

God's Antidote To An Evil-Speaking Tongue

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 April 2021

Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 00] Do you ever wish you could cut out your tongue? Well, perhaps that's a little drastic. Let me ask the question another way.

Do you wish you could take back some of the words you spoke, or at least have said them in a different way? There are some sins which have become so commonplace, you know, we really don't give them a second thought.

In fact, if truth be told, we've forgotten that they are vices. And we've turned them into virtues. Many of the sins of the tongue fall into that category.

Sins like gossip, slander, and continual criticism. What James calls in verse 11, speaking evil against one another.

You know, when we soberly reflect on the conversations we have had with others, we have to say that too much of what we have said to them, or about them, has been sinfully judgmental.

[1 : 06] And in these moments of sober reflection, we want to confess to God our evil speaking tongues, and cut them out of our mouths. But is evil speak inevitable when Christians get together to talk about church?

It used to be said that the favorite Sunday lunch of the free church congregation was roast preacher. If it wasn't his sermon being criticized, it was the color of his suit, or his haircut, or the illustrations he used on his applications.

Must Christians who disagree with one another in a church lure themselves to speaking evil to each other and of each other? That's often the way it works in the world, but what about the church?

Is this not the perfect way to destroy a work of God in the unity of his church when Christians slander, gossip, and continually criticize?

Listen to some of the definitions of this phrase, evil speak, that I've come across while studying for this passage. John Calvin calls it detraction, slander and smearing remarks, all that flows from spiteful slanted views.

[2 : 27] The Lutheran commentator Lensky, one of my go-to guys, he calls it unwanted derogation, running each other down. But the best I've come across is from a liberal commentator who says this, what James condemns here is judgment that is censorious, uncharitable, mean and small.

That carping spirit of criticism and fault finding which is at once irritating in itself and the mark of a little soul.

There are some people who have a keen eye for the failings of others while blind as bats to the virtues and beauties of their character. Now, I don't know about you, but these definitions hit me when it hurts.

Smearing remarks, running each other down, that carping spirit of criticism and fault finding. And these sins of the tongue are precisely that, sins.

That evil speak, in whatever guise, under whatever pretense, is sinful and a sign that our wisdom is not from above, but is earthly and spiritual and demonic.

[3 : 44] In 1 Peter 2, 22, it said of Jesus, he committed no sin, neither was any deceit found in his mouth.

You never find evil speak in the mouth of our Lord. The gospel doesn't fit us for evil speak. And yet, when we get together as Christians, how much of it doesn't just go on, but is promoted as a virtue. Smearing remarks, running each other down, a carping spirit of fault finding and criticism. Jerry Bridges, whose book, *Respectable Sins*, you can find it downstairs in the library, he calls this a respectable sin.

But must it be that way? Are you sick of hearing evil speak in your workplace? Are you sick of hearing your colleagues gossiping and slandering one another?

Is it inevitable that this shall happen in the church also? It was most definitely happening in the church to which James was writing. What the ESV translates as, do not speak evil of one another, is actually more literally translated as, stop speaking evil of each other, stop saying bad things to each other and about each other.

[5 : 08] You see, it is inevitable that a disunited church will be dominated by the sin of evil speak. Let's get even closer to the bone here.

Are you like me, convicted by James' teaching here in James 4, 11 through 12? In light of this teaching, don't you wish there are times you could cut out your tongue? But what is God's antidote to the problem of an evil speaking tongue?

What's God's antidote? Well, motivated by the gospel of Jesus, where there is forgiveness for our sin and the power of the Holy Spirit to change who we are and how we speak to and of each other, James tells us that God's antidote to the problem of our evil speak rests in six calls.

A call to love, a call to realize, a call to do, a call to respect, a call to admit, and a call to humility. Never mind anyone else. are you sick of the ways in which you make smearing remarks about others, in which you run others down, and of which we have a carping spirit of criticism and fault finding.

[6 : 35] Well, listen very carefully and commit yourselves by God's grace to heeding and obeying God's antidote to the problem of our evil speak. First of all, we have a call to love.

Flowers are wonderful, but you're a lot better looking than flowers, people. We have, first of all, a call to love. Over the last few months, I've coined the catchphrase, Glasgow City is a family we belong to, not a building we come to.

Now, what's true of us for Glasgow City is true of the whole church of Jesus Christ, both in heaven and on earth. The church is not a religion. It's not an institution.

