

CHRISTIAN WORKER

"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Corinthians 6:1)

VOLUME 111, NUMBER 8

DO NOT SPEAK EVIL OF ONE ANOTHER (Jas. 4:11-12)

John Baker

"If of others you're tempted to speak, five things observe with care: **of** whom you speak, **to** whom you speak, and **how**, and **when**, and **where**." Everybody has trouble with their tongue, but our Heavenly Father warns us to be careful with our words: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits" (Pro. 18:21). Christ reminds us that we will give account for every idle word we speak (Matt. 12:36). Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). Father, Son and Spirit demonstrate that our words really do matter to God.

Few sins in Scripture are as thoroughly condemned as gossip, slander, and evil speech. Romans 1:30 places "slanderers" next to those who are, "haters of God." Ephesians 4:31 demands that Christians put "evil speaking" away because it does not harmonize with our new life in Christ. Simply put, evil speaking of a brother is a violation of God's will (Lev. 19:16).

In an epistle that has much to say about our words, James 4:11-12 warns Christians not to speak evil of one another. The Greek word here translated as, "speak evil," means, "to put down, to slander, to criticize."

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

Consider the logic of James's argument. He gives two main reasons why Christians must not speak evil of one another.

Speaking evil of our brethren violates God's law (v.11). Earlier in the book, James mentioned the "Royal Law" which states, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Jas. 2:8; cf. Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:37-40). Now in James 4:11, the author says that those who speak evil of their brethren also, "speak evil of the law and judge the law." By speaking evil of our brethren, we are acting as if God's requirement

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FROM THE EDITOR:

DO NOT BE PRESUMPTUOUS (Jas. 4:13-17)

Cody Westbrook

In 1 Corinthians 6:19 we find an important truth about our life. That is, it doesn't belong to us. Paul said, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" The idea that "you are not your own" is deeply troubling for the vast majority of those in our world. Western Culture is all about self autonomy. I can be whoever or whatever I choose to be; I can do whatever I want, whenever I want, and how dare you say a word against any of my choices. Such an attitude is the epitome of selfishness, and it is the kind of attitude James condemns in James 4:16—"But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."

The "boasting" of which James speaks is presumptuous bragging. Just as it is now, there were those in the first century who lived as if their life was their own. As if they had all the time in the world and so they would seek to take care of themselves and their own interest first, then see to the will of God later. James 4:13-17 condemns that kind of thinking and reminds us of three important truths.

First, life is short and unpredictable (Jas. 4:13-14). We make big plans and dream big dreams. We put our children through school and help prepare them for the future, we put money aside for retirement and for that dream vacation. Plans and goals are good and part of good stewardship. But, of course, sometimes those plans do not come to fruition, and usually because of factors that exist outside of our control. An illness, a death, a natural disaster, a global conflict that sends the economy into a tailspin. Whatever the case, "time and chance" happen to us all (Ecc. 9:11). Our days are "swifter than a weaver's shuttle" (Job 7:6). Our time is short (Ps. 89:47) and even in the prime of life we are nothing more than a vapor (Ps. 39:5).

Second, God's will must be the priority (Jas. 4:15). When James said, "Instead you ought to say, if the lord wills, we shall live and do this or that," he wasn't telling

us that our time is predetermined and out of our control. It's not a denial of free-will. The point is that our God is alive and providentially working out His will, and thus our attitude in life should be to prioritize His desires (cf. Gen. 15:16; 17:21; Esth. 4:14; Gal. 4:14). Solomon put it this way: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end" (Ecc. 3:11). The word "beautiful" refers to what is good, proper, or appropriate. And so there's a certain meaningfulness to the passage of time and the experiences of life when we recognize God as the sovereign of time and do things His way.

Third, we must do what good we can, while we can (Jas. 4:17). The problem with the boaster (v. 13, 16) is that he never took the time to do anything for the Lord. He did not recognize the brief and transitory nature of life, he did not acknowledge God in any of his plans or bother himself with what God wants. Instead, he pushed the good he could do for the Kingdom to the side in order to do whatever he wanted to do in the moment. God comes later. James said that this kind of thinking is sinful. Failing to do what we can in service to God now in order to wait until tomorrow assumes that we will have tomorrow.

