

THE SATANIC NATURE OF SLANDER

Proverbs 10:18

"The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool."

INTRODUCTION

Claude Pepper (1900-89) had represented FL in the U.S. Senate since 1936, but conservative Democrat George Smathers opposed him for reelection in 1950. Pepper's far-left liberalism and support of Soviet Communism in the 1940s earned him the nickname, "the Red Pepper." But instead of honestly campaigning against Peppers on the issues, Smathers vowed to expose his "secret vices." He slandered Peppers by using innocent but suggestive labels and horrified rural voters by the shocked tone he used to report them. Smathers declared he had proof Pepper was "a known extrovert," his sister was a "thespian" (actress), and his brother a "practicing homo sapien." He was charged with having actually "matriculated" when he went to college. Worst of all, he'd "practiced celibacy" before marriage. Pepper lost his Senate seat to Smathers. But he recovered from such smear tactics to win a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives and represent FL from 1963 to 1989. Today's message, *The Satanic Nature of Slander*, explores *The Guilt of Practicing Slander against the Innocent* and *The Guilt of Perceiving Slander about the Innocent*.

I. THE GUILT OF PRACTICING SLANDER AGAINST THE INNOCENT

A basic definition of "slander" is, "A statement that unfairly places someone in an unfavorable light." Published slander, including Internet postings, is classified "libel." Do we misrepresent the truth about someone we slander? Deliberately! The underlying Hebrew of **Proverbs 10:18** links "lying" and "slander" as actions by one individual. The NLT brings this out: "Hiding hatred makes you a liar; slandering others makes you a fool." The Hebrew word for "slander" means, "to glide over" or "by-pass the truth by stealth to defame another by an evil report." On Monday April 17, President Trump hosted the annual White House Easter Egg Roll. *Politico*, an American political journalism company, posted a video on its web site with the caption, "A kid asks Trump to sign his hat at the White House Easter Egg Roll. The president signs ... and then tosses the hat into the crowd." A young man leaned over a fence to ask the President to sign his *Make America Great Again* red cap. The edited video makes it appear Donald Trump signed the cap and then deliberately tossed it to the crowd, to the horror of this young man, who shouts, "No!" Three million viewers watched it within hours of its posting at 11:51 a.m. EDT, triggering a firestorm of abuse against the President. Yet, the *Gateway Pundit* web site reveals this video is another example of "fake news." Even *NBC Nightly News* vindicated Donald Trump by showing another camera angle with the kid thankfully retrieving his cap after the President playfully tossed it high in his direction rather than handing it back to him. *Politico* knew its posting was libelously aimed at tarnishing our President's reputation.

In **Mark 7:20-23** (NLT), Jesus includes "slander" among the "vile things" that "comes from inside" us that make us disgusting to God: "And then He added, 'It is what comes from inside that defiles you.²¹ For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder,²² adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, *slander*, pride, and foolishness.²³ All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.'" The Greek word for "slander" in this passage is behind our English word, "blasphemy." In the New Testament, "blasphemy" usually describes "slandorous defamation of God's character." But *blasfamea* combines two Greek words: one means "to harm" or "injure"; the other means "news" or "fame." Thus, "slander" is "any defaming statement aimed to spread harmful news about another." A man who spends much of his life traveling the world for a mission agency once stayed for a time in an extremely remote, forested part of India where people live very primitively. His task is to assess how best to bring the Gospel to a people group where Jesus is unknown. To do this, he seeks to learn the cultural values of these people; what matters most to them. One day, he succeeded in gaining an audience with their chief elder. He asked him, through a translator, "What are the 5 worst things people can do?" He expected him to name what western cultures often deem the most heinous crimes, like murder or rape. But

the chief elder listed "slander" first among the 5 things his people believed were the "worst things people can do." The missions' agent replied, "Really? You would put slander ahead of murder." The elder said, "Yes. If you kill a man, you've killed him. He's gone. If you slander him, if you try to deceitfully destroy his reputation, you have killed him while he yet lives." While researching this message, I came across a startling truth: more ministries and lives of pastors are being ruined today by the slanderous tools of social media than by pornography. Disgruntled church members are not content to leave a church after a dispute with their pastor; they embark on a scheme to "kill him while he yet lives" through the vilest slanders.

