

JAMES - SOUNDNESS OF SOUL FROM THE INSIDE OUT - Part fourteen

Teaching #1830 - Sunday, September 27th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

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HOW TO KEEP YOUR LIFE FREE FROM THE MOST SERIOUS MISTAKES

James 4:11-17 - "Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, 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. [12] There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? [13] Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— [14] yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. [15] Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." [16] As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. [17] So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

This section flows naturally from **4:10** - "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." Verses **7 through 10** bring one of the most starkly formed calls to repentance found anywhere in the New Testament.

Here's the heart of today's text. There are certain sins which *especially* harden the heart by the way in which they not only form *habits*, but by the way they *feed pride*, and thus *stymie* the growth and formation of humility. And we *need* humility, remember, because James tells us God only gives His *grace* to the humble - ".....'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'" (4:6).

In today's text, because James loves *grace*, he probes deeper into the whole issue of *humility*. He does this by noting two of the most common and crippling forms of *arrogance and pride* in the body of Christ. *First*, he deals with the habit of "*speaking evil*" against others (**4:11-12**), and *second*, he deals with the habit of *presumption* in our daily living (**4:13-17**). We'll look at the first today and the second next Sunday.

1) **EVIL SPEAKING TYPIFIES THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE FORM OF SIN BECAUSE IT IS A MORE MALIGNANT SIN THAN OTHER MORAL FAILURES**

There are tumors and there are malignant tumors. Here's why evil speaking is a malignant tumor:

James 4:11 - "Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, 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."

James reverts back to the term "*brothers*" - "Do not speak evil against one another *brothers*" - to show the particular wickedness of this sin. This sin of "*speaking evil against others*" - these *planned* pain-producers - are like a terrorist attack against *one's own family*.

It's wrong to speak evil of *anyone*, for sure. But it's *incredibly* wrong to speak evil against your own *brother* or *sister*. This sin is of the same family of sin seen in Cain as he killed his own brother, Abel. And James means for us to *see* the rotten nature of our evil words against our brothers and sisters in Christ.

There are two very important insights in this one verse:

- a) "**Do not speak evil of one another**"(4:11a). These words are *similar* to, but not quite the *same* as, some of the things James has written earlier in this letter about speech sins:
James 3:7-8 - "For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, [8] but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."

You can tell from the wording of these verses James is dealing with sins of an *uncontrolled tongue*. He's talking about the tongue's wild nature. That's why he describes it as an *untamed* member of the body. How hard it is to steer and control!

Words are tied so closely to our emotions, our tempers, and our pride. Words reveal what's in the heart because of the way they *gush forth*. When James says we "*stumble*" in our words (**3:2**), he means we frequently regret

the things we catch ourselves saying in unguarded moments. Like **stumbling**, our words can have a dangerous, unbalancing momentum. Stumbling means our words can cause us to **trip** spiritually. They can bring our souls crashing to the pavement.

But when James warns these Christians about **“speaking evil “against” one another”(4:11)** he’s describing not only a sin of a different **degree**, but a sin of a different **type**. This is not a **“stumbling”** sin. This is a **planned** sin. When James talks about speaking **“against”** one another he means using words in a **planned attack**. Words **“against”** another are words **aimed**. They’re words used **“against”** another the way you’d aim a knife, bullet.

Because this sin is far more **premeditated** it is not only more dangerous to the **one against whom I speak them**, but far more dangerous to **me** as I speak them. Whenever sin is planned it **hardens the will** of the one committing it more quickly and **blinds the mind** against seeing how terrible the sin really is.

Revenge feels good and right. When we judge others and speak evil of them it brings the **delusion of holiness** into our souls like a hallucinogenic drug. And the better sin feels the harder it is to forsake. And the harder sin is to forsake, the less likely the heart is to repent.

This is what James has in mind as he moves to his **second** thought in this complicated eleventh verse:

- b) **“...The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, 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”(4:11b).**

James labors to expose the deeper evil of **justifying a sinful course of action**. We all know Paul’s words about **restoring a fallen brother who has been “caught in a transgression”**(Galatians 6:1). I’m to reach out to that brother in a spirit of meekness because I know that I, too, can easily end up in exactly the same kind of situation - **caught unexpectedly - like a rabbit in a snare**. This is the kind of sin James talks about in **3:2** - **“We all stumble in many ways...”**

But this sin of **“speaking evil against my brother”** that James speaks of is not just **“stumbling”** in some regretted error. James defines this sin more closely, and with good reason. He says there is a kind of sinning that doesn’t just **break** God’s law, but sets itself **above** God’s law. It puts the law of God aside as an insignificant factor. It **dares** God’s law.

James is writing to people like me, who **know** the law of God - who **know** what His Word says - who have heard sermons and teaching Sunday after Sunday - who have known the voice of the Holy Spirit and have pushed it down into the depths of their stomachs. This is why James is so passionate when he thunders, **“You’re starting to sin against the law of God and the voice of His convicting Spirit!”**

The law of God to which James refers is probably **Leviticus 19:18** - **“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”**

Or, he may have been thinking about the words of brother Jesus:

Matthew 7:12 - **“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”**

That’s the clear voice of the Law of God. Jesus fleshes it out even more fully. But it’s never that simple when you’re the one striking out at your neighbor. “I know what the law says and I know what Jesus usually wants. But this is a special case. I’m **removing myself from that arena just for this particular situation**. I’m pleading special circumstances. The rules don’t apply right now because **I’ve been hurt too much. I’ve truly been wronged. No one else can possibly understand what I’m facing right now. My situation is different! After all, it’s only right that I expose the truth about so and so.**”

This is the point where sin becomes **high-handed and stubborn**. It’s more than just the **stumbling** into sin James describes in **3:2**. The will is kicking in with a pride of its own righteousness. The ear to the Spirit is growing closed. And the ability to repent is beginning to disappear.

This is what James means when he says there is a type of sin that is more than *failure*. There's a type of sin - and **"speaking evil against a brother"** is a good example of it - that *presumes exemption from the law of God*.

People who have lived the closest to God, *or* people who have felt the sting of their own rebellion in their past, *these* people are always particularly careful about this specific type of high-handed sin:

Psalm 19:12-14 - **"Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. [13] *Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me!* Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. [14] Let the *words of my mouth* and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."**

"Innocent of great transgression." That's where the title of this message comes from - **"Keep your Life Free From The Most *Serious* Mistakes."** There are high-handed sins that quickly rule the life of the one who commits them. **"Presumptuous sins"** are *proud* sins. They bring a *particular form of bondage*.

David was a wise man who understood if he could stay clear of *those* sins he could experience purity of heart. He was so mindful of this particular danger he does something very wise. He prayed in *advance* for divine grace to keep him from excusing himself from the clear commands of the Lord, no matter how his feelings pulled at his heart when the temptation to those sins arose.

Now we begin to see the proper context for those seemingly harsh words we studied last week - **James 4:9** - **"Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom."** People can actually form a very *comfortable mind-set* while committing high-handed, proud, presumptuous sins.

When you set yourself *above* the law of God it ceases to *convict* as it should. That's why James seems to almost command a *forced* repentance - **"Be wretched and mourn and weep!"** **Do this!** This blind bubble of bliss needs to be punctured by proper grief and repentance. That's the only way the deceived, drugged heart can open up to God's grace and healing.

So bring your heart back to James' medicinal, life-giving words in **James 4:10** - **"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."**

Humble **"yourselves."** Don't wait for any other impulse. God won't do this for you. The road up is down. Let God exalt your life on His own terms.