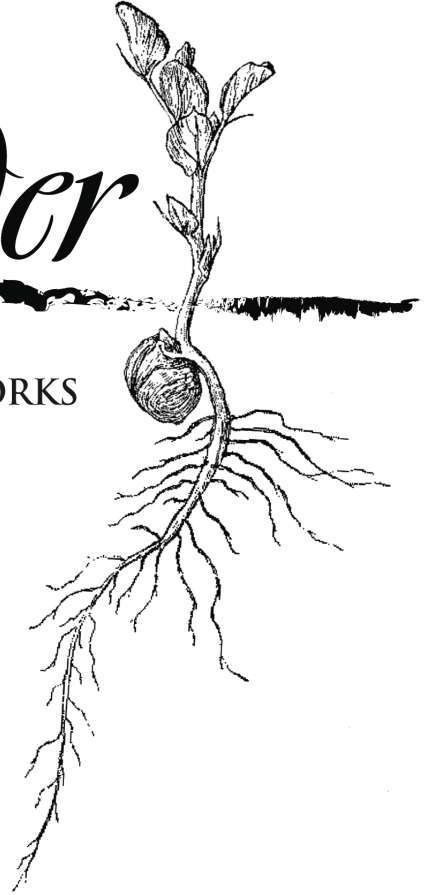


Slander

WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT WORKS



JOHN D. CLARK, SR.

Slander

What It Is and How It Works

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Author's Notes

- In English, there is no difference between the singular and plural forms of “you”. However, in biblical Hebrew and Greek, the differences are obvious. To more accurately convey the biblical writers’ messages in verses where the word “you” appears, I have italicized the “y” of all plural forms, such as you, your, yours, and yourselves.
- Translations of Old and New Testament scriptures are my own. Following standard practice, when a word is added to the translation for clarification, it is italicized.
- Punctuation appears inside quotation marks only when that punctuation is part of what is quoted. To include all periods and commas within quotation marks, as many grammarians demand, leaves too much room, in my opinion, for misrepresentation of the quoted material.

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BOOKS OF THE BIBLE AND THEIR ABBREVIATIONS

Old Testament Books

Genesis	Gen.	Ecclesiastes	Eccl.
Exodus	Ex.	Song of Solomon	Song
Leviticus	Lev.	Isaiah	Isa.
Numbers	Num.	Jeremiah	Jer.
Deuteronomy	Dt.	Lamentations	Lam.
Joshua	Josh.	Ezekiel	Ezek.
Judges	Judg.	Daniel	Dan.
Ruth	Ruth	Hosea	Hos.
1Samuel	1Sam.	Joel	Joel
2Samuel	2Sam.	Amos	Amos
1Kings	1Kgs.	Obadiah	Obad.
2Kings	2Kgs.	Jonah	Jon.
1Chronicles	1Chron.	Micah	Mic.
2Chronicles	2Chron.	Nahum	Nah.
Ezra	Ezra	Habakkuk	Hab.
Nehemiah	Neh.	Zephaniah	Zeph.
Esther	Esth.	Haggai	Hag.
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zech.
Psalms	Ps.	Malachi	Mal.
Proverbs	Prov.		

New Testament Books

Matthew	Mt.	1Timothy	1Tim.
Mark	Mk.	2Timothy	2Tim.
Luke	Lk.	Titus	Tit.
John	Jn.	Philemon	Phlm.
Acts	Acts	Hebrews	Heb.
Romans	Rom.	James	Jas.
1Corinthians	1Cor.	1Peter	1Pet.
2Corinthians	2Cor.	2Peter	2Pet.
Galatians	Gal.	1John	1Jn.
Ephesians	Eph.	2John	2Jn.
Philippians	Phip.	3John	3Jn.
Colossians	Col.	Jude	Jude
1Thessalonians	1Thess.	Revelation	Rev.
2Thessalonians	2Thess.		

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Foreword

I believe the Bible. I trust it to be historically and prophetically true. I believe that Jesus is Lord of all, that he was born of the virgin Mary, that he suffered and died for our sins, that on the third day, he was raised from the dead by the power of God, that he ascended into heaven to offer himself to God for our sins, that he will return at the appointed time to reign on earth a thousand years, and that in the Final Judgment, he will be the Judge of both the living and the dead. I believe that there is no hope of salvation except by faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son. Jesus has filled me with his Spirit and taught me. I am his servant.

I also believe that the religious system known as Christianity is an abomination to both God and Jesus. I believe that, to date, Christianity is Satan's crowning achievement, and that by it, he has successfully divided and confused the body of Christ, and that he reigns over the flock of God through Christian ministers, though they do not realize it. And I believe that in order for God's people to attain to the unity and purity that Jesus prayed they would enjoy, they must come out of Christianity.

I am, by the wonderful grace of God, a follower of Jesus. I am also, by that same grace, not a Christian and not a part of what you know as Church religion. The Iron Kingdom Series, of which this book is the first part, is an explanation and defense of my faith.

This book lays the foundation that is needed in order to understand slander in its most perfect form: the religious system called Christianity. The books that follow will then tell the story of how Christianity rose to the heights of worldly glory and imposed its will upon kings and nations, falsely assuring all people that it is Christ's representative on earth. They will bring to light the apostasy of the early body of Christ, detailing what went wrong in the days of the apostles so that believers ended up devising for themselves a religion that slanders the very Lord it claims to serve.

Introduction

Words

God warned His people through David, “I will destroy him who slanders his neighbor in secret” (Ps. 101:5). Thus, the justification for Solomon’s comment, “He who utters slander is a fool” (Prov. 10:18). And in the light of such scriptures, there can be no disputing the fact that slander is a great evil. But what, exactly, is slander, biblically speaking? This book will answer that question.

Meanings of words often evolve, so that one generation may use a word in a way that differs from the way another generation uses it. An example is the word “offend”. In our time, “to offend” most often means to insult or annoy, but to previous generations, to offend most often meant to cause someone to fall away from righteousness, to trip someone up, as we might put it. Biblically speaking, an offense is a stumbling block, usually a spiritual stumbling block, though it can be a natural one, as in Leviticus 19:14: “You shall not curse a deaf man, nor shall you put a stumbling block before a blind man.”¹ Such changes in the meaning of words are not a small matter, for an awareness of those changes is critical to understanding what the men of God who wrote the Bible were actually saying.

The word “slander” has not undergone such a change in meaning that the biblical writers’ point is entirely lost; however, those writers understood slander in ways that modern dictionaries do not capture. Today, a dictionary will tell you that to slander means “to make a false spoken statement that damages a person’s reputation.” But the stories of slander found in the Bible reveal that slander can be verbal or non-verbal and that slander often uses truth to accomplish its purpose. As you will see, the serpent used truth to slander God when he spoke with Eve in the garden of Eden, and Absalom used truth to slander King David, his father, and Judas used truth to slander Jesus and persuade the other disciples to honor him as they honored Jesus, if only for a few days.

¹ For a more detailed discussion on the biblical use of “offend”, see the appendix.

Names

Even a casual reader of the Scriptures can hardly fail to notice the prophetic significance of the names of many biblical characters. For one example, the name “Methuselah” means “at his death, it shall be sent”; accordingly, the Flood was sent the same year Methuselah died.

To convey adequately their attributes and authority, biblical characters of high position required numerous descriptive names. The Messiah, for example, was called by a host of names other than Jesus: Immanuel (Isa. 7:14), Wonder, Counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (all from Isaiah 9:6), the Branch (Zech. 6:12), the Word of God (Rev. 19:13), the Prince of life (Acts 3:15), and others too numerous to list here. All of his many names are in some way descriptive of his work or character, and they all add to our understanding of the Lord. Satan, too, is called by many names: Lucifer (Isa. 14:12), the Wicked One (Mt. 13:38), the Enemy (Mt. 13:39), the Serpent (Rev. 20:2), the Dragon (Rev. 12:3), the prince of this world (Jn. 14:30), and others, each title being in some way descriptive of his work or character. It is significant that slander should be such a pronounced element of Satan’s character that “the Devil”, that is, “the Slanderer”, became one of his names. That, in itself, is sufficient reason to learn what slander is and how it works.

Slander, as we find it in Scripture, is a most effective tool of unclean spirits; it has a very high success rate both in the world and in the body of Christ. Without a good understanding of slander, God’s children are much more likely to be victimized by it, or worse yet, to become slanderers themselves. And so, it is to you who, whether eight or eighty, are young in Christ that this work on slander is joyfully dedicated. For as your eyes are enlightened to the truth, so will be dimmed the Slanderer’s hope of luring you into one of his snares. As wise Solomon once said, “Surely, in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird” (Prov. 1:17).

Take your flight now, my friend.

The Second Eve

John D. Clark, Sr.

Wisdom came and suffered;
God's Lamb and Image wept.
Fools rejoiced to see it,
but faith the righteous kept.

Wisdom, treated rudely
for his pure and simple prose,
often saw them lauded
who made a pretty show.

Purchased life from heaven
fell on a humble few.
Mocked they were, then scattered
to winds, and heat, and dew.

Constantine's disaster
combined two former foes,
and hatred of the Master
was guised in "sacred" robes.

Guise is wise; he knew it,
and thus the Serpent came.
Poison seed, implanted,
bore fruit of sin and shame.

Saints undone and plundered
of glory and their peace,
empty, yet elated,
knew not that life had ceased.

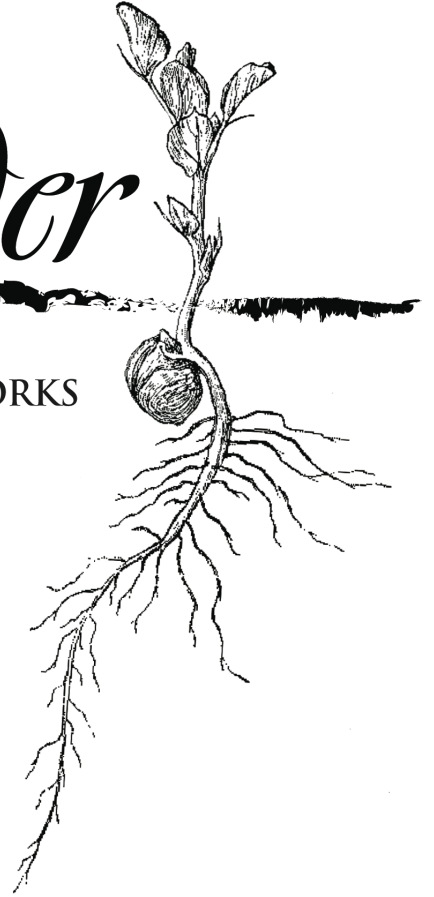
Holy truth suspicioned;
the Serpent's lie believed.
Eden's vale revisited,
the fall of another Eve.

Foolish Eve the second,
how fallen, yet beloved!
Mercy will redeem you
from your forbidden love.

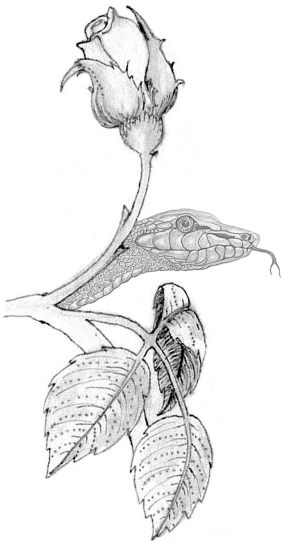
Hope of all the ages
will ope your blinded eyes,
e'er the trumps of glory
announce him from the skies.

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WHAT IT IS AND HOW IT WORKS



JOHN D. CLARK, SR.



He who hides hatred with lying lips,
and he who utters slander, is a fool.
Proverbs 10:18

CHAPTER 1

A REMARKABLE DREAM

“No One Ever Knows”

One day in November of 1980, I was at home reading the Bible when I came to this, in Matthew 4:1: “Then Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the Devil.” At that, the Lord put it on my heart to find out what the word “Devil” means, and I found in my research that one definition for *diabolos* (the Greek word for Devil) is “slanderer”. Then, I decided to read every verse in the New Testament where *diabolos* appears, hoping to gain insight into the Devil’s character. A little past halfway through the thirty-five instances of *diabolos*, I came to 1Timothy 3:11, where Paul was speaking of one of the qualifications for those who would be servants of Christ: “Their wives must be worthy of respect, not slanderers.” When I read Paul’s comment concerning wives of ministers, Jesus used certain events that I had witnessed, but had not understood, to open my eyes to what slander is and how it works. It was a sobering revelation. The people involved were believers whom I loved dearly, and it was painful to see; nevertheless, I was thankful to have heard from Jesus, and I was glad now to have some understanding concerning the evil of slander.

There are souls in the body of Christ so used by the Slanderer that they earn for themselves the title “slanderer”, with a small “s”, as in 1Timothy 3:11. This is tragic but avoidable if believers are given sound instruction about slander. The fact that most believers are ill-informed concerning slander, as the Bible presents it to us, provides sufficient incentive for this work.

Shortly after the Lord began to show me what slander is, I wrote to a brother in Kentucky, Jimmy Tolle, relating to him what Jesus was teaching me, and the following month, in January 1981, he visited us. During his visit, Jesus, with a remarkable dream, gave Jimmy an insight into slander that was so profound that it took me almost two decades to fully comprehend it. Here is Jimmy’s testimony, as he told it:

From the time the Lord started dealing with me in the mid-1970s, there had been a haunting question that plagued my heart: “Why can’t all

God's people see the truth of the gospel and be healed of their divisions?" I would spend days and even weeks to myself, thinking and praying about why all God's people can't see the truth about God together and understand His doctrine. That question would stay on my mind and spirit at times until I became vexed with it. I never knew when or what might set it off. It could be just a word someone would say or something I would read; I just never knew. It was so painful! How could God's people be so divided and deceived? I was beginning to feel this was going to be the way I had to live my life. I would feel it when it began to creep over me; my whole countenance would change. I would look to God for relief, confessing to Him that it was none of my business, pleading for Him to take away the tormenting thoughts that were in my heart and mind. Little did I know that it was God who had placed those thoughts there and that He had something wonderful in store for me as a result.

In late 1980, Brother John Clark wrote me a letter describing what God was teaching him from the Scriptures about slander. After reading his letter, along with numerous scriptures related to the subject, I recall thinking to myself that I had read these scriptures before and understood what they said. But there was a connection I did not yet see between his letter and the heaviness I had felt so often about people not seeing the truth. Through Brother John's letter, God was beginning to give me the answer I had sought for so long.

In January of 1981, I decided to make a trip to North Carolina with my wife and two very dear friends, Brother "Junior" Embry and his wife, Sister Natalie. The day after we arrived, everyone was looking forward to that evening's prayer meeting, wondering what the Lord might do. What a wonderful feeling of love, joy, and peace as we entered Brother John's living room, where the meeting was to be held! I remember looking around the room and seeing the saints' faces and their wonderful joy and happiness. Such a respect I felt, being in the midst of the power and holiness of God which filled the room as we started to sing praises and glorify God!

After a while, there was a pause in the music, and a very sweet elderly woman stood to her feet and began thanking God for her being "saved, sanctified, and filled with the holy Ghost." And after her, another elderly Church of God woman did the same. As these words came from their lips, I could feel my spirit and heart begin to sink within me. That old, tormenting question was rising again in my heart! How could these elderly, kind, and loving mothers in Christ, who had no doubt conducted their lives better than I had and spent more time praying than I did, be so

blind to the truth of God concerning the new birth? Why was I able to see and understand, and they could not? “Lord,” I pleaded within me, “how can this be?” I felt myself beginning to sink again on the inside, although on the outside, I thought I was doing a pretty good job of holding myself together.

But the questions kept gnawing at me: “God, how could these sweet saints not understand your truth? God, there isn’t any place in the Bible where anyone ‘got saved and sanctified’ before receiving the holy Ghost. The Scriptures do not teach that. How can such good people say such things?” But no answer came. Inside, I felt crushed. I began to feel as if I were wearing a plastic smile. “Oh God, how can this be?”

After the meeting that night, a few of us gathered at “Preacher Clark’s” house (Brother John’s father) and sat around his table for something to drink and a snack. While talking about the meeting and the events of the day, Sister Martha (Brother John’s mother) said, “Brother Jimmy, what in the world is wrong with you? I can see something is wrong by the look on your face. You’re troubled!”

I couldn’t hold it in any longer. I just blurted out, “I just can’t understand why those sweet, saintly ladies can’t see the truth! Why? Why can’t God’s people see?” I knew as I spoke these words she could tell how bad I was feeling inside. I went on to say, “I know those women pray more than I do. I feel as if they are better people than I am. Why can’t they see the truth?”

Sister Martha said, “Preacher Clark (she always called her husband, “Preacher Clark”), can’t you help Brother Jimmy?” Then he walked over to me and placed his hand on my shoulder lightly and said, “Brother Jimmy, the Bible tells us there are five wise virgins and five foolish.” In his attempt to help me, he only made me feel worse, and yet, I felt that if I could be helped, he was the one who could do it.

My wife and I left their home a little later to go next door, where we were staying with Brother Earl Pittman and his wife, Sister Betty. I said to my wife, “I’d like to leave here now and go home to Louisville.” But I knew it wasn’t the right way to leave. I felt so bad in my heart that I told her if I had to go through this torment again, I wish I could just die in my sleep. Her reply to me was, “Shame on you, Jimmy!”

After going to bed that night, I lay there and prayed, “Lord, if you don’t help me tonight, don’t let me wake up in the morning!” That prayer was in my heart as I began to fall into a deep, deep sleep. It felt as if I was falling off a very high cliff, falling, falling, and all of a sudden, I found myself looking down on a wide table, very long, covered with a

solid white tablecloth. On it was every kind of food: meat, vegetables, fruits, pies – anything you could imagine – and it was beautiful. On both sides of the table sat people eating, talking, and laughing, with wonderful feelings being shared with each other. I was watching all of this at a distance, and then I saw myself sitting at the table, directly across from Sister Martha.

As I stood there looking at this scene, I became aware that the Lord was standing there with me, and He was there in such a way as I had never felt before, or since that time. It was completely overwhelming. My Lord! I felt totally subdued. I didn't even try to look at Him, but I felt His powerful presence, and I knew that He knew everything about me. Oh, the awesome presence of God! Nothing goes unnoticed or undetected before Him. In His presence is an absence of all debate, strife, and opinions. There is absolutely no defense against Him at all. Everything is just as it really is in the presence of God. I never had to say anything to Him with my voice because everything that was communicated between us was asked and answered through the heart, never through my mind or tongue. Every answer I received while in His presence was communicated directly to my heart and not to my mind. Oh, the power of the Almighty God!

As I viewed the feast, with the Lord by my side, I saw myself down at the table becoming very angry and upset, and I saw Sister Martha trying to settle me down. She started pleading with me, "Please, Brother Jimmy, don't get angry now. Sit here and eat and have a good time with us. We love you." But I would not give in. Then she said, "You've had a good work with us in the past, and it's going to be greater from here on." As she was speaking these words, she was reaching out to me, so kind and sweet, yet inside me was a great and growing anger and wrath. The Lord and I watched as I became completely out of control.

I sprang up from the table so quickly, anger burning within me, that the chair I was sitting on shot across the floor behind me, and I replied to her, "I wouldn't stay any longer, no matter what you said! Even if —" and then I saw myself hesitate for a moment. Standing beside the Lord, I was thinking, *Don't say it! Don't say it!* But anger was consuming the Jimmy who was at the table, and he blurted out, "Even if *God* told me to, I wouldn't stay here any longer!"

Then, still in the presence of the Lord, watching myself behave like that, I suddenly realized that I was beginning to wake up. I could feel God's presence leaving me, too, and I began to cry out in my heart, "Oh God! No! I don't even know why I was so offended!"