It's not a movement. Not as at the million buildings. The Christian church is a family made up of God as father, Jesus Christ as elder brother, the Holy Spirit as the bond of love, we as sons and daughters of God by adoption.

We are one family. James often reinforces that important truth at seminal points in his letter.

[7 : 56] Remember, he's writing to a church which is threatened by disunity and division and so is it pains to point out to them that they're not rivals or competitors or colleagues.

their brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Their ambition as individual Christians must never be to lead one another. Listen carefully to that.

Their ambition as Christians must never be to lead one another but to love one another. Their ambition as individual Christians must never be to tear one another down but to build one another up.

And that's why James writes, do not speak evil against one another, brothers. Because that's what they are, a fraternity, a family.

They're not battlers, they're brothers, they're not strivers, they're sisters. So the first gospel antidote against evil speak in whatever form that should take in the church is a call to love one another as brothers and sisters.

[9 : 01] Tragically, as we know, all too many families are split apart by harsh words and painful arguments in the past.

Perhaps parents harshly judge their children and belittle them or children argue with one another. Families are broken and reconciliation becomes tragically impossible.

Family members don't speak to each other for many, many years and relationships are destroyed for generations. I wonder, do we view each other in this way as brothers and sisters in Christ? Because you know, if we view each other as colleagues in mission or fellow worshippers or God forbid rivals, it will lead to a church which is divided at best and dead at worst.

If we viewed each other as brothers and sisters, I guess we'd think twice before we made smearing remarks about each other, before we ran each other down, before we continually criticized and carped and found fault with each other.

[10 : 14] I'm your brother. You're my sister. Most importantly, God is our father and Christ our elder brother. that means as a family we have to forgive one another, bear with one another, stick together.

When our ambition is to lead one another, which is at the root of all earthly wisdom, there will be division. When our ambition is to love one another, which is at the root of all heavenly wisdom,

there will be unity.

So the first gospel antidote to the problem of evil speak is a love which is fueled by grace and exemplified by Jesus himself.

Second antidote. Second antidote against evil speak. A call to realize. A call to realize. James continues, the one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

What is this law? We speak evil against and judge when we talk down to and find fault with each other. Well, in James chapter 2, verse 8, you can look back in your Bible, it is called the royal law of scripture, namely, love your neighbor as yourself.

[11 : 37] That's the law. The king's law is love. By speaking evil against one another, we are both breaking and judging that law of love.

We're not loving our brother as ourselves because we would not have them continually carp at us and find fault with us. Likewise, we would not continually carp at them and continually find fault with them.

That's the royal law. In the first instance, according to James, by speaking evil of one another, we are breaking that law.

We are commanded to love one another in word, in thought, and in deed. But when we speak evil of each other, we are not loving each other as we should. Therefore, we are breaking that law of love. So gossip and slander, constantly looking down on other believers and slandering them, it breaks the king's law. One Christian might gossip about another Christian, how another Christian has sinned and is living now in a worldly way.

[12 : 47] But do these Christians realize that they're sinning just as badly by gossiping about that other Christian? In the second instance, by speaking evil of each other, we are judging the law because we're saying that God's law really shouldn't be about loving one another.

It should be about giving us the freedom to criticize one another and to carp on at each other's faults. We're saying that if we were the lawgivers, we'd have done a better job than God did.

If anything, to speak evil against each other is ultimately to speak evil of God. The point is, brothers and sisters in Christ, before we open our mouths to make smearing remarks or indulge in a Sunday dinner of roast preacher, let's realize how sinful the action which we're engaging in.

Surely, if we're mature Christians, we want to stay as far away from sin as we can. We don't even want to flirt with it because, at the very least, our sin drove the nails into our Savior's hands.

Surely, we want to be pure and holy. Well, realize then how evil and sinful evil speak is. You know, we do everything we can to not be infected by or not infect others with COVID-19.

[14 : 17] We wear our masks. Let's take every step possible to restrain our evil speak because the reality of it is this.

It is a serious breach of the royal law of God. Third of God's antidotes against evil speak, a call to do, a call to do.

As we've discovered, the law to which James is referring in verse 11 is the royal law of Scripture found back in chapter 2, verse 8, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

And in James 4, 11, he says, if you judge the law, you're not a dude of the law, you're a judge of the law. Let's put it in the starkest possible terms, as James seems to put it.

