



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## Speaking Against a Brother

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### 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 Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?*

### Introduction

The theme of hypocrisy runs throughout James. In our last study of his “ten commandments” (4:7-10) we were instructed to repent, mourn over sin and let God exalt us. We are told to submit and draw near to God. Perhaps the most pernicious way we exalt ourselves is to put other people down. And, a major way we put others down is to slander them.

To slander someone is sinful hypocrisy because as soon as we do it we are sinning also! The Scripture repeatedly warns us to keep our hearts undefiled before the Lord and not to focus on others’ shortcomings. We are actually instructed to consider others better than ourselves.

A word of caution is in order concerning “judging.” While it is true that we are not to be judgmental, there are legitimate ways we ought to judge the actions of others.

Leaders in the church are told to judge outrageous or public sin in the congregation. Church leaders are given the responsibility to judge true doctrine vs. false doctrine. Of course, in the civil realm, sound judgment is a requirement for successful leadership.

### Our Study

*Brothers...*

The biggest problem with slander is normally found within the group to which we belong. While it is true we can slander a stranger, the sin of speaking against someone is most hurtful when it is a member of our own community, family, or church. It is within a more intimate group that jockeying for status and position breaks out in slanderous speech. Sometimes, slander is muted by a humorous style, but a hurtful intent often lies behind the joking.

*...do not slander one another.*

The term slander literally means to “speak against.” In the Bible it is used to describe two different problems. First, one may “speak against” another by saying something that is true, but the circumstances of the truth-telling are inappropriate. The most common form of this sin is gossip. Gossip may be true but it is a truth spoken in the wrong circumstance, to the wrong people, and without the motive of love.

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### BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: MONDAYS, 5:00 PM, ROOM 1425, LIGHT DINNER FOLLOWING STUDY

STAFF: MONDAYS, 12:00 NOON, CHAPEL, 2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR LB

# North Carolina

## Speaking Against a Brother

Second, “speaking against” could mean to say false things about someone else. This is the type of slander James seems to have in mind (see 2 Corinthians 12:20).

Notice in context from verse 7 we “resist” (stand against) the Devil (the Slanderer). If we are instructed to stand against the Slanderer, we are imitating him when we slander someone. We are doing devilish work.

*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.*

The thought of James may not be immediately apparent to most who read the above words. First, speaking against a brother is speaking against the law because it violates the “Law of Love.” Remember Jesus’ summary of the commandments to love God and neighbor.

Second, speaking against others is a decision to break one part of the law while maintaining other parts of the law. “I may slander and gossip but you will never find me doing such and such...” I decide which parts of the law apply to me.

*There is only one Lawgiver and Judge...*

Now James turns up the intensity. If we demonstrate our lack of regard for the law, then we likewise despise the One who gives the law, God Himself.

*...the one who is able to save and destroy.*

Whoa! The Lawgiver is the one who saves and destroys. How foolish would a person be to stand before a king and berate his commands, therefore, impugning his character?

*But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?*

“Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment” (Jesus, John 7:24).

None of us has some inherent right to be judgmental concerning our neighbor. Generally, we are not fit to be judges because we are guilty of the same sins that we criticize. Jesus says our neighbor may have a speck in his eye but we have a log in ours.

Three principles may be helpful when we find ourselves plunging into someone else’s business.

Ask three questions: 1. Do I have the authority to judge this other person? 2. If I do not have the authority, have I been invited to offer my opinion? 3. Am I speaking truth in love?

Think about it...

What’s in it for you when you slander or gossip?  
What is the consequence for the one who is the target of your “speaking against?”  
Is any of the above loving toward your neighbor?