He answered, "No one ever knows."

I was growing frantic because of the layer-by-layer waking up that was taking place. I did not want to wake up without knowing the answer to my burning question: "God, why was I so offended?"

Again, He answered, "No one ever knows why they are offended."

I felt myself getting closer to being awake, and I was afraid that if I woke up without knowing why I was offended, I might really act like that sometime. So, I made a final attempt before regaining consciousness: "But God, some people know!"

And just before I awoke, He replied once more, "No one ever knows."

Then, at that very second, I was awake! My eyes sprang open, and I lay there in complete silence for a long time. Wave after wave of the power of God rushed over my body, beginning at my feet, then slowly and ever so gently moving up my body to my head, and then back again to my feet. As I lay there silently, it felt as though my body was floating in the air, even though I knew it wasn't. Silently, with tears running from my eyes and falling to the pillow, I prayed, "Oh God, what does all this mean?" I told God that if He would show me what the dream meant, I'd tell it everywhere I can and preach it to anyone who will listen. I kept asking God what He meant when He said people never know why they are offended. "Oh God, please help me to understand!"

After some time passed, with me lying there praying and the power of God rushing back and forth over my body, I glanced over at my wife beside me. She was still sound asleep, unaware of anything that had just taken place, yet I knew the Lord had visited me and that my life would never quite be the same. And I felt as if the Lord told me, "Brother Clark has your answer." So, in the morning, I walked back over to Preacher Clark's apartment, but my conversation with him did not bring me the relief I was hoping for.

Later that morning, still pondering over the things the Lord had shown me, Brother Junior and I went over to Brother John's house, and I began to tell him and his wife, Barbara, all the things that I had experienced during the night. Then John began to tell me more concerning what he had been learning from the Scriptures about slander. Most important, he told me that the word "offend" isn't used in the Bible the way we use it now. Today, it means "to insult", but in the Bible, it means "to cause someone to fall away from righteousness". That was the key Jesus used to open my eyes. That was the moment I began to understand the question that God had put into my mouth as I was coming out of my dream: "Why was I offended?" It was only then that I realized that I was

not asking, “Why was I insulted?” Instead, I was asking why I was refusing the feast that God had prepared for His children! Something had caused me to adamantly refuse the heavenly food which those precious saints were so enjoying, but what? The answer to that question was the mysterious thing that nobody ever knows who refuses to eat the truth that Jesus serves his people. Jesus had been right when he told me that “Brother Clark” had my answer; it was just not the elder Brother Clark, as I had assumed. It was his son.

At last I understood why so many of God’s dear children were blind to the truth. Those two dear old saints who had testified to being “saved, sanctified, and filled with the holy Ghost” were only saying what someone had taught them to say. Neither of them would have known who sowed that evil seed in their hearts and blinded them to the truth. Then I found myself wondering if in my past, someone had sown seeds of slander into my own heart against the Lord, and I began to weep. I told everyone there at Brother John’s house that I thought we should seek God by doing some praying, and I especially wanted them to pray for me, in case some seeds of slander had fallen into my heart and taken root! It was overwhelming, what God had spoken to me, that no one ever knows why he is offended, and I knew for sure that I was not above being fooled. At that point, we got down to business and did some praying.

As we were praying, the Lord was very merciful, and showed me great kindness, and He began to teach me the real meaning of my dream, which was that false doctrine and lifeless ceremonies are seeds of slander against the right way of the Lord. Those things, highly esteemed among men, make God’s children blind to the truth of the gospel. Every time a Christian minister speaks of “joining the church”, he is sowing seeds of slander against God’s way of entering the body of Christ, for in 1 Corinthians 12:13, the apostle Paul says, “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” And any time a person obeys a Christian minister and joins a church – any church – that person *becomes slander in action*, slander against the Lord’s one and only way of becoming a member of his body: the baptism of the holy Ghost. And not only do they not know why they are offended (caused to turn away from the truth), *they do not even know that they have refused the truth in the first place*. At least in my dream, I knew that I was sinning by getting up from the Lord’s table. And now, I saw that most of God’s people do not even know that much! It is no wonder that without God’s help, “no one ever knows.” Almost nobody who receives Christian doctrines and ceremonies even feels the need to

ask the question I had asked in my dream! And they don't know that the food they are being taught to refuse is holy manna from heaven.

I now understood, for the first time, that to wear special robes for worship is to slander the invisible robes of righteousness that Jesus gives. And to eat bits of bread and drink little glasses of wine (or grape juice) is to slander God's holy and unique communion with His children in the Spirit. And I also understood that those who partake of such rituals do not know that they have been led astray (offended) and are sinning against the truth. God's people are good people, but they have been led badly by ministers whom they trust. They have been offended!

Where those saintly old ladies stood with God who said they had been "saved, sanctified, and filled with the holy Ghost", I could not say or even know, but where the ministers who taught them those things stood in God's sight, I would not want to stand. In Mark 9:42, Jesus said, "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." In my dream, when I heard Sister Martha pleading with me, "Please stay with us," I was deafened to her plea because I felt something, but I never knew what it was that made me feel it, so that I refused to partake of the feast. Nobody ever knows. Only with God's help did I come to understand, the next morning at Brother John's house, that the Jimmy who refused the wonderful feast had previously taken into his heart something that was not of God, and it was that evil seed which led him to reject the feast that God had spread for His people. And nobody, including me, knew when that seed had been sown, or by whom.

May God help us to seek Him with all our hearts and give us the power to escape the crafty slander of men, and see the truth and love it – and neither receive any seed of slander against the truth nor sow any. For in Matthew 13:41–42, Jesus said, "The Son of man will send forth his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and those who do iniquity, and they will cast them into the furnace of fire. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!"

*Remember this: False doctrine and lifeless ceremonies
are slander against the right way of the Lord.*

Seventeen Years

A few months before Jimmy received his vision, I had printed my first book, *Spiritual Light*.² And now, with the understanding of slander that

² Available for online reading or download at GoingtoJesus.com.

the Lord had given me, I decided to write a book on that subject. However, soon after I started working on it, the Lord forbade me to publish that book until the four people in our congregation who were slanderers had died. I knew who they were from the moment Jesus showed me what slander is, for I had witnessed for several years the trouble they caused by (what I now understood was) slander. In fact, on that November day in 1980 when I read Paul's comment about slanderers from 1Timothy 3, it was their ungodly examples which Jesus used to teach me what slander is. But, as I said, he refused to allow me to publish a book about it, or even to speak plainly on the subject, because he loved those guilty children of his, and he did not want them to see the damage they had done. It would have hurt them too much to see it. What a loving Savior our Jesus is!

So, I put my manuscript aside, and I waited – for seventeen years.

At length, in 1997, when the last of those four saints fell asleep in Jesus, I felt free to finish my book (this book) on slander. But before I began again to work on it, the Lord surprised me with an even more profound understanding of slander. He showed me slander in its most perfect and deadly form, and as strange as it sounds, Jesus revealed it to me through Brother Jimmy's testimony – the same testimony I had heard many times since 1981! And then, instead of finishing my book, I found myself researching the rise and development of that most deadly form of slander: the institutionalized slander called "Christianity". That research consumed much of my time for over two decades, and only then did I feel prepared to put on paper what Jesus had shown me and what I had learned by study.

It seems impossible that a person could hear a testimony like Jimmy's, as I did, and rejoice in it, as I did, and yet fail to understand it, as I also did. Yet, that was the case. Looking back on it, I believe that Jesus was waiting until I fulfilled my obedience to his command not to publish a book on slander before he would allow me to fully understand what he had been saying to me in Jimmy's testimony. And I see now that if I had pushed past his command to not publish the book, not only would the book have wounded hearts that he did not want to be wounded, but my teaching on slander would have been unworthy of him, being incomplete.

When I finally came to understand Jesus' answer to Jimmy concerning why so many children of God are not feasting on the truth of Christ, I saw them as victims of the delusive, slanderous religion they have joined. But all that is the *end* of the story; that is the understanding Jesus gave me at the end of the seventeen years. For this book, we return to the beginning of those years, when Jesus revealed to me the fundamentals of slander.



CHAPTER 2

THREE CATEGORIES OF BELIEVERS

There are three categories of believers in the body of Christ, and every believer on earth belongs in one of them:

- (1) The Unwise: experienced believers whom Jesus called “foolish virgins”³
- (2) The Innocent: inexperienced believers who are neither wise nor foolish – yet
- (3) The Wise: experienced believers whom Jesus called “wise virgins”

(1) The Unwise

Unwise believers are those who “after escaping the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . . . are again entangled in them, and overcome” (2Pet. 2:20). The apostle Paul, with tears, wrote about such children of God, saying that they had become “enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Phip. 3:18b–19). However, the unwise themselves do not think of themselves that way, for to be unwise is to be unable to judge anyone rightly, including oneself.

The unwise have been in the body of Christ long enough to become spiritually mature, yet they have failed to do so. Not realizing that such is the case with them, however, they do not give up either their profession of faith or their religious activities. On the contrary, they continue to worship with other believers, and they may even exercise spiritual gifts in the Assembly. It was of such believers that Jesus spoke in Matthew 7:22–23: “Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord! Lord! Haven’t we prophesied in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and performed many miracles in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Go away from me, you who work lawlessness!’” The unwise will be surprised by Jesus’ judgment of them in the end.

³ Jesus’ parable of the wise and foolish virgins is in Matthew 25:1–12.

Remember this: The unwise have been believers long enough to be wise, but they are not, and they do not realize it.

Unwise believers are the third kind of soil in Jesus' foundational parable of four kinds of soil.⁴ In that parable, Jesus explained to his disciples that there are four kinds of people (four kinds of soil) who hear the word of God. The first kind of soil rejects the word of God outright. The second kind rejoices to hear the word of God, but when faced with persecution, their joy and faith quickly wither. Then Jesus described the third kind of soil, the unwise among his people: "These are they who hear the word, but the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke out the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Mk. 4:18–19).

Believers who are the third kind of soil do not reject the word of God outright, as the first soil does, nor do they succumb to persecution, as does the second. Instead, they receive the word of God, endure persecution, and stay among the saints. However, for whatever reason, they are never perfected in Christ.

Remember this: There are four kinds of people who hear the word of God.

The apostle Paul said this: "Christ loved the Assembly of God and gave himself up for it, that he might sanctify it, purifying it by the washing of spoken water, that he might present it to God, with himself, as a splendid Assembly without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. 5:25b–27a). We learn from Peter that the "spots" in the body of Christ are unwise believers, and he describes them like this: "Like unreasoning beasts of nature, born to be caught and killed, they will be destroyed, receiving the reward of unrighteousness. They are spots and blemishes, reveling in their deceitful ways while they feast with you, seducing unstable souls. They are cursed children, having forsaken the right way" (excerpts, 2Pet. 2:12–15). In those verses, Peter was speaking in particular of men who act as ministers in the body of Christ (cf. 2Pet. 2:1–3).

Those who are the third kind of soil are cursed to remain among the saints in spite of their ungodly spiritual condition. Unlike the first and second kinds of soil, who returned to their former sinful life in the world, God curses unwise believers to stay in His Assembly to be used by Him to

⁴ Mt. 13:3–9, 18–23; Mk. 4:2–20; Lk. 8:4–15.

try the hearts of others. At some point in their lives, they refused God's final call to repent and, so, were turned over to spiritual darkness.

*Remember this: The unwise are cursed by God
to stay among His saints, to try them.*

Appearances

Every generation of believers has some who choose the appearance of righteousness rather than the substance of it, and the scriptures which we just read from Peter warn us of the awful judgment awaiting believers who make that choice. One example of trusting appearances in Christian cultures has been the heavy emphasis placed upon "attending church". During colonial times in America, people were even punished with fines for failure to attend Church services. As a pastor, I certainly acknowledge the need for believers to assemble, "and so much the more as you see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25), but I also know that believers can assemble together and be the worse for it (1Cor. 11:17). Being in a church building is, of itself, no holier an act than being in a grocery store; what matters is what takes place *in* a building, not what the name of the building is. In fact, I would argue that it would be better for one to be in a grocery store than in a church building if the Spirit of God is not in control of the people inside the church. Holiness is a matter of spiritual purity, not physical location.

I once saw a pamphlet which declared, "Church attendance could be hazardous to your health." Whoever produced that pamphlet was not, I feel sure, trying to discourage believers from gathering together, but was warning them that attendance at church services, in itself, is not a holy act. Righteousness is a matter of the heart.

*Remember this: Holiness is a matter of spiritual purity,
not physical location.*

In congregations where appearances matter too much, the unwise prosper, for they know enough about the things of God to maintain an appearance of righteousness, even though their hearts are not pure. Carnal religious settings are tailor-made for the unwise, for in ceremonial worship, unclean spirits can hide behind proper form. Such churches are, "a prison for every unclean spirit, and a prison for every unclean and loathsome bird" (Rev. 18:2). In such congregations, the foolish may rise to po-

sitions of influence over the children of God who are there and become an offense to them.

Paul warned believers to avoid those who trust in appearances instead of trusting in the power of God (2Tim. 3:1–5). He reminded the Corinthian saints that when he was among them, “My message and my preaching were not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, so that your faith might not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1Cor. 2:4–5). The way of appearances is the easy, broad way that leads to death, but the unwise serve God in it, and they corrupt the hearts of those who follow them.

Such a corruption of righteousness happened in ancient Israel whenever the leaders were unwise. And, ironically, as Israel’s example shows, when God’s people follow unwise leaders, they often become *more* religious, not less. The Israelites corrupted their holy faith by adding religious acts to those of the law of Moses. More ceremonies gave them an appearance of righteousness before men, but it grieved the heart of God.

What congregation wouldn’t want to be described in terms such as these: “They seek me daily, and delight in knowing my ways. . . . They ask me for righteous judgments; they delight in approaching God. . . . They speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, ‘Come, I pray, and let us hear what the word will be that comes from the LORD!’” (Isa. 58:2; Ezek. 33:30). *What godly people!* one might think. *What desire for righteousness!* But those scriptures refer not to godly people but to the ungodly in Israel, who loved to be seen listening to a sermon but had no mind to obey it. God told Ezekiel, “They come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say, but they will not do it! Oh, with their mouth, they show love, but their heart goes after their own gain. Behold, you are to them like *one who sings* erotic songs with a lovely voice while playing skillfully on an instrument, for they hear your words, but they do not do them” (Ezek. 33:31–32).

Remember this: In congregations where appearances matter too much, the unwise prosper.

A. B. Dawsey was an overseer for the Church of God sect in New Mexico when he fell asleep in Christ in 1984. While he was District Overseer in North Carolina, pastoring at the South Henderson Church of God, I was a teenager who, in spite of my ignorance of holy things, frequented his services and came to admire him. One of my lasting memories of him was etched upon my heart on a Sunday evening after the choir,

of which I was a member, had just completed an upbeat Pentecostal song. He slowly arose from his chair and, standing at the pulpit, stunned his congregation to silence with words close to these: “I want to assure you that we can come here to this building and offer loud, long prayers, and sing a few snappy songs, and clap our hands until they burn, and still be spiritually dead and out of the will of God!”

It can happen. It does happen with unwise believers. Despite their experiences of healing, or their occasional insights into the mysteries of God, or their spiritual gifts, or the prestigious titles they may hold, their lives are never truly brought under subjection to the will of God. Appearances of goodness notwithstanding, in their hearts, Peter said, they “cannot cease from sin” (2Pet. 2:14). James warned believers with secret sins not to rejoice along with the upright, “and, so, lie against the truth” (Jas. 3:14), but that warning always falls on deaf ears among the unwise because the unwise do not realize that it applies to them. They “cannot cease from sin” because God has ceased allowing them to feel conviction for their sin. Jesus and Paul both applied God’s condemnation of ancient Israelites to the Israel of their day: “The heart of this people is hardened, and they hear with dull ears, and they have closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand in their heart, and repent, and I heal them” (Mt. 13:15; Acts 28:25–27). So it is with the foolish of every generation. Unaware of what they have become, unwise believers continue to maintain appearances as they worship God with the congregation. Consequently, like a camouflaged snare, the foolish are in a position to do enormous harm to undiscerning “babes in Christ.”

Before continuing to the next category of believers, I should make it clear that in this section concerning unwise believers, no accusing finger is being pointed at any person or group. In consideration of the fact that the unwise are not aware that they are unwise (cf. Rom. 1:22; 2Tim. 3:13), it behooves each of us, with fear and humility, to search our own hearts to see whether “they” actually be “us.”

*Remember this: Peter said that some of God’s people
“cannot cease from sin”.*

(2) The Innocent

The innocent are those who, regardless of their natural age, are young in Christ and innocent in spiritual matters. What Paul called “the mind of Christ” (1Cor. 2:16) is not yet formed in them (Gal. 4:19), and so, they are

still carnally minded (1Cor. 3:1–2) and “unskillful in the word of righteousness” (Heb. 5:13). Their spiritual discernment being shallow (Heb. 5:14), they are open to the influence of both the wise and the unwise (cf. Eph. 4:14).⁵

Typically, when a person is first born again, he esteems everybody in the body of Christ to be better than himself. He honors all who belong to Christ, and he cannot discern the wise from the unwise among his elders. He is aware that he has much to learn, and so, he is innocently and equally open to all members of the family of God. His soul has not yet been tested, and it remains to be seen which path he will follow, the path of the wise or the path of the unwise. Growing in the knowledge of God means growing in the knowledge of who is who in the body of Christ, and it is critical that every child of God gain that knowledge (1Cor. 11:29–30). To do that takes time, but if the young believer will cling to the beginning purity of his faith, he will attain to wisdom.

Remember this: Growing in the knowledge of God means growing in the knowledge of who is who in the body of Christ.

Respect of Persons

I have met children of God who were afraid to admit that they loved certain brothers and sisters more than they loved others, that they respected certain ministers more than they respected others, and that they preferred the company of some believers more than that of others. They fear that if they admit to their feelings, they will be condemned as a “respector of persons”. But feeling closer to some, or having more respect for some, or preferring the company of some has nothing whatsoever to do with being what the Bible calls a “respector of persons”.

Paul acknowledged that God makes differences among members of His family (1Cor. 4:7; 12:14–21), and it is wise to acknowledge what God has done. It is altogether profitable and safe, for example, to discriminate between those who are anointed to teach and those who are not, between those who are feeble in faith and those who are strong, between those “to whom honor is due” and those from whom it is necessary to separate oneself. Paul even said that some elders were due twice as much honor as other elders (1Tim. 5:17). Acknowledging such distinctions among believers does not make one a respector of persons; it makes one wise.

⁵ Those whom Paul described as feeble-minded (1Thess. 5:14) belong in this group, but since God does not try them as He does His other children, they are not included in this discussion.

“Respect of persons” is a biblical phrase used to describe the act of “quenching” the Spirit in order to gain the respect of a person. Many Christian teachers mistakenly define “respect of persons” as “esteeming one above another” or “loving one more than another”, but who in heaven or in earth doesn’t esteem and love some people more than others? There was even a disciple whom Jesus especially loved (Jn. 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20). It is contrary to real life in both heaven and earth to demand, as unwise ministers do, that believers love everybody equally, saying that “the Bible says that we must love everybody the same.” That doctrine is not only non-biblical; it is nonsense. Not even our heavenly Father loves everybody equally. Daniel, for example, was especially loved by God (Dan. 9:23; 10:11, 19), and God felt so close to Abraham that he was called the friend of God (Isa. 41:8). Those whom we have long known and with whom we have shared experiences have our special affection, and the wise have outgrown the superstitious fear that God will be displeased if they admit to those feelings.