If you stand in judgment over the law by speaking evil of your brothers and sisters in Christ, you're not obeying the law. The law calls you to love your neighbor as yourself, but by harshly judging your neighbor, more harshly than you'd ever judge yourself, you're not loving them.

[15 : 25] You're not doing what God has enabled you to do through the gospel and commanded you to do through the law. In John 14, 15, Jesus said, if you love me, obey my commandments.

Obeigence to the commandments of Jesus is our mark of love for him. We're not merely called to listen to what Jesus says and admire it, we're called to do what he says. Remember what James says in chapter 1, verse 22?

But be doers of the word and not hearers only. It is doing which is a mark of faithfulness and maturity in the Christian life, not just hearing.

And as Christians, we're commanded to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we're not merely to hear this command and admire it, we're to do it. Not merely talking about it, but actually doing it.

So what do you think? Let me paint a scenario for you. A weak Christian has done something very foolish. And because of that, other Christians are smearing his reputation and constantly running

him down.

[16:30] Who is guilty of the greater sin? If those mature Christians, instead of running their foolish friend down, really wanted to be faithful and obey God's royal law, they'd keep their mouths shut and at the very least say nothing against him.

The Christian songwriter, Sheila Walsh, was very active when I was a boy. She has a song with a lyric when she prays to God in this lyric.

I want to be truly pleasing in your sight. I want to be truly pleasing in your sight. She wants to be faithful to God in everything she thinks and everything she says and everything she does. If we want to be truly pleasing in the sight of God, we'll make sure that we love each other in the words we say to each other and about each other.

But then I can hear an objection in our minds because I have this objection myself. Right? Surely Jesus tells us to be discerning. Right? And Paul tells us we should speak the truth in love to one another.

Yes, indeed, both Jesus and Paul say that. But be honest with yourself. So I was with myself when I had this objection in my head. Are you really speaking the truth in love by running another Christian down?

[17:49] Or by constantly carping and criticizing him for his failures? By smearing his reputation? Jesus' constant command is this.

Love one another. Love in word. Not just in thoughts. In words. Build others up. Don't tear them down. Speak gospel to them.

Not evil against them. God's fourth antidote against evil speak is a call to respect. A call to respect. When James writes in verse 12 there is only one lawgiver and judge. He is hearkening back to an earlier argument. If we speak evil against a brother or sister in Christ we are standing in judgment against the law gave...

Standing in judgment over the law God gave us to love each other as we love ourselves. We're breaking the law. And in essence we're saying we could have done a better job of forming that law than God did.

[18:52] And yes all of us at one time and another when we speak evil of each other are guilty of doing this. It might not be conscious but it's there and fundamentally it's idolatry.

The idol of putting our own ideas and standards of judgment and critique before that of God's. The antidote to this is single-minded wholehearted worship of God.

Listen carefully. We think little of each other as Christians primarily because we think little of God. We look down on others because we have forgotten the gospel which teaches us that we are more sinful than we could ever imagine but more loved than we could ever dream and that Jesus didn't die for the righteous but for sinners.

So I come back to this single-minded wholehearted worship of God is God's antidote to our evil speak. If we are wholly concentrating on the content of the sermon on God's message to us through his word you know we wouldn't really care so much about the minister's suit or about his haircut we'd only have eyes for Jesus and for his glory.

By saying there is only one lawgiver and judge James is taking us back to Sinai where God was hidden in clouds with great flashes of lightning and rumbles of thunder and trumpets booming from the mountain had you been there as an Israelite at the foot of that mountain you'd be totally transfixed on what was happening at the top of that hill your heart would be filled with reverence and awe your mind would be filled with worship and you'd fall to your knees in praise and the fear of God you wouldn't even think about the man sitting next to you with his unkempt hair and his rather unfashionable cloak you'd be so filled with the beatific worship of the glory of the love of God you wouldn't even notice what was going on around you top professional golfers you know are so focused on their shots that they don't often hear anything else going on around them

