

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Watch What You Say! James 4:11-12**

Walter Wangerin, in his collection of short stories “*Ragman and Other Cries of Faith*”, begins one of his stories with what seems to be a lesson in entomology or the study of insects. But he turns it into a metaphor of spiritual truth..... He explains that a female spider is often a widow for embarrassing reasons -- she regularly eats those who come her way. Lonely suitors and visitors alike quickly become corpses so that her dining room becomes a morgue. A visiting fly, having become captive, will be granted the illusion of wholeness, but she will have drunk his insides so that he has become his own hallow casket. Not a pleasant thought, especially if you have a touch of arachnophobia. This may not be a pleasant thought but it is the truth.

The reason for this macabre procedure is that the female spider has no stomach and so is incapable of digesting anything within her. Through tiny punctures she injects her digestive juices into a fly so that his insides are broken down and turned into a warm soup. “This soup she swills” as one would drink through a straw. Having said this Wangerin then makes this comparison to our speech and how we talk to one another saying “even as most of us swill souls after having cooked them in various enzymes: guilt, humiliations, cruel love -- there are a number of fine, acidic mixes. And some among us are so skilled with the hypodermic word that our dear ones continue to sit up and to smile, quite as though they were still alive.”

This is a gruesome but effective metaphor to describe the power of destructive words. Destructive words do not dissolve mere organs and nerves but souls! This world is populated by walking caskets because countless lives have been dissolved and sucked empty by another persons words. Destructive words is clearly James’s target in **James 4:11,12** “**(11) Do not speak against one another, brethren. 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. (12) There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?**”

The use of destructive words may be an acceptable practice in the world but it is a totally unacceptable practice amongst Christians. **James 4:11, 12** tells us why this is. This weekend as we look at these reasons I would hope that we would be even more motivated than ever to weigh our words very carefully so that be may behave more like a Christian than like a female spider when it comes to the area of our speech.

### WE ARE COMMANDED NOT TO USE DESTRUCTIVE WORDS

The command is found in the very first part of **V. 11** “**Do not speak against one another, brethren....**” The word translated “**Speak against**” (KATALALEITE) literally means to “**speak down on.**” Therefore the command to “**speak against one another**” forbids any speech which runs down another person.”

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But how do we keep from violating this command? How do we keep from running one another down in our conversations? I don't believe that the best way to keep from violating this command is by eliminating all negative speech. Ignorance needs to be addressed, apathy needs to be addressed, rebellion needs to be addressed. Rather I believe that the best way to keep from violating this command is by purposing that all our communication would be edifying.

If we are going to keep from running people down in our conversations we must be committed to building people up in our conversations (Eph. 4:29).

And isn't this exactly what we are told to do in **Eph. 4:29? "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."** The word "to edify" literally means to "build a house." When we are characterized by edifying speech we will be seeking through our speech to build people up. Speaking down" or "speaking against" is the exact opposite of what we are supposed to do. Therefore by purposing ourselves through our speech to build people up this will naturally lead us away from speech which is tearing people down.

I would suspect that most of our speaking against individuals take place in our homes with husbands running down their wives, wives running down their husbands, parents running down their children and children running down their parents. It can be very vicious or it can be subtle. In fact it can be so subtle that the victim and the victimizer might not even know that it is being done. If someone came up to you and said, "You are not going to wear that tonight, are you?." Does it sound particularly vicious. Not particularly. But it is a potentially very damaging statement. Especially if the person hearing it interprets this way, "You idiot how could anyone choose to wear such an absurd outfit." This is not an edifying statement. It is not a building statement. If you are purposed to be edifying in your speech I am sure by the grace of God that you will come up with a much more profitable statement if you purpose to do so.

But even though most of our speaking against individuals probably takes place in our homes the instruction given by James is specifically addressing relationships within the church itself. Look again at the verse, **"Do not speak against one another, brethren."** If we are ever going to get this speech area right it is very important that we not only get it right with our friends and family outside of the church but more importantly we need to get it right with our brothers and sisters in Christ inside of the Church (John 13:34-35; James 4:11). **John 13:34,35** makes it very clear why this is so important. Listen to the words of these two very important verses **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (35) By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."** When people hear us talking about one another hopefully they will be able to sense the concern that we have for one another. Hopefully when people hear us talking about one another they will be able to see our commitment to each other's best interests. Hopefully when we are speaking to one another we will be able to sense that we are rooting for each other, that we are pulling for one another, that we are committed to the care and support of one another. God forbid that we would ever be guilty of speaking against the brethren. God forbid that we should ever be guilty of running down the brethren. We have been specifically commanded not to do this.

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What is another reason why we should not persist in “speaking against” the brethren? Using destructive words is extremely prideful.

### USING DESTRUCTIVE WORDS IS PRIDEFUL

Speaking against one another is very prideful because it is self-elevating. Some people are motivated to speak against people often times because they are harboring some form of ill will toward an individual. But probably the far most common motivation for speaking against others or running others down is the desire to exalt oneself. Certainly by running down another person we are indirectly but very effectively elevating ourselves above them. When we speak against another person we could very easily be compared to the pharisee in **Luke 18:11** who thanked God he wasn't like other sinners. People who elevate themselves at the expense of others could be compared to an individual who has chosen to seize and advantage by walking on the heads of certain people and feeling good about it. But James wants us to understand that speaking against others is not only prideful because it is a self-elevation of others. It is also a self-elevation above the law (V. 11).