Titus 3:1-3 places "slander" within the context of what all Christians should understand about how our Savior wants us to live: "Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, *to slander no one*, to avoid fighting, and to be kind, always showing gentleness to all people. For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, captives of various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another." This passage from **Titus** strongly suggests that slander comes naturally to us, apart from a deep work of God's Spirit to instill Christ's character within us. There are many ways we can be guilty "unfairly placing someone in an unfavorable light." We've probably all done it sometime. The first mate of a sailing vessel was angered by the captain entering into the ship's log, "Mate drunk today" on a day the mate was not on duty. He knew ship owners would fire him after reading this entry. Though sometimes drunk, to the captain's annoyance, he'd never been drunk on duty. The stubborn captain insisted, "This is the fact, and into the log it goes." When the mate next kept the ship's log, after the routine entries he added, "Captain sober today." The indignant captain protested it would leave a totally false impression in the owners' minds, as if he were usually not sober. The mate answered, "This is the fact, and into the log it goes." True, but both men libeled the other with half-truths.

I will soon ask if you can name the first person slandered in the Bible. First, what good things can you say about Joseph, Jacob's son? A remarkably fine man of God; slander is his only recorded flaw. Jacob unwisely lavished attention upon him as the favorite of his 12 sons (**Genesis 37:3-4**). He schemed to make his brothers look unfairly bad to insure his place as the favorite. **Genesis 37:2** (NIV): "Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers . . . and he brought their father a bad report about them." The Hebrew word for "report" is translated "slander" in **Proverbs 10:18**. "Bad" here means "injurious." Joseph made sure his "injurious report" would displease Jacob. He could have said, for example, "I often saw my brothers lying around and paying the flock little attention," without clarifying they had a right to lie down and rest at the end of a long day when the sheep were in from the fields and safely penned for the night in a sheepfold. Slander is often a matter of what we leave *unsaid*, not just what is said.

Let's intensify our working definition of, "Unfairly placing someone in an unfavorable light." Slander is "making knowingly false statements to defame and damage another's reputation." Such statements are often spawned by pure meanness, to harm others or to self-righteously judge them. But another motivation for slander is what is known as "divide and conquer." An Aesop fable describes four bulls who were great friends. They went everywhere together, ate together, and lay down to rest together. They kept so close to each other that if danger was near, they could all face it at the same time and protect one another. A lion in the nearby woods was more than a match for any of these bulls alone, but not united. He began to look for opportunities when one of the bulls was nearer to him in the trees than the others. The lion then whispered he had heard the other bulls saying unkind things about him. Over time, these slanderous accusations succeeded in making the bulls uneasy around each other. Each thought the other three were plotting against him and decided to live alone. They then became easy prey for the lion, who enjoyed four fine meals!

I Peter 5:8 (ESV) identifies the "lion" seeking to have Christians for breakfast, lunch, or dinner: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." "Sober-minded" translates a Greek adjective meaning, "temperate," "not carried away by a stimulant" (like alcohol or strong passion). In other words, we need to guard against Satan manipulating us to

reject God's will for us. One of the Devil's most successful manipulation tactics is slander. Whom did he first slander? God. Satan concealed his hatred of the LORD when he voiced a slanderous report about God to Eve. Throughout the early history of Adam & Eve covered by **Genesis 1 & 2**, had their Creator given them any reason to believe He did not have their best interests at heart, even when commanding what they should not do? No. Yet, without any basis in truth, the "serpent" in **Genesis 3:1-5** (which **Revelation 12:9** identifies as "Satan" embodied), used two classic tools of slander to place the LORD in an unfavorable light.

First, Satan utilized a "loaded question" to imply Eve had reasons to be suspicious of God. Questions, like dice, are loaded if they seek to produce a predictable outcome, as when a controversial assumption is stated as fact. Colin Powell became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest military position in the Department of Defense, in 1989. That same year, AR Governor Bill Clinton moderated a Town Hall meeting and asked a participant, "Do you favor the United States Army abolishing the affirmative-action program that produced Colin Powell? Yes or no?" What was the controversial assumption? [He needed affirmative action to succeed, which implies he could not have succeeded on his own merits.]

Genesis 2:15-16 (NIV) describes the "obedience test" given to Adam & Eve: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'" In **Genesis 3:1** (NIV), Satan's loaded question falsely assigned guilt to God for His command. "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, "You must not eat from any tree in the garden"?' Satan knew God's restrictions upon Adam and Eve were more than fair. He could have more honestly asked, "Did God really say, 'You may eat of any of the marvelous trees scattered across this lush Garden except just this one tree?'" Instead, his loaded question hoped to implant this thought in Eve's mind: "God's restrictions upon you are excessive."