So, young believer, you are free to admit, without fear or shame, that you love some people more than others, and respect some more than others; only, be careful that no one gets so close to you that they intrude into that sacred place in your heart which belongs to God alone. You should hold no one in such high regard that he can influence you to do wrong; *that* is the error which the Bible condemns as the respect of persons. God does not forbid us to feel what we naturally feel toward those who have played significant roles in our lives. Otherwise, we wouldn’t even be allowed to love and honor Jesus above all.

A respecter of persons fears people’s displeasure more than he fears God’s, selectively obeying God by quenching the Spirit when in the presence of people whose respect he desires. The respecter of persons is a slave to respect *from* persons. When James (2:1) wrote, “Do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons,” he meant, “Hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ *without* respect of persons”, that is, walk in the Spirit wherever you go and in the presence of whoever is there.

This is important information to take in, for slanderers take advantage of the young before they have learned these things. Slanderers know that even if a young believer feels uncomfortable with what they say, that innocent child of God will still listen out of respect for his elders, not knowing that he is free to refuse to listen to anything that grieves the Spirit of God that is within him. Learning thus to be led by the Spirit is a critical part of maturing in Christ. Wisdom is sometimes learned through painful experience, but it must be learned.

Remember this: You should never respect anyone so highly that you would do wrong in order to please him.

All new believers are either becoming more dependent upon the Spirit of God for their feelings and their understanding (that is, they are becoming wise) or they are becoming more dependent upon people they respect (that is, they are becoming foolish). The wise in the body of Christ are examples to young believers of being led by the Spirit and, so, being genuine children of God (Rom. 8:14).

Your Greatest Enemy

It is popularly said among Christians when someone is converted to Christ that he has come to “know the Lord”. Nothing could be further from the truth. No one has the knowledge of God when he is first converted. Indeed, many of God’s children *never* come to know Him at all. Just as a new-born human baby is ignorant of the mind of its earthly father, so a newly born “babe in Christ” is ignorant of the mind of his heavenly Father. The greatest need of every young believer, then, is to continue in the word of God so that he might come to know Him “who delivered us from the domain of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). Jesus said, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and [if you continue in my word,] you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:31–32). Not only before but also after being converted, we have much to learn about our heavenly Father, and we must continue on the path of holiness to learn it.

Remember this: No one has the knowledge of God when he is first converted.

You will have taken a large step forward in your walk of faith, my young brother or sister, when you realize that your greatest enemy is not Satan, nor sinners, nor the world, nor even slanderers, but your own ignorance of God. The adversary that will cause you the greatest problems is whatever you lack in possessing the mind of Christ. In the mind of Christ, nothing lingers of the opinions and attitudes that were formed in your days in darkness; in that mind, none of the old desires and interests remain unconquered. Those old ways form the greatest enemy of your growth in Christ, but if you continue in the grace of God and learn of Him, your greatest enemy will be overcome.

*Remember this: Your greatest enemy is whatever
you lack of the knowledge of God.*

The “little ones” in Christ are not any less precious to God for all that they lack in spiritual perfection. Their angels are given continual access to God (Mt. 18:10), a fact which Jesus made known in order to underscore their special value to the Father. “It is impossible”, Luke quotes Jesus as saying, “for stumbling blocks not to come, but woe to him through whom they come! It is preferable for him if a millstone is placed around his neck and he is hurled into the sea than that he should offend one of these little ones [i.e., cause him to go astray from righteousness]” (Lk. 17:1–2).

Just as it is of the highest concern to the Father that His children be taught to be led by His Spirit, so it is of the highest concern to the Slanderer that he persuade God’s children to follow him, as they have been following Christ. I dare say that for all his efforts to have influence over people of the world, Satan’s desire to have influence over children of God is greater, for their allegiance is the greater prize.

*Remember this: It is of the highest concern to the Father
that His children be taught to be led by His Spirit.*

(3) The Wise

Believers whom Jesus labeled “wise virgins” have not only been called into the kingdom of God, but they have also learned to trust Jesus with an undivided heart. They are the good, fourth kind of soil in Jesus’ parable: “The seed that was sown onto good soil are those who hear the word, and welcome it, and bear fruit: one, thirtyfold; one, sixtyfold; and one, a hundredfold” (Mk. 4:20). These believers are patient and diligent. They are “those who are perfect” (1Cor. 2:6), “spiritual” (1Cor. 2:15), and “fully grown, who by experience have their senses trained to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). They are also “good stewards of the multifaceted grace of God” (1Pet. 4:10) and have “ceased from sin” (1Pet. 4:1), being “full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). Speaking of such, John wrote, “The love of God truly is perfected in him” (1Jn. 2:5), for he “loves his brother, continues in the light, and there is no stumbling block in him” (1Jn. 2:10).

To say “there is no stumbling block in him”, is not to say that the righteous never stumble. On the contrary, we are plainly told that the righteous do fall (Dan. 11:35). What John meant is that when the upright

fall, they are still good examples of faith in God because they repent of their error and get back up. Being humbly determined to please God, they pick themselves up when they fall and resume doing God's will (Prov. 24:16a). The unwise, on the other hand, stay fallen (Prov. 24:16b).

*Remember this: The wise are those who trust Jesus
with an undivided heart.*

Full Circle in Love

In describing young believers, I have pointed out that they esteem everyone in the body of Christ as better than they, and they love all who were in the body of Christ before them without discerning between the wise and the unwise. Yet, it is a godly thing to love everyone in the body of Christ and to consider others in the body to be better than yourself, and we are all exhorted to do that (Phip. 2:3). What makes doing that dangerous for new converts is that they love and respect all others in the body, being ignorant of their spiritual condition. Wise believers, on the other hand, love and respect all others in the body of Christ, *knowing* their spiritual condition. That is a critical difference.

Jesus once said, "As often as you do it to one of the least of these my brothers, you do it to me" (Mt. 25:40). But Jesus did not leave it to us to decide who are "the least" of his brothers, for he also said, "Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches men to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:19). So, according to Jesus, believers who are disobeying God and influencing others to do the same are "the least" in God's kingdom, and the wise have learned that they love the Lord only as much as they love them, for the love of God is shown in our differences, not in our similarities.

*Remember this: We love God only as much as we love
the least upright in His kingdom.*

Didn't Jesus treat Judas at least as well as he did his other, less treacherous disciples? Even when Judas approached him in the garden to betray him, didn't Jesus, even then, call him "friend" (Mt. 26:50)? Jesus was perfect, just as his heavenly Father was perfect, and to this perfection, he has called us all (Mt. 5:43-48).

The wise live in the holy love of God, which never excuses sin but can cover a multitude of it (1Pet. 4:8). They are not ignorant of the spiritual condition of those around them, yet they sincerely love them all and es-

teem them to be better than themselves. They have been tested; they have been hurt and disappointed by brothers and sisters; they have been young and gullible, and have been taken advantage of because of it. But they kept their eyes on Jesus and learned from it all. They picked themselves up and recovered, and they retained their first love, rather than becoming bitter and devious. The fiery trials which wise elders have endured along the way taught them to see faults and still love, just as Christ sees and still loves us. An old saint whom we called “Uncle Joe” once said, “I don’t want to know more than I can love.” That is a wise desire, but a fully mature believer can know anything about a fellow believer and still love as sincerely as ever.

The first time I felt this kind of love, it surprised me. Out of the blue, it dawned on me one day that my love for certain believers had not changed even though they had done wrong. Their unrighteous conduct made me sad, of course, but it thrilled me to realize that my love and respect for them was just as strong as it had ever been, and it was easy! There was no willpower involved; it was just how I felt. It was who Jesus had made me!

That experience was a watershed moment in my life. When I was a sinner, my feelings toward others would change depending on whether or not their deeds pleased me. It was so different now to feel the steadfast love that our heavenly Father has for His children, even the disobedient ones! His is truly a love that “passes all understanding” (cf. Phip. 4:7). For God to share with us His pure, supernatural love is more than generous, and He is worthy of our highest praise and thanksgiving for it. God commends His kind of love to us, wrote Paul, “in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

*Remember this: The love of God never excuses sin,
but it can cover a multitude of it.*

Paul said that God’s kind of love is shed into our hearts by the holy Spirit that He has given us (Rom. 5:5). Therefore, we know that all who belong to Christ have that love within them, for all who belong to Christ have received the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). Keeping that first love in operation through our sometimes difficult experiences with others in the family of God is wisdom. Leaving that first love is the way of the foolish. The book of Revelation speaks of a pastor in Ephesus, otherwise a good man, who had become bitter in his struggle against false teachers and had left his first love. Seeing that he was in danger of becoming foolish, Jesus sent

him this message: “I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and that you cannot tolerate those who are evil. And you have put to the test those who make themselves out to be apostles, but are not, and you have found them liars. . . . Nevertheless, I have against you that you have left your first love. Remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works. Otherwise, I will come upon you suddenly and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (Rev. 2:2–5). The lampstand represented this pastor’s congregation (cf. Rev. 1:20), which means that Jesus was threatening to remove this good man as pastor of the congregation unless he regained his love and respect for all God’s people, even the foolish ones.

Finally, I will add an observation concerning one’s “first love” that my father once made in a sermon: “People often say that the pastor in Ephesus whom Jesus warned had ‘lost’ his first love. But that is not what Jesus said. He said that the pastor had ‘left’ his first love (Rev. 2:4). If you *lose* your first love, you don’t know where it is, and you don’t know where to go to find it. But if you *left* your first love, then you know exactly where to go to get it back.” The truth is, we all know where to go to regain our first love if we have left it, for we can always go back to the fountain that flows from the throne of God and be refilled with the pure love we once knew. Many a wise saint has done just that, in recovering from some hard blow, but the foolish refuse to be refreshed.

Remember this: We all know where to go to regain our first love if we have left it, for we can always go back to the fountain that flows from the throne of God.

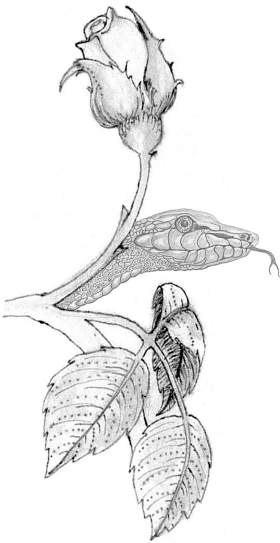
These, then, are the three categories of God’s saints on earth: the unwise, the innocent, and the wise. Regarding making a decision as to who belongs in which category, my father gave me an admonition that I will pass along to you: “Do not judge too quickly who is a wise virgin and who is a foolish one. There may be some foolish things about a wise virgin, and there may be some wise things about a foolish virgin.” That is good counsel. It is best for us all to do as Paul said and “judge nothing” before Jesus returns (1Cor. 4:5). Jesus will make all things known in his time.

It is helpful also to remember that King Asa served God *with a perfect heart* even though he allowed the people to continue worshipping in the

high places (1Kgs. 15:13–14), which God had sternly commanded Israel not to do (Dt. 12:2–5). It would be difficult to believe the Bible’s comment about Asa’s heart being perfect were it not so plainly written. How could anyone have a perfect heart while not doing as God commanded? Nevertheless, Asa’s story teaches us that people with pure hearts can sometimes fail to do the expressed will of God. Asa was like those two elderly saints whose testimony in our meeting so troubled Brother Jimmy; both he and they loved God without having perfect knowledge of Him, and apparently, God was satisfied with that.

*Remember this: There may be some foolish things
about a wise virgin, and there may be some
wise things about a foolish virgin.*





I will destroy him who slanders his
neighbor in secret.
Psalm 101:5

CHAPTER 3

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR SLANDER

Over the years, in response to my question, “How many people are required for slander to take place?” a number of people have answered, “Two: one to talk, and one to listen.” However, that leaves out a crucial third person: the one talked about. In order for slander to take place, then, these three parties are required:

- (1) The slanderer
- (2) The one receiving the slander
- (3) The one being slandered

The difference between gossip and slander is that with slander, each of those three people must be in one of the spiritual conditions that we described in chapter 2:

- (1) The slanderer – an unwise believer
- (2) The one receiving the slander – an innocent believer
- (3) The one being slandered – a wise believer

No other combination is slander. If the wise talk about someone, they will have a godly purpose for it, such as giving warning concerning a brother who has gone astray and is a danger to the body of Christ. The apostle Paul, for example, warned young Timothy of certain brothers who had become false teachers: “Their talk will spread like gangrene, among whom are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have erred” (2Tim. 2:17–18a). Paul was not slandering Hymenaeus and Philetus, for he was not an unwise believer using the fault of others to promote himself. Nor was the apostle John slandering the arrogant Diotrephes when he warned a congregation that Diotrephes was puffed up and loved to have preeminence among the saints (3Jn. 1:9–10). Wise elders such as Paul and John know when and to whom to bring up the errors of others, and what they say does good, not harm, to their listeners.

Neither would it have been slander if Timothy, or some other young believer, had written to Paul asking or complaining about an error he saw in a brother. Young believers should be open with their elders concerning what they think and feel. Sometimes, they will be correct in their judgments, and sometimes, they will be wrong, but that is acceptable. As

someone has said, “Anything worth doing is worth doing wrong”, that is, worth doing wrong until one learns to do it right. Toddlers often fall when they are learning to walk, and no parent holds that against them because walking is worth doing wrong until a child learns to do it correctly. So, innocent believers who are wrong in a particular judgment should be encouraged to continue to be open about what they think until they learn to make righteous judgments.

Talk becomes slander only when an unwise believer sows a seed of discord in the heart of an innocent believer regarding a wise elder. The information he sows may be factually true; it may involve a real fault, past or present, of a wise elder. Indeed, the most effective slanderers use information that is factually true. In the garden of Eden, as you will see, *most* of the information about God that the serpent gave to Eve was factually true, but Eve took it *all* in, acted on it, and was cursed with death. Paul said that Satan comes as a “messenger of light” (2Cor. 11:14), that is, as a messenger with enlightening information, but a slanderer’s information is never the unadulterated truth.

Remember this: In the act of slander, the three people involved are each in a specific spiritual condition.

While the slanderer directs an innocent believer’s attention toward a wise believer’s fault (whether imagined or real), the slanderer’s *target* is never that wise believer; it is always the listener. This is the reason that victims of slander seldom realize what is happening to their hearts when they take in the smooth words of a slanderer; their attention is focused on the wise elder being talked about. But the slanderer’s attention is on the new believer. Will he receive the seed and begin to trust the slanderer as he ought to trust the wise? When that happens, the innocent believer never realizes that his heart has been tampered with, nor does he know what seed led him to divide his faith between the wise and the unwise. As God told brother Jimmy in his vision, “No one ever knows.”

A slanderer will go to great lengths to impress God’s innocent children with his concern for their well-being, but that appearance of concern is a lie, for his purpose is to steal a share of the respect which the young have for wise elders.

Remember this: The person who listens to slander, not the one being slandered, is the one damaged by it.

Envy and Pride

The chief Slanderer's original goal was to share in God's glory, to be like God in the eyes of all God's creatures (Isa. 14:14b). Satan was created "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (Ezek. 28:12), but when he became proud of his beauty, his wisdom was corrupted (Ezek. 28:17). However, Satan did not know that God saw him as evil, and he certainly did not see himself that way. On the contrary, he judged himself as better than any other creature and worthy of the highest honor. He said within himself, "I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the Mountain of Assembly, on the far north side. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:13–14).

Satan's expectation to be promoted to reign in glory with God reveals two principal elements of his corrupt spirit: envy and pride. First, he envied God's glory, which means that he admired and wanted to partake of it.⁶ Second, he became so proud of his astonishing beauty that he considered himself worthy of sharing in that glory. Envy and pride likewise characterize human slanderers. They envy the honor which the wise receive from God's children, and they think that they are worthy of sharing in it. To persuade the innocent to think so, too, is every slanderer's goal.

When Jesus warned his disciples to keep their eye single, he meant for them to keep their hearts undivided. To divide their faith between him and anyone else, he went on to say, would darken their whole being: "If your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is evil, your whole body will be dark. Therefore, if the light that is in you becomes darkness, how great that darkness will be!" (Mt. 6:22–23). How great is the darkness of those who divide their trust between the wise and the foolish, those who receive seeds of slander and then become foolish themselves.

Absalom the Slanderer

An Old Testament example of a slanderer is Absalom, one of King David's sons. The characters in his story and the roles they played are these:

- (1) The slanderer – Absalom
- (2) The ones listening to slander – the Israelites

⁶ It is a Christian myth that Satan once tried to overthrow God. Being "full of wisdom" (Ezek. 28:12), Satan knows that God cannot be overthrown, and he has never tried to do that. Humans, on the other hand, being ignorant of both God and Satan, have promulgated the ridiculous story of Satan trying to overthrow God.

(3) The wise elder being slandered – King David

Absalom was considered by the general public to be, as it were, an elder in the faith. He was a prince, a popular and attractive son of the king. “In all Israel, there was no man so acclaimed as Absalom for beauty. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him” (2Sam. 14:25). But Absalom, like Satan, became proud of his great beauty and began to consider himself worthy to be king.

Flattery is always involved in slander. Absalom endeared himself to many of the people by flattery and by adjudicating their legal cases in a manner which promoted his personal standing with them. At the same time, indeed, in the same breath, he pointed out David’s failure to appoint a judge for such matters (2Sam. 15:3). This implied that David either didn’t care enough for the people to appoint judges to settle grievances or that he was too incompetent to see the need – though Absalom never said those exact words to the people. Instead, the proud prince presented himself as a humble friend of the common man: “When any man who had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom would call to him and say, ‘What city are you from?’ And he would say, ‘Your servant is from such-and-such place in the tribes of Israel.’ Then Absalom would say to him, ‘See now, your claims are good and right, but there is no man appointed by the king to hear you.’ And Absalom would say, ‘Oh, that I was judge over the land! Then any man who had a suit or a cause would come up to me, and I would do him right.’ And it came to pass that when any man drew near to do him obeisance that he would reach out and take hold of him, and kiss him” (2Sam. 15:2b–5).

How impressive it must have been to the common folk in Israel for the king’s own son to be so concerned (as it appeared) with the common person’s plight and so compassionate (as it appeared) for the “little ones” in the kingdom that he would not even allow them to bow before him! Rather, he kissed them as if he were their near kinsman, ready to take their lowly part in life. “Absalom did thus to all in Israel who came to the king for judgment, and Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (2Sam. 15:6).

Remember this: Flattery is always involved in slander.

For the innocent to be shown attention by those whom they consider their superiors can seduce them to open their hearts to an evil influence if the one giving them attention has an evil purpose, as did Absalom. How

“high and mighty” Absalom made David seem, how out of touch and insensitive to the people’s needs! And though Israel would never have a king more godly and compassionate than David, the seeds which Absalom planted in their hearts began to bear the fruit of contempt and anger which led to David’s overthrow and civil war.

Absalom did not admit to the men of Israel that he hated his father, David, though he did,⁷ or that he wanted them to help him overthrow his father and seize the throne, but with flattery and an appearance of goodness, Absalom made them *want* to help him overthrow David. Absalom sowed pleasing seed into their hearts and then covered that seed over with kisses, and it grew. Soon, Absalom was able to raise an army, drive his father out of Jerusalem, and take the throne for himself.

Remember this: Attention from an elder makes the innocent feel loved and opens them up to be influenced.

In the ensuing civil war between the armies of Absalom and David, many Israelites died hating David as their enemy, when in fact their enemy was the one who had sown the seed of that hatred in their hearts. And yet, the one who sowed that evil seed was the one to whom they clung, for whom they fought, loving and trusting him to the death.

