

# Sticks and Stones

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Date: 28 May 2014

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to be, we're still in chapter 4.

We completed the first 10 verses last week under kind of the title War and Peace.! And now it may seem that we're moving into a new kind of subject, but really it all ties together.

And I've entitled the study tonight, Sticks and Stones. And we're just going to be taking two verses, but very important verses in James' teaching.

And the subject is the tongue, as is James seemingly his favorite subject. One of them anyway, in the book of James, he gives a great deal of instruction about how we use our tongues.

And it's very fitting because the tongue is, that is the use of the tongue, is connected to so many things in our lives. And for good, sadly, usually not for good.

[ 1 : 10 ] So the subject is the tongue. And the verses fit in really quite well with what James wrote in verse 10. Even though, again, difficult.

Most scholars, some scholars, look at the book of James and they've come to the conclusion that it's just kind of a conglomeration of loosely fit together subjects.

And even though you may have some common subjects or subjects that are revisited several times in the book, that, you know, it's just seemingly no rhyme or reason.

But there is. And things kind of move from one emphasis and then very, very smartly, very fittingly moves on from there to related subjects.

And that's the case here with the tongue. And so in verse 10, and then going from 10 on into 11.

Now, we finished 10 last week.

[ 2 : 13 ] Remember, humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up. That's verse 10. And then verse 11 begins, do not speak evil of one another, brethren.

Now, it may be difficult to see how those two relate to one another. But they do. Really do. And James' point is, instead of humbling ourselves and letting God lift us up, and that's the subject of verse 10, what are we more apt to do?

We're more apt to lifting ourselves up. And we do it with the tongue. We do it by using the tongue to put others down. And so that's the idea, crazy idea, self-deceived idea, that we could actually lift ourselves up by lowering someone else.

But that's kind of the way our thinking is or sometimes goes, sadly. And so we think we are making ourselves look better by cutting everyone else down.

But in reality, when we do that, we not only lower ourselves, we're actually lowering ourselves, lowering ourselves. We're deeply hurting others. And it's a major problem within the church.

[ 3 : 27 ] It was a major problem here with James readers, clearly. And we'll kind of see that as we go along.

And so here's what I would say. The old adage that probably all of us, most of us, many of us anyway, learned as a child, as children, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me.

Have you ever, what do you think about that? Is it true? Well, you look at the notes, you know I don't think it's true. It's not true because words do harm.

They really do. In fact, they can harm us more than sticks and stones. And, you know, harmful words often hurt more than physical harm.

And the harm or damage that can be done by hurtful words lasts much longer usually. And in some cases never heal.

[ 4 : 29 ] So even though I've entitled the study Sticks and Stones, it's really kind of a misnomer because James is not talking about physical suffering or physical abuse by another person, though that's a very real thing and can even happen within the body of Christ.

He's talking about the tongue and how the tongue can be used to harm people. All right, so we're going to look at three truths. And I think you'll be able to see this pretty clearly, especially as I identify these kind of three movements of James' thought as he's discussing the use of the tongue. Three truths about the tongue, and here's the first one. How you use your tongue reveals how you regard others. And that's both believers and non-believers, even though James is writing to the church.

And he's writing, by the way, I believe, to a bunch of believers who, within the body of Christ, have been using their tongues against one another.

And he's dealing with that issue. He's not writing to unbelievers. But believers can use their tongues in wicked and evil ways toward non-believers.

[ 5 : 48 ] And that, too, can be a very big problem. And so he says there in verse 11, Do not speak evil of one another, brethren.

Brethren is not excluding the sisters, okay? He's just talking about the body of Christ, the local body, the church. Do not speak evil of one another.

Now, the Greek word that's translated speak evil, katalaleo, I've got it there for you, it means to speak down.

And, you know, kata is a preposition. It means down. And so to speak, actually speak down to someone. And that's the idea behind how the King James, and I believe also, well, I know the New King James, and I believe the King James also translates it speak evil.

But that's the idea. And it refers to really all of the various forms of slander, and just to name a few, how we can use the tongue to defame someone's character, even to assassinate their character.

[ 6 : 57 ] The tongue can do that. Telling falsehoods about people. Things are just out and out lies. To defame them, to bring them down.

