

## A Letter to the Church at Providence in 2023 Part 8

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*Letter to Providence Church*

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**Preached on:** Sunday, November 19, 2023

### **Providence Church**

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Turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 4, verse 29 to 32. Two weeks ago, I began to unpack this passage and use it as a point of departure for application. Ephesians 4:29-32, and under the title, "The Vital Importance of Redeeming Our Words." The Vital Importance of Redeeming Our Words. I want to mention, next Sunday I'm planning to be back in 1 Peter, chapter 3 verse 8, where we'll pick up. We stopped at 3 verse 7 a couple months ago and we departed into this series of messages on issues, questions that have been asked or burdens that we have pastorally for you and so we wanted to talk today about this last area, continue to talk about the importance of redeeming our words. The vital importance of redeeming our words. This is part three. So two Sundays ago we began last Sunday if you recall, I told you last Sunday that I would be preaching last Sunday about the vital importance of redeeming our words to one another, and at this Sunday, I would be sharing about the vital importance of redeeming our words spoken about one another. So, as I promised last Sunday, that's the topic for this morning, the vital importance of redeeming our words about one another and we're going to see that the Scripture has a lot to say about this. The Lord, as we see in Ephesians 4, he's greatly concerned about the things that come out of our mouths. He takes these things very seriously and we'll see that in our passage and then also in a number of other places we're going to look this morning.

So let's read together Ephesians 4:29 to 32.

29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, as we come to You this morning, we come praising You indeed with thankful hearts. Lord, we have so much to be thankful for, and even the world in this season pauses to give thanks, though they don't know You and, Lord, for those of us who do*

*know You, how good and right it is for us to always be thankful, always giving thanks for this is the will of Christ Jesus concerning You. We pray, Lord, as we come to Your word we know that we need to have our hearts open so give us ears to hear, eyes to see, hearts to really receive Your word, the implanted word which is able to save our souls, transform us by the renewing of our minds and make us more and more like our Savior. Make us speak words of life and edification for the glory of Jesus. We pray in His name, amen*

So the vital importance of redeeming our words. That's really the main theme of this passage, if you look at it. He says we are to stop letting unwholesome words come out of your mouth. Those are words which spread putrefaction, words of rottenness, words that promote death, words that tear down and you're to replace them with words that edify and build up. This passage is built upon the foundation of something he said earlier in verses 22 to 24. He says and Paul helping us to know what our calling is in the Christian life, he says in Ephesians 4:22, "that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Lay aside the old nature, put on the new nature through union with Christ. The believer has been united to Jesus Christ. If you have repented and placed your faith in Christ, you have entered into Christ himself. You're united to Jesus, and therefore the path of righteousness is not through a legalistic adherence to rules, though the law of God is essential for us to know how to live, but the law shows us where we need to change, and then Christ is the means and power to change. And we do that on a daily basis. He says here, laying aside the old self and putting on who we are in Christ, being renewed in the spirit of our mind in the middle, and putting on who we are in Christ. And what happens there then in verse 25, look how it flows out of that, "Therefore, based on what I've just said, Paul says, "laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor. You see lay aside falsehood, speak truth. Be angry, don't sin, don't give the devil an opportunity. Look at verse 28, "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good." See lay aside stealing, put on giving, working so that you can give. This is the beauty of what Christ does. He takes that which formerly was natural to us, still feels in many ways because of remaining sin, still feels natural, lay it aside through the death of Christ and put on a different way of living through the power of union with Christ. And that's where then verses 29 to 32, he says, in the same way, lay aside unwholesome speech and put on words that edify and build up.

So we're to redeem our words, the vital importance of redeeming our words. He speaks about the heart. We talked about the problem with our words. We talked about the power of our words two Sundays ago. We talked about replacing our words, and last week we talked about speaking words, replacing words that we speak to one another and I told you last week, this week we would talk about replacing words we speak about one another. We speak to one another about a third party. We say something to this person about that person. Redeem those words. The Bible has a lot to say about that. In fact, one of the phrases, the words, key words in this passage, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you." The first thing we're going to talk about,

we're going to talk about two couplets. There's basically two main points and my sub points are not as well laid out. So you've just got to follow two main points. We're going to go a lot of different places. So the two main points, let's lay aside, first point, gossip and slander. Second point is going to be grumbling and complaining. These are ways the New Testament and the Old Testament speak about things that we tend to do with our tongues, where we're speaking about others that tear down and bring, promote, destructiveness rather than constructive, edifying speech. That doesn't mean that we're not supposed to speak the truth. No, we're supposed to speak the truth in love. He's just said that earlier in chapter 4 verse 15. The way that we grow is by being reprovved and rebuked, and the Lord blesses us by putting Christians around us who will tell us the truth. We desperately need to hear the truth, every one of us. We need to be confronted where we are off, and if we don't have that, we're in trouble, that's why the God's put us in a body. So we have to speak the truth but still, we have to use those words in the right way.