Slander is a form of murder, for if you ruin a person’s reputation, you kill his influence, and if you kill his influence, he is, in effect, dead to those around him. To the Israelites who were taken in by Absalom, David’s influence was destroyed so that they were rebelling against a man who was dead to them, figuratively speaking. And Absalom’s goal was to turn that figurative death into an actual one.

Remember this: Slander is a form of murder.

David’s Wisdom

Because King David was wise, his love for Absalom was not diminished because of Absalom’s sin. When he heard from his servant Cushie that Absalom had been killed, David’s heart was crushed. Absalom had done great harm to David and to the nation, yet David’s love was steadfast: “The king said to Cushie, ‘Is it well with the young man Absalom?’ And Cushie said, ‘May it happen to the enemies of my lord the king, and to

⁷ David had not punished his son Amnon for raping Absalom’s sister, Tamar, and Absalom was bitter against his father.

all who would rise up against you for harm, as it has happened to that young man!’ And the king began to shake, and he went up to an upper chamber of the gate, and wept. And thus he said as he went up: ‘Oh, my son Absalom! My son! My son Absalom! Would God that I had died instead of you! Oh, Absalom, my son! My son!’” (2Sam. 18:32–33).

David had this kind of love for his enemies even when he was a young man. He was loyal as a youthful servant to King Saul, but the envious king mercilessly and relentlessly pursued him to kill him. Nevertheless, David’s love for his king never failed, and upon learning of the death of Saul (and Saul’s son Jonathan) at the hands of the Philistines, David wept as though his heart would break: “David mourned with this lamentation over Saul, and over Jonathan, his son. ‘The honor of Israel is slain! How the mighty ones have fallen! Saul and Jonathan were beloved and delightful in their lives, and in their deaths, they were not divided. They were swifter than eagles, stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul! O how the mighty have fallen in the midst of battle!’” (2Sam. 1:17, 19, 23–25a). I dare say that few among us would mourn for someone who had tried repeatedly to kill us, or say that such a one was honorable or “beloved and delightful in his life”. But then, the Scriptures are clear, are they not, that the way of eternal life is narrow, “and few there are who find it” (Mt. 7:14b)?

When the prophet Samuel told King Saul that God had rejected him as Israel’s king, he added, without saying who it was, that God had found a man with a heart like His to replace Saul (1Sam. 13:13–14). That man was David. And in nothing does David better demonstrate a heart like God’s than in his humble, loving attitude toward his most bitter enemies.

*Remember this: David was wise to love his enemies
and to do good to those who hated and abused him.*

Judas the Slanderer

In the New Testament books, the best example of a slanderer is Judas, a man whom Christ, a thousand years before God sent him to earth, foretold would be his close friend: “It was not an enemy who reproached me; then, I could have borne it. Nor was it one who hated me who puffed himself up against me; then, I would have hidden myself from him. But it was you, a man my own equal, my intimate friend, and my companion, for we took sweet counsel together, and walked among the throng in the house of God” (Ps. 55:12–14).

Here are the characters in Judas' story, and the roles they played:

- (1) The slanderer – Judas
- (2) The ones receiving the slander – the disciples
- (3) The one being slandered – Jesus

It must have impressed the disciples when Jesus chose Judas over Matthew, a professional money-handler, to carry the money that people gave to Jesus. The disciples never saw Jesus speak harshly to Judas or treat him in a way that would make them suspicious of him, even though Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas was a slanderer and that he would betray him (Jn. 6:64, 70–71). So certain were they that Jesus held Judas in special regard that at the Last Supper after Jesus said that one of them was about to betray him, they still did not suspect Judas – not even after Jesus looked at Judas and said, “What you do, do quickly.” And even when Judas arose and went out, the other disciples assumed only that Jesus had sent his close friend Judas out to buy some food or to go give something to the poor (Jn. 13:27–29). So, ask yourself this question: if Jesus' disciples held Judas above suspicion, do you think anyone looking on would have seen Judas as evil? Of course not.

The following two scenes from the Bible, taken together, reveal Judas' great influence among Jesus' disciples:

John 12:1. Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, who had died, whom he raised from the dead.

2. So they made a supper there for him; Martha was serving, and Lazarus was one of those who reclined at the table with him.
3. Then Mary, taking a pound of very expensive perfume of pure spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair, and the home was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.
4. Then, one of his disciples, Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who was to betray him, said,
5. “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor!”
6. (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief, and he carried the moneybag and stole from what was put into it.)
7. But Jesus said, “Leave her alone! She has kept this for the time of my burial.”

Four days later, just two days before the Passover (Mt. 26:2), the following scene took place:

Matthew 26:6. While Jesus was in Bethany, in Simon the leper's house,

7. there came to him a woman with an alabaster bottle containing precious perfume, and she poured it upon his head as he reclined at the table.
8. But when his disciples saw it, they became indignant, saying, "Why this waste?"
9. This perfume might have been sold for a lot of money and given to the poor!"
10. But when Jesus became aware of it, he said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for me. . . .
12. She has poured this perfume on my body to prepare me for the burial."

Did you notice the influence of Judas' slander on the other disciples? Six days before the Passover, Judas alone complained about Mary's "waste" of an expensive perfume poured on Jesus. But four days later, all of Jesus' disciples complained when another woman poured expensive perfume on him.

The implication of Judas' indignation at Mary, six days before the Passover, was that she and Jesus did not care for the poor as much as he did. The disciples all knew that in both the law and the prophets, God commanded Israel to care for the poor and that He condemned those in Israel who splurged on themselves instead. So, in rebuking the woman, Judas would have appeared to be in agreement with the law and the prophets, while Jesus did not. And with the Scriptures on his side, Judas needed only four days to convince his fellow disciples of the righteousness of his cause, so that when the second woman demonstrated the same love for Jesus that Mary had shown him, they all spoke up and condemned her – *knowing what Jesus had said to Judas a few days before*.

Who could have argued against Judas' position? Jesus alone knew why God had put in the women's hearts to pour perfume on him. No one, not even the women themselves, knew that Jesus would be dead in a few days. The women only knew that they loved Jesus, and because they loved him so, God put it on their hearts to pour their expensive perfumes on him, without revealing to them why.

*Remember this: Judas had the support of many scriptures
when he won the disciples to his point of view.*

We are not given the details of how Judas acted (probably humble) or what he said to the disciples (flattery, no doubt) during the four days that

passed between the two events, but we can certainly see the results. Whatever the details, the effect of Judas' slander was to divide his fellow disciples' respect between him and Jesus and to puff them up with foolish confidence, just as Judas was puffed up. And they were confident enough to repeat in Jesus' presence what Judas alone had previously said – again, *even though they knew that Jesus had rebuked Judas for saying it*. Ponder over that for a moment. Jesus' disciples scolded the second woman for pouring her perfume on Jesus, even though they knew that Jesus would disapprove of their doing so!

When Jesus rebuked his disciples for scolding the second woman, as he had rebuked Judas previously, he presented them with a choice that held eternal consequences for them. It was a choice between following him alone (“keeping their eye single”) or following Jesus and Judas as co-leaders. And when Judas saw them humble themselves to Jesus' rebuke instead of continuing to stand with him, when he saw his fellow disciples yield to Jesus demand of complete submission to him, he immediately arose and went away to the chief priests and made his wicked deal with them (Mt. 26:14–15).

It is often the case that when a slanderer's effort to steal some of a young believer's respect for godly elders is thwarted by the word of God from a wise believer, he becomes vindictive against the one who rescues his intended victim. Slanderers are sore losers.

*Remember this: Jesus alone is Lord of all.
There are no co-Lords in the kingdom of God.*

Established

The believer who is slandered is always the “wise virgin” because to be slandered is the only role in slander that the wise will play. A wise believer neither slanders others (Titus 3:2) nor gives ear to slander (Ps. 15:3). And as I said earlier, although a wise believer is always the *subject* of slander, he is never the *target* of it. When a young believer matures in the knowledge of God, he, too, will become the subject of slander instead of the target because slanderers in the body of Christ can sense the change, and they avoid approaching those who can discern spirits. Grossly immoral adults in this world consider the seduction of an innocent young person to be a special prize. “An adulteress”, David told his young son Solomon, “hunts for the precious life” (Prov. 6:26). Just so, slanderers only approach those who cannot yet discern unclean spirits from clean ones.

To mature in the knowledge of God, it should be noted, does not mean that one has reached a point in spiritual growth where nothing can change his opinions or ways. The man who is wise, according to Solomon, is the man who is unrelentingly teachable. Solomon made these observations concerning wise men: “A wise man will hear and will increase learning” (Prov. 1:5a); “Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser” (Prov. 9:9a); “The ear of wise men seeks out knowledge” (Prov. 18:15b). So, to be established in the Lord does not mean that one has reached the end of spiritual growth; instead, it means that one is established in continually growing. Speaking of the wise, the Psalmist wrote, “Nothing shall offend them”⁸ (Ps. 119:165), that is to say, no earthly disappointment can be so great, or earthly success so deluding, that the wise will abandon or divide their trust in God.

Remember this: The wise are they who are unrelentingly teachable.

True Wisdom

One can be among the wise in God’s family and be unable so much as to recite the alphabet, for God’s kind of wisdom has nothing to do with human intellect or education (cf. 1Cor. 2:13). God’s wisdom is a wisdom that will not allow those who possess it to be satisfied until they know God – indeed, until they see Him in His heavenly glory (Ps. 17:15). On a human level, wise believers may be physically unattractive, ignorant, and even have comic faults. Abraham might have been an awkward little fellow who habitually talked with his mouth full of food, for all we know. It was Abraham’s faith in God that made him great, not any earthly fineness. Conversely, an unwise believer may possess great human intelligence, be charming and mannerly, and have much wit, beauty, and wealth. According to the prophet Isaiah, Jesus was physically unattractive (Isa. 53:2). It is Satan who was “perfect in beauty” (Ezek. 28:12, 17).

The maturity to which God desires all His children to come is to learn to trust what is spiritually true and good, rather than what is physically appealing, yet bad. Those who have learned to rely on God’s Spirit alone to guide them are beyond the Slanderer’s power to steal for himself and his ministers a share of their trust in Christ. Maturity in Christ is characterized by an unwavering, undivided devotion to God, and the source of such devotion is not human will-power, but a true knowledge of God. To

⁸ King James Version. Literally, “There is for them no stumbling block.”

know God is to love Him, and those who know Him best are always the ones who love Him most.

Remember this: The wise do not judge on the basis of what appears good, but on what the Spirit tells them is good.

A Valuable Service

The spirit of the Slanderer is more cunning than the human slanderers that he uses. Human slanderers are deceived (2Tim. 3:13); they believe they are good servants of God (cf. Jn. 16:2), for they trust in appearances more than they trust in truth (cf. 2Cor. 11:13–14). Their acts of slander are the fruit of their spiritual condition, not of their intelligence. If slanderers knew what they were doing, they would not do it.

Being blind to themselves, slanderers can sow wicked seed among the saints and then gather and rejoice with them to worship. They do not understand that God blesses them so that they will think they are righteous and *not* repent! This is what Peter was referring to when he told the saints that unwise believers “revel in their deceitful ways while they feast with you” (2Pet. 2:13). That makes for confusion in the body of Christ, and in the midst of that confusion are God’s innocent believers, esteeming everyone, both the wise and the unwise, to be better than themselves and, so, worth listening to.

One might wonder why a wise elder, knowing this wickedness is going on, would not put a stop to it. The short answer is that the test of slander is the work of God, for “the LORD tries the hearts” (Prov. 17:3), and God’s test of hearts must not be interfered with. The wise virgins are patient, like God, and they trust Him to know when and how to try the hearts of His children. They know that time will tell if a new believer will follow the wise and become wise, or if he will follow the foolish and become another fool in the body of Christ. All that the wise can do is to pray for the young, as Jesus prayed for Peter before his great trial (Lk. 22:32), that their faith will not fail. Moreover, if the wise believer were to intervene, the innocent believer, still viewing everyone in the body of Christ as good, may well become suspicious of the wise saint who warned him and lose some respect for him.

In its own perverted way, slander performs a valuable service to the body of Christ, for God uses it to try the faith of His children. Will the young brother retain his first love for righteousness and his first desire to follow those who follow Christ even if a wise elder’s embarrassing faults or past blunders are brought up? And will the wise elder stand fast in faith

even when he knows that his name and his faults are being used by a slanderer to win the hearts of God's "little ones"? Such trials of faith are designed and directed by God for a good purpose, though they be carried out by ungodly souls.

Remember this: God's test of hearts must not be interfered with.

Until the Harvest

While waiting to be allowed to write a book on slander, I observed that slanderers remained in the congregation, worshipping and rejoicing with all the saints, even after some of the believers they had offended left, and I wondered why God did not cast out the offenders. But I eventually learned that there is a good reason for Him not to do that.

God's love does not change. (Remember David's love for his son Absalom.) He loves even those of His children who cause others to stumble and fall. And if He ever opens the door of repentance to them, and they respond and repent, they will certainly be forgiven. God promised through Ezekiel that if the wicked turned from their wickedness, even after a lifetime of doing evil, He would forgive them and welcome them into eternal life: "The wicked man who turns from all his sin that he has done, and keeps all my statutes, and does what is just and right shall live; he shall not die. None of his transgressions which he committed will be remembered against him. He shall live because of his righteousness which he has done" (Ezek. 18:21–22).

Among the greatest biblical examples of God's incredible mercy are the thief on the cross, whom Jesus pardoned just hours before they both died (Lk. 23:39–44), and Manasseh, the very wicked king of Judah. Manasseh's father, King Hezekiah, restored the nation to God after previous kings had led them astray, but when Manasseh became king, he undid all the good that Hezekiah had done, and then outdid those other kings in wickedness: "He rebuilt the high places that Hezekiah his father had torn down, and he erected altars for the Baals, and he made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of the LORD. . . . And he built altars to all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he sacrificed his sons in the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and practiced soothsaying, and divination, and sorcery, and dealt often with a necromancer and a spiritualist, and did what is evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. And he set up a graven image and an

idol, which he had made, in the house of God. . . . And Manasseh caused Judah to go astray and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do greater evil than the nations which the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel. . . . Yea, moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood until Jerusalem was filled with it from end to end, besides his sin by which he made Judah to sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD. And the LORD spoke to Manasseh and to all the people, but they would not listen.” In response to the nation’s extreme apostasy, “the LORD brought against them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, and they captured Manasseh with hooks, and bound him with chains of bronze, and took him to Babylon” (excerpts, 2Chron. 33:3–13 and 2Kgs. 21).

That, one might assume, is the end of Manasseh’s story. But not so, for “in his distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him. And He was moved for him, and heard his supplication, and He returned him to Jerusalem, into his kingdom, and then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God” (2Chron. 33:12–13). That is an astonishing example of God’s mercy and forgiveness. And He has not changed. So, even slanderers have hope.

Before we who are ministers of Christ cast out anyone, we should consider Jesus’ words: “Those who are well do not need a doctor, but those who are sick” (Mt. 9:12). It is tempting to want to be rid of troublemakers. What a lovely mirage we may deceive ourselves into chasing when our patience runs low, and we suppose with what ease we could minister if we threw out those who most need our ministering! When we servants of God see tares in God’s wheat field, that is, when we see slanderers stalking Jesus’ little lambs, it is tempting to ask the Lord, “Do you want us to go out and pull them up?” (Mt. 13:28). But he is still answering that question as he did in his parable so long ago: “No, lest in gathering up the tares, you uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest” (Mt. 13:29–30a).

Remember this: God’s mercy is higher than heaven.

God’s reason for allowing slanderers and other transgressors to continue in His earthly family is not well understood, but in his parable, Jesus compared it to one plant uprooting another. That would have happened to many Israelites if God or David had slain Absalom for his slander. The Israelites loved Absalom so much that they would have been discouraged if he had been taken away. They believed that Absalom was a good man

who loved and cared for them, and if he had been slain, many in Israel would have thought, *if such a good man as Absalom was slain, what use is it for me to try to be righteous?* To prevent such discouragement in the hearts of His little children is a principal reason God leaves slanderers in the body.

Slanderers are often loved by the innocent because they have wonderful testimonies and perceptive spiritual insights which bless the young. If God were to bring immediate judgment upon slanderers for their wrongdoing, innocent hearts would not understand it, and some would become so discouraged that their faith would wither and die with the slanderers they loved. This is what Jesus said would happen if the tares in God's field (slanderers) are plucked up before the wheat (new believers) has matured.

*Remember this: The patience of God has been
the salvation of many.*

The faith of God's children is tried only by God's design. He Himself has ordained that slanderers remain in the congregation of saints, "speaking perverse things in order to draw away disciples after themselves" (Acts. 20:30). Those who do not follow the Spirit will reap what they have sown and be taken in by the attractive spirit of the unwise, and those who keep themselves pure will reap what they have sown and escape from those who live in error. That is the law of the Spirit in the kingdom of God, and Paul let the saints know it: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap, for he who sows to his flesh shall from the flesh reap destruction, but he who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:7-8).

A New Voice

Every newly converted sinner has already passed the test of hearing the world's ungodly talk against Jesus and believers, for had he received those criticisms, he would never have repented in the first place. But what if a new kind of ungodliness should come to him through the trusted voice of an elder in the faith – not to prevent him from coming to Christ but to steal a share of Christ's glory in the young believer's heart? God's children can be deceived only by someone they trust, and in the beginning, as I have said, they trust everyone in the body of Christ. Young believers would never receive slander against an elder, except it come from one of the elders himself.

Having overcome open enemies of righteousness in the world, the “babe in Christ” hardly expects to have to overcome a much deadlier enemy within the household of faith. But that is the reality. Having resisted and overcome the spirits of darkness, young believers are often caught unawares by an “angel of light” who may compliment them on their spiritual progress while sowing seeds that will stop it. Meeting in an unwise brother or sister no obvious hostility or ungodliness, a “little one” in Christ cannot perceive the polite, cruel warfare being waged by a slanderer for a place in his heart. And how politely cruel it is!

This is perfect deception, so valuable to the Slanderer that only experienced believers who, like Satan, are backslidden in spirit but not in appearance meet the requirements of that practice. Only those who have tasted the sweet bread of fellowship with the pure in heart qualify to “lift up their heel” against them.

*Remember this: God’s children can be deceived
only by someone they trust.*

Just as the spiritual condition of the older, unwise believer especially suits him to be used by the envious, proud spirit of slander, so the young believer’s undeveloped sense of discernment especially suits him to be victimized by it. Every new believer’s goal, then, should be to grow out of the spiritual immaturity which makes him a target for the slanderer’s tongue.

Holding On to His Peace

We sometimes refer to a teenager as passing through an “awkward age”, no longer a child and yet not quite an adult, confused at times but perceptive at other times. As innocent believers grow in spirit, they will pass through an awkward age of their own, still child-like, yet in some respects, mature. But through that awkward period, if they continue to hold fast to their sincerity and uprightness, they will grow beyond this stage, too, and escape forever the Slanderer’s snare.

In the late 1970s, a congregation with which I had frequent contact was having a serious problem that was threatening to divide the congregation. One evening, the telephone rang in my home, and on the line was a young sister in Christ, Natalie Embry, who belonged to that congregation. (She and her husband, Junior, were the ones with Brother Jimmy Tolle when he visited us in 1981 and Jesus gave him his amazing vision.) Nearly in tears, Natalie asked me to help her. She wanted to know if it was okay *not* to take sides in the dispute that was raging in her congregation.

Everyone around her, it seemed, was caught up in the controversy, constantly talking about it with bitterness and strife. But she, through it all, had felt nothing but joy and peace, and she was beginning to feel guilty about that! Natalie had reached that confusing spiritual “awkward age” when a child of God begins to outgrow some of the ones who brought him to Christ. I told Natalie to hold on to the peace Jesus was giving her, that she was being led by the Spirit and that she should not give in to the pressure from those around her, including some elders, to take sides. When she heard those words, I could sense Natalie’s immense relief over the phone line, a relief so great, as I recall, that she wept.