So, what is the solution? How do we deal with such a short and unpredictable life? It does us no good to worry about it or live in fear of it. It is also incorrect to leave God out of it. This is the issue at hand in James 3:13-17. A wealthy businessman becomes so consumed with plans and profit that he never takes the time to consider God. Instead, we should see time clearly as a gift from God. We would redeem it (Eph. 5:16), make the most of it (Gal. 6:10), measure it (Ps. 90:12), and glorify God with it, to the best of our ability. Do not presume to have time an opportunity in the future. Life is like a vapor, it is here today but it may be gone tomorrow.

CW

DO NOT BE COVETOUS (Jas. 5:1–6)

John Haffner

The final chapter of James opens with a strong warning directed to the rich. The problem is not merely having wealth, but rather covetousness. This is the greedy, self-indulgent attitude that is never satisfied. It misuses riches while mistreating others. Hard work and honest success notwithstanding, James exposes the sort of heart that loves money more than God, and possessions more than people. This section of scripture offers a powerful reminder, we must not envy the rich or long for their lifestyle. We must not hoard wealth for selfish ends, and we must never allow the desire for accumulating more to push us into sin. “Take heed and beware of covetousness,” Jesus warned, “for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). Let’s explore James 5:1–6 and what God says regarding covetousness.

Disappointing Riches (Jas. 5:1-3)

James, by inspiration, delivers a graphic image. He calls upon the rich to howl (shriek, utter cries of distress) because misery is coming for them. Their future is not secured. Like the rich fool, their souls will be required of them (Luke 12:20). We live in a world where wealth is often envied, celebrated, or even idolized. But James pulls back the curtain to reveal the truth. Covetousness always leads to misery, not joy. The love of money deceives people into thinking they are secure—when in truth, they are standing on a trapdoor and have “pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (cf. 1 Tim. 6:9–10).

The wealth the rich so readily trust in is perishing. Their food spoils, their clothes rot, and even their gold tarnishes. Even more striking, James says that the corrosion (rust) of these material riches “will be a witness against [them] and will eat [their] flesh like fire” (Jas. 5:3). This is the language of the Lord’s judgment. Not only will their wealth fade, but it will also testify against them at the last day. While judgment was near and people around them were in need, they shut up their bowels of compassion and heaped up for themselves treasures on earth (Matt. 6:19-20; 1 John 3:17). Their priorities were completely out of step with the character of Jesus and with the purpose of His eternal kingdom. The foolish rich live like this life is all there is.

This is the danger of covetousness. It tempts us to focus on what disappoints and forget the things that matter most.

Decaying Relationships (Jas. 5:4-5)

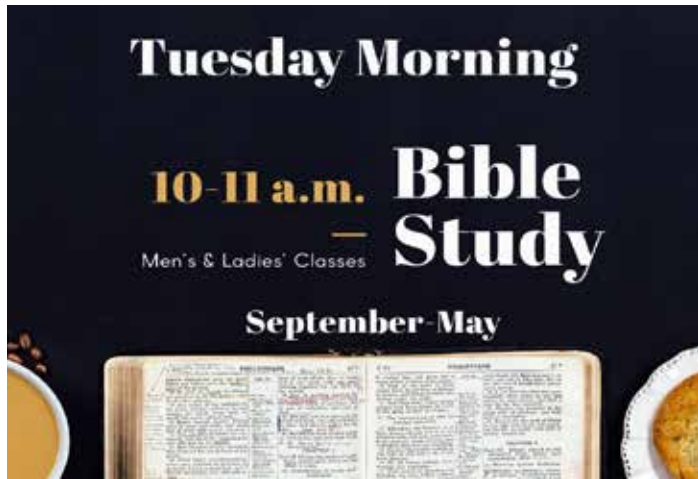
Next, James points out how covetousness creates divides among mankind. The rich withheld fair pay from workers. The laborers had done their job but were cheated out of the compensation which was rightfully theirs. God, who sees all and knows the hearts of men, cannot help but take notice of this injustice. James said, “the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth” (Jas. 5:4). That name—Lord of Hosts—stresses God’s power and justice. He sees the wrongdoing, and He hears the cries of the oppressed. As the people of God in the Old Testament learned, “you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23). The way of business for the Christian is different. Be honest in your dealings. Pay what you owe. Value people more than profit.