So last Sunday we talked about that. This Sunday now, not just how to speak to one another, but how we speak about one another and the first key phrase here, or the word I want to mention, is the word slander. So we're talking about gossip and slander. Here's the first point, gossip and slander, introduced with this key word, slander. These are two words that are used throughout the Old and New Testament together, closely. In fact, you'll see if you carefully look like you do word studies when you're studying a passage and you look up what the word means behind it, or you compare translations, you'll often find that a translation will use the word slander, nother translation might use the word gossip, the two sides of one coin, really. And so, we're going to look at that today.

Slander is essentially, well, this particular word here is the word actually the Greek word blasphemia. So he's saying let all slander be put away from you, blasphemia. You can hear the word blasphemy in that. It's a common word in the New Testament. This is speech which injures another person's reputation, speech which injures another person's reputation, words which detract from another person's good name. Proverbs 22:1 says that a good name is to be desired above all riches, and words of slander attack a person's good name. So this is what the word slander means and the word blasphemy is a word we're more familiar, it's used of people attacking the name of God. That's how we normally think of the word blasphemy. We don't think about blaspheming each other, do we? That's what the word, actually the literal Greek word, we translate it slander but blasphemy is when someone says something that dishonors the good name of God. They slander God. So it's the same idea, but we're talking now on the horizontal about how we speak in ways that detract from a brother's or sister's good name.

Now you see a lot of different words in the Scriptures. The first place that I really find, other than what Satan says about God in Genesis 3, the first place you really find a slander happening interestingly enough, is in Genesis 37, where Joseph brings back a bad report about his brothers. The text says a bad report. Some translations say an evil report. Now, he may or may not have been right, but he probably was at least enjoying it a little too much to tell his dad, "Man, those brothers of mine, they're a problem." And so he brings back an evil report. The same word translated bad report in Genesis 37 is also in

Numbers 13:14, talks about the spies brought back an evil report about the land of Canaan. But the first passage that you really find really dealing with slander in detail is Leviticus 19.

So turn with me to Leviticus 19. Some of you will recognize Leviticus 19 as the location for the second great commandment. Remember Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment and I think they were probably expecting one of the 10 Commandments, you know, first commandment, second commandment, and he says, he didn't pick one of the 10, he says the greatest commandment and he quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment." But then he gave them a bonus. They didn't ask the second commandment, but he gives them the second, the second is likened to it. It flows from it. If you are loving God with all your heart and soul and mind, the second will be natural, you will love your neighbor as yourself. One of the reasons we see this so clearly as we read through the New Testament is how does God want us to express our love for him? Jesus said it, "As I have loved you, love one another." When you and I love one another, we are loving Jesus, we are loving God. And so, but this is the location. He quotes from Deuteronomy 6:4, the first commandment, and he quotes from Leviticus 19:18, the second great commandment, love your neighbor as yourself. Look at the context of that great commandment. Let's begin reading at verse 16. Well, let's start verse 15. "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people," there's that word, slanderer among your people, "and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD. You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD." God says, "Listen, I am the Lord. This is how you are to live with one another. You shall not act, go about as a slander among your people."

It's really interesting the language here in the Hebrew. He basically uses a phrase, the verb, "you shall not go about" speaks of going here and there but the word slander actually is an interesting word too. It actually kind of means the same thing, going here and there. It's actually a word that would be well translated trafficker of merchandise. So he's like you shall not go about as a trafficker of merchandise but what is the merchandise that you're trafficking in, it's in slander about your neighbor. You shall not go about trafficking in slander about your neighbor. This is the idea. So it has the idea really the emphasis here is on trafficking more than even what you're saying but clearly the context shows you that this is a person who's, this is why they translate it a slanderer because you're trafficking in information that defames, that diminishes how someone sees someone else. In fact, Lou Priolo has a very helpful comment in his book on deception. He has a section on the importance of slander, and he defines what used to be called the sin of detraction, something that the Puritans talked about, the sin of detraction. So this is what Lou Priolo says. Now listen to this, this is the flip side of it because in the text what we saw is that to go about as a slanderer among your people is very closely akin to acting against the life of your brother. Literally in the Hebrew act against the blood of your

brother. You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart. You must reprove him. You shall reprove him. You're able to reprove him. So when you see a need don't stew on it and hate him for it, but speak to him about it. Reprove him, that's love.