A new believer, having been accustomed as a sinner to becoming embroiled in one controversy after another, may think it strange when a controversy arises among believers that he still feels joy and peace. He must not surrender that peace, for it is the peace which Christ promised to give us, the kind of peace that cannot be taken away (Jn. 14:27). The innocent believer may surrender it, if he chooses, but it cannot be taken away, either by the world or by foolish believers.

Despite how awkward it may feel to stand still when we are pressured to take sides, we must learn to use peace as a weapon to overcome the strife. Peace, joy, and love are among the mightiest weapons anywhere (2Cor. 10:4), and they are given to us to use. So, we should say no to partisanships of any kind and stay free in our soul.

It is unhealthy, spiritually speaking, for young believers to become involved in conflicts, and no wise elder will try to drag them into one.⁹ Young saints are free to stand for what is right, of course, but as yet, they are neither strong enough nor wise enough to take a vanguard position against any great evil; they should leave such battles to those who have put on the whole armor of God (cf. Eph. 6:10–18). Their time on the battlefield will come soon enough. Let them enjoy their youth in Christ while they can. And if they resolutely remain at peace (which can, itself, be a battle), it will be impossible for a slanderer to sow into their hearts an attitude of discord with anyone. The seeds of slander cannot grow in good soil. Sister Natalie was good soil, and so, she was not moved from the peace of Christ by the spirits around her.

Remember this: The seeds of slander cannot grow in good soil.

⁹ I have known personally two men who, immediately after their conversions, became embroiled in bitter doctrinal controversies. For one of them, it took years to regain his lost joy and peace. The other brother never regained his at all.

Not Holding On to His Peace

We live in a world that is more spiritual than natural. That is to say, our internal spiritual condition is more our world than is the natural one around us. The following story, together with the previous one about Sister Natalie, illustrates this.

One day, during the years I was waiting to write this book, I was chatting in my backyard with a small group in which an unwise saint named Marla¹⁰ was present. Marla was a sweet person who had been in the Lord for about thirty years, but she was also proud, and a slanderer, harboring a deep bitterness that few discerned, including me at the time. The group that she and I were part of was chatting casually about nothing in particular, as I recall. I doubt that I would ever have thought about that conversation again, except for what took place between Marla and me the next day.

Unknown to me (and for what reason, I cannot imagine), news quickly spread about that relaxed conversation, and as always happens, the more the news spread, the less accurate the news became. Then, less than twenty-four hours after that conversation, Marla, having heard the false report about it, asked me why I had made a certain ungodly comment during the conversation, a comment which I did not say, nor would have said. I was speechless for a moment. Then I replied, “You were there! You *know* I never said that.” Marla’s puzzled reaction made a deep impression on me which lingers to this day. I could tell from the look on her face that she realized that what I said was true, that I had not made that comment, and she seemed stunned. She just stared at me, as if that moment was the first time it had occurred to her to compare that false report to the reality that she herself had witnessed.

Jesus used this experience to teach me that a person can fall under the spell of slander so deeply and for so long that mere talk becomes more real than one’s own experience. I know how unbelievable that statement sounds; at the same time, I know it to be true. And though, since that day, I have witnessed that same strange phenomenon a number of times, it never fails to astonish me when it happens.

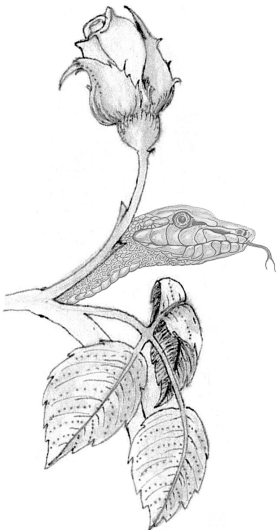
Yes, our spiritual condition, for better or worse, determines our reality more than what happens around us. Marla’s poor spiritual condition made her forget what she had seen and heard for herself. Natalie, on the other hand, was so filled with the Spirit that the strife around her did not determine her reality; she still felt joy and peace. Jesus lived that way (Isa. 11:3), and he recommended that we live that way, too (Jn. 7:24). Paul

¹⁰ In this, and other cases, real names are not used.

also lived that way, explaining that “we do not look at things that are seen, but at things that are not seen, for things that are seen are temporal, but things that are not seen are eternal” (2Cor. 4:18).

It is a learning experience to deal with either kind of believer, an unwise one like Marla, so blinded by the spirit of slander to her experience that she could believe a lie about it, or a wise one like Natalie, so filled with the Spirit in her experiences that she could believe the truth about it. Such an experience with either kind of believer can be breath-taking.

*Remember this: Our spiritual condition determines
our reality more than what we experience.*



It may be that God will grant them
repentance, that they come to their
senses and escape out of the snare
of the Slanderer.

CHAPTER 4

LESSONS ABOUT SLANDER

During the years I was awaiting the time appointed by God for me to write my book on slander, I learned a number of important lessons concerning what slander is and how it works. A few of these lessons have been touched on already, but they bear repeating and are included in the list below.

Lesson #1: SLANDER IS NOT GOSSIP.

Slander compares to gossip about the way a rocket compares to a horse and buggy. Slander is a sophisticated evil; gossip is the plaything of shallow minds.

Lesson #2: ONLY EXPERIENCED BELIEVERS QUALIFY TO BE SLANDERERS IN THE HOUSE OF GOD.

Anybody can gossip, but only experienced believers qualify to commit the sin of slander. Many in Israel hated Jesus and wanted to turn him over to the chief priests and elders, but they were not close enough to the Lord Jesus to know where he would be at a specific time. Only someone close enough to Jesus and his disciples to know his routine qualified to be the betrayer. The role Judas played in Jesus' betrayal required a man who was a very close friend.

Lesson #3: THE SPIRIT OF SLANDER IS MORE CUNNING THAN THE SLANDERER HIMSELF.

If a slanderer knew what he was doing, he would not do it. The spirit of slander is the spirit of Satan, and Satan is wiser in wickedness than any of the unwise believers he uses.

Lesson #4: FLATTERY IS ESSENTIAL IN ORDER FOR SLANDER TO SUCCEED.

For new believers to be given attention by experienced, older saints understandably makes them feel loved. But not all attention is for their good (cf. Gal. 4:17). Sometimes, the attention is a subtle form of flattery, such as when an elder begins confiding in them concerning weighty issues or faults in other elders. That can lead the new believer to think more of himself than is warranted.

God values greatly the innocence of His children. Jesus said that to corrupt the innocence of one of His “little ones” is a sin that God will punish with extreme severity (Mt. 18:6). Innocence is a shelter for the young soul, in which children will mature normally if they are allowed to remain innocent for a sufficient amount of time. It is often said that when young children in the world are molested, or otherwise become acquainted with matters appropriate only for adults, they are forced to grow up too fast. But the truth is that the corruption of their innocence interrupts the process of mental and spiritual growth; it does not speed it up, and only with much difficulty do such abused children ever truly grow up at all. Young children of God should be left alone so that they may concentrate on being joyful and eating heartily from the Master’s table. They have not yet developed sufficient discernment to be able to judge among the brothers, and they should not be asked to.

*Remember this: God values greatly
the innocence of His children.*

Paul told Timothy that young believers were not prepared to be leaders in a congregation and deal with such matters. An overseer, he said, “must not be a new convert, lest, becoming conceited, he fall into the condemnation of the Slanderer” (1Tim. 3:6). Paul warned of this pitfall in Romans 12:3: “By the grace given to me, I say to everyone who is among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according to the measure of faith that God has apportioned to each one.” Don’t be fooled, my young brother or sister; don’t let a slanderer make a fool out of you and lead you to think you are able to judge weighty matters or your elders in Christ. The wise have reasons that you may not yet understand.

Pray to see yourself, my young brother or sister, as God sees you, for if you see yourself as He sees you, you cannot think of yourself too highly or too lowly, for you, like Him, will not be moved by the flattery or the criticisms that will certainly come your way. And pray to see everyone else in the body of Christ as He sees them. That way, no seeds sown about anybody will influence you, for you will know what is right about everybody.

Every elder who loves you with God’s love will want for you, as Paul wanted for the saints of his day, “not to think of anyone beyond what is written, so that no one be puffed up for one and against the other” (1Cor. 4:6b). That is the way clubs and cliques are started, and God condemns such: “I urge you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you

all speak the same thing and that there not be divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. What I mean is that each of you says, 'I am of Paul'; 'I am of Apollos'; 'I am of Cephas'; 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you, or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1Cor. 1:10–13). Paul humbly confessed his own weaknesses and neediness to the saints, "lest someone hold me in higher regard than what he sees in me or what he hears from me" (2Cor. 12:6).

Righteous judgment is what Jesus exhorted us to make (Jn. 7:24), and for us to grow in grace to be able to judge every person and every situation rightly is not wishful thinking; it is the very purpose for which Jesus suffered and died. And if not tampered with, the spirits of the young in Christ will attain to it.

Lesson #5: ONCE THE SEED OF DISCORD IS SOWN, IT BEGINS PRODUCING FEELINGS OF DISUNITY.

Those who receive slander begin to feel feelings of dissatisfaction and suspicion without knowing why. Naturally, then, they begin to search for a reason for those feelings. They do not suspect that the feelings sprouted from seeds that were craftily sown into their hearts, and covered up, by a trusted slanderer. Nor do they consider that the feelings arose in their hearts before a legitimate reason for them existed. Nobody who is deceived by slander ever considers that. "No one ever knows."

An Example

On Sunday, January 18, 1981, a couple of months after Jesus revealed to me what slander was, and just a couple of weeks after Jesus gave Brother Jimmy Tolle his amazing vision about being offended, four spiritually immature saints became angry at our pastor's sermon and refused any longer to attend our worship services. Zach, one of them, told me excitedly as he left the meeting that afternoon, "This was the greatest prayer meeting I've ever been in!" I was happy that Zach felt that way. It had been a wonderful meeting to me, too. However, when I visited Zach three days later, he complained that, "I don't think people ought ever to leave a meeting feeling as bad as they did last Sunday." I knew it was pointless for me to remind him of his own words from the previous Sunday, for I had learned from similar situations, like the one with Marla, that talk is more real to some people than their own experiences. For them, talk replaces real memories with false ones. It was surprising to me to learn that

Zach, an ex-military man with battle experience, was that kind of person, but we have no power to decide who is what in the kingdom of God. So, encouraging Zach to pray much and be faithful to Jesus, I left for home, never to see him again.

What Jesus taught me in this situation was that Zach and the offended believers with him did not really know why they felt such antagonism at our pastor's message. The sermon could not have been the true cause, I knew, for we had all heard our pastor speak on the subject several times before, with no adverse reaction from anyone. Why then, when they heard a familiar message, did those dear saints feel such indignation? Since Jesus had opened my eyes to slander, I could answer that question, but at the time, I could do nothing about it, for Jesus had commanded me not to tell what I saw.

To answer that question for you now, let me ask another one. Have you ever experienced a sudden feeling of anger or impatience for no apparent reason? Those who have had that experience (can anyone say he has not?) know that in those times, there is a temptation to find something or somebody at which to vent that anger. So, the grumpy husband barks at his beloved wife for leaving dishes on the table, though he usually would not mind at all. Or a mother yells at her children for playing with their usual fervor. Or an employer becomes infuriated at a slight infraction of the rules by one of his workers and lambastes the surprised employee. In other words, the person feeling those feelings is looking for something on which to blame the anger burning in his chest. That is a fault-finding spirit, a spirit that is looking for a reason for the feelings which are already there. In the case of slander, it is a sign that evil seeds have been sown and are beginning to spring up.

Such is the spiritual condition into which those four saints had fallen. More than a year before, I had expressed to a trusted brother, Earl Pittman, my concern that harm was being done to them by the unwise talk of an elder sister, Freda, whom we all loved. At the time, I did not understand that what I was sensing was the sin of slander, and neither Earl nor I knew what to do about it but pray.

Sister Freda, I eventually understood, had been sowing seeds of discord in those believers' hearts since they became members of our congregation. And by January of 1981, her seeds had produced some ungodly feelings in their hearts, and they were looking for a reason for them. In the months leading up to their last meeting, they had become less tolerant and more skeptical as they searched for a reason for what they felt. They had become the kind of people who are easily insulted. Slowly, the un-

seen roots of slander wrapped around their once-clean spirits, choked them, and in the end, covered over their multitude of love with sin. And when they heard something that they could blame for their feelings, they seized on that explanation, and went away.

Victims

Those four precious saints were not villains. Though they criticized and falsely accused, they were not villains. They were victims. First, they were victims of their own lack of spiritual growth, which left them vulnerable to the influence of slander. Then, they became victims of unwise Freda. For several years, she had been their close friend and confidant, but she was constantly injecting into otherwise good conversations unnecessary criticisms of our pastor, and then covering those seeds with friendly words and deeds. Such conversations tacitly communicate to the innocent soul, “. . . but we’re not like that, are we?”

Freda was a faithful attender who worshipped freely in the congregation, enjoyed the blessings of the Spirit, and had, at times, good spiritual insights. In many respects, she was a very likable person. I loved her very much. But the offended brothers and sisters let her good qualities influence them to receive the bad seeds she was sowing. And at last, those seemingly harmless seeds bore the bitter fruit of pride, contempt, and anger – attitudes directed, of course, at their wise pastor, not at the unwise slanderer who had sown those seeds in their hearts.

Their first love for their pastor and congregation was eaten away by the malignant insinuations of a trusted elder. It could not have been accomplished by anyone else. No sinner – no army of sinners – could have taken from their heart what they freely yielded to the slanderer in exchange for her friendship. It is a story as old as Eden and as new as the latest offended saint.

Remember this: The wicked wisdom behind slander is beyond human comprehension; it must be revealed by the Spirit of God.

The Pattern

The pattern of slander was fulfilled perfectly in the situation we just described. A trusted, unwise believer sowed the seeds of discord, spiritually immature saints listened, and a wise elder was slandered. In this case, however, the slanderer’s purpose actually failed because the goal of slanderers is not to drive people away; it is to keep them close and share in their respect for the wise, to gain admirers in the Assembly who will look

up to them as they look up to wise elders. No slanderer throws away what he steals; he values the innocent believer's respect for the wise; that's the very reason he steals it. But these offended saints left, and in the course of time, they passed away, never realizing that the indignation they felt at that meeting in 1981 was not because of their pastor's sermon but because of seeds of discord that had been sown into their hearts by their trusted friend, seeds sown and then forgotten, covered over as they were by friendly words and time.

Lesson #6: AN APPEARANCE OF GOODNESS IS ESSENTIAL FOR SLANDER TO SUCCEED.

Slander doesn't have branches; branches are out in the open and can be seen. Slander only has roots, all underground and out of sight, except for the eyes of God. Nothing men see or hear from a slanderer is what is really there. Even if he does a good deed, that deed is serving an ulterior, self-serving motive. (When Satan was in heaven, every time he obeyed God, it was with a self-promoting agenda.) A slanderer's seed of discord may be sown with a friendly smile, or a tear, or even in the guise of a prayer request, and it is for this reason that slander cannot be discerned by those who judge by appearances instead of by the Spirit.

Wickedness must be covered with a veneer of goodness in order to attract the children of God because sin, when exposed, is repugnant to innocent hearts. Who in God's family would ever listen to slander if the slanderer announced beforehand, "I am now attempting to poison your heart with my words"? No one.

In this world, many things that, at first, appear to be good are evil, and many things that appear to be evil are good in God's sight. I have seen the poisonous Dead Sea, and it is beautiful, but people have died swallowing its lovely water. Near the end of time, Jesus said, a great wickedness will arise which will seem so good and right that if it were possible, even God's elect servants will be deceived (Mk. 13:22). Knowing of that approaching reality should keep us sober-minded.

It should be emphasized to every newly born child of God that they must learn to distinguish the voice of the Spirit from all others. If young saints do that, they will not be deceived by any evil thing, no matter how good it may seem. Young brother or sister, learn that gentle voice of Jesus; it is always whispering to you, "This is the way; walk in it" (Isa. 30:21; cf. 1Kgs. 19:12-13). No victim of slander, once he has taken the wrong path, will mature in Christ to know that voice from all others; that is why God told Brother Jimmy when he was pleading to know why he was offended, "No one ever knows."

“But God, somebody knows!”

But nobody ever does know, that is, nobody who is offended and becomes a “foolish virgin”. As David once said, “They do not know by what they are made to stumble” (Prov. 4:19). None of God’s “cursed children” know that they are cursed. They think they know where they are spiritually, but nobody who is led astray by slander ever knows.

*Remember this: Slander doesn’t have branches;
it only has roots, all underground and out of sight,
but nothing is hidden from the eyes of God.*

As I have said, to discern good and evil is not an ability yet acquired by the young in Christ, for godly discernment is achieved through experiences. Wise believers are described in Hebrews 5:14 as those who are able to discern both good and evil because God has put them through some training for it. But to those who have not yet been through such training, some evils may not appear to be evil at all. When Jesus told his parable of the Ten Virgins, five of them wise and five, foolish, he did not intend for us to picture them as separate groups, the five wise standing apart from the five foolish. Those ten virgins were one group; they were mingled together, and hardly anyone looking on would have noticed the one small difference between them: the extra supply of oil which the wise virgins carried (Mt. 25:2–3).

Likewise, no one who judges by appearances is able to pick out the foolish in a congregation of believers, for *by appearances*, there is not much difference between the wise and the unwise. For, over time, the foolish develop a sense of when to stand and when to sit, when to raise their hands and when to clap them, when to look serious and when to shout for joy – aided all along by the memory of earlier times when they worshipped with pure, innocent hearts. That being so, one may wonder how any innocent believer ever escapes the influence of unwise believers. The answer is that God knows the heart, and He keeps every sincere and humble child of His from being overcome by evil. It is as Paul once said about a weak child of God, “He will stand, for God is able to make him stand” (Rom. 14:4). God is a loving, attentive Father.

*Remember this: God keeps every sincere and humble child
of His from being overcome by evil.*

“Love One Another”

When James said, “Confess your sins one to another” (Jas. 5:16), he meant, of course, for us to confess our *own* sins, not somebody else’s. One of the most underhanded ways a slanderer confesses the error of another is to bring it up as a prayer request. That enables the slanderer to maintain his appearance of righteousness by covering his seed with a layer of feigned brotherly love. But Jesus never said, “If your brother sins, announce at a prayer meeting that he needs prayer.” It is best to obey Jesus’ command to go to a guilty brother alone, for it may be that he will repent, and if so, there will be no need to ask others to pray for him.

When a brother goes astray, or you are concerned that he might have, the first and best thing to do is to be still and talk to Jesus about it. He sees all things rightly, and if he leads you to do so, then go to him alone. You will find the experience to be worthwhile, no matter what the result. If he has indeed fallen into some error, you may rescue him. And if he has not, he may have something from God for you. And just think of the benefits to finding that out! Even if you and he cannot immediately come to an agreement, you have demonstrated sincerity and concern for the well-being of your brother and the body of Christ. How can that ever be a bad thing? And if you both do that, can unity be far behind? We can never fail if we love one another with God’s kind of love.

Our Adversary will never find a place to work among us if we are open, honest, and loving with one another. This was in Paul’s mind when he gave this exhortation to the saints: “Putting away lying, speak the truth, each one with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. . . . Give no place to the Slanderer!” (Eph. 4:25, 27). As long as we sincerely love our family in Christ, as long as we are concerned for one another’s well-being and not just our own, we cannot fail to strengthen “the perfect bond of unity” for the whole Assembly.