Again, presumably, to lift ourselves up. Unfounded opinions. If you've ever talked to somebody, and they are just kind of using your ear as a trash can, and giving you their opinion about a certain person, a certain person that you know mutually, someone in the church, or someone else.

And so they have an opinion about that, and they're just very vocal about it. And yet the opinion is very unfounded. They've just kind of conceived this in their own heart and mind.

Innuendos, insinuations. I remember reading a story about a ship's captain, and he was writing in the log for that particular day.

They would always fill in the log of the events of the day. And he wrote in the log that he said the first mate was drunk today. And the first mate read that, and he demanded that the captain remove that from the log.

[ 8 : 15 ] And he said, I'm not going to remove it. It's absolutely true. You were drunk today. And so the next day, the first mate was drunk again. So the captain wrote in the log, first mate, my first mate, drunk today.

And the third day, it was the first mate's turn to write in the log. And so he wrote in the log, the captain was sober today. Now you catch the innuendo there.

All right. And sometimes we're very gifted with our tongue to say things that are true, but they're said in such a way as to imply something that is not true or something that is hurtful or wicked.

And so these are ways that we can speak evil of someone. We have to be very careful. We're so good at it that it just kind of rolls out without us even really thinking about it.

Exaggerated opinions. I just jotted down a few things that came to my mind. Gossip. That would be kind of the general term. Just speaking about things about other people behind their backs, spreading certain things about another person.

[ 9 : 25 ] And it's gossip, whether it's factual or not. You know, some gossip is true. In fact, I've even had people tell me, you say, well, I only tell things that are true.

Well, if it's hurtful, you shouldn't say it. I mean, when you think about it, just because it's true doesn't mean you need to share it with someone. Is it going to hurt that person?

In your heart of hearts, if you analyze and really be honest, are you speaking that bit of gossip because you want to defame someone or want to hurt that person?

And so this is what's meant behind the word, speaking down. It's evil speaking or speaking evil. The Greek word is present tense.

It's a present tense verb, and we've talked about that so many times. You understand that that conveys the idea of a continuous action. So it's speaking and speaking and speaking evil.

[10:26] And then when you combine this with the words one another, and all this comes right from the phrase here, this very first phrase in verse 11, you add to that one another, speak evil of one another, and even adding the word brethren there, then you understand, I think, that you kind of read between the lines that James is addressing a real problem in the church, a problem that was out of control.

It's called this kind of continuous action, speaking evil of one another, and the grammar suggests what is called equivalent retaliation.

That's the technical term. What does that mean? It means retaliation from both sides, a constant retaliation. It's the tit for tat, you know.

And so, you know, one person will say a thing about another person, and that person will say something back to the other person. You know, this person will say, you know, you're lazy.

And the other guy says, well, I'm not lazy, but you're lazy, and not only lazy, you're ugly. And then the other comes back and says, well, you're ugly too, but uglier.

[11:37] You know, and it just goes back and forth and builds and builds. Now, that's kind of a silly illustration. But this is what was happening, apparently, within the church, and James is addressing it.

That's why he addressed the issue of the tongue so often in this very short little letter, that it was just a continuous kind of round robin of speaking evil of one another within the body of Christ, and he's addressing it very strongly.

And James, really, when you broaden it out to look at both of these verses together, he's really identifying two distinct groups of people in the world that we should never slander.

And when he identifies these two distinct groups of people, what he's doing, in effect, is saying everyone is included here.

No one should ever be spoken of or to in an evil way or in a slanderous way. But we can see it in the passage when you bring both verse 11 and 12 together.

[12:46] It says, of course, in verse 11, do not speak evil, brethren. And so there he's very clearly referring to those within the body of Christ. Talking about believers.

Don't speak evil. Don't slander. Don't criticize your fellow believers. Then in verse 12, and this kind of caps it off at the end of these two verses, who are you to judge another?

And the word another appears in the King James and New King James. But there's a different word that appears in some of the older and more reliable manuscripts.

Those manuscripts that were used to translate, for example, the New American Standard, even the NIV, the ESV, some of those.

Two different words appear there in the Greek text. And it's plesion, rather than as opposed to heteros. Now, heteros is what appears in the King James, the manuscripts that the King James was translated from.

[13:55] And that's the word from which we get hetero, hetero, like heterosexual. And it just means one of a different kind.

And as opposed to homosexual, the same kind. And so heteros is what appears in the King James, and it just means another.

