

James 4 (11-12) – Don't Badmouth Your Brother

Imagine someone tackling their own teammate, blocking their own shot, or signing a contract for one team and playing for another. James is talking about a sin that's like aiming our arrows at ourselves. The key to overcoming this sin is not by minding your mouth, it is by renewing your mind (Proverbs 4:23 / Luke 6:46 / Romans 12:2). We think wrongly that is why we speak wrongly. When we see the true depth of this sin, it will motivate us to repentance and renewal.

This phrase "speak evil against" is basically referring to something like slander. In this passage it is tied here together with a judgmental attitude. To be "judgmental" means to "call into question, to dismiss or condemn". It is taking a posture over and against someone, and passing sentence on them. Now Christians are definitely called to judge, in the sense of discernment, and discipleship, but not in the sense of wanting to pass sentence on people, or to hurt others.

James is warning against the expression of a critical and condemning spirit. It is usually verbal, but it can be in print, or through electronic or other media. Slander itself is usually associated with lies, but it may not be a lie, just an attack. For example, a person may say something about how or what someone else does or did. They may not be telling an outright lie about it, but they may twist the truth, or paint the picture in a disparaging way, so that it looks worse than it really is. What they are trying to do is to make the other person look bad.

Everyone knows about this. It's on the social media sites, TV, magazines, movies, and the newspaper. James is talking about "badmouthing" somebody. It's a judgmental spirit that leads to judgmental speech. The message can be badmouthing, because it isn't true, and the motive can be badmouthing, because the goal isn't godly. Sometimes it's both.

When James says, "don't badmouth", he isn't saying that we shouldn't talk about other people. He isn't telling us not to correct or rebuke one another, exercise discernment, evaluate leaders, or warn people against false doctrine and false teachers. He isn't teaching us not to expose or speak against sin, not to call people to repentance, or not to practice church discipline. He isn't arguing that we should never "name names" or call out high profile people publicly. No, the NT has examples of all of those things, and we are called to do them all at times.

Of course, there are proper and improper ways to address those issues, but James is not specifically addressing those issues here. We have covered these matters in detail in our book "*The Fellowship Files*", and our sermon "*What Gossip Is & What It's Not*", and other places. The question is if we desire the spiritual profit of the other person.

When it comes to Christians and their treatment of one another, we are all called to be judges without being judgmental. And you aren't being judgmental when you recognize sin as sin, or you make godly distinctions about people's spiritual condition (cf. Matthew 7:1, 6, 20). It's right to push each other, with mercy, and by grace, in the direction of Christlikeness.

When James says, *Do not speak evil against one another*, he is addressing the issue of "badmouthing" your brothers and sisters in Christ. The issue is the intent of the heart. Is it righteous or malicious? Christians are called to build each other up, to help, encourage, exhort, teach, and

train each other to be obedient for the sake of God's glory. Slander, on the other hand, aims at bringing others down. A slanderer wants to ruin the reputation of someone else. They bring railing accusations and assign bad motives to people. They are looking to wound, not to heal. Slander results in the defamation of character, the ruining of real-life people and relationships, and it injures the integrity of organizations. Badmouthing is bad news for everybody.

We can badmouth someone "by accident", too. It is possible that our intent was not to injure someone but we did it anyway through our carelessness. We ought always to be careful with our words, especially when we talk about somebody else to someone else. Of course, sometimes people are just looking to be offended, and sometimes it's just a bad mind that thinks it's being badmouthed. I want you to think about that for a minute. You see, what is happening there is that we can adopt a slanderous mindset that thinks the worst of people. You can be speaking evil against someone to yourself. You can be badmouthing in your own brain. It's like a poison pressure cooker, a mind stewing in slanderous sin. Everything looks like poison to the poisoned mind. And if there is venom on your lips, there is poison in your heart.