*Remember this: We can never fail if we love
one another with God’s kind of love.*

It stands out in Paul’s letters that when he wrote to, let’s say, the Assembly in Colossae, he dealt with the Colossians’ problems; he did not write to them about another Assembly’s problems. Likewise, when Jesus sent messages to the seven pastors of Asia (Rev. 2–3), he dealt with each pastor according to *his* need; Jesus did not speak of one pastor’s failure to another pastor. Paul’s letters and Jesus’ messages are examples for us. The fall of any believer is an opportunity for us, not to talk to others about

him, but to heed Paul's counsel to the Galatians: "Brothers, if a man be overtaken in some transgression, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1–2).

"Not By Any Means"

You will do well, young believer, to avoid receiving accusations against anyone in any form – as a prayer request or otherwise – and to learn to be quiet and to mind your own business (cf. 1Thess. 4:11a). The Assembly at Thessalonica had received epistles forged with Paul's signature, declaring a doctrine that Paul bluntly condemned (2Thess. 2:1–3; cf. 2Tim. 2:16–18). Paul then warned them, "Let no one deceive you by any means." He knew that if there is a means by which any of God's little children can be lured away from their purity of heart, then Satan will inspire his ministers to use that means. If God's children are moved by humility, he will inspire his ministers to act humble; if by tears, they will cry; if by fear, they will threaten; if by hope, they will make promises. Slander comes in many forms. Let no one sow seeds of discord into your heart by *any* means! But by all means, "let brotherly love continue" (Heb. 13:1), for the Master said, "By this, all men will know that you are my disciples – if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35).

*Remember this: Learn to be quiet
and to mind your own business.*

Lesson #7: THE SEED OF DISCORD DOES NOT RESEMBLE THE DISCORD IT PRODUCES.

Who, without prior knowledge, would ever associate a mighty, spreading oak tree with a tiny acorn? Or who, without prior knowledge, would imagine that the small, dull seed of an apple could produce a stout tree with green leaves, and limbs that produce brightly colored, tasty fruit? That which such seeds produce bears no resemblance to the seed. So it is when a slanderer sows discord among believers.

What a slanderer sows is never discord itself; rather, it is the *seed* of discord. A slanderer's words can produce envy and bitterness, but the words themselves, the seed of those sinful feelings, may be "smooth as butter." And because it takes time for a seed to produce its fruit, by the time the fruit of slander appears, the seed from which it sprang is long since forgotten. Victims of slander never connect the seemingly harmless seed they received at some time in the past to the bitter fruit it produces.

“No one ever knows.” And thus, the unwise elders who sowed the seed escape exposure and continue in the assembly of saints, as blind to themselves as their victims are to what they have done to them.

Good Words

Because the spiritual warfare which saints wage can weary the spirit, a kind, complimentary word can be especially appealing. From unbelievers, the young saint may face scorn and even ridicule, but from God’s people, the young believer is often refreshed with kind, encouraging words. I myself have experienced such kindness and have felt the rest which pleasant words can bring. How true are Solomon’s observations: “The tongue of the wise is healing” (Prov. 12:18), and, “A word spoken at the right moment is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (Prov. 25:11). Thank God for wise elders who are able to renew our sometimes flagging spirits with good, healing words!

The young believer must learn, however, that not all good-sounding words produce good fruit. Friendly words are welcome to any battle-weary believer, but the young must learn that not all friendly words are from their Friend and that they may be just another part of the battle. This truth is often acknowledged only after painful experience. Consider these scriptures, written by wise men who attained to wisdom, in part, by painful experiences with slanderers whom they loved:

“There is nothing in their mouth that can be trusted; their inward part is destruction itself; their throat is an open tomb; they flatter with their tongue” (Ps. 5:9).

“His words were smooth as butter, but war was in his heart. His words were softer than oil, but they were drawn swords” (Ps. 55:21).

“Their tongue is a deadly arrow; he speaks deceit with his mouth. He speaks peaceably with his neighbor, but in his heart, he is setting his ambush” (Jer. 9:8).

Pleasant, poisonous words. How little they resemble the divisions they can cause or the death they can bring! How cleverly may the seed of discord be hidden within conversations which have no appearance of evil! And how many innocent children of God have opened their hearts to receive such words without realizing that sometimes, pleasant words are bait on a hook which the Enemy wants them to swallow.

LESSON #8: SLANDER CAN BE INDIRECTLY AGAINST WISE SERVANTS OF GOD.

Slander is not always directed at a person. It may be directed at a thing, something that a wise believer teaches or does. Peter said that slanderers “speak evil of [that is, they slander] things they do not understand” (2Pet. 2:12b). The way of truth is very often spoken evil of by slanderers who do not understand it (2Pet. 2:1–2), and when they do that, they often turn the hearts of those who listen to them against the servants of Christ who preach it – even if the slanderers never mention the names of those servants.

An excellent Old Testament example of this is the story of the twelve men whom Moses sent ahead of Israel as spies into the promised land of Canaan (Num. 13–14). The characters and the roles they played are these:

1. The slanderers – ten of the twelve spies
2. The ones listening to slander – the Israelites
3. The object of slander – the promised land of Canaan

When the spies returned to Israel’s camp in the wilderness from their mission in Canaan, they discouraged the people from taking the land by telling them the Canaanites were too powerful for Israel to conquer. Much of what they reported about the land was factually true, but God’s assessment of what they said was that they had brought back “an evil report [slander] concerning the land” (Num. 14:36b). And their factual report was indeed evil because they left off the fact that God had promised to give that land to Israel.

The immediate effect of the spies’ slander of the promised land was that the people turned against Moses (Num. 14:36a), the man who had told them of the promised land and was leading them to it. Their slander also turned the people’s hearts against Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who had come back with a different report: “Joshua ben-Nun and Caleb ben-Jephunneh, who were among those who spied out the land . . . said to all the congregation of the children of Israel, ‘The land which we went to spy out is an extraordinarily good land! If the LORD is pleased with us, He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey! Only, do not rebel against the LORD, so that you are afraid of the people of the land, for they are bread for us! Their protection is departed from them, and the LORD is with us! Do not be afraid!’” (Num. 14:6–9). But the people did not believe Joshua and Caleb; the other spies’ slander had already taken root within them, and they decided to kill

Joshua and Caleb along with Moses. And they would have stoned them right then, had not God intervened and stopped them (Num. 14:10).

The ten spies never mentioned Moses by name, but by slandering the blessing toward which Moses was leading them, Canaan's land, they turned God's chosen people violently against the man whom God had used to deliver them from slavery in Egypt and bless them with the law and precious promises.

*Remember this: Slandering the gifts of God
can turn believers against servants of God
who would lead them to those blessings.*

Slandering the Holy Spirit

When false prophets in Israel slandered their greatest blessing, the law of Moses, it moved many of the people to spurn the true prophets who were exhorting Israel to keep it. So it is now concerning the greatest blessing for New Testament saints, the holy Spirit. False prophets taught Israel that keeping the law was not enough to save them, but that they should add to their faith the worship of other gods. And by that slander of the law, the false prophets turned the people's hearts against the prophets who taught that keeping the law was altogether sufficient. Similarly now, false teachers teach believers that walking in the Spirit is not enough to save them, but that they should add to their faith ceremonial rites and membership "in the church of their choice". And by that slander of the Spirit, the false teachers have turned believers against the men of God who teach that walking in the Spirit is altogether sufficient.

That, in a nutshell, is what Jesus was showing Brother Jimmy in his astonishing night vision in January of 1981. Jimmy could not understand why sweet people of God, such as the two elderly saints who testified imperfectly in the prayer meeting the previous evening, could not see the truth, even after being in the family of God for decades. But Jesus comforted Jimmy by showing him that those precious elderly sisters were blind to the truth, not because they were wicked (they most certainly were not) but because they had believed Christian ministers' slander against the sufficiency of the Spirit of Christ.

Jimmy understood then, after his vision, that every Christian baptism in water, whether by immersion or sprinkling, is slander against the sufficiency of Christ's baptism of the Spirit, and that becoming a member of any Christian church – Catholic, Protestant, or Independent – is slander against the sufficiency of belonging to the body of Christ, and that every

Christian communion service, no matter the style, is slander against the sufficiency of the holy communion that God's children share with Him and His Son in the Spirit! Such slander, institutionalized and revered now as "Christianity", blinds otherwise good, innocent children of God to the truth, and can even provoke them to anger against the men whom God sends to teach them to trust in Christ alone, that is, to trust only in the Spirit to lead them into eternal life.

Remember this: The battle for the hearts of believers today concerns whether Christ saves by the Spirit alone or if Christianity's rites and rules are also required.

The Slanderer would win no allegiance from God's children by declaring that Jesus is *no good at all*, but he has persuaded untold millions to embrace the adding of ceremonies to the life of the Spirit that Jesus purchased with his blood. But to divide one's faith between reliance upon the Spirit and reliance upon rituals is to declare that Jesus is not good *enough*. It is, in fact, to divide one's faith between Christ and Satan, and between life and death, for the Spirit is alive, but the elements used in rituals (wine, bread, water, incense, etc.) are all dead things.

To convince hearers that something which is good enough, is good, but not really good enough, is a cunning tactic that was used for a good purpose in one biblical story. When King David was fleeing for his life after his son Absalom seized the throne, David's faithful friend, Hushai, was given the formidable task of persuading Absalom not to follow the perfectly sound advice of Ahithophel. Ahithophel had counseled Absalom to pursue after David immediately, and if Absalom had done as Ahithophel advised him, he would have easily caught and killed his fleeing father. Standing before Absalom and his generals, Hushai knew that if he were to say that Ahithophel's counsel was *no good at all*, he would be laughed out of court. Ahithophel's counsel was always excellent, always good enough to accomplish its goal. Before joining the rebellion, Ahithophel had been David's counselor,¹¹ and his counsel was always so perfect that it was as if Ahithophel had heard directly from God (2Sam. 16:23). Everyone in the king's court knew that. So, what could Hushai say that would persuade Absalom not to follow Ahithophel's advice, so that David would have time to escape?

¹¹ Ahithophel shared Absalom's bitterness against David because David had forced himself on his grand-daughter Bathsheba (cf. 2Sam. 23:34b with 2Sam 11:3) and then murdered her righteous husband, Uriah, to cover up his sin (2Sam. 11:12–26).

God gave the worried Hushai the cunning answer, the only answer that would have succeeded against the perfect advice of Ahithophel. Rather than dare say that Ahithophel's counsel was no good at all, Hushai told Absalom and his officers, "The counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good at this time" (2Sam. 17:7). Then Hushai proceeded to advise Absalom that it would be better to go slowly, plan carefully, amass a large army, and then go after David. Upon hearing this, Absalom and his officers declared, "The counsel of Hushai is better than the counsel of Ahithophel!" But it was God who made them think that Ahithophel's excellent advice was not good enough, for "the LORD had determined to frustrate the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring destruction upon Absalom" (2Sam. 17:14).¹²

So, God knows how to use the "not good enough" strategy, too.

That is the kind of cunning the Slanderer uses to lure innocent children of God away from whole-hearted devotion to Jesus. He and his ministers do not agree with Paul, that Christ is sufficient to save, all by himself, and that he saves only by the Spirit, for that truth leaves man's abilities and ideas out of the salvation process. Instead, those ministers admit that while receiving the Spirit is good, *it is not good enough*, for one must also receive them and their religion, Christianity. Under those conditions, and only under those conditions, will they agree that Christ saves.

But Jesus did not suffer and die to bring about the confused and carnal religious system called Christianity. He suffered and died for us to have God's holy Spirit within us, and every one of the rituals and doctrines that Christians have added to the Spirit is slander against it, and it turns people against the servants of God who are telling the truth.

Remember this: Jesus suffered and died for us to have God's Spirit, not to bring about the confused and carnal religious system called Christianity.

The holy Spirit is God's answer to everything human. It is the answer to all that is wrong with you and all that you think is right with you. The Spirit of God was not sent to us to take sides; it was sent to take over — completely! And all the alternatives that Christianity provides to walking in the Spirit are slander against the One who died for us and sent us the

¹² Having won for David some extra time, Hushai secretly sent messengers to the king, telling him to flee quickly, which David and those with him did (2Sam. 17:15–16, 22). As for Ahithophel, when his counsel was rejected, he foresaw how it would end, and, so, he went home and hanged himself rather than wait for David to return in victory and execute him (2Sam. 17:23).

Spirit. That is why God's children around the globe keep hearing a "still, small voice" whisper in their ear, "Come out of her, my people!" (Rev. 18:4a). That call is not a call for God's children to come out of the world; they are already out of the world. That is how they became God's people to start with. Rather, it is a call for God's people to come out of the institutionalized slander they have joined, the religion of Christianity, so that they may walk together as one in Christ, in the purity of the holy Spirit.

*Remember this: The holy Spirit is God's
answer to everything human.*

Lesson #9: SLANDER EMBODIES ALL SEVEN SINS THAT ARE AN ABOMINATION TO GOD.

David admonished Solomon when he was young to beware the seven sins that God hates most of all. He said to him, "These six things does the LORD hate. Yea, seven are abominations to His soul: an exalted appearance, a deceptive tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that engraves wicked thoughts, feet that hurry to run to evil, a false witness that breathes out lies, and he who sows discord among brothers" (Prov. 6:16–19). If we were to try to define slander as it is revealed in Scripture, we could do no better than those words from David to his son.

Slanderers have "an exalted appearance" (the appearance of righteousness), "a deceptive tongue" (seeming to speak the truth), "hands that shed innocent blood" (poisoning the soul of young believers), "a heart that engraves wicked thoughts" (upon the hearts of innocent children of God), and "feet that hurry to run to evil" (quickly befriending new converts). They are all "a false witness that breathes out lies", and they all "sow discord among brothers." Solomon passed on to his son this wise warning concerning a slanderer: "When his voice is gracious, put no trust in him, for there are seven abominations in his heart!" (Prov. 26:25).

God abhors slander because it is a sin that disguises itself with an appearance of righteousness, subverts the way of His innocent children, and introduces envy and strife into His family – all without being noticed by His little children. Among the multitude crying out for Jesus' crucifixion (Mk. 15:11–14), how many realized that they were not crying out for his death out of their own conviction but because of the slander of some of their elders? By an appearance of godly concern for the well-being of the nation, those highly regarded elders of Israel persuaded the people to believe that Jesus had gone too far and had at last become Israel's enemy.

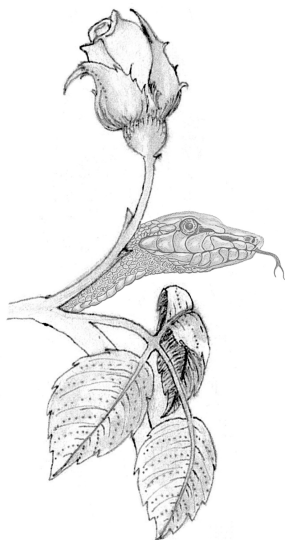
And how many Israelites died for Absalom in battle against David, thinking they were doing good in God's sight?

"No one ever knows."

The apostle James summed up the matter in his epistle: "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him by good conduct show his works in the meekness of wisdom. If you have bitter envy and strife in your heart, do not glory [*in spite of it*] and, so, lie against the truth. [*When slanderers rejoice with the congregation, it is a lie, for they are not as pure in heart as they appear.*] This wisdom [*to appear to be something you are not*] does not come down from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and strife are, there is disorder and every base thing. But the wisdom from above is, first of all, pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who produce peace" (Jas. 3:13–18).

Lesson #10: SLANDERERS VARY IN COMPETENCE.

Just as believers vary in how well they represent Jesus, slanderers vary in how well they represent the chief Slanderer. Human slanderers must go through stages of growth to become just like Satan, just as God's children must grow in grace to become just like Him. And just as God's children reflect the nature of Christ to various degrees as they are growing in grace, slanderers, too, labor among the saints in various degrees of effectiveness.



Put on the whole armor of God so that
you will be able to stand against the
machinations of the Slanderer.

Ephesians 6:11

CONCLUSION

Overcoming Slander

My intent in describing slander in such detail has not been to make slander out to be so dangerous that the Reader fears it. We who believe have nothing to fear, for we dwell with Christ in “the secret place of the Most High”, where no danger of any kind can find us. Under God’s wing is the perfect haven from all of this world’s sin and trouble. His peace is a shield for us, as are His joy and love, and the same may be said of all the fruits and gifts of the Spirit. Paul called living close to the Lord, “walking in the Spirit”, and doing that is a refuge and a sure defense against all ungodliness.

Those who walk in the Spirit do not need a list of “dos and don’ts” to help them avoid being ensnared by the Slanderer. All efforts to construct guidelines for righteous conduct are inadequate, for the complexities of life mock all of man’s attempts to codify righteousness. If we but walk in the Spirit, all the details of godly living will take care of themselves. While walking in the Spirit, the righteous effortlessly “live in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us” (Eph. 5:2), and those who live in God’s love cannot be deceived.

A phrase, again from Paul, which is synonymous with walking in the Spirit is “led by the Spirit”. And according to Paul, those who receive the Spirit and then are led by it are truly God’s children (Rom. 8:8–9, 14). As a beloved elder of mine, “Uncle Joe”, once said, “Knowing the truth does not make us a wise virgin; obeying the truth does that.” Likewise, receiving the Spirit gives us hope of eternal life, but being led by the Spirit after receiving it secures our hope.

*Remember this: Walking in the Spirit is a refuge
and a sure defense against all ungodliness.*

Our Three Mightiest Weapons against Slander

In the Spirit, we have three weapons at our disposal which always and quickly kill the Slanderer’s seed. These are: being sincere, having witnesses, and keeping your heart clear.

(1) BEING SINCERE

Sincerity is the perfect antidote for a slanderer's poison, for a slanderer cannot be sincere. Sincerity is simple and straightforward; slander is twisted and complex. A sincere person speaks openly from an honest heart, but no one living under the spirit of slander can do that. A slanderer avoids the light because he can sense that his goal cannot be achieved if he is open and sincere about what he is after.

Sincerity is often overlooked and under-appreciated as a quality of righteousness, perhaps because Paul did not mention it in his well-known list of fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23); nevertheless, sincerity is a precious fruit of the Spirit, and it preserves us, just as salt preserves food. It keeps us “unspotted by the world” (Jas. 1:27); it keeps us pure and true; and it is a key ingredient of the good soil of Jesus' parable. Whenever a seed of discord is sown into the heart of a sincere child of God, it cannot germinate because sincerity is open, and openness is poisonous to the seed of slander. The light of the Son kills it.

*Remember this: Sincerity is the perfect antidote
for a slanderer's poison.*

The Bible's first story of slander, which took place in the garden of Eden, could have been discussed earlier, but I wanted to wait until now because of certain questions concerning sincerity that I will ask after we read it. Here are the characters:

- (1) The slanderer – the serpent
- (2) The one receiving the slander – Eve
- (3) The one being slandered – God

Genesis 3:1. Now the serpent was more cunning than all of the creatures of the field that the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Did God really say that you may not eat from every tree of the garden?”

2. And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden,
3. but of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘You shall not eat from it nor touch it, lest you die.’”
4. And the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die, surely.
5. For God knows that in the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

6. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise,¹³ she took some of its fruit and ate it. Then she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate it.

Despite Eve's experiences with God's love and care, she believed the serpent's tactful lie, that God had a self-serving purpose in forbidding her to eat the fruit. Then, she acted on that lie rather than on her experience, and God cursed her with death. We are not told how much time transpired between Eve's conversation with the serpent and her decision to act upon it, but it was her decision; the serpent did not make Eve do it.