And that's why it's translated that way. But plesion is a word that means neighbor. And so that's why some of those other translations, New American Standard, ESV, NIV, use the word neighbor.

And I'll just point that out to you, but either word still conveys the idea of those, including those outside of the body of Christ. So he opens the discussion in these two verses by specifically addressing evil speaking toward those within the body of Christ.

And he closes the discussion, the end of verse 12, with a word that is much more general that would include those in the body of Christ as well as those out. Believers as well as unbelievers.

[15:10] And so then a neighbor includes everybody, right? Everyone. So we're not to speak evil, criticize, slander, defame, use our tongue to tear down people whether they're believers or unbelievers.

Because everyone is our neighbor. Jesus said, you shall love the Lord your God. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this, you shall love your neighbor or ask yourself.

There's no other commandment greater than these. And yet, who's our neighbor? That's what a certain lawyer asked Jesus. Remember that story. He said, who is my neighbor? And Jesus answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

And the Good Samaritan, of course, teaches the idea that everyone is my neighbor. And that doesn't exclude anyone regardless of what they believe, whether they are believers or unbelievers. Second, this is the second truth about the tongue that James is teaching us. How you use your tongue reveals how you regard God's law.

[16:19] All right, so the first one is how you use your tongue reveals how you regard others, whether they're saved or unsaved. And then he moves really a little deeper and he says how you use your tongue reveals how you regard God's law.

And this is interesting how he puts this. He who speaks evil of or slanders a brother and judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law.

James 2, verse 8, reveals what he means by the law. So what's he talking about when he talks about the law? Well, he's talking about the royal law.

He says in James 2, 8, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. You do well. So he's talking about the royal law.

What is that? Well, the royal law is the law of love. It's the law of love. Jesus called it the great commandment of which James really only identifies the second half of it.

[17:34] What is it? Well, you can find it in Matthew chapter 22. Jesus gives us the law of love. In Matthew 22, here it is.

Somewhere. There it is. Jesus said to him, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Both of these commandments deal with love. Loving God, loving others.

Loving your neighbor as you love yourself. And to say that these two commandments hang, on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets, it's pretty clear.

In fact, if you go to the Ten Commandments, you can very easily identify two categories of laws.

[18:32] The first category relates to how we love God. The second category relates to how we relate or love others. And so, this is the law of love or the great commandment.

And so, that being the case, then to slander someone, to criticize someone, to defame someone, is to slander God's law of love. It's to criticize it. It's to defame it.

Alright, so if you want to use your tongue to speak down to someone, criticize someone, either to their face or to their back, then in that very process, you are actually slandering God's law, His royal law, His law of love.

And so, and He has the word judge here, to judge someone is to judge against God's law, law of love. So, we slander His law, we judge His law, and that makes it a very, very, very serious thing because it makes us a judge of the law.

what we're actually judging God's law is to put yourself or oneself above the law. And that's what He's getting at when He says you are not a doer of the law, but a judge.

[19:48] You're no longer now obedient to the law, a doer of the law, someone who follows the law and obeys the law. Now you place yourself in a position to judge God's law. Because God says love, love your neighbor as you love yourself.

And when we use our tongue in slanderous ways and critical ways, damaging and hurtful ways, then we are judging God's law and not doers of the law.

And so it is to judge when the law applies to you. That's maybe the first step. We're judging actually when it applies to me. You know, sometimes we have something to say and some juicy bit of little gossip and we just can't hardly help ourselves from saying it, you know, about so and so.

And at that very moment we make a choice, don't we? Whether that, God's law of love is going to apply at that moment. You know, and it does every time.

But we sometimes have the idea that we can decide when it applies and when it does not. And not only that, but whether the law applies to you.

[21:05] All right? It may apply to somebody else, but it doesn't apply to me. You know, let's just give you an example. Let's say, you know, you know something about about some what?

You know, some bit of kind of, you know, interesting information and your friend doesn't know about it. And so, you say, well, should I tell her or him about this?

And you're kind of reasoning this in your mind. Though we do it so quickly, you know, we're almost, it's almost just a second nature. And maybe we come to the conclusion, well, I better tell my friend about this bit of information about so and so so that my friend will know better how to pray for my

friend, you know, this other person.