The text paints a picture of the foolish rich, a people living in pleasure and self-indulgence. In today’s world we may think of the luxurious lifestyle of a “fat cat.” To be clear, the problem is not comfort or enjoyment in itself, we want to be able to give our families a good and secure life. What’s at issue is that their life was defined by those things. They were haughty and were not “ready to give, willing to share” (1 Tim. 6:17-18). They lived for themselves and indulged every appetite. This should give us pause. Are we building our lives around comfort, ease, and pleasure, without thinking of others? If so, we are falling into the same trap. Covetousness is not always about greed for more—it can also be the unwillingness to deny ourselves or to share with our fellow man. As the writer of Hebrews put it, “do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb. 13:16).

Damaging Results (Jas. 5:6)

This final verse sums up the ultimate end of unchecked covetousness: it led them to oppress and destroy even the innocent. It’s not hard to imagine a wicked man using his wealth to “buy off” judges and to ensure every legal decision goes his way. There is disagreement about how best to understand the phrase “murdered the just” here. Some take it as a reference to Christians suffering at the hands of the rich. Others take this as a reference to the Lord Himself. Jesus is often referred to as the Just One (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14). In either case, the righteous did not fight back, though they were mistreated, condemned, and even killed. This is what the sin of covetousness produces—a heart that desires more at any cost and will ultimately hurt anyone who stands in the way, even the sinless Son of God.

Covetousness is far more than a desire for the finer things. It is a destructive mindset that corrodes our faith, our relationships, and even our soul's standing before God. Instead of envying the rich or longing for worldly success, let us guard our hearts against greed and learn contentment in Christ. Do we use our resources to bless others or only to please ourselves? One day, all riches will fade, save those that are found in Christ. Let us heed James' warning, avoid the snares of covetousness, and live with our eyes fixed on "the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (Jas. 1:12).



WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

Steve Lloyd

This article attempts to answer the question "What would we know about our origin and the purpose for our lives without the Old Testament?" That is a great question! In this article, we will explore life's "big questions" as they relate to the Old Testament.

First of all, let's take a look at what is meant by "big questions." Most writers agree that the "big questions" include the following: Who am I? Why am I here? What went wrong? What is the solution? How a person answers these questions will identify their worldview—their view

of the world. The atheist, for example, will come up with radically different answers to these questions than the Christian. What does the Old Testament say about the "big questions" that we would not know otherwise?

I have argued elsewhere that the Bible can be read as a Story. That Story can be broken down into 6 Acts: Act 1 is the Story of Creation; Act 2 is the Story of the Fall; Act 3 is the Story of Israel; Act 4 is the Story of Jesus; Act 5 is the Story of the Church; Act 6 is the Return of the King. The Old Testament contains the first 3 Acts.

Imagine jumping into the middle of one of Shakespeare's plays and trying to make sense out of it. This is what it would be like to read the New Testament without the Old. You would only have the last 3 Acts to make sense out of the whole. We are fortunate that the New Testament has much to say about the "big questions," but it is the "sum" of God's word that constitutes the truth (Ps. 119:160). Our understanding of the truth concerning the "big questions" would be poorer without the Old Testament.

The New Testament often makes reference to a name or an event in the past, but you must go to the Old Testament for the details. This is known as an allusion. Allusions can be thought of as literary shorthand. The book of Jude contains a number of allusions. For example, Jude alludes to "the way of Cain," "Balaam's error," and "Korah's rebellion" (v 11). If you did not have access to the Old Testament, you would not fully comprehend what Jude was communicating to his reader. This little letter is filled to the brim with other allusions, and the same case could be made: if you did not have access to the Old Testament, the full meaning of the letter would be lost on the reader. Allusion as a literary device is handy, but it assumes something of the reader. It is handy if your reader knows the story or person you merely reference, but if the reader is unfamiliar, the message is likely to be lost. (E.D. Hirsch addressed this with reference to culture in his book, *Cultural Literacy*.)

One of the big questions is, "Who am I?" Paul, a disciple of Jesus, in a conversation with the disciples of Socrates, quotes their poets: "In him we live and move and have our being," and "For we are indeed his offspring." Paul then explains, "Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man" (Acts 17:28-29).

