

4. There are times when we need to speak up. How do you know if your words about others are spoken within biblical parameters, or if they are spoken from improper motivations?

5. Have you ever been damaged by the words of others? What was your response, both internally, and to them? What work of the Spirit happened in you as a result of this kind of injustice? (How were you more spiritually formed as a result?)

6. When we speak against others, the offense is not only to them, it is to God. We act as judge, taking his seat, presumably knowing enough (as much as God?) about a person to pass judgment. How does God view such sin? Would this deter you in the future? Why or why not?

7. Since faultfinding is so common, is such an accepted practice, how do we guard against it? What will turn our hearts to internal examination at the point of temptation?

8. Enabled by the Spirit, how do we change? How do we respond more like Christ under pressure?

James 4:11-12

Discussion Group Questions

June 1, 2008

LESSON 9

Dr. Jerry Nelson

For discussion following the sermon on June 1, 2008

Faultfinding

Key Points

In this passage, James once again challenges us to be careful with our words. Slander is sin, and results in damaged relationships. With a culture that suggests that it is no big deal, everyone does it, we are challenged to look at the attitudes that produce sinful actions in light of God's Word. In today's text, we will face issues of:

Slander

Speaking against one another

Judgment of the law

The sin of "playing God"

Faultfinding is an acceptable practice in our culture. We seem to thrive on the mishaps of others. Perhaps driven by unbelief (I can't believe they would do or say such and such), shocked by absurdity, driven by fear, or arrogance, negative comments flow freely. And they are supported by our listeners. There is a connection, a camaraderie in complaining to one another about someone else. This is the world.

What about the church? Are we as prone to slander, to speaking against those of the world, and to speak critically about our brothers and sisters in Christ? We may rationalize that we are entitled to our opinions, to speak out about the injustice of our day and the poor decisions and misconduct of high-profile people and think nothing of it. In the church, as we become irritated with the

attitudes of immature believers, get frustrated with what appears to be inconsistent behavior, or are offended at the actions of others, when is it appropriate to speak to someone else, and when do our words cross a line and become slander?

This is a challenging question, for in order to guard against the sins of our speech, we must take an honest look at the motivations of *our hearts*. As we think about speaking up, our operative question should be “to what end”? Are we ready to speak words of life, words that bring restoration and healing, or are we more likely to speak words of death—the purpose to damage the reputation of someone else (and perhaps elevate ourselves)? As we look at this passage, our challenge is to look at ourselves. If we seek God with all our heart, he will be faithful to reveal to us sinful motivations of positioning, one-up-man-ship, arrogance, revenge and self-promotion. These are deeds of the flesh, and they are always damaging. Our challenge is to walk in the Spirit. May God enable us to think before we speak, and to keep silent where sin is present.

Leader’s Guide

Personal Preparation

This lesson is challenging, for no doubt some of you have been reminded of situations that you perhaps didn’t handle as well as you thought you should have. Maybe you spoke out against someone else and should have kept silent. If so, confess your sin so that you are not leading your group with a load of guilt.

Group Preparation

- Take a moment to evaluate your group. Is there a thread of “slander” that has been prevalent in your group? Do casual conversations (or formal discussions) often gravitate to criticism of others? Is it slander or healthy discussion?
- Are there individuals in your group who are prone to slander and complaint? If so, what is the reaction of the rest of the group? Do they join in, or do you sense a discomfort from others in the group?
- If you find that this has been a silent issue for your group, pray especially for wisdom and the work of the Spirit. This discussion could bring defensiveness, or conviction. Be ready to respond as the Spirit directs.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the characteristics of slander?
2. Somehow slander is sweet for a moment, but it doesn’t take long for it to turn against us. If this is true, why do we so readily engage in this type of activity?
3. Take time to surface and discuss some of the motivations of the heart: positioning, one-up-man ship, arrogance, revenge, hatred, deceit, self-promotion.