

But now that your identity is in Christ, you are free to love that person enough to go to him or her. And lo and behold, sometimes you will find that there really was another side to the story! And maybe even that you were wrong, or what you heard was wrong. Or the person you were going to was wrong but no one ever loved him or her enough to go in gentleness and humility, as Paul says in Galatians 6:1.

The good news is that Jesus promises a new and clean heart to all those who will turn from their sin and trust in him. And when a person comes to faith in Christ, Christ will begin to change that person and his speech. You see, when Christ controls the heart, he controls the tongue.

The answer is not found in relying on your own abilities but by relying on the one who has much greater power than you have. For you have the unlimited resources in Christ to draw on. And the most important way you can rely on those resources is through prayer.

In Psalm 141:3, David prayed, "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips."

## Conclusion

There are four frames in an old picture story taken from a *Life* magazine in the late 1960s.

In the first frame you can see a little house in the middle of a wheat field. The sun is going down, and a young boy is wandering out of the house into the cold night.

In the second frame you see people racing back and forth through the field in search of the little boy. The attitude among the people is one of panic.

In frame three, we see the sun beginning to rise and the people joining hands to walk through the whole field together at the same time.

And in frame four you see the father carrying the limp form of his son into the house. Underneath the fourth frame are the only words found in this picture story. The caption read, "If we had only joined hands a little sooner."

Brothers and sisters, life is too rough to go through it constantly fighting with others. Especially in the church, and in our families, our mission and purpose is dependent on our joining hands. We join hands so that we can support one another and work with one another and build one another up rather than tearing one another down and destroying each other.

That is why I pray that none of us will ever have to say, "If we had only joined hands a little sooner." Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributor\\_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181)
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## **PRAYER:**

Our gracious and forgiving God, we thank you for the way you have dealt with us. You have seen all our sins and failures and yet you have chosen to forgive us and to restore us to yourself. We pray with the Lord Jesus that you might make us one. Take all our broken relationships and through Christ restore us with one another. Thank you for setting before us the task of telling the world of your love. Show us how to join hands now, all so that the world will see your love through ours.

If there is even one person listening today who has not yet received your pardon for sin, draw them to yourself. Make that person's heart restless until he or she finds rest in you.

Lord, we give you our many weaknesses today and ask for your strength. And Father, as I exchange my weakness for your strength, control my words. I ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

## **CHARGE:**

The final words in a person's life are important. Final prayers are even more so. Never forget that one of Jesus' final prayers was a prayer for us that we would be one. Why? So that the world would know his love through ours. As you recommit yourself to building others up instead of tearing them down, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.