One of the many problems Paul addressed in Corinth related to appropriate headaddress for men and women. He writes, "For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God..." (1 Cor. 11:7). The whole text

(11:1-16) is a knotty one to unravel, but man being made in the image and glory of God is not knotty. It affirms the same thing Paul said to the Athenians in Acts 17.

So, the New Testament answers the question, “Who am I?” We are made in the image and glory of God, but the details of our making and the One in whose image we are made are discovered in the Old Testament, in Act 1.

These texts are, in a sense, like the allusions in Jude. To know the whole story, you must go to the Old Testament. New Testament references to the Old Testament are, as one author put it, “echoes” broadcasted first in the Old Testament, and referenced in the New.

The New Testament answers most, if not all, of the “big questions.” Why am I here? ...to glorify God (Eph. 1:3-14). What is the problem? ...sin (Rom. 3:23). What is the solution? ...the gospel (Rom. 1:16, 17). But, in my opinion, we sacrifice too much if we think we can do without the Old Testament.

The Old Testament tells us the Story of our origin. The New Testament refers to the “beginning,” time and time again, but it is to the Old Testament we must go for the details on which the New Testament often depends.

The Old Testament tells us the Story of the Fall (Gen. 3). The New Testament refers to it (John 8:44), interprets it (Rev. 12:9), and amplifies it (Rom. 5:12), but it is to the Old Testament we must go for the original Story—for the details.

The Old Testament chronicles the huge Story of Israel. The New Testament refers to it time and time again, but it is to the Old Testament we must go for the details. If we were to eliminate the Old Testament from our Bibles, we would eliminate many of the essential details the New Testament depends on to communicate its message. This does not even take into consideration the exquisitely beautiful literary works of art contained therein.

CW



THE TONGUE...

Wayne Jackson

Jesus Christ gave a stern warning regarding the unseemly language that sometimes proceeds from a person's mouth. It is not without significance that two of the Ten Commandments deal with speech—taking the name of God in vain and bearing false witness against another person (Ex. 20:7,16). Similarly, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned against the abuse of the tongue in “swearing falsely” (Matt. 5:33-37). The way one talks is a very revealing index to his character. The Scriptures describe different kinds of “tongues” (speech). Let us consider some of these.

The Hateful Tongue

Jeremiah spoke of those “treacherous” people who “bend their tongue like a bow.” He cautioned that no one should place trust in the person who “deceives” and “slanders,” nor with those who “have taught their tongue to speak lies” (Jer. 9:2-5). Jehovah hates the lying tongue (Prov. 6:17; cf. Acts 5:3-4). Some use their tongues to rip and gut others—even their brethren in Christ.

The Licentious Tongue

Solomon said that the mouth of the forbidden woman is a “deep pit” (Pro. 22:14). Note the perfume-drenched words (“fair speech”) of the dissolute woman who lures the unwary lad to his destruction (7:14ff). Men have similarly taken advantage of vulnerable, lonely women by their deceitful language.

The Boasting Tongue

The vain Pharisee, in a dramatic presentation before the Lord, paraded his feigned accomplishments, but he was not accounted as just with God, in spite of his boasting (Luke 18:9ff). It was Francis Bacon who said something to the effect that “a bragging man is scorned by the wise, and admired by fools.” There are those with whom one can scarcely engage a conversation without being bored to tears with an incessant stream of self-adulating and dubious accomplishments.

The Impetuous Tongue

An inspired writer declared: “[L]et every man be swift to hear, slow to speak” (Jas. 1:19). The poet Robert Frost once said that “half the world is composed of people who have something to say and can't, and the other half who

have nothing to say and keep on saying it." A wise man wrote: "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise" (Pro. 17:28). Unfortunately, he frequently opens his mouth and removes all doubt! There are far too many people who talk in an attempt to discover the content of their thoughts.

The Obscure Tongue

Have you ever had a religious conversation with a person, and when the exchange was concluded, you had no earthly idea where he stood on any significant issue? Such folks slip and slide, flip and flop. "What is your position, brother?" "Well, I think there is much to be said on both sides of that argument." Some people simply cannot be pinned down on any point of truth.

The Critical Tongue

A wise man values constructive criticism; it's just that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between constructive criticism and plain old meanness. But, as Solomon observed, "A rebuke enters deeper into one who has understanding, than [do] a hundred stripes into a fool" (Pro. 17:10). A wise person can learn valuable lessons from his critics if he but will. On the other hand, there are those who have turned criticism into a recreational sport. Whenever they gather, like vicious piranha, they devour all flesh in sight.