The sin of slander and its evil cousins, like gossip, and lying, are heavily referenced in the OT, perhaps more than any other sin (cf. Leviticus 19:16 / Psalm 15:1-3, 50:19-20, 101:5, 140:11 / Proverbs 10:18, 11:13, 20:19, 30:10 / Jeremiah 6:28, 9:4 / Ezekiel 22:9). The NT also speaks very clearly against this sort of sin (Matthew 15:19 / Mark 7:22 / 2 Corinthians 6:8, 12:20 / Ephesians 4:31 / Colossians 3:8 / 1 Timothy 5:10, 6:4 / 1 Peter 2:1 / Revelation 2:9). The Bible shows us many examples of "badmouthing". It warns us of the consequences. It tells us to keep our ears from hearing evil things, and our lips from speaking evil things (cf. Exodus 20:16, 23:1 / 2 Samuel 10:1-3, 15:1-6 / 1 Kings 21:1-13 / Psalm 31:13, 34:13, 41:5-8, 109:2 / Proverbs 6:16-19, 11:9, 16:28, 17:4, 9, 18:8, 19:5, 24:28, 25:23, 26:20, 22 / Isaiah 32:7 / Jeremiah 20:10 / Acts 6:11-14 / Romans 1:29-30 / 1 Timothy 3:11, 5:13 / 2 Timothy 2:16, 3:3 / 3 John 1:10).

Slander is pure evil, and it comes from the pit of hell. You want proof of that? Consider that fact that Satan was the first slanderer. He slandered God's integrity and motives in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-5), and he continually slanders God's children now (Revelation 12:10). The king of sin is the ultimate slanderer. When you are badmouthing you are doing the devil's work.

Jesus was slandered by the religious leaders. They said He was a glutton and a drunkard (Matthew 11:19). They called Him illegitimate (John 8:41). They accused Him of being demon possessed (John 8:48). They looked for people to spread lies about Him (Matthew 26:59-61).

Do not speak evil against one another – the instruction is clear. Now what are the implications of either repeating or repenting of this sin? What does it say about us and the way we think?

The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother – believers share in the same life, the same Lord, and this is an eternal reality (Romans 12:5 / 1 Corinthians 6:17, 12:13 / Ephesians 4:25). This bond is deeper and greater than any natural bond on earth. Christians are blood relatives by the blood of Christ (cf. Acts 20:28). Believers are spiritually united with Christ and with each other. Would you speak evil of Jesus? Would you condemn Christ? We think that we wouldn't, but that's what you're doing when you badmouth someone in His family. Even natural love teaches you that you shouldn't badmouth a member of your own family. How much more is

that true for those who have been united in a *supernatural* love, members of your eternal family? The way we treat each other is the way we treat our Lord (cf. Matthew 25:40, 45). Because of our union with Christ, when you badmouth someone you are not only badmouthing them, you are badmouthing Jesus, and you are badmouthing yourself, too.

Badmouthing is bad for you. It is abusing your spiritual power. To continue in or repent of this sin shows what you think about other believers. But there's more, because this sin not only shows what you think about other believers, but also what you think about God's Word.

The one...speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. The reason we involve ourselves in badmouthing is because we have wrong thoughts about the Word of God. Remember what "judging" here is; it is not the generic sense of judging as in discerning that James is talking about, but the judgmental attitude, the critical spirit which calls into question, dismisses and/or condemns. In this sense, to make yourself a judge is to place yourself in a position above something or someone else.

When we badmouth a child of God we badmouth the Word of God. The "royal law" (James 2:8 – love your neighbor as yourself / Leviticus 19:18 / Matthew 22:39 / Romans 13:8-9 / Galatians 5:14) is the essence of what God commands. But when we badmouth we are, by our actions, acting as a judge of it, saying that it doesn't apply to me in this situation, as if we know better than God. To judge the law is to put yourself above the law, to dismiss it. When we badmouth we are exalting ourselves over others, and we are also exalting ourselves over God's Word.