You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the son of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. This is what Priolo says about detraction, defamation, slander. "We have a vital responsibility to watch out for and protect the good reputation of others. That's what love does. It rejoices in the truth. Have you ever heard of the sin of detraction? It's an archaic term meaning to speak ill of or belittle someone. The idea behind the word is that of taking away from or reducing the value of something. When you slander someone, you are taking away from the honor and good reputation of that person. You're reducing the value of his good name. This is one of the most hurtful things you can do to another person. You know how much it hurts because it's been done to you probably more than once. So he's saying that detraction, that's the idea of slander. It is to call someone to be thought less of by others and the idea is unjustly or unnecessarily.

Now slander can be, often is based on lies or inaccuracies. It can even mean the truth, though. You can say the truth about someone who doesn't need to know the truth about someone in a way that demeans and diminishes them unnecessarily. You know, it's like airing dirty laundry. We don't want to share our dirty laundry with other people, do we? That's stuff we keep private in the home and sometimes within the home, we don't like to share our dirty laundry with each other so much. Well, so slander can be, it's about the heart. Am I trying to diminish someone or am I doing what the Scripture says, love them by protecting their good name? This is how we're to think about one another.

Now, when I felt led to speak on this, this issue of how we use our words, I know that I struggle with these things and I know that we all do and I know this is one thing that we don't think that we struggle with. In 30 years of ministry, I don't think I've ever had anyone, I can't remember, if you came to me and you can correct me on this, please tell me, I don't think I've ever, anyone has never said, no one has ever said to me, "I have a problem with gossip, would you please help me?" Never, in 30 years, isn't that amazing? I've never had someone say, "I have a problem with slander, would you please help me?" In fact, if I was to list my number one problems, I wouldn't list those. But you know what we have to do is let the perfect law of liberty come up and look at ourselves against God's holy word and sometimes we see that things aren't quite like we thought they were. Right? There's stuff in our hearts that's not the way it needs to be.

So let's continue to look at this, the idea of slander and closely akin to gossip, because as we go through some of the Old Testament verses where that same word is used, in fact, turn with me to Proverbs 11. This is the Hebrew word, trafficker is the Hebrew word, rakil, and it's used twice in Proverbs and here you get the idea of the connection again with slander and gossip. Hebrews 11, I mean, I'm sorry, Proverbs 11:13. "He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter." That word, talebearer, is the same word, rakil, that we read earlier, slanderer, from Leviticus 19. Here it's translated talebearer, someone who traffics in information. An informant is a

way that this could be translated. You're informing about bad news. You're sharing a bad report.

Turn with me to chapter 20. I'll show you another place the same word is used. We're going to be in Proverbs here for a little while, so just hold your place there. Proverbs 20 verse 19. The same first part of the clause is identical to 11:13, the second part's different. "He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip." So it's really clear from those two verses, repeated twice in the Proverbs, that he who goes about as a trafficker in information reveals secrets and here the warning is, don't associate with a gossip. That word gossip's translated differently other places and other other translations. It's a word which literally means loose lips. It has the idea of simpleness too about it. One translation, the ESV says simple in the way it describes this word, simple babbler. Don't associate with a simple babbler, stuff just coming out of his mouth, and he's simple and there's a connotation about that with this Hebrew word that the idea is this person doesn't know what he's doing. Just sharing stuff, and he doesn't realize that the damage that he's doing.

So that's this key word, rakil. Now another word that we find in the Proverbs translated with gossip or with slander related to it, we see in chapter 16 and verse 28, same concept of slander and gossip. "A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends." Now here is a word, it's not the same word, rakil, before which meant trafficker. This is the word nirgan which means murmur or to whisper. In fact, some translations say a whisperer when they translate this word. A perverse man spreads strife and a slanderer separates intimate friends, that is a murmurer. The idea is you're saying something quietly. When do you speak quietly? When you don't want other people to hear what you're saying. The idea is you're saying something about a person that you would likely not say to them, but you say it about them.

So this is the idea of this word, and it's used four different times in the Proverbs. In fact, turn over to 18:8, This shows how tempting this sin is and how blind we are to it. This same identical Proverb is repeated twice in the Proverbs. Proverbs 18:8, "The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body." The words of a whisperer, the murmur or the whisperer, are like dainty morsels. They go down into the innermost parts of the body. The dainty morsels translates a phrase which means to gulp down greedily. The idea behind that word is it's something you put in your mouth and it's so good you just swallow it quickly. You know how there's some food that you so look forward to and then it's like over so quickly, your meal, right? You can relate like sometimes it's something you're looking forward to so much and we should slow down and savor, like hey this is a great opportunity to make application this week on Thursday, slow down and savor, right? I'm saying that to myself but you find something and it's so good and just suddenly it's gone. This is what he's saying, that the words of a whisperer are like that. There's something about our sin nature that delights in receiving bad news about others. It's a part, I think, of just the essence of sin in us. I mean, think about Satan. He is the accuser. He is the Diablos, the one who insults and tears down and so, sin is his birth. He birthed it, and we have in us some of that wiring. That's what Proverbs 18:8 is saying.

