

How to respond when you're slandered

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Advent: I Believe Series

Matthew 5:43-48

INTERACTING WITH THE SERMON

SYNOPSIS OF THE SERMON

We live in a world of slander today! As a result of 24/7 news broadcasts and endless websites and blogs, people can easily post their negative comments for everyone to see. Day in and day out there are innuendos and attacks on integrity—few public figures will escape this avalanche of slander!

A few examples of slander include a politician friend who was running for office, and came home the night before the election to find her house smeared with inflammatory (and false) statements about her; or a friend who found himself slandered in a book; or most recently, Vineyard Columbus, which is being slandered by protesters each weekend out on Cooper Road.

Slander is speaking falsely about someone in a way that injures or ruins their reputation. Slander often involves syllogisms—a couple premises that erroneously lead to a conclusion. For example: Bob is friends with Bill. Bill is a racist. Therefore Bob is a racist.

Jesus dealt the problem of Slander in Matthew 5:43-48

***43** "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' **44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. **46** If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? **47** And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

What Jesus is forbidding in this passage is *hate*. In other words, we should not treat others the way they treat us. This premise runs through all of Christian ethics. We may not be able to control what happens *outside* of us, but we can control what happens *inside* of us. This is an extension of the golden rule—Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves and treat people the way we want to be treated.

We continually want to shrink the circle of people we owe something to. We want to close our hearts and say, "I don't owe this person love or kindness because they are an enemy!" Jesus on the other hand continually expands the circle of people to whom we owe love. He told us to love our neighbors as ourselves—now He is telling us that enemies are included in



neighbors! We must clarify that loving our enemies is not the same as *liking* them. Love is a choice—choosing to treat them better than they deserve.

One way we show love is to pray for our enemies. The obvious question is *what do we pray—God, kill them?!* According to Jesus, we pray for what we would want. We would want to receive grace and forgiveness—so we pray grace and forgiveness for our enemies. We would want to grasp the truth, be brought to repentance and so not go to hell—so we pray for repentance and salvation for our enemies.

This seems impossible at times, but Jesus is always asking us to do the impossible. He tells forgive 70 X 7 when we have a hard time forgiving once! Now He is telling us to love our enemies and pray for those who mistreat us! We've got to remember that Jesus never asks us to do something He didn't do first. He turned the other cheek and prayed for His enemies. And, He is not merely a good example for us to follow. He shares with us His Spirit who enables us and empowers us to obey all that He has instructed.

When we are slandered, we can find encouragement in the realization that there are people who are way better than us who have been treated way worse than us! We find encouragement from being surrounded by other heroes of faith (Hebrews 11) who withstood the tests and made it through.

Is there ever a time when we should respond to slander or defend ourselves? In general, as followers of Christ, we are not to be self-protective. But when the gospel is at stake or the well-being of the church, we can and should speak out. So we can defend the message if it is being maligned, and we ought to challenge divisiveness that can destroy the church when we find it within the body of believers.

In 5 minutes or less, briefly give a synopsis of this week's sermon. What insight, principle, or observation from this weekend's message did you find to be most helpful, eye-opening, or troubling? Explain.

GETTING THE CONVERSATION STARTED

These questions can be used as ice-breakers in the beginning OR interwoven between the questions below to draw the group into the discussion.

1. What did you find most interesting, most challenging or most encouraging about this week's sermon?
2. This week's sermon will hit home with most of us because there is hardly anyone who has not been the victim of slander. Take a few moments to share personal experiences—especially those that are fresh—from the past few weeks or months.
3. What did you find most helpful in this weekend's message? Was there anything that surprised you—that you had never thought of before?



SCRIPTURE STUDY

Context: This is perhaps Jesus' best-known parable. We find it only in Luke's gospel, although Matthew and Mark have similar interactions between Jesus and a religious leader about the greatest commandment. Luke is the only non-Jewish author in the entire bible and he's particularly concerned about the inclusion of outsiders (Gentiles, the "unclean" such as lepers, women) in the kingdom of God—a theme we find in both his gospel and Acts. Luke places this parable in the middle of Jesus' ministry, immediately following the sending out of the seventy-two on a ministry/mission trip, but it can stand alone as a teaching. Parables are stories from every day life that are intended to illustrate spiritual truths. Each parable has one main point or one major theme. In other words, every detail of the parable is not meant to symbolize something. The "expert in the law" is most likely not a Pharisee (part of the Jewish sect that emphasized adherence to the minutia of the law—Jesus regularly had conflicts with the Pharisees). This man is a scholar, maybe even a scribe, whose job it was to copy the scriptures. He would have been quite familiar with the content of the bible. Samaritans were half-breeds, descended from intermarriage between Jews and Assyrians around the time of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. . They held to only parts of the law (Hebrew bible) and did not worship or sacrifice at the Jerusalem temple. Samaritans were considered *enemies* of the Jewish people. They were not simply from a different culture or race—there was deep animosity and hatred between these two groups from a long history of conflict.

Read Luke 10:25-37

25 *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

26 *"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"*

27 *He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

28 *"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

29 *But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*

30 *In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. **31** A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. **32** So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. **34** He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

36 *"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands*



of robbers?"

37 *The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."*

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

1. Describe the occasion for this parable. Why does Jesus share it? (What is the basic question Jesus is responding to?)
2. From this passage, what are some things we learn about this "expert in the law?" In other words, what kind of a person is he?
3. Describe the story (parable) Jesus shares. Who are the characters in it and what is significant about each of them? Why do you think Jesus chose to include each one in His parable?
4. We aren't told who the victim of the robbery is. Why do you think Jesus does not specify when he does with all the other characters in this parable?
5. What is the main point or theme of this parable? Put it in your own words.
6. How does the expert in the law answer Jesus question in verse 36? What does his answer reveal about him?
7. Take some time to retell this parable in a contemporary context. In what ways does this help to underline the main theme for you/your group?

MINISTRY APPLICATION

Below you'll see some options for ministry time with your group. We always encourage you to reserve time in your group to pray for one another and wait on the Holy Spirit.

1. Ask the group if they have anyone in their lives they would consider an "enemy." It could be an ex-spouse, or a boss, a neighbor, even an abusive parent. Allow some time for the group to reflect silently about this and for the Holy Spirit to bring things to everyone's mind.
2. Then ask the group to share (as honestly as they can) how this enemy makes them feel.
3. Based on the sermon and bible study, have people share how they believe Jesus wants them to relate to their enemy. What are some specific things they should do or stop doing? What are specific things that will help them deal with negative heart attitudes (e.g. how can they pray for this enemy)?
4. Take time to pray for those who are currently dealing with slander in their lives—at work, in the families, etc. Also take time to pray for those who are struggling with an "enemy"