The Double-Tongued

In setting forth qualifications for deacons, Paul admonished that they must not be "double-tongued" (1 Tim. 3:8). The double-tongued person is one who has refined the art of duplicity. He will say anything to get you off his back, then say quite another to someone else. His word is not his bond. His tongue flaps like an irritating awning in a winter storm (see Pro. 8:8).

The Explosive Tongue

James observed that the tongue is an instrument that no man can control completely (cf. Jas. 3:8). But some make almost no attempt at the effort. At the least irritant they explode with expletives. One might be surprised to listen to the language of the man on Monday who has spoken so piously over the Lord's table on Sunday! To those who operate in such fashion, the Lord's says: "What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant upon your lips?" (Ps. 50:16).

Conclusion

"Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth" (Eph. 4:29), rather, put away shameful speaking from your mouth (Col. 3:8). Listen to the warning of the Judge of the universe:

"I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt. 12:36-37).

CW

WITH WHAT MEASURE

Don Walker

Jesus said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom; for with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38). There are some interesting lessons here.

First, we cannot out give God! We give, and God sees to it we are given unto. In addition, what

God gives is "pressed down, shaken together, and running over." When you get a box of cereal at the store the manufacturer informs you that "some settling of contents may have occurred." Sure enough, you open it and the box is half empty. That, my friends, is "shaken down," but it is not "running over." God will fill your cup till it "over runs," even after having been shaken down!

Second, the things "men" give to us are actually provided by God. The atheist may say, "I worked hard, I labored, I sowed, I reaped! I have provided my blessings; not God!" But what does the atheist use in order to plant the seed and reap the harvest? He must have the seed, fertile ground, rain and sunshine - all given by God. The means by which the atheist or unbeliever acquires the necessities of life is no different than that of the obedient child of God. The former ignores God's benevolent hand behind it all, the later believes that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (Jas. 1:17).

Third, it should be noted that Jesus did NOT say, "With what type you give, so shall it be given unto you again." Some contend that if we give monetarily to the Lord, He will in turn make us rich. That is never promised in the Scriptures. It may be that God will provide us with abundance of material things - as He has so done to those of us who enjoy the standard of living we now enjoy. Genuine wealth, however, cannot be measured in terms of dollars and cents. It can only be measured in currency that is spiritual, namely eternal life and eventually a home in heaven with our Father

Who has blessed us in so many ways.

Fourth, God will give to us according to what measure we give to others. If we are greedy and selfish, giving little to others in the way of assistance and encouragement, God will use that same "measure" to give back to us. Have you ever wondered why it is that some people are constantly struggling with life, finances, emotions, to name but a few areas in which they have difficulty?

Is it possible that life seems to have "passed them by" because, like the rich man in Luke 16, they have passed others by along life's pathway?

Finally, we learn that our God is a beneficent God! He is not stingy, nor does He reprimand us when we ask His blessings. A most beautiful passage in this regard has to do with God's gracious bestowal of wisdom to those who ask. But within that passage we see a wonderful trait of our God that few realize: "But if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given to him" (Jas. 1:5, emphasis mine, TW).

This article is not really an article having to do with our contribution, though certainly the principles apply. This article is really an attempt to help us recognize the wonderful God Whom we serve, and His desire to give to His children those things they need - and in many instances those things they don't NEED but that make life enjoyable!

I'll close with a pointed, but humorous illustration: A baker living in a village not far from Quebec bought his butter from a neighboring farmer. One day he became suspicious that the butter was not a full one pound weight, and decided he would investigate the matter. For several days he weighed the butter, and discovered the rolls of butter the farmer brought were short the designated amount. This so angered him that he had the farmer arrested. "I assume you have weights," said the judge. "No sir," replied the farmer. "How do you manage to weigh the butter that you sell?" "That's easily explained, Your Honor," said the farmer. "When the baker began buying his butter from me, I thought I'd get my bread from him. It is the same one pound loaf which he brings me that I've been using as a weight for the butter I sell him."