Now turn over to 26, and you see the exact same proverb in verse 22, and then there's another verse right beside it where the same word is used, *nirgan* again. Verse 22, "The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body." When a proverb is repeated word for word twice, you know it's important. God doesn't make any mistakes. It's not like the Lord is sitting in heaven saying, "Uh-oh, I already had that in there, I forgot." You know, you're going through Proverbs, it's so easy to just repeat one. Clearly, that's not how the Lord does anything. He has it there because he knows we need to hear it more than once. The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, they go down to the innermost parts of the body.

Look at verse 20 though, same word *whisperer* there, 26:20. "For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down." What he's saying is if we will just learn not to spread what others may or what we may be tempted to spread, what happens is contention, conflict, negativity dies down. It's the repeating of it that continues to stoke the fire of discontent and negativity and all the kinds of ugliness and division and strife that come from it.

How does God feel about this? You know, he makes it real clear. Since we're in Proverbs. Let's go one more place, chapter 6, verses 16 to 19. We saw that the second great commandment is right there in the context of it's the opposite of slander, right, to love others and protect their good reputation. Look how God feels about gossip and slander. This is the six things the Lord hates, seven things which are an abomination to him in Proverbs 6:16. Listen to the seven things he lists and think about how much of it relates to gossip and slander. "There are six things," Proverbs 6:16, "There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers." So gossip and slander are spreading strife, and so often they're lies, and they're told from haughty eyes. Feet that run rapidly to evil sounds just like that hurrying to hear the gossip. And the Lord feels strongly about these things.

He hates these things. In fact, go back to Ephesians 4 when he says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you," what was the verse right before that? He said, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth," that is a word which brings putrification, "but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." We grieve the Spirit when we act in wrath, in anger, gossip, slander. God wants us to be one, even as he is one. That's what Jesus prayed for. Look at John 17, not now, but just later, just a homework assignment. Read John 17 and hear Jesus' heart, how he prays that "they may be one even as We are one. I in You, You in me, may they be one as We are one." That's his heartbeat right before the cross, our oneness in unity.

Now I want to point out that we mentioned that sometimes there's inaccuracies and one of the problems we have is that we often spread things that are unsubstantiated, in fact,

Priolo writes again, "When unsubstantiated suspicions are verbalized," listen to this, "When unsubstantiated suspicions are verbalized to others, seeds of doubt and distrust can be planted, especially in naive and unsuspecting minds." So we have something we think, we've seen some information, we've got some data, and we are prone to draw a conclusion from that and then, or we may receive something from somebody else, they had some data, but it wasn't substantiated. They passed it along to us, it was negative, seeds of doubt planted, then you spread it, and what's happening is really potentially lies are being spread under the guise of truth. And listen, one of the ways that we need to just be really frank and honest, one of the ways that we can gossip is we can spiritualize it and call it a prayer request. "Hey, you really need to pray for So-and-so. Have you heard what's going on with them?" Well, if you know what's going on with them, you need to pray, but you don't need to spread the negativity, right? We don't need to do that. We need to just pray or we need to go to So-and-so and talk to them and see how we can minister directly to them.

Now, Proverbs 18:13, and 17 are important verses. I mentioned 18:13 last time because of the importance of listening. Proverbs 18:13, "He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him." One of the things we have to remember is we're prone to overestimate our conclusions. We draw conclusions on inadequate data and think we have judged rightly. We way overestimate our abilities. The humble keeps asking. He waits until he's heard. In fact, he's so sure that he's going to hear and understand before he speaks so that he doesn't give an answer because that's folly and shame.

But look at verse 17. Here's another place that we find ourselves possibly trafficking in lies. "The first to plead his case seems right, Until another comes and examines him." How many times have you heard one side, this is something as a pastor through the years, I talk to one, particularly this happens in marriage, right? You talk to the man, he gives you a perspective, or you talk to the wife, she gives a perspective, and you hear that, and you're like, "Wow, I don't know how you live with that guy, or I don't know how you live with that woman." I don't actually say that, of course. That's not very good counsel. That'd be terrible counsel. But you know, you're hearing one side and what have you heard when you're done? You've heard one side. You don't know. When you've heard both sides, you still don't know the way God knows. God's the judge, we're not. But we should definitely make sure we hear both sides and a lot is done, a lot of damage has been done because one side's been heard, and then we draw a conclusion, make a determination, and then act on it, and then even spread it.

