

Hold Your Tongue James 4:11,12

The command that James has issued to HUMBLE YOURSELVES IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD is appropriately followed by the command, DO NOT SPEAK AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, BRETHREN. The theme of the tongue is certainly not new to us as we have studied James. However, he feels the need to offer a pointed reminder of the seriousness of misusing the tongue in the body of Christ. Of regard for the body of Christ and the nature of the Lord, the Christian is to refrain from speaking against a brother. Why is this a major concern for James? Let us consider his rationale offered to all of us.....

I. THE COMMAND REGARDING THE TONGUE

James does not want to retrace his steps on the subject, James sees another aspect that is critical. The best way, however, he can see to make his point, James does indeed retrace his steps in order to drive home the critical issues addressed. He has explained that the claim of being religious must be met with the discipline of the bridled tongue (1:26). The tongue is an extension of the heart, so that it reveals the inward motivations; therefore the believer is to speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty (2:12). He explains that the tongue is small but capable of accomplishing mighty things if properly harnessed (3:1-5). He also reminds us of the capacity of the tongue to cause great harm, as a raging fire that needs to be controlled (3:6-12).

Now James comes back to the tongue yet again.

1. a few qualifications

When James tells us, DO NOT SPEAK AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, BRETHREN, it is obvious that He is addressing Christians within the context of their local churches. How do we relate this command to the seemingly contradictory commands in the New Testament? We are told to admonish, instruct, and correct one another. Surely such commands will often be more than soft-spoken, casual conversations. We are told to make judgements on false prophets and to “judge with righteous judgement (John 7:24).

What James was concerned with was the proud, arrogant attitude that would make one Christian think that he could talk down to another. And this is true whether it is face to face or in discussion with others. The arrogant attitude, often clothed in self-righteousness, is at the heart of SPEAKING AGAINST ONE ANOTHER.

2. Characterizations of “speaking against one another”

DO NOT SPEAK AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, BRETHREN, is a command that appears to address a persistent problem that had emerged in the early church. The term James uses goes beyond “slander,” It literally means to “speak against” or to “speak down to or about someone. The sinfulness wrapped up in our natures comes out in a

sneaky way at this point. For we might know something that is true about another person and think that since it is true we have a right to pass it along to others. If it damages the other person or tears down their character or will make you look better than the other person, then it needs to remain unsaid!

Go back to the root of this: a lack of practicing humility (4:10). Pride lunges to assert itself and will stop at nothing to elevate itself on a pedestal, even among the body of Christ. We have noted earlier that we deal with life by dealing with the tongue. Here we see that we deal with the tongue by DEALING WITH PRIDE. One commentator has stated this clearly:

Defamation begins and lives on in the mind. It is something we say to ourselves long before we pass it on. But if our minds were drilled in biblical attitudes, then love for our brothers would begin to root out censoriousness. Consideration for our neighbors would begin to replace the hurtful and arrogant word by helpful and caring pastoral concern.”

So we must nurture an attitude of humility before God if we are to hold our tongues from tearing down a brother or sister. But James adds to this sense of restraint by showing the whole nature of speaking against a brother.

II. THE EXPLANATION FOR RESTRAINING THE TONGUE

James command is followed by an explanation that exposes the heart and soul of speaking against a brother. Seeing this can help to remind us of the seriousness of guarding our comments about someone or to someone.

1. **The Issue of speaking against and judging a brother**

This is a repetition of terms that point to the body of Christ: ONE ANOTHER, BRETHREN...BROTHER...NEIGHBOR. So James warns: HE WHO SPEAKS AGAINST A BROTHER OR JUDGES HIS BROTHER, SPEAKS AGAINST THE LAW AND JUDGES THE LAW. At the heart of the problem is a failure to grasp the nature of the Christian community. The terms that James uses point to a family relationship or close tie. The person you are speaking against has also been redeemed by the blood of Christ. Would any believer dare to raise His voice against another who is so intimately and uniquely joined to him as a brother or sister in Christ>

The last word of the paragraph, NEIGHBOR, is a term that in the OT designated a “fellow member of the community in covenant with Yahweh. It is in the same sense that James employs the word. The Old Testament context was equally as clear. Leviticus 19:17 says YOU SHALL NOT GO ABOUT AS A SLANDERER AMONG YOUR PEOPLE, AND YOU ARE NOT TO ACT AGAINST THE LIFE OF YOUR NEIGHBOR; I AM THE LORD. The bonds of fellowship are to be so strong, the consciousness of relationship together in Christ so real, that Christians must restrain their tongues from speaking against a brother.

Would it be inaccurate for me to suggest that no sin has brought more damage to the body anymore than than this sin of speaking against each other? Reputations have been ruined, churches split, families divided, and ministries shattered due to this sin?

2. The issue of speaking against and judging the law

To add to all this, James explains that the nature of this sin is actually an attack upon and judgement of the law of God. **HE WHO SPEAKS AGAINST A BROTHER OR JUDGES HIS BROTHER, SPEAKS AGAINST THE LAW AND JUDGES THE LAW; BUT IF YOU JUDGE THE LAW, YOU ARE NOT A DOER OF THE LAW BUT A JUDGE OF IT.** This is a bomb he drops right in the middle of our sin – you are actually denigrating the law of God when you speak against one another.

This is a shocking statement, but one we can not learn too well. Are you treading down the law of God by your tongue? As if that is not enough, James takes matters one more step, so that we can grasp the seriousness of the way we treat others in the body of Christ.

III. THE REALIZATION OF OUR POSITION AND THE LORD'S

1. Danger of being a judge rather than a doer of god's will

BUT IF YOU JUDGE THE LAW, YOU ARE NOT A DOER OF THE LAW BUT A JUDGE OF IT. We are to follow Jesus Christ, and do what he says. The message of the text is clear: our responsibility is not to declare laws or commands, but to obediently follow Christ. We have plenty of obedience to consume us without infringing on God's responsibility to judge.

3. Danger of assuming what belongs to god alone

The solemnity of the whole matter is summed up in verse 12: **THERE IS ONLY ONE LAWGIVER AND JUDGE, THE ONE WHO IS ABLE TO SAVE AND TO DESTROY; BUT WHO ARE YOU WHO JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOR?** The command to love our neighbor as ourselves and to not slander our neighbor was not given arbitrarily. God did not write anything except what expresses His moral character. We can not improve on the law of God unless God's character can be improved.

There are not two, three, or more lawgivers and judges. Only One exists: the Lord God who created the heavens and the earth. Have you subtly attempted to usurp the position that belongs only to God? In order to help us, James reminds us that the Lord is **THE ONE WHO IS ABLE TO SAVE AND TO DESTROY.** None of us has the power or prerogative to do either. If judgement were turned over to us we would miserably fail. For there is only one who is able to save and to destroy.

Conclusion:

And now a simple question for us to consider in light of the command to not speak against one another: **BUT WHO ARE YOU WHO JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOR?** God is

on his throne. He has established the moral criteria for all humanity and He will judge the world in righteousness. So if the Lord is doing this, then what sense does it make for me to think that I can improve upon what He is doing to help Him out by speaking against a brother?

Let us heed what the Scripture says so plainly: **DO NOT SPEAK AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, BRETHREN.** In so doing, may we manifest the sweetness which Christ designed for the body of Christ.