Think back again to Genesis 3. Adam and Eve listened to the word of the devil. Satan accused God of lying about the consequences of their actions (you won't die, you will be like Him). He slandered God's integrity and accused God of bad motives. And they doubted the goodness of God, the rightness of His plan for them, and they questioned the limits God had placed on them. In other words, they judged the character and the commands of God. They called into question God's design, and by eating the fruit, they condemned God's counsel.

Don't miss the fact that Satan was saying that *he* was like God. How else could he say that God was lying to them, and that he knew what would happen if they ate the fruit? You see, the devil was placing himself in a position of equality to God, above the law. He was not only saying that they would be like God, but that they would be like *him*. In an evil sense, he was right.

When we badmouth our brother, when we slander our sister, we are saying that God's Word isn't right. We are standing over our fellow believers, and we are standing over God's Word. We are judging both to be unworthy of us and our obedience. Even worse, James points us to a third implication here, because we are also standing over and judging God Himself.

There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. When we practice badmouthing, it not only shows us what we think about other believers, and it not only shows us what we think about God's Word, it shows us what we think about God.

In the Garden of Eden, Satan was exalting himself to the position of God, and this is what he enticed Adam and Eve with. He said, "You will be like me; you don't need God to tell you

what's right and what's wrong". God had given them the law, "don't eat of this tree", but they placed themselves in a position as if they were equals with God, the law giver.

When we are speaking against and judging our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are doing the very same thing. You have a real problem when you are picking and choosing which parts of God's Word you will submit to, especially when this is the part that sums up all of God's Word. You aren't showing any reverence or respect for God's authority when your actions say that God's Word isn't right, isn't enough, isn't applicable to you.

You have no right to stand above God. When we adopt a judgmental attitude, when we condemn fellow believers, when we badmouth our brothers, when we slander our sisters, we are usurping God's rightful place. We can discern and we can disciple, we can examine and we can exhort, but only God has the right to judge a person's heart and pass sentence.

Again, Christians are called to judge, but this means to judge righteously, according to the substance and the spirit of the Scriptures, and not according to our own preferences and purposes. When we practice badmouthing, we are acting as our own God. But there is only one God, and let me tell you, it isn't you or me (Deuteronomy 32:39 / Matthew 10:28).

Badmouthing shows what you think about other believers, what you think about God's Word, and what you think about God. And finally, it actually shows what you think about yourself.

But who are you to judge your neighbor? In vs.11 James speaks of "brothers", but in vs.12, by using "neighbor", he widens the specific admonition into a general command. We know what sin does to people. We know what happens to people who don't repent of their sins and place their trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation. We can warn people of the coming judgment, but we cannot be judgmental towards them. This means both believers and unbelievers.

God is the one who matters when it comes to judgment, and He tells us not to badmouth people. When we presume to judge others, it is because of our pride. Do you know the difference between properly judging, as in discerning or discipling, and being judgmental, in the sense that James is dealing with here? Do you really want to see believers who are bound in certain sins turn from those sins? Do you really want to see Christians grow in grace? Do you really want to see lost people get saved? Or do you really just want to self-righteously rail against them?

We need to keep a short account of this sin in our lives, and when we commit it, intentionally or unintentionally, we need to confess it and repent of it. A true Christian wants to be rid of this sin; they don't want to be badmouthing a brother or sister. To the maturing Christian, it isn't the one who is badmouthed, but the one who does the badmouthing that gets the bad reputation.

If you are the victim of badmouthing, 1 Peter 2:12 tells you to live right. 1 Peter 3:16 tells you to keep a clean conscience. Eventually, the truth will win out, your true motives will be manifest, the wrong will be put to shame, and God will be glorified. 1 Peter 2:21-23 tells you not to strike back, but to follow the footsteps of Jesus, and leave the judging to God. God is your witness, and His righteousness will prevail. No matter what you've done, turn to Him for mercy and grace; trust Him with your soul. Satan can slander but Jesus makes us right with God (Romans 8:1, 33).