This is something, I think, is especially difficult for us because in our day, I mean we live in a culture, we're surrounded by people, media has changed so much in the last 30 years, hasn't it? I mean, it's always been bad. I remember hearing a joke years ago, how bad media folks can be. If you're in the media, I'm sorry. You're probably a shining light in the midst of a black, dark...no, I'm just kidding. But you're hopefully a shining light if you are in that. But have you heard the saying, "Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you enjoy the play?" Okay, those of you may have to tell somebody else what I meant by that. But anyway, so Abraham Lincoln was killed at a play, his wife, other than, "Hey, we want to get, what's your reaction to the play?" Okay, all right. Not good when you have to



explain a joke, that's bad. Okay. But we are prone to miss what's important and so in the media today is in such a rush to be first that they don't verify anything. So they go out and report things, and they're totally, completely wrong and it does such great damage. And we live in a culture where they also report on just the charge. They make, you know, a mountain out of the fact somebody's been accused of a crime. He's not been tried. He's just been accused. How many people today's lives and livelihoods and families have been destroyed by false accusations? You think about that. People in my mind come to mind right now. You know, a baseball player here, a football player, there are people that I see in public life, politicians. Now many of them have done what they are accused of but they still deserve their day in court before we draw conclusions about that. But some are completely innocent, someone just wanted to ruin their life accuses them of some misconduct and their lives are destroyed.

You know what's interesting is that's not something that's just new to this day. I found a quote from Jonathan Swift that he wrote in 1710 in an article. Great literary hero, British literature, Jonathan Swift. Listen to what he said back in 1710. "Besides as the vilest writer has his readers," now think in terms of old English with me for a little bit, right? "As the vilest writer has his readers," because no matter how bad the writer they're going to have people that read them, "As the vilest writer has his reader so the greatest liar has his believers and it often happens that if a lie be believed only for an hour, it has done its work and there is no farther occasion for it. Falsehood flies and the truth comes limping slowly after it so that when men come to be undeceived about the lie they've heard, it is too late. The jest is over and the tale has had its effect." How true that is. Falsehood flies because this is the world of darkness. Satan is the god of this age. He's a liar and the father of lies and the one place that ought not be true is in the church of Jesus Christ. We should hate falsehood. Psalm 101 verse 5, David says the one who slanders his brother, I'm not quoting it perfectly, the one who slanders his brother I will destroy. David says that, showing the heart of God. We need to rebuke each other. You hear me slandering, rebuke me, reprove me. It's too important.

But we are prone to make those judgments. We make premature judgments without enough information, and we think we know what we're talking about, and so we conclude that we're right, and we speak. James 4:11, and 12. I mentioned James last week because he talks so much about the tongue. Chapter 3 is an incredible chapter. Chapter 4 verses 1 to 10 are incredible. He keeps talking about the tongue. James 4:11, and 12, he's speaking about kind of slanderous judgments. He says, "Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?" James says, "Listen, if we take the role of judge, we are taking the role that belongs only to God."

Now, there's a balancing truth. In fact, Leviticus 16 said, you are to judge fairly your neighbor and when Matthew, this is why Scripture has to interpret Scripture, the principle of the analogy of faith, that is, the clear verses help us understand the less clear verses, and there's balancing truths that have to be brought together so we see exactly what God

is saying. So what God is saying is that we do need to carefully evaluate. When we see a spiritual need in a brother or sister's life, we need to make sure we carefully investigate and we judge what we can see correctly but there's a humility about even what we conclude. Why? Because you and I are not God. No matter how well I think I've thought it through, how well you think you've thought it through, we haven't thought it through to the perfection. We don't really know. We know what we see and what we have interpreted, but we know that God sees the heart and so based on what we see though, if we try to see it accurately, hear both sides, we are to try to judge fairly and speak the truth compassionately but clearly but we are not to presume to be judge. And he's saying here, we all have a tendency to make judgments about others when we should worry about doing God's will ourselves. He says you become a judge of the law rather than a doer of the law. That's what happens to you and me. We're supposed to be doers, not judges.