And we've got to be informed so that we know how to go to the Lord in prayer, how we might be able to help, and is that really our motivation? Usually. It's not usually. And so, then, what we're doing is judging when God's law of love applies and we're judging whether it applies at any given moment.

or in any given situation. It's like driving the interstate and seeing a sign that says, road construction next nine miles.

[ 22 : 30 ] I hate it when I see those kind of signs. And then, of course, not on the same sign, but then you'll have reduced speed. All right, so let's say it's 60 miles per hour. So you're coming up on a road construction site, you're just breezing down the interstate, making good time, and suddenly there's this, you know, this sign.

So you've got to, it says reduce your speed. Now, what do you normally do? I'm not asking for any testimonials here tonight. I mean, do you, you know, you're thinking you're in a hurry, you know, and you're thinking, well, I don't see anybody working.

Doesn't that just irritate you when you're driving and suddenly there's a reduced speed and there's signs and you just keep driving. They may even have cones out blocking one of the lanes, you know, so you've got to merge down to one lane and yet not anybody is working, not for miles.

In fact, you don't even see any construction equipment. You ever had that happen? Now, in that case, there's just no reason to reduce your speed, is there? Huh? Yeah. And so, you know, and by that, by the way, you know, not only that, but everyone seems to be going 70 miles an hour faster, usually faster.

All right, so are you going to be the only one? And, you know, let's just face it, you don't want to hold up traffic, you know, slow people down and could even potentially cause an accident.

[ 23 : 58 ] I know you've never really thought these things. And so, what do you do? You decide to drive 69. Yeah, just to be safe, just be on the safe side.

Besides, you know, Tom, police officers don't ever pull anybody over unless they're going, what, 10 miles over the speed limit? I've heard all kinds of things like that. All right, are you breaking the law at this point?

Well, of course. So, what are you saying about the law? You're saying it's stupid. I mean, we really are. It's stupid or at least unimportant.

I mean, given the situation, everybody else driving where they're driving, maybe there's not, there are not many cars on the road and no construction work going on, nobody's in harm's way and it's, you know, it's just kind of middle of the night too and who's going to be watching and, you know, we don't need, we don't need to reduce our speed.

We don't really have to obey it. Nothing will happen if I don't obey this law. Have you ever had that thought process?

[ 25 : 04 ] I know you're a lot holier than I am, but, well, some of you probably are, but, hey, you know how the mind begins to think, I'm using a strange illustration, but this gets to the point.

I read it somewhere. Yeah, I read it somewhere. This hasn't actually happened to me. You know, I'm just, somebody was telling me about this the other day. Or, I've got a friend who, you know, does this kind of stuff.

Alright, so, but here's the point. To slander, to fame, criticize, talk down, put down, you know, fill in the blank there, anyone is to violate God's law of love and reveals a disregard for God's law, judging it to be invalid.

That's what we're doing. We're judging it to be invalid. You're not a doer of the law, but a judge. That's the position that we place ourselves in when we use our tongue to tear people down and to hurt people.

Third, and it gets worse, how you use your tongue reveals how you regard God Himself. See how James is progressively getting worse here.

[ 26 : 18 ] I mean, first of all, we have a problem with how we're, you know, what kind of regard we have for people. And when we use our tongue to defame people, and then, not only that, but, you know, it shows disregard for God's law of love.

And not only that, it also shows disregard for God Himself. There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

Now, according to James, then, we're not only slanderers, we are usurpers. We're usurping God, usurping His authority, His position, His rights, and so forth.

And we not only place ourselves above the law, but we place ourselves above God. Now, we don't think this. I mean, we're obviously not setting out to place ourselves above God's word or God's law or God Himself.

I mean, who among us here would ever imagine trying to elevate ourselves above God Himself? And yet, James says that's what we're doing when we do not control the tongue and we use the tongue to tear people down.

[ 27 : 32 ] We're placing ourselves above God. There's only one God, one God and one judge who's able to save and to destroy. This is who God is.

God is the Lord of life and death. That's what He's saying here in verse 12. Now, there are two reasons why we cannot, must not, pass judgment on anyone else.

And that's what we're doing with our tongue. We're making a judgment about the character of a person, the life of a person. We're making a character about the worth of a person.

You know, all of these things when we use our tongue in critical ways and slanderous ways. And there are two reasons why we cannot make proper judgments in this way.

We cannot judge people with our tongue. The first one is because we lack perfect information. Perfect information. We don't know all the facts.