Secondly, Satan blackened God's motives, a second classic tool of slander, by feeding Eve another lie in **Genesis 3:4** (GNT). He claimed he knew why God restricted access to this tree; it wasn't for their benefit, but for His. "The snake replied, 'That's not true; you will not die. God said that because He knows that when you eat it, you will be like God and know what is good and what is bad.'" In other words, Satan was suggesting, "God is holding out on you. You couldn't possibly die from eating the fruit of 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' because of how much more godlike you would become." The Hebrew of **Proverbs 10:18** makes recurrent use of the "s" sound, which hisses at you when this description of hatred concealed by lies and slander is read in Hebrew. It's fitting the LB of **Genesis 3:4** is, "'That's a lie!' the serpent hissed. 'You'll not die!'"

We slander people insidiously like a serpent when we blacken their motives without justification, as when Satan slandered God's motives toward Adam and Eve. We are guilty of slander if we unfairly place people in an unfavorable light due to our meanness, a desire to divide and conquer, to make ourselves look better at their expense, to conceal our hatred or dislike of them, or for other reasons. We can slander people not just by *what* we say about them, but *how* we say it. In England, a man once faced a charge of slander for declaring these words in public, "You are a fine body of men." The sneer in his voice revealed he intended his words as a negative critique of his hearers: "You are a *fine* body of men." If our goal is to injure someone's reputation by *what* we say or by *how* we say it, we are guilty of committing slander.

II. THE GUILT OF PERCEIVING SLANDER ABOUT THE INNOCENT

A second, often overlooked aspect of slander is the trouble we can stir up by falsely perceiving evil intent in others. Joaquin Andujar won 20 or more games in back-to-back seasons pitching for the St. Louis Cardinals, in a Major League Baseball career from 1976-88. But he frequently tangled with teammates, players on other teams, umpires, and sportswriters over misreading their intentions. He often thought

people were out to get him when they were not. While he warmed up one day to pitch against the Cubs, Cubs manager Jim Frey passed near the pitching mound. Frey said good-naturedly, "How are you doing today, Joaquin?" and walked on without expecting a reply. After a few seconds, Andujar stopped his warm-up, stared after the Cubs Manager, and said with defiance in his voice, "What do you mean by that?"

When we encounter statements damaging to others, whether arising in our own mind or another's, they should pass three tests or die with us. First, are we certain it's true and not just our own unfair perception? D. L. Moody (1837-99), an American pastor and evangelist, commented on this issue, "A great many people say, you must hear both sides; but if a man should write me a most slanderous letter about my wife, I don't think I would have to read it; I should tear it up and throw it to the winds." Secondly, is there any necessity to pass it? Thirdly, is it kind? Even if they are true, repeating unkind statements unnecessarily violates Christian love. Someone approached an evangelist with a negative story about a sister in Christ. He said to the gossip, 'Before you say anything about that person, I should like to ask you three questions: First, will it do me any good if you tell me your story? Second, will it do you any good to tell it? Third, will it do the sister any good?' Needless to say, the person left with this slander unspoken.

CONCLUSION

Years ago, the most hated man in a poor Italian village was the town miser. Money seemed to be his only god. He worked and scrimped and saved and amassed considerable wealth. But he absolutely refused to help the townspeople, no matter how worthy their requests for help. Many in this town openly despised the miser to his face or they conveniently blamed him for all their woes. They relished thoughts of him suffering in Hell for ignoring their sufferings.

Then the miser died. At the reading of his will, they learned he'd left all his vast wealth to the town. The people were ashamed. The miser stated in his will that his life goal had been to acquire enough money to dig a tunnel through the nearby mountain to give his town direct access to fresh water. Previously, all water had been carried in on pack animals and at such expense that it kept most of the townspeople in poverty and poor health. This miser who had been the town's zero thereafter became the town's hero because of the desperately needed tunnel his sacrifices bought for them. They now realized the evil they had perceived in him existed unjustly only in their own minds.

When was the last time we slandered someone unjustly as despised by God for his or her actions; yet, if we knew the full truth about what was done, we would applaud this person for heroically carrying out God's will despite all the unfair criticism he or she suffered? When will be the next time we allow this to happen?