Now, four questions that help us decide if something might be better left unsaid. The first is will what I'm about to say, if I'm thinking about saying something to another brother or sister about a third person, so I'm talking to this person about, I'm thinking about now saying something about this person over here. Here's the first question, will what I'm about to say detract from that person's reputation? In other words, will what I say tend to lower this person's esteem and honor and value of this other person? First question. That's not the only question because sometimes we have to say things that are going to do that, but it's a good place to start. Second question, am I even sure what I'm saying is true? Have the facts been verified or is this an unsubstantiated suspicion? Number three, and this is a very important question, does the person to whom I'm speaking have a biblical responsibility to know this? If they don't, why am I telling them? A way of thinking about that, t biblical responsibility to know this, are they really a part of the solution to this need that I see? Because the prayer request, like I said before, you can pray for somebody without praying for, without being specific about the problem is and not demeaning someone by telling it, right? We can do that. And number four, so I said, will I, what I'm about to say detract from their reputation, that was number one. Am I sure what I'm saying is even true, number two. Number three, does the person to whom I speak have a biblical responsibility to know this? And number four, am I willing right now to go directly to the person that I have this concern about and say exactly what I'm going to say to this person to them directly? That is, instead of talking about someone, whispering to someone about someone, am I willing to take exactly what I'm going to say and say to the person that I said it about, "This is what I shared with this other brother?" If you can answer those four questions correctly, then you have a pretty good idea that maybe you're okay in sharing it but if you have to say no to these questions, then it's gossip. It's slander.

Now, so I said watch out for the prayer requests, watch out about how many people you ask for counsel about a problem. You want to keep the circle small. It's appropriate to ask someone who's more mature about a problem with someone else over here but hey, wherever possible, don't use names. "I have a conflict with a brother, would you help me? He said this, I said this, this is what happened." A brother, right? Or a sister. Now sometimes it's obvious. "I have a problem with the person who lives in my house that I've been married to. I'm not going to say her name." But really we can protect the reputation

of people with just some thoughtful loving intentions, right? Just we want to help, we want to be a blessing and so this is where we have to pray, this we have to put off the old man that would be careless, thoughtless, unkind, enjoy gossip, and put that off. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind through the word of God, union with Christ, "Jesus, You help me. You always spoke words of grace." Even when he spoke hard words, they were words that were gracious because the person needed to have the hard word spoken. "So You live through me and help me put on now words that are blessing."

Now, grumbling and complaining, that's gossip and slander. We'll spend less time on grumbling and complaining. It's really closely related and let's go to the New Testament. You're in James, turn to Philippians. Back in front of Colossians, between Colossians and Ephesians, Philippians 2:14 to 16. This is in a passage where Paul's really burdened about the oneness of mind of the believers in Philippi. He begins this chapter with, you know, urging them to have the same mind, verse 2, chapter 2:2, "the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind, regard one other as more important than yourselves. Don't look out for your own interests, but also the interests of others. Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Be like Jesus And then he says after he said all that, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing," so that, this is verse 14, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain." He says, listen, it's so important to put away grumbling and complaining. It makes you shine in the midst of a dark world. The whole world is grumbling and complaining. The one group of people who shouldn't be grumbling and complaining are the redeemed saints that are heading for heaven.

What do we have to complain about really? We know that whatever happens in our lives, I mean the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ Jesus. No matter what suffering you're going through, Romans 8:32 says that if God did not spare his own Son, if God did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how will he not together with him freely give us all things? That is saying that God, he's argued from the greater the lesser, if God gave Christ to you, he will only give you good things for the rest of eternity. This means we go through suffering. We end up in situations where we're going through painful circumstances. Guess what? That's the most wonderful thing that could be happening to me right now. I have a friend who said, I shared this in the profile class today, that he was dealing with a particularly difficult situation with a deacon in his church, and the Lord had convicted him and basically, this is what the Lord, he felt like the Lord was saying to him, is like, you know, Deacon Smith is an expression of how greatly I love you. And he was thinking, man, please stop loving me. No, not really. But seriously, the Lord brings adversity to make us like Jesus. It's from his hand of love. If that's the case, in everything we give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Always being thankful for all things. It only makes sense because of the providence of God. The Christian is the most thankful, most joyful person. Think about the fruit of the Spirit. What's the fruit, the main fruit of the Spirit? Love. What's second?

Joy. Joy, that's right. Love, joy. So, we're supposed to be joyful people. We're not supposed to be grumbling and complaining.

This word grumbling here, translated in chapter 2 verse 14, I'm reading the New American Standard, is a Greek word which means to mutter, to mumble. It speaks of quiet displeasure not openly avowed. That's what the word study book says, quiet displeasure not openly avowed. I have displeasure in my heart and I'm grumbling inside and it's actually coming out. I'm muttering. You know, isn't that something that's just so natural to us? I know for me, I mean, you know, now, I was in the grocery store yesterday, and a lady was talking to herself, like you see often, very loudly in the... anyway, the frozen food area. And I was, of course, I knew she was on the phone, but she's sitting there talking, so it was very loud. And, you know, used to be, we knew people were crazy if they were doing that. Now we just know they're on the phone, or we don't know. They're probably on the phone. They could be crazy. Is there something in their ear? Anyway, so, but you know, I know that I often find myself kind of muttering, you know, especially if I'm doing a project around the house. It's taking longer than it should have. I'm making my fourth trip to Home Depot. Thankfully Home Depot is only a couple of miles away from my house, but still four times so I'm just, "I can't believe that." You know, just kind of muttering. Mutter, this is the idea, this is the word.