Using destructive words is a self-elevation above the law (V. 11)

**“Do not speak against one another brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother ( with this judgmental spirit) speaks against the law, and judges the law....”** The Greek in V. 11 does not have a definite article before the word “law” which most likely keeps the thought purely qualitative. The reference therefore is not likely to the Mosaic Law but rather to the law governing the Christian life “the royal law,” which is the law of Christian love (James 2:8).

When Christians speaks against a brother or in other words judges a brother with a judgmental spirit he is violating the “royal law” which is the law of love. And if he does this what happens? Look again at the verse he **“speaks against the law, and judges the law.”** Their failure to keep the royal law the law of love in respect to their speech amounts to judging it, in that he has judged it to be invalid and unnecessary. Such a person says Douglas Moo, “becomes a judge of the law and sits himself ‘outside’ and ‘above’ the law. thus the law is not kept but is ‘disdained.” If we think this way we evidently view our opinions as better than God’s. We imagine that given the change we could improve the Law. Thus we become like Tolstoy, who said he was god’s older brother.

James is not saying that Christians are never to make judgments about Christian brothers. Listen to the words of Paul in **1 Cor. 5:9-13** **“(9) I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; (10) I did not mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. (11) But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler - not even to eat with such a one.**

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**(12) For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? (13) But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”** James is not saying that Christians are never to make judgments about Christian brothers. What the Scriptures forbid is judgmentalism, a critical and censorious spirit that judges everyone and everything, seeking to run others down rather than building them up (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

But someone might say but what about **Matt. 7:1 “Do not judge lest you be judged.”** Sometimes when well meaning Christians read this verse and conclude that Christ is saying that if you dare make a judgment about someone’s actions you will be in big trouble with God. They neglect to read the saying’s context. The instruction to “not judge lest you be judged” is directed to people who are overlooking the logs in their own eyes while they judge others. But if they are careful and deal with their own personal sins before attempting to lovingly deal with the sins of his brother then the passage goes on to say that they will see clearly so that they can remove the speck in their brother’s eye (Mt. 7:1-5).

Exercising judgment is not a problem in our relationships in the body of Christ in fact under certain circumstances it is our duty. But what is a problem is when we exercise judgment and speak against or speak down to our brother and when we do this we in effect **“speak against the law, and judge the law.”** And if we judge in this way the verse goes on to say then we are **“not a doer of the law , but a judge of it.”** This should be a very sobering statement .

Why should we not speak against the brethren? If we speak against the brethren we are elevating ourselves above the Law. Why is this so important to know. It is because it begins to make **James 4:6** come alive to us in relationship to our unloving speech. What did **James 4:6** say, **“God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** Those who run down the brethren not only are pridefully elevating themselves over their brothers and sisters in Christ but more significantly they are pridefully elevating themselves over God’s law. Now this is a scary thing to consider.

But there is an even more sobering truth. Those who speak against the brethren are not only exercising pride by elevating self above others, above the law but God Himself.

Self-elevation above God (V. 12).

Let us read **V. 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?”** Of course there is only one Lawgiver and Judge because there is only one who is able to save and to destroy and that is God. In **Matt. 10:28** Jesus warned his followers not to fear men who could kill the body but not the soul, but to fear God **“who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”** Sometimes when men get a little caught up in themselves the Lord has to remind them of their limitations (Job 40:7-14).

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Listen to the words of God to Job in **Job 40:7-14** “**Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me. (8) will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified? (9) Or do you have an arm like God, And can you thunder with a voice like His (10) Adorn yourself with eminence and dignity; and clothe yourself with honor and majesty. (11) Pour out the overflowings of your anger; and look on everyone who is proud, and make him low. (12) Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him; and Thread down the wicked where they stand. (13) “Hide them in the dust together; bind them in the hidden place. (14) Then I will also confess to you that your own right hand can save you.”**

Since God is the only one who can “save and destroy,” only God has the right to judge! Therefore, for us to judge one of God’s creatures is to usurp a right that only God has. Thus judgmentalism is not only arrogant but blasphemous! This alone ought to seal our judgmental, demeaning lips for eternity.

James concluding rhetorical question is powerful: “**But who are you who judge your neighbor?.**” Would we want to take God’s place? Ignorance mars our best judgments. We can judge external sins to be sins, but only imperfectly. We certainly do not know what is in the heart of another. God, however, knows every subtlety. Listen to **1 Cor. 4:5** “**Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts.** Sin also inhibits our judgments. We are all such sinners that our subjective judgments are clouded by our fallenness. Listen to the words of the Puritan William Beveridge “**I cannot pray, except I sin; I cannot preach, but I sin; I cannot administer, nor receive the holy sacrament but I sin. My very repentance needs to be repented of; And the tears I shed need washing in the blood of Christ.**”

### CONCLUSION

Let us thank God with all our hearts that we will not be judged by our sinful human counterparts.

But now let us go back to the original question that we were seeking to answer. Why should we not speak against the brethren. First of all we are commanded not to speak against the brethren. Therefore for us to speak against the brethren is sin. But it is not just a serious sin it is one of the worst sins. It is one of the worst sins because speaking against the brethren is extremely prideful. It is not only a self-elevation above others but it is also a self-elevation above the Law, and even worse, it is a self-elevation above God.

If you are here this morning and know that you have a problem in this area of your life in speaking badly about others particularly the brethren. Then you need to take these words to heart. Humble yourself before the Lord confessing your sin and purposing yourself rather than playing the role of the spider feeding on the souls of the brethren rather to play the role of the healer using your to edify and build the lives of those who name the name of Christ.