The serpent's demeanor was neither threatening nor aggressive. He acted as a friend, informing Eve of an opportunity for great personal advancement. Nothing about him aroused suspicion. Perfect in guile, the serpent said very little to Eve, just forty-five words in English (less than that in Hebrew). He was too cunning to say too much and "overplay his hand". And after that brief conversation, the crafty serpent went his way, possibly with a parting wish for Eve to have a pleasant day.

Note especially that the crafty serpent did not ask Eve to eat the forbidden fruit; he only sowed the seed into her heart, and soon afterward, the seed sprouted, and his desire became hers: to "be like the Most High". Every time a seed of slander sprouts, it produces in the innocent believer's heart the feelings and views of the slanderer, as happened in the following story, which a sister in the Lord named Doris shared with me shortly before this book went to press.

Decades ago, when Doris was young in the Lord, an elderly saint named Becky, whom Doris respected, complimented her on her singing in a recent gathering. That was flattery, the bait for what followed, for Becky then added that she wondered why Evelyn, another elder, had sung the same song for the congregation the following weekend. Until that moment, it had never crossed Doris' mind that anything was wrong with hearing the same song twice, whoever sang it. She loved the song and enjoyed hearing it. Her heart was pure. But after that conversation, Doris began to look at Sister Evelyn in a new way, a way she would never have thought to look at her if Becky's poisonous words had not been planted in her heart. Some time passed, and feelings of resentment grew in Doris' heart until, at length, she made a phone call to Evelyn, as she said it to me, to "tell her what I thought."

¹³ Or, "successful", which implies a worldly wisdom.

At that, I stopped Doris and said to her, “You did not call Evelyn to tell her what *you* thought.”

“I didn’t?”

“No,” I said. “You called her to tell her what *Becky* thought.”

Doris laughed and said, “That’s right! That is what happened to me!”

Doris had always been open to everyone in the body, and that openness proved to be her means of escape from the slander she had taken in. She had done well to call Evelyn and open up to her about how she felt, though she was wrong in feeling it, for after their conversation, the resentment was gone and their fellowship, restored. Where Eve went wrong in the garden of Eden is that she did not open up to God about her new feelings toward Him. He would certainly have helped her.

As with all expert slanderers, much of what Satan told Eve was factually true. When she and Adam ate the forbidden fruit, their eyes *were* opened (Gen. 3:7), and she and Adam *did* become like God in knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:22), just as the serpent said. The serpent’s only outright lie was that Eve would not die, but even at that, she and Adam did not die immediately. In fact, Adam lived 930 years (Gen. 5:5)!

Consider how Adam and Eve must have seen this. God told Adam that if he ate the forbidden fruit, he would die in that day (Gen. 2:17b), but when Adam ate it, he did not fall down dead. The serpent, on the other hand, told Eve that in the day she and Adam ate it, their eyes would be opened, and they would be like God, knowing good and evil, and those things did happen when they ate the fruit. Judging by appearances, then, the serpent seemed to be the more trustworthy source of information. But what God said was absolutely true, for on the day Adam and Eve disobeyed Him, they died inside, where it counted. It was only because God is good that they did not drop dead immediately, but were given time to die, so that they could repent of their foolishness.

Questions

What do you think would have happened if instead of eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve had been open with God and asked Him about what the serpent said? What if they had brought the serpent’s words, spoken in private, out into the light? Their story would have had a different ending, don’t you think?

Or what if Absalom had been sincere with his father, David, about the bitterness in his soul? Or what if the Israelites who heard Absalom’s slander had suggested to Absalom that he go talk to his father about what he saw as his father’s errors? The nation would have been spared the trauma of a bitter civil war.

Or what if Judas had been sincere with Jesus about his weakness for money? Would Jesus have despised him for confessing his need for help? Of course not. But as it was, that weed of greed was allowed to grow, and Judas was at last overcome by his unconfessed sin, and tragically, he became a slanderer.

Or what if the disciples had come to Jesus and sincerely asked him why he thought the first woman who poured oil on him had done a good deed? Would Jesus have condemned them for asking? I don't think so.

Or what if the four members of our congregation who walked away in 1981 had gone to our pastor and humbly asked him what he meant in his sermon? They would certainly have been rescued from the seed of discord that had sprung up in their souls.

Remember this: There is safety in openness.

(2) HAVING WITNESSES

Along with sincerity, or perhaps as part of it, we have this wise counsel from the apostle Paul to young Timothy: "Do not receive an accusation against an elder, except in the presence of two or three witnesses" (1Tim. 5:19). As we have seen, slander flourishes in the dark, out of sight. Bringing it out into the light before witnesses will always expose it as wrong. Even if the witnesses are simple-minded, the young believer's openness with them will put the slanderer on notice that what he says in the shadows will be brought out into the light. Doing that will kill whatever influence the slanderer may have already gained over that believer and will make it highly unlikely that he will try that young believer's heart again.

Remember this: "Do not receive an accusation against an elder, except in the presence of two or three witnesses."

In Matthew 18:15–16, Jesus gave specific instructions for dealing with a wayward brother: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he doesn't listen, take one or two more with you [to talk with your brother], so that 'by the mouth of two witnesses, or three, every matter may be confirmed.'" When asked, "Have you been to the person about whom you're speaking?" an exposed slanderer may attempt to ward off the question by making light of it, perhaps even saying that the error

mentioned is not one of sufficient importance that he should talk privately with the other about it. But if it is truly of such small importance, why even mention it? If someone's fault is too insignificant to bring it to his attention privately, then it is too insignificant to bring it to anyone's attention at all.

I hasten to add that in asking if the speaker has been to the one spoken of, there need be no accusing tone. It might be good to turn the question into a suggestion, such as, "Our brother may have never looked at himself or his situation in that way. Why don't we go and discuss it with him?" Our guiding principle in all things is the love of God – love, I say, not only for the brother who is being talked about but also for the one who is talking.

*Remember this: Our guiding principle
in all things is the love of God.*

3) KEEPING YOUR HEART CLEAR

Take this in; it will save you many a heartache: if you do not in some way clear your heart of slander when you hear it, the slander you have heard will affect your spirit *even if you know it is false*.

That may be difficult to believe, but I saw this happen during the years I was quietly watching slander work. On one occasion, while traveling with a slanderous older saint, Freda, whom I mentioned previously, some new believers felt that the things they were hearing from her was not right – I know because afterward they came to me about it – but instead of being open and honest with her about how she was making them feel, they were polite, awkwardly making sociable comments that, to their dismay, only kept the conversation going. Then, after their trip, they soon began wrestling with uncharitable thoughts and feelings toward a wise pastor whom Freda had slandered. Thankfully, they were open with me, their pastor, about the situation, and I was able to give them the help they needed in order to recover themselves.

*Remember this: If you do not reprove slander
when you hear it, the slander you hear will affect you
even if you know it is false.*

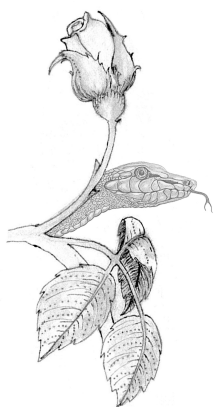
As an example of how a young believer might “rebuke” an unwise elder without words, I will add this story. When I was very young in the Lord, I was visiting Freda in her home when she made a comment about someone that did not feel right to me. I did not verbally rebuke my elder, for the apostle Paul said not to do that (1Tim. 5:1). Instead, I sat quietly, resisting the pressure I felt to reply and agree. After an awkward silence, she said, “Well, you’re not saying anything,” and then she got up and walked away. That was rebuke enough from me, a novice in Christ. Without words, I had brought her comments to the light with silence, which, in that case, was all I needed to do to kill the influence of her poisonous talk.

These, then, are the three most powerful weapons against slander, all of them as simple as slander is complex:

- being sincere
- having witnesses
- keeping your heart clear

In the Spirit, these mighty weapons are always close at hand, keeping us safe and happy in Christ Jesus.





Psalm 52

How can you commend yourself with evil, O mighty man? God's faithfulness never ceases. Your tongue, like a sharpened razor, devises ruinous things, working deceit. You love evil more than good, a lie more than to speak righteousness. Selah. You love every word that devours, O deceitful tongue! Oh, but God will bring you down forever. He will seize you and tear you away from your tent. Yea, He will uproot you out of the land of the living. Selah. And the righteous will see it, and fear, and they will laugh at him, saying, "Behold the man who did not make God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches! He sought refuge in his own destruction." As for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I will trust in the lovingkindness of God forever and ever. I will praise you forever because you have done it, and I will wait for your Name, for he is delightful before your saints.

REMEMBER THIS

Chapter 1

- False doctrine and lifeless ceremonies are slander against the right way of the Lord.

Chapter 2

- The unwise have been believers long enough to be wise, but they are not, and they do not realize it.
- There are four kinds of people who hear the word of God.
- The unwise are cursed by God to stay among His saints, to try them.
- Holiness is a matter of spiritual purity, not physical location.
- In congregations where appearances matter too much, the unwise prosper.
- Peter said that some of God's people "cannot cease from sin".
- Growing in the knowledge of God means growing in the knowledge of who is who in the body of Christ.
- You should never respect anyone so highly that you would do wrong in order to please him.
- No one has the knowledge of God when he is first converted.
- Your greatest enemy is whatever you lack of the knowledge of God.
- It is of the highest concern to the Father that His children be taught to be led by His Spirit.
- The wise are those who trust Jesus with an undivided heart.
- We love God only as much as we love the least upright in His kingdom.
- The love of God never excuses sin, but it can cover a multitude of it.
- We all know where to go to regain our first love if we have left it, for we can always go back to the fountain that flows from the throne of God.
- There may be some foolish things about a wise virgin, and there may be some wise things about a foolish virgin.

Chapter 3

- In the act of slander, the three people involved are each in a specific spiritual condition.

- The person who listens to slander, not the one being slandered, is the one damaged by it.
- Flattery is always involved in slander.
- Attention from an elder makes the innocent feel loved and opens them up to be influenced.
- Slander is a form of murder.
- David was wise to love his enemies and to do good to those who hated and abused him.
- Judas had the support of many scriptures when he won the disciples to his point of view.
- Jesus alone is Lord of all. There are no co-Lords in the kingdom of God.
- The wise are they who are unrelentingly teachable.
- The wise do not judge on the basis of what appears good but on what the Spirit tells them is good.
- God's test of hearts must not be interfered with.
- God's mercy is higher than heaven.
- The patience of God has been the salvation of many.
- God's children can be deceived only by someone they trust.
- The seeds of slander cannot grow in good soil.
- Our spiritual condition determines our reality more than what we experience.

Chapter 4

- God values greatly the innocence of His children.
- The wicked wisdom behind slander is beyond human comprehension; it must be revealed by the Spirit of God.
- Slander doesn't have branches; it only has roots, all underground and out of sight, but nothing is hidden from the eyes of God.
- God keeps every sincere and humble child of His from being overcome by evil.
- We can never fail if we love one another with God's kind of love.
- Learn to be quiet and to mind your own business.
- Slandering the gifts of God can turn believers against servants of God who would lead them to those blessings.
- The battle for the hearts of believers today concerns whether Christ saves by the Spirit alone or if Christianity's rites and rules are also required.
- Jesus suffered and died for us to have God's Spirit, not to bring about the confused and carnal religious system called Christianity.

- The holy Spirit is God's answer to everything human.

Conclusion

- Walking in the Spirit is a refuge and a sure defense against all ungodliness.
- Sincerity is the perfect antidote for a slanderer's poison.
- There is safety in openness.
- "Do not receive an accusation against an elder, except in the presence of two or three witnesses."
- Our guiding principle in all things is the love of God.
- If you do not reprove slander when you hear it, the slander you hear will affect you even if you know it is false.

Appendix

- Before the disciples received the Spirit, they could not bear to hear all the truth.
- After Jesus paid the price for the New Covenant, continuation in the law of Moses became useless for salvation.
- The love of money undermines the integrity of every man who rents himself out as a pastor.



Appendix: Offend

In the Scriptures, “to offend” often means “to cause to fall from righteousness”. Ironically, children of God sometimes are turned away from righteousness by righteousness itself. Jesus said, “Whoever is not offended by me is blessed” (Mt. 11:6; Lk. 7:23). By that, he meant that whoever was not offended by the holy things he said and did was blessed. Paul could have said the same thing, or Peter, or any other godly person. Every true servant of God speaks truth (Jn. 3:34), and the truth often offends those who hear it. The following are examples of God’s people being offended, not by slander or by any evil thing, but by righteous works of God. Their example teaches us that we should be careful not to reject what is from God just because it contradicts what we have been taught. It may be that we have been taught poorly.

Holy Things That Can Offend

(1) Jesus’ Birth

The Jews of Jesus’ time had been taught that the Messiah would not come from an ordinary family in Israel, and they knew that Jesus’ mother and father were two ordinary people. “We know where this man [Jesus] is from,” they insisted, “but when the Messiah comes, nobody will know where he is from” (Jn. 7:27). “‘Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?’ they said to one another. ‘Isn’t his mother called Mary, and his brothers, Jacobus and Joses and Simon and Judas? And his sisters, aren’t they all with us? So, where did he get all these things?’ And they were offended in him” (Mt. 13:55–57a; cf. Mk. 6:3). Judging Jesus on the basis of what they thought they knew, many Jews rejected their Messiah, God’s Son, and it cost them their souls.

(2) The Truth Jesus Taught

Many in Israel turned from righteousness upon hearing Jesus preach because his doctrine was not what they had been taught. And, of course, some sensed that his doctrine, if accepted, would require them to change, and they were unwilling to do that. Centuries before sending His Son to earth, God said this would happen when His people heard His Son preach: “He will be a stumbling stone and a rock of offense for both houses of

Israel, a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them will stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared and taken” (Isa. 8:14–15). Sometimes, Jesus’ closest disciples were astounded and deeply troubled by his teaching (e.g., Mk. 10:23–26), but they were not offended; they stayed with him, at least until he was arrested (Mt. 26:31; Mk. 14:50). Other followers of Jesus were not as wise; they rejected his teaching “and walked with him no longer” (Jn. 6:66).

Jesus did not tell his closest disciples all the truth he could have told them, for he knew that until they received the Spirit, some truths would offend them, and they would abandon him as others had done. The night before he died, Jesus told them, “I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth” (Jn. 16:12–13).

Remember this: Before the disciples received the Spirit, they could not bear to hear all the truth.

On the other hand, there were truths that would strengthen the disciples and keep them from being offended, and Jesus was diligent to tell them those things. For example, knowing the persecution his disciples would face, and not wanting them to be discouraged when it came, Jesus plainly warned them of what was in store for them: “I have spoken these things to you so that you will not be offended. They will put you out of the synagogues. In fact, the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing God service” (Jn. 16:1–2).

(3) Jesus’ Death

To this day, the death of Jesus is a stumbling block to Jews because they have been taught that when the Messiah comes, he will not die. Rabbis who speak on the subject routinely mention Jesus’ meekness and death as proof that he could not have been their mighty Messiah. It seems absurd to them for believers to say that Isaiah was speaking of the Messiah when he prophesied of a man who would suffer terribly, a man whom God would be pleased to torture and to kill (Isa. 53:3–12). The apostle Paul was deeply grieved at the unwillingness of his fellow Jews to consider that the Messiah died and was raised from the dead, but Paul would not deny the truth in order to accommodate their unbelief: “We preach Christ crucified,” he wrote, “a stumbling block to Jews” (1Cor. 1:23a).

(4) The Truth Paul Taught

The heart of Paul's gospel was that Christ, in purchasing the Spirit for mankind with his sacrificial death, had fulfilled the law and brought it to its intended end. But that truth offended unbelieving Jews as well as many believers, Jew and Gentile. Paul taught that after Jesus paid the awful price for God's New Covenant to begin, and after Israel, in the main, rejected it, the Jews' continuation in the law, once a holy thing to do, became vain. He explained that once the Son of God was revealed, the glorious law of Moses had no more glory: "That which was once made glorious [the law] has been made not glorious, on account of the surpassing glory of Christ" (2Cor. 3:10). The law, after Christ was glorified, became a death trap, a meaningless religion of rites and rules, and many a soul was offended by that truth when Paul spoke it.

Remember this: After Jesus paid the price for the New Covenant, continuation in the law of Moses became useless for salvation.

(5) The Liberty of God's Children: Paying Taxes

Just as there were truths that Jesus refrained from speaking,¹⁴ lest he offend his followers, Jesus also refrained from certain good deeds that would have offended them, as in the case of paying certain taxes.

One day, Jesus told Peter that although children of the King (God) were at liberty not to pay a certain tax (Mt. 17:25–26), they should not exercise that liberty, for if they did, it would be misunderstood and become a stumbling block for others: "Jesus said to him, 'Lest we be a stumbling block to them, go to the sea, cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when you've opened its mouth, you'll find a stater. Take that and give it to [the tax collectors] for me and you'" (Mt. 17:26–27).

(6) The Liberty of God's Children: Eating and Drinking

There was much controversy between Jewish and non-Jewish believers concerning the law's dietary rules, but the revelation given to Paul was that, "Food does not bring us close to God. We are neither better if we eat nor worse if we do not eat" (1Cor. 8:8). Paul taught that God's children are free from Moses' dietary laws, for "the kingdom of God is not food

¹⁴ Paul did the same with spiritually immature saints (1Cor. 3:1–3).

and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the holy Spirit, and he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men” (Rom. 14:17–18). Paul would not compromise that truth, but at the same time, he warned believers who understood it not to become proud of their liberty to eat whatever they liked.

Paul’s attitude was perfect. He loved the children of God the way Jesus did, to the point of self-denial in matters in which he had perfect freedom of choice. He understood that eating and drinking certain things could offend ignorant children of God, and he knew that when a child of God has been offended, it is very difficult to win him again to the right path. Solomon pointed this out: “A brother offended is a strong city, with contentions like the bars of a castle” (Prov. 18:19). It is much better to walk in the Spirit to start with and avoid offending a brother than it is to try to win back a brother who has been offended.

Those who are like Jesus will walk in love toward God’s children who do not understand their liberty. “Do not let your good be evil spoken of,” Paul exhorted believers, “but determine this instead: to lay no stumbling block before a brother” (Rom. 14:16, 13b). He warned them to walk in love and “beware, lest this privilege of yours become a stumbling block to the weak” (1Cor. 8:9). “All things are lawful for me,” he explained, “but not everything is beneficial” (1Cor. 6:12).

Paul was free in Christ to eat whatever he pleased, and he never wavered from that truth. However, he loved his family in Christ and was willing to forbear from using his liberty if doing so hurt a brother: “If food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, lest I cause my brother to stumble” (1Cor. 8:13). And to the believers in Rome, he wrote, “It is good not to eat meat, nor drink wine, nor *do anything* by which your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak. Do not destroy, with what you eat, him for whom Christ died!” (Rom. 14:21, 15b).

Unholy Things That Can Offend

(1) Unwise Love

When Peter heard Jesus say that he was going to suffer and die, Peter declared that he would not allow such a thing to happen. But Peter was unaware that his kind of love for Jesus would keep him from fulfilling the Father’s purpose. Jesus would have none of it: “He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You’re a stumbling block [an offense] to me! Your mind is not on the things of God, but the things of men’” (Mt. 16:23).

No one could offend Jesus, that is, cause him to turn away from righteousness, because all his faith was in God. Jesus knew that no one at that time had the holy Spirit and that without it, no one could be trusted: “Many believed in his name, seeing his miracles that he performed. But Jesus did not trust himself to them because he knows all men. He knew what was in man” (Jn. 2:23b–24, 25b).