Now he's talking about an attitude of heart that sees the negative and dwells on the negative, grumbling, and this word disputing, it's an interesting word too. It's actually a word and this is the the the lexical definition, the thoughts of a man, listen to this, this is the word disputing. Don't grumble, don't mutter and mumble. That's grumbling and don't dispute. Do all things without these. Leave these things out. Disputing, this is the definition: the thoughts of a man deliberating with himself, almost always negative in the New Testament. This is a word translated evil thoughts in Matthew 7. I'm sorry, Matthew 15, Mark 7, evil thoughts come out of the heart. This is the word, a disputing or arguing in your heart. Think about that. When we we we are thinking about how bad something is, how upset we are about something, what somebody's done to us and we reason through it in our hearts. This is what he's saying. Do all things without grumbling or disputing. Don't spend your time thinking and rehearsing and arguing with yourself about how wrong someone else has been to you. And if you stop this, if you do all things without that, then you prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent children of God, above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you appear as lights in the world. You shine when you leave aside grumbling and complaining. This is what God is calling us to.

Paul writes this, this is his letter of joy. It's interesting to me, he writes this in his letter of joy, which was written from prison. Paul's in prison and the Philippians is called, it's recognized basically universally by Bible scholars as a letter of joy. Rejoice, rejoice, joy all over the place. He's saying, listen, you are joyful people, leave aside, leave away grumbling and complaining because grumbling and complaining have a progressive and growing tendency in the heart. It's like a malignancy in the soul. Grumbling and complaining only gets worse, and it does that in the church. In fact, an interesting word study, this word goggusmon, that means grumbling, translated grumbling in the Greek

New Testament, occurs throughout Exodus and Numbers in the Greek Old Testament. Remember the Hebrew Old Testament is the original, but they translated the Hebrew into Greek in the Septuagint, and the word that is used when you read back into Exodus 16, 15, 16, 17, about them grumbling, remember the people grumbled? First of all, in Exodus 16, they come out of the Promised Land, they got no food, and it says they grumbled against Moses. One of the things about grumbling is we tend to grumble against those who are in authority over us. This is what they do, they grumble against Moses, and he tells them, "Listen, you're not grumbling against me, you're grumbling against God," and that's how the Lord sees it. We're grumbling because as we saw in 1 Peter, what's the theme of 1 Peter that we've seen in that section? Be submissive to authority and grumbling is kind of a resistance and resentment about being under authority.

But you read Exodus 16 verse 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, this word comes, they were hungry and so they grumbled. God gives them bread out of heaven. You think that, I mean, think about that. Can you imagine what it was like to wonder, I mean, they were probably two or three million people coming out of Egypt, and they have some stuff they probably brought with them, but it goes pretty quickly. You pack a lunch, and you're going out into the desert, into the wilderness. Food is gone quickly, and they're hungry. But what do they do? They don't say, "Hey, Moses, what are we gonna do? You must have a plan. Surely God didn't bring us out here to kill us." They don't say that. They don't have eyes of faith. They have eyes of grumbling. They say, "Why did you bring us out here to kill us in the wilderness?" They just saw the 10 plagues. They just saw the Red Sea open, and the whole Egyptian army killed, and they don't think God's going to take care of them. They grumble.

He gives them bread out of heaven. Now you would think, okay, the grumbling's over, right? I mean, he's got it under control. He's feeding us out of heaven. Next chapter, chapter 17, they run out of water. It's not, "Well, the Lord's got this under control. He gave us bread. I'm sure he's going to take care of this." No, no, no. "Moses, why did you bring us out here to kill us?" They grumble against God again. God brings them water out of the rock.