[21:15] I remember speaking to a top professional golfer once and he told me of a time that he was taking a putt to win a tournament later someone said to him weren't you distracted by that train which was going by when you were taking your putt and he replied I was concentrating so hard on making my putt I didn't even notice it when you see a professional golfer being distracted by noises in the crowds it's a sign that he's lost his concentration and he's not playing very well in the same way the Christian man or woman who was continually criticizing who was running others down and making smearing remarks is showing that he has lost his concentration on God he's no longer focused on God he is being distracted by the noises around him God's antidote to evil speak is

single minded and wholehearted worship God's answer to our evil speak is a call to admit ultimately every moral issue ethical issue in the

Christian life derives from our doctrine of salvation that's very important every moral issue in your life derives from your understanding of the concept of salvation we have been saved by grace therefore we live by grace we've been made holy therefore we live holy we've been dearly loved on the cross therefore we dearly love others through the cross we have been forgiven in Christ therefore we forgive others in him the giving of the law in Exodus chapter 20 derives from our doctrine of salvation it begins this way I am the Lord your God brought you up out of the land of Egypt you shall have no other gods before me the doctrine of salvation is here in the law I am the Lord your God who has brought you up out of the land of Egypt I have saved you now for the ethical consequence you shall have no other gods before me God's antidote to the problem of our evil speak is to derive our moral and ethical behavior from our doctrine of

Christian salvation that's why in verse 12 James says there is only one lawgiver and judge he who is able to save and to destroy don't read this as a threat read it for what it really is deriving our moral behavior from our doctrine of salvation who has saved us the one lawgiver unjudged we deserved to be destroyed because of our evil and sinful ways but on the basis of Christ's perfect obedience and pure righteousness given for us on the cross our lawgiver and judge has saved us we have salvation not because we saved ourselves but because he saved us so God's antidote to our evil speak is to admit to ourselves that our salvation and status is entirely due note the words entirely due to the grace of God and the gospel of his son we believe in the salvation by faith alone in Christ alone through grace alone so what reason then do we have to place ourselves above another Christian and look down on them if our salvation is by grace alone and we walk by grace alone then surely we should adopt the view there but for the grace of God go I you see God's antidote to an evil speak is to go back to the cross and see a savior suffering there to take away your sin God's antidote to our evil speak is to realize that whereas we deserved on account of our sin to be destroyed rather on account of his grace and love we have been saved let's go back to that for a second we've already finished that definition of evil speak from earlier on from that liberal commentator compare that kind of spirit with the spirit of God when in

Psalms 103 verses 9 and 10 we read of him he will not always chide nor will he keep his anger forever he does not deal with us according to our sins nor repay us according to our iniquities that's the gospel that's his antidote to our evil speak well lastly sickly and lastly God's answer to the problem of our evil speak is a call to humility a call to humility consider very briefly what James says at the end of verse 12 and who are you to judge your neighbor who are you to judge your neighbor indeed to borrow the title of a popular TV program who do you think you are really and truly who am I to judge another child of God the previous passage closed off in verse 10 with the command humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you humility humility humility

[26 : 55] St. Augustine said these were the three greatest virtues in the Christian life God's antidote to the problem of our evil speak is to take a good long hard look inside if anyone had a right to look down on others and slander them it was the reformer John Calvin but he didn't and one reason for that is contained in the first line of his magnum opus the institutes of the Christian religion listen this is one of the most famous sentences in the Christian world nearly all the wisdom we possess that is to say sound and true wisdom consists of two parts the knowledge of God and of ourselves if we should know ourselves the way God knows us we should not be so quick to make such smearing remarks about other Christians and run them down in fact rather than stand above them in judgment we'd stand below them in admiration or to slightly change an earlier phrase we'd be as blind as bats to their failings and have a keen eye to their virtues and the beauties of their character so you see evil speak in the church is not a respectable sin nor is it an inevitable sin in fact in fact if this has convicted you at all this evening it presents you with a wonderful opportunity to put into practice the transforming power of the gospel of

Jesus Christ the call to love the call to realize the call to respect the call to do the call to admit the call to humility let me challenge each of you as I challenged myself and I really challenged myself when I was preparing this sermon do not speak evil against one another brothers let us pray father sometimes your word just cuts us deep and this is one such time when these aren't abstract concepts that we can look at the person beside us in the pew and say well that's that's okay for them this has got nothing to do with me every one of us knows that this is all about us father give us such a heart for Jesus that we have no time to make smearing remarks about each other to run

each other down to constantly carp and criticize one another and then to make an excuse saying we're speaking the truth in love we ask these things in Jesus name amen