(2) Persecution

We saw in Jesus’ parable of Four Kinds of Soil that some converts quickly turn away from righteousness when persecution comes (Mk. 4:17). According to Jesus, apostasy because of fear will increase near the end of this age, for fierce persecutions will befall the children of God: “They will turn you over to persecution, and they will kill you. You shall be hated by all nations because of my name. And during that time, many will be offended, and they will betray one another and hate one another” (Mt. 24:9–10).

It was the fear of suffering for Christ that finally offended even Jesus’ closest disciples the evening he was arrested, as Jesus had predicted would happen: “Tonight, you will all be offended because of me, for it is written, ‘I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (Mt. 26:31; cf. Mk. 14:27). Naturally, they found it hard to believe that, and they insisted they would never leave him (Mk. 14:29–31), but later that night when the officers came to arrest Jesus, “they all forsook him, and fled” (Mk. 14:50).

(3) The Prosperity of Wicked People

David’s godly friend Asaph became bitter at life once, and he almost fell away from righteousness when he saw the wicked prospering while he and other upright people were constantly chastened by God. But the love Asaph had for his fellow Israelites prevented him from going too far, and he realized that if he gave in to the spirit of envy and expressed his ungodly thoughts, he would discourage and offend some of God’s people. Asaph confessed to God, “If I had decided, ‘I will talk that way,’ behold, I would have offended a generation of your children” (Ps. 73:15).

Some of God’s prophets were also frustrated when they suffered, while the wicked enjoyed ease and prosperity. Jeremiah, for one, made this supplication: “You are righteous, O LORD, though I complain to you. Nevertheless, let me speak with you about your judgments. Why does the way of wicked men prosper? All those who deal treacherously are at ease. You have planted them, and they have taken root; they grow and bear

fruit. You are near in their mouth, but you are far from their hearts” (Jer. 12:1–2). Jeremiah knew that God had long before given this admonition to the upright: “Do not fret yourself because of evildoers, nor be envious against workers of unrighteousness. Trust in the LORD and do good” (Ps. 37:1, 3a). However, it still frustrated Jeremiah to see the wicked living a life of ease and comfort while he was being slandered and abused.

(4) Professional Ministers

The Christian custom of hiring and firing ministers is as ungodly a custom as can be found anywhere on earth. Jesus called such ministers “hirelings”, and he did not speak well of them (Jn. 10:12–13). How can a minister be free to hear from God for his congregation when he has been hired by them to preach what they already think is true? Even if those ministers have a desire to hear from Jesus, and I am sure that many of them do, they know that the congregations which hired them may fire them if they preach contrary to their theological position. Peter was warning of this pitfall when he admonished the men who watched over the flock of God not to do so “for sordid gain” (1Pet. 5:2b). In a system of hireling ministers, no congregation can grow in the knowledge of God.

God’s prophet Balaam was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to prophesy against Israel, and even though God refused to allow Balaam to prophesy against His people, Balaam earned his pay by counseling Balak as to how he might conquer Israel with guile instead of military force (Rev. 2:14; Num. 22–24). The love of money undermined Balaam’s sense of right and wrong, and it likewise undermines the integrity of every man who rents himself out as a pastor.

Several decades ago, after I had taken some pay for teaching an Old Testament class, God sternly commanded me, “Don’t you ever teach my gospel for money again!” And I have not. Ministers who are hired by churches may never hear such a Voice as I heard, but they have this, from the book of Jude: “Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain and, for reward, have given themselves to the error of Balaam” (Jude 1:11a).

Remember this: The love of money undermines the integrity of every man who rents himself out as a pastor.

The apostle Paul saw this hireling system coming: “The time will come when they will not put up with sound doctrine, but will heap up [hire] teachers for themselves according to their own lusts, having itching ears, and they will turn away from hearing the truth, and they will be

turned over to myths” (2Tim. 4:3–4). Paul wrote to the saints in Rome, “Such men are not serving our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and with smooth words and flattery, they lead innocent hearts astray” (Rom. 16:18). And he told Titus, “There are many rebellious vain talkers and deceivers . . . teaching things they should not for the sake of base gain” (Tit. 1:10–11).

Every true man of God is like God in that he is displeased whenever he learns that a child of God has been offended. Paul was expressing the heart of God when he wrote, “Who is offended, and I am not indignant?” (2Cor. 11:29b). God’s ultimate judgment for the offenders will be what John called the “Second Death”.¹⁵ It is the dreadful Lake of Fire (Rev. 14:10–11; 20:10, 15), and Jesus advised us to do whatever it takes to avoid it: “If your hand offend you, cut it off! It’s better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into the unquenchable fire” (Mk. 9:43a). Of course, Jesus was speaking spiritually concerning the body of Christ, for it is sometimes better for a congregation if the pastor casts out a member of the body than to allow him to remain and infect the whole congregation with ungodliness.

It is terrifying to think of offending a child of God and being cast into the Lake of Fire. That is why James’ statement (Jas. 3:2), that we have all been guilty of offending someone, is so sobering. Yet, we must admit that what he said is true. We have all, at some point, been a poor example for others. Let us fear God, then, and pray to be so filled with His Spirit that we mature beyond being a stumbling block to anyone, so that Jesus may present us “holy and faultless and blameless” before the Father, “without blemish in the presence of His glory with great joy” (Col. 1:22; Jude 1:24).



¹⁵ For more on this, see my online tract, “The Second Death”, at GoingtoJesus.com.

A Letter from a Reader

I proof-read this book with my congregation, one chapter at a time, as I wrote it. One morning, I received the following letter from a sister in the Lord who had been reading with us, which so blessed me that I decided to include it with this book. It communicates well the joy and the relief one feels at having one's eyes opened by Jesus and coming out of the institutionalized slander that is Christianity.

jdc



Good morning,

I really loved the reading from your book on slander. Sometimes, it's not about the words on the page as much as the feelings from the words on the page. I loved what I felt when we were reading those pages.

So many things stood out to me. The last paragraph on page 56 really packed a punch! (But the whole page 56 is so good)! You wrote:

"The holy Spirit is God's answer to everything human. It is the answer to all that is wrong with you and all that you think is right with you. The Spirit of God was not sent to us to take sides; it was sent to take over – completely! And all the alternatives that Christianity provides to walking in the Spirit are slander against the One who died for us and sent us the Spirit. That is why God's children around the globe keep hearing a "still, small voice" whisper in their ear, "Come out of her, my people!" (Rev. 18:4a). That call is not a call for God's children to come out of the world; they are already out of the world. That is how they became God's people to start with. Rather, it is a call for God's people to come out of the institutionalized slander they have joined, the religion of Christianity, so that they may walk together as one in Christ, in the purity of the holy Spirit."

That is so true! The holy Ghost is the answer to everything! Yet, slander against the One who sent the holy Ghost has tried to convince us that we don't even need it! As a matter of fact, in all my years in Christianity, I never once heard that there was such a thing as being baptized with the holy Ghost! Many of us sat in congregations for years and were offered any and everything besides the joy and peace of being filled with the holy

Ghost and walking in that! We were told that baptism with water was the “one baptism” Paul preached, and that baptism was all we needed. We were told that if we repeated a few scriptures and “accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior”, then we were saved and not to dare let anyone make us doubt that! We were told that when we drank a little cup of grape juice and ate a small, dry cracker that we were having communion with the Father! We were told not to go by our feelings. We were taught that the Bible was the word of God! We were taught that the Father and His Son were part of a divine trinity wherein they were separate and they were one, all at the same time. It was total confusion! And it was all lies. It really was institutionalized slander! Slander that was intended to come between us and our Father! Those rituals and doctrines only served one purpose, and that was to take the place of the real relationship we can have with Jesus through the holy Ghost. The holy Ghost *is* everything! If that’s left out, then Jesus can be nothing more to us than an unattainable being who lives far away in the sky.

What if we had been satisfied with calling the crackers and grape juice our communion with Jesus? What if we had believed that sprinkling some water on a baby’s head or dunking someone in a dirty river was the one baptism that Paul talked about in Ephesians 4? What if we had remained in those pews for all those years like dead men walking?

But so many of us felt that there must be more to Jesus than the dead rituals and doctrines we were experiencing in Christianity. And with a sincere heart, we took this simple thought to Jesus: “There has to be more to You than this!” And little did we know that Jesus was just waiting for us to come to Him with that thought! By being open and sincere with Jesus, He was able to show us (through His Spirit), that there really is so much more to Him than the dead rituals and false doctrines of Christianity. He gave us the truth by leading us to a place where we could be fed good, clean food that leads to “purity of the holy Spirit”.

Thank you for feeding us more good, clean food through this writing! I know it has taken hours and hours to get it all down, but I’m hoping a sincere heart who is still inside those walls of institutionalized slander will read these pages, and then feel free to go to Jesus with the questions he’s had in his heart. He’s waiting. . .

I’m looking forward to reading the next section (or rereading this one)!

Lee Ann

Afterword

Christianity is slander in the form of an institution, and its slander of the truth which was revealed to Paul has been very effective through the centuries in preventing many believers from even acknowledging it. Indeed, the slander of the religious system of Christianity has been so successful in that regard that Paul's gospel is now almost unknown. Book Two of The Iron Kingdom Series, The Jerusalem Council, will help to remedy that tragic reality.

A right understanding of Paul's gospel is essential to seeing the development of Christianity as it should be seen. Building upon the foundation now laid concerning what slander is and how it works, Book Two will explain Paul's gospel, and then will show from the scriptures that his gospel was rejected by the body of Christ as a whole. That apostasy of the body of Christ provided the foundation upon which Christianity was built, and the early Christians built upon that foundation with great, though misguided vigor, as this Series will demonstrate as it continues.



Books by John David Clark, Sr.



Spiritual Light

Suffering and the Saints

The Apostate Fathers

Speaking in Tongues at Spirit Baptism

What the Bible really says about HELL

Is the Bible the Word of God?

Marriage and Divorce

Solomon's Wisdom

God Had a Son before Mary Did

Tithes and Offerings

Malachi: prophet to an apostate nation

After Jesus Died

The Iron Kingdom Book Series:

Book 1: Slander

Book 2: The Jerusalem Council

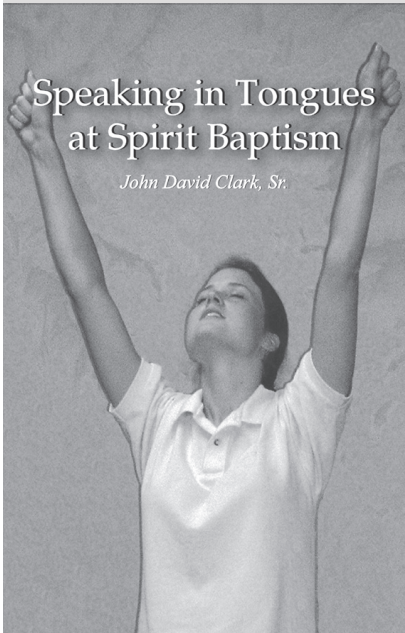
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When Is a Person Born Again?



"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

We need to know who has received the Spirit of God and who has not. Otherwise, we are lost in a world of religious confusion as to who really is born of God and who is not, which is the condition that exists among believers of today.

This booklet presents an accurate and consistent biblical explanation for speaking in tongues being the "initial evidence" of being baptized with the Spirit.

If true, this belief radically alters the commonly accepted picture of the body of Christ, for since the baptism of the Spirit is the only means of entering the body of Christ (1Cor. 12:13), then the body of Christ is composed only of those

who have received that baptism, with the evidence of speaking in tongues. Study *Speaking in Tongues at Spirit Baptism* for straightforward, biblical answers about this important subject.

Where Is Hell? Who Goes There?



Can anyone escape from Hell?

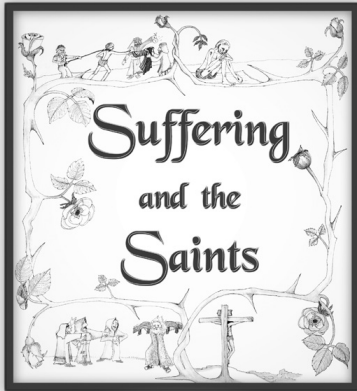
Is Hell the "Lake of Fire"?

Our objective in this study was to find out what the Bible really says about the abode of the dead so that we can separate fact from fiction. No tradition, no belief, no opinion was immune from critical examination in the light of what we would find in the Bible.

It seems odd that the study of Hell and the other gruesome places of spiritual damnation could inspire a gentle and deep loving care for others, and yet, that is what we experienced. How could such a thing be? Holy love is perceived generally to be such a tender thing, and, by contrast, Hell is a place where tenderness

can only be remembered, never experienced. Nevertheless, this study produced in us a sense of the love and goodness of God that is always directed toward men. In truth, and to our happy surprise, this work proved to be more a story of God than of Hell.

Who Is in Charge of Our Suffering?



*Let those who suffer according to the will of God
commit their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.
1 Peter 4:19*

John David Clark, Sr.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”

You are hurting. You have suffered a crushing loss. You have been disappointed, misunderstood, betrayed. What are you to do? What do you think?

Suffering and the Saints takes you through beautiful Biblical stories of faith where men and women are not only seen doing good in desperate situations but, more than that, the reason they did good is explained. By knowing what they knew, we can do what they did, and be what they were, and receive the strength to continue in well doing.

As you read *Suffering and the Saints*, stand in awe of the goodness, power, and wisdom of God by which the saints of old met and overcame the suffering that God gave them to endure and by which we may also endure our trials and corrections.

The Relationship Must Come First.

TITHES and OFFERINGS

*The right relationship
between a pastor and his congregation*
BY JOHN D. CLARK, SR.



*The right relationship
between a pastor and his congregation*

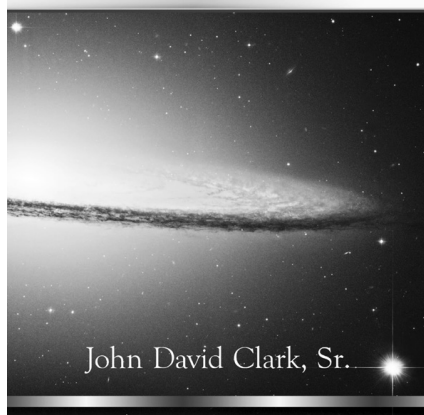
This is not a book about money. It is a book about the proper relationship of a pastor and his flock, both his responsibility toward them and theirs toward him. How to deal with God's money is a necessary element of the discussion, but the more important issue is, how are we to deal with each other?

Upon reading this manuscript, one lady commented, “Every sentence will be a new thought to God's people.” That may not altogether be the case, but many of the sentences in this book certainly will bring new thoughts to those who read them.

The truth about tithes and offerings will help to heal the current mass confusion concerning the issue. But be warned; the truth of the matter will challenge your heart with light which, to my knowledge, is shining nowhere else.

God Is, First of All, a God of Relationships.

God Had A Son *before Mary Did*

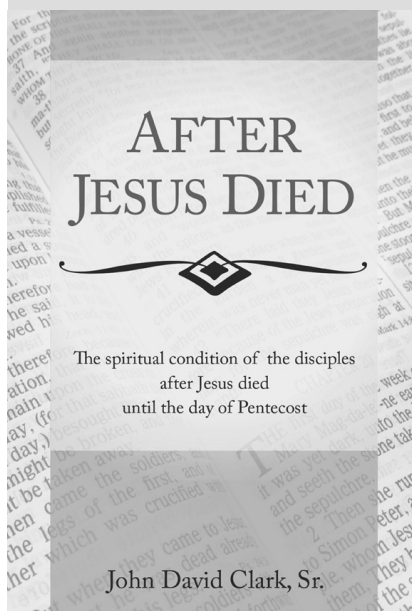


What love the Father had for us, to transform us desperately sinful creatures into saints and to re-create us as His children, worthy to live forever! God sent His Son to give us life so that we might know Him, and by revealing Himself through His Son, God accomplished the impossible in us.

The revelation that from the beginning there existed a beloved Son lets us know that above all else, God desires loving relationships. That desire lies at the heart of everything God has ever done, and nothing in Creation contradicts that truth.

God Had a Son before Mary Did examines the significance and glory of the “mystery of God”, the mystery of the Son, which God kept secret from the foundation of the world until He revealed it in the person of Jesus Christ.

When Were the Disciples Born Again?

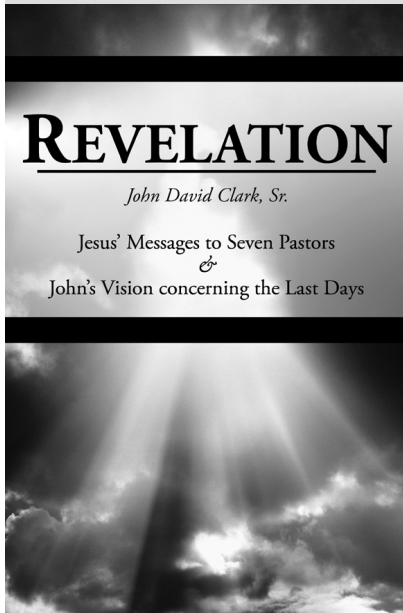


If anyone on earth was born again after Jesus died, and before Pentecost, surely his disciples were – but they were not. If anyone on earth understood his purpose and doctrine after Jesus died, and before Pentecost, surely his disciples did – but they did not. *After Jesus Died* shows that the Bible leaves no reasonable alternative to those two conclusions.

When we carefully study the disciples’ actions and words in the time between Jesus’ death and the day of Pentecost, we are forced to conclude

that they were not born again until they were baptized with the Spirit on Pentecost morning. May God give us the same grace that He gave to his disciples to escape spiritual blindness and to walk with Jesus in his light.

Are You Ready for Jesus Not to Come?

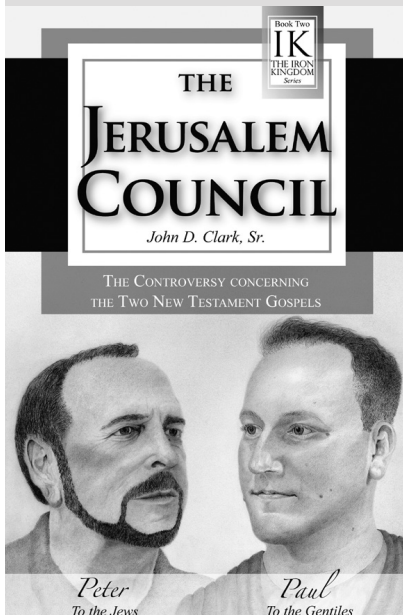


The question, “Are you ready for Jesus to come?” may be a good question to ask, but the more appropriate question is, “Are you ready for Jesus not to come?” because the reality is that it is not time for Jesus to return. So, the real issue is, are we ready to stay here and do the work that remains to be done? Are we prepared to endure what this world and the body of Christ will suffer before the coming of the Lord?

After examining the seven messages from Jesus to the pastors of seven congregations, this study of John’s revelation reveals why the Jews rejected Jesus and presents in great detail the wonderful promises God made to Israel through the

prophets, all of which will be fulfilled after He has greatly scourged and sifted the nation for their rebellion against Christ.

Jesus Alone Can Save.



The aged apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “All they in Asia have forsaken me.” And such was the case in the Assemblies of God everywhere, for before the apostles died, the body of Christ fell into apostasy. Today, the body of Christ remains confused and divided, and the confusion and division can be traced back to the issues debated in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Few perceive what was at stake when the leaders of the Assembly in Jerusalem convened this special Council.

This book takes the reader through the likely arguments that were made at the Council and explains why both sides were desperate to win the day. It also

reveals that while Paul’s argument was accepted by the leaders of the Council, the body of Christ as a whole eventually rejected Paul and his gospel.