CW

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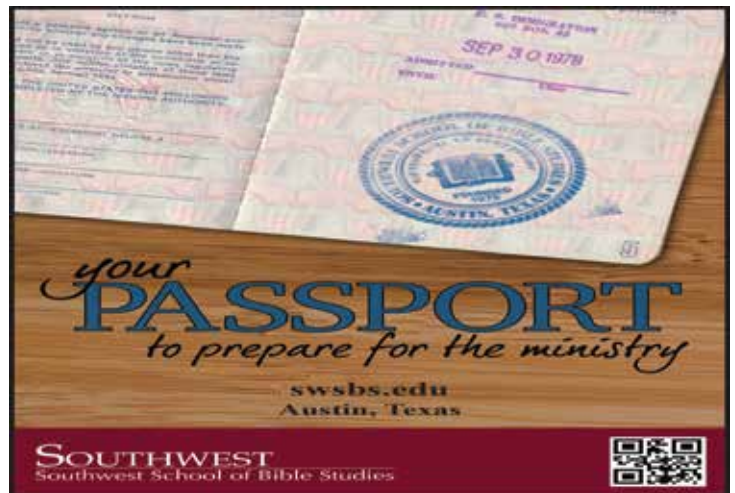
that we love our neighbors as ourselves doesn't matter. To illustrate: a person who chooses to speed through a school zone is essentially saying, "The posted law is unwarranted /

ridiculous / illogical / irrelevant / inconvenient, and thus I do not have to obey it." So, the speeder is not only violating the law, but he is passing judgment on the merits of the law as well. In like manner, James argues that when Christians speak evil of one another, we are sitting in judgment on God's law, which clearly forbids such behavior. Every unkind remark, harsh criticism, and unfair judgment of others is implicitly proclaiming, "I can say what I want because I have judged that God's word on how to treat my neighbor does not matter."

Speaking evil of our brethren usurps God's authority (v.12). In theory, we understand that God is great, supreme, and unrivaled as the Lawgiver and Judge of all the earth (Ps. 119:97; Gen. 18:25; Acts 17:30-31). However, James argues that when we speak evil of our brethren (thus passing judgment on the merits or validity of God's law), we put ourselves in the place of God Himself. Notice the rapid contrasts implied in James 4:12. God is the "one Lawgiver," we are not. God is able, we are not. God is able to save, we are not. God is able to destroy, we are not. When we appreciate the realities of these comparisons, we are left with the humbling question: "Who are you to judge another?" When we develop a harsh, critical, faultfinding spirit, we end up placing ourselves on a throne that only God should occupy. How we all need to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord (Jas. 4:10).

So, this passage warns us not to become verbal assassins. Let us be righteous in our judgments, careful in our statements, and gracious in our intentions. Often, the most godly thing we can do is to simply remain silent. Let us pray in this manner, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer" (Ps. 19:14).

CW





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From the Director's desk



Trent Kennedy
Director
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For decades, the study of the original languages of Scripture has been part of the curriculum at Southwest. Still today, the students take one quarter of Biblical Hebrew to introduce them to the language and alphabet (alephbet!), and four quarters of Biblical Greek to help them get a foundation for future study. Some have wondered why we study Greek at Southwest. Here are some reasons why we study Greek:

Studying Greek reminds us of the original context.

Studying Greek makes us slow down as we meditate on God's word.

Studying Greek helps our English grammar.

Studying Greek opens up nuances occasionally missed in translation.

Studying Greek allows us to discern when others “go to the Greek.”

Studying Greek promotes responsibility in handling the text.

Do you need to know Greek to go to Heaven? Of course not. Do you have to know Greek to be an effective preacher? Evangelist (a word with a direct Greek tie)? Teacher? Missionary? Minister? Absolutely not. Is Greek the magic bullet that makes difficult passages easy? Not even close. Should the SW graduate bring up Greek words in every sermon as a way to show higher education? God forbid. When you have one year of Greek study, are you equipped to denounce English translations with which you disagree? Probably not.

Biblical Greek is one tool in the exegete's tool kit. It is not the only tool. If you are capable, it is probably the best tool in the toolkit for studying the New Testament. However, even an introduction to Greek will help you immensely as you study the Bible in various English translations, use Bible software programs like Logos, or want to dig more deeply into a text of Scripture. If you come to SWSBS, you will not leave a Greek scholar, but we will do our best to help you learn to use this tool to make you a better Bible student and servant of God.

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