[ 28 : 34 ] I've made that mistake so many times, I hate to admit it to you. That I'll get a little bit of information about something or someone. And to my discredit, I'll share that with someone else, maybe a valued friend, a trusted friend.

Maybe I have convinced myself of good motives in that, only to find out in a week or two or a month or longer that I was wrong about that judgment.

I didn't have all the information. It's amazing how more information sheds a completely different light on a situation. And then we find ourselves thinking, how did I ever come to that conclusion in the first place?

And yet, the problem is not the conclusion. That's the beginning of the problem. The problem is taking the conclusion and extending that out through the tongue, through the things that I might speak.

And we might as well add to that even things that we write or type or text. I tell you, we live in an age with, you know, with the advent of all the various social media avenues, Facebook, which is now becoming kind of passe and we've moved on to other things, Twitter.

[ 29 : 54 ] It's amazing the things that God's people will tweet to someone or just tweet out there for anybody to read without thinking or even taking time to think of what damage it might do to a person or church or community.

And it just seems like once we get on the internet, and I know I'm looking at some of you that don't do this kind of thing. You don't even do Facebook. I don't either. But some of you do.

And when we get on the internet, it just seems like all inhibitions just leave us. And all thought about ramifications, all thought about what harm things might do.

We might be 100% right about an issue. And yet we throw it out there, whether on Facebook or other ways, and people read that and they form conclusions.

You know, the other problem is that writing is not the same as speaking. and when you're carrying on a conversation with someone, there's a whole lot that's being communicated by your face and your actions that are explanatory to what you mean.

[ 31 : 08 ] But when you write just words, it leaves it open to interpretation. You know, and people come to conclusions and think you're saying something when you really are not saying.

And so it'd be better to just not do it, especially if there's any possibility of damaging someone's character or reputation. Just slight things.

Just the things we speak. I heard a story about a preacher who, and it wasn't Baptist, it was one of those denominations where the kind of the whole denomination selects their own pastors.

Come in, have a seat. Selects their own pastors, pastors for their churches, and the church don't really have much input. And so this pastor had been appointed to be the pastor of this church, and he moved to town even before his very first Sunday.

And suddenly the gossip got around that the pastor, the new pastor of Sunset Church, had barged into the ladies' garden club and grabbed his wife and drug her out, stomped out of the garden party,

garden club party.

[ 32 : 27 ] And the word was just going around town about this new pastor and how he treated his wife and all of this kind of stuff, and people were just appalled, and it got so bad, and finally he got wind of all this.

And so his first Sunday, he got up to preach, and he said, now I know there's some word going around about me attending the garden club meeting and dragging my wife out of the place.

And he said, I just want to set the record straight. He said, first of all, I did not attend that garden club meeting. And second place, I did not drag my wife out of the garden club meeting.

I didn't do that. And in third place, I don't even have a wife. I'm single. So you see, just one little word. Somebody got an idea, maybe a mistaken identity, and they attached it to someone else, some little juicy bit of gossip, and it nearly ruined the man's ministry.

So, you know, we don't have perfect information. And even if we do, then we need to decide at that point whether it even needs to be said. Does it need to be said?

[ 33 : 40 ] Will it hurt somebody? And if it will, then we shouldn't say it. God, on the other hand, knows all the facts.

God possesses all the facts necessary to make correct judgments. And so we leave all that to Him. He's the only judge. The second reason why we cannot pass judgment on anyone is because we lack personal integrity.

Now, I hope that we're people of integrity. I hope you are a man, a woman of integrity. But even the most honorable of us, we lack perfect personal integrity, every single one of us.

We're all guilty ourselves and therefore unqualified to make judgment. That's what Jesus said.

Remember, He said, whoever among you has not sinned, cast the first stone.

And we don't judge with our tongue and speak things about people, about their character, about their activities, about the things, not only because we don't know all the facts, but because we're guilty ourselves.

[ 34 : 56 ] And we lack personal integrity. Romans 2, 1 to 3, therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are, who judge, for in whatever you judge another, you condemn yourself.

for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, that you who judge those practicing such things and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

See, it's a dicey and very dangerous position we put ourselves in when we begin to use the tongue to criticize, judge, demean, degrade, defame, slander, anyone, because we are placing ourselves under judgment as well.