The narrative, it kind of slows down. They're at Sinai for a while, so not a lot happens. They're getting bread out of heaven, they have water supply, but then when they get on the move again in Numbers, it picks up in chapter 13 and 14. You know what they're doing? They're grumbling when they're ready to go into the Promised Land. In fact, it actually starts in Numbers chapter 11. I forgot about that. Chapter 11, they're grumbling about the bread. They're tired of manna coming out of heaven. Every day, God makes food fall from the sky, and they're like, "We're sick of this." They grumble. It's a miracle, but it's gotten old. So God gives them quail. Remember that? He says, "You want some meat? I'll give you meat." That's Numbers 11. Chapter 12, Miriam grumbles against Moses. Chapter 14, they grumble because of the bad... they received that evil report, remember? And what did they do? They grumbled against God. They murmured against God. Chapter 16, chapter 17, chapter 20, grumble, grumble, grumble. And you know what the Scripture says about those people? 1 Corinthians 10 talks about this, their ungodliness, their wickedness, Hebrews chapter 3 and 4, for them, their grumbling

resulted in them coming short of God's kingdom. If our lives are characterized by this and we don't repent and allow God to transform us, it may show that we're not elect. Read Hebrews 3. That's the whole point of Hebrews 3 and 4, or one of the main points, searching to see if you're truly saved and see the evidence of it.

And so we need to put these things off. These are very natural for us, though, aren't they? It's so easy. It is so easy to grumble and complain but remember, if we see it correctly, everything that they grumbled about, everything they grumbled about was because God put them in a position where they did not have the resources to meet the situation. Read it, all those passages I mentioned. They didn't have bread. They didn't have water. They didn't have meat. They knew they didn't have the ability to take the Promised Land in and of their own strength. They did not. They were right about that. They had no business taking the Promised Land in their own strength. But what was God saying? "You don't have the resources. I am. I am the great I am."

Paul picks up on this in 1 Corinthians 10, he says, what God wants us to know is that we need Jesus every moment of every day. You need Jesus to cover your sins, to make you able to stand in the presence of God. You cannot stand. I don't care how good your life is. The Scripture says it's like filthy rags in God's sight. You hold up the law of God, we all are hopeless. But Jesus Christ has done everything necessary to make you and I clean forever in the presence of God, his perfect life. He gives you his righteousness. He takes your sin. He takes it away, nails it to the cross. He rose again to prove that he is a great Savior. He makes you his. And then he wants the rest of our lives, sanctification is learning how you and I do, listen to this, you and I do not have the resources for today. Christ is our only hope. We need to live like they did. We need manna. We need water from a rock. We need God to continually supply all of our needs. And praise God, in Philippians chapter 4 he says, "I praise my God who will supply all of your needs according to the riches and glory in Christ." You know that, what have we got, what have we got to grumble about? We find ourselves in a situation where we are at the end of our resources, that's great news. Now you can see the glory of God at work in your life. Jesus is able.

Paul says 1 Corinthians 10, he's talking about this when they were grumbling, and he says, listen, the rock that went with them was Christ and the water that came out of the rock was Christ, he says. It was a type of Christ. The rock, what happened? Moses struck it with a rod and it poured forth water because God struck Christ. He pours forth life. That's the gospel. And he wants you and me to learn how to live in that every day. And he will redeem our words. He will help us put off negativity, grumbling, complaining, help us put off gossip and slander. He'll help us protect and love our brothers and sisters because he loves them so much more than we do, and he will love them through us. And he will help us build up and edify and encourage. And yes, there will be times where we have to go and say hard things to our brothers and sisters and praise God for those moments, and you and I need to welcome that kind of correction, don't we? We so need it. And it's such a loving thing when people do bring correction to us. Praise God for that. But we have to learn in the midst of all of that to also walk in accordance and obedience to his word because we are so prone to miss one side or the other of the straight and

narrow. We need Christ every moment, the Spirit helping us every step of the way to walk as he would have us walk. And he will do great things. He will build up our body and when it's done and the more that it happens, the more glory he gets and the more you and I get to say it's all Jesus. Whatever you see in me, whatever, this is what we say, "Whatever you see in me that is good is Jesus."

Let's go to lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we praise and glorify Your name. You are so good. We thank You that You are God who speaks and You made us to be people in Your image who speak, that our words, as we saw previously, have great power because You made them that way, power to destroy or power to build up. We want to be like You, Lord. We want to be words, to speak words that build up. You know our hearts. You know our lives. You see every idle word. You see every idle thought. We hold ourselves up against the standard of Your holy law. We see that we come so far short and we say as we said earlier in the service, have mercy on me, the sinner. Be propitiated toward me, the sinner. Look at the sacrifice, Lord, and have mercy on me. And we rejoice that that is Your plan and You delight to hear that prayer, and that man went home justified, and we go home justified, every time we look to You, we're reminded of that justification we received when we first believed. And we walk in and bask in the riches of Your grace. Lord, make us people who are so enamored and amazed by Your forgiving grace, Your lovingkindness, that we breathe Your lovingkindness and grace to each other. Make us able to shine like like stars in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation and help us to hold fast the word of life and as people look at the difference, let us be ready to give the answer, it is Jesus. It's only Jesus. We pray this in His name, amen.*