

God has chosen to unify all of these people into one unique body, you will find it to be remarkable!

Why did God chose to do this? Why did God choose to love individuals, draw them to Himself, and unify them together into one body with Christ as its head? How does this accomplish His eternal purpose of glorifying Himself? Verse 10 of chapter 3 clearly spells out the final motivation for this plan:

3.10-11 "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God called a people and unified them into a body so that His manifold wisdom might be marveled at. God's purpose for calling out a people for Himself and unifying them together into one body under Christ is that His great wisdom might be marveled at by supernatural beings, ultimately bringing him supreme glory. Now what does it take for supernatural beings to marvel? It takes something supernatural, and God's eternal plan of regenerating sinful people and uniting them together in one body is clearly that kind of supernatural act.

What, then, is our responsibility as believers in light of this eternal purpose of God? Chapter 4 of Ephesians begins a section that tells us how we should live in light of these truths:

4.1-3 "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

**A believer is responsible to preserve unity in the body of Christ.** The way to cause supernatural beings to marvel at the wisdom of God is to exemplify unity in the body of Christ. This is truly something to marvel at, because when you consider that God has taken people who are completely different from one another and unified them together into a body, that is a remarkable work.

This familiar command to be kind to one another in verse 32 lies right in this section that describes how to be unified in the body of

Christ and therefore fulfill the eternal purpose of God to bring glory to Himself. Here we find the much deeper, God-centered motivation for being kind. It is not something rooted in man. It is a motivation rooted in God's plan to glorify Himself.

*Christian Kindness preserves the unity of the body of Christ, which causes the wisdom of God to be marveled at and brings the supreme glory to God.* Take a moment and think about yourself, and then think about someone else in your church who is completely different than you. When you are unified with that person, and more specifically when you demonstrate kindness toward that person, you are causing the wisdom of God to be marveled at, and this brings glory to God!

**Christian kindness preserves the unity of the body of Christ, which causes the wisdom of God to be marveled at and brings the supreme glory to God.**

When we come into a situation where we really want to be unkind, a man-centered motivation is not going to be enough to cause us to be kind. But when we realize that it is the glory of God that is at stake in our decision, we will be much more motivated to be kind in that situation. We really need to ask ourselves, what is more important, getting the "justice" we feel we deserve by being unkind or causing supernatural beings to marvel at the manifold wisdom of God and thereby give him supreme glory? The next time you feel impelled to be unkind to someone for whatever reason, remember that it is the glory of God that you are toying with. Satan would like to do anything he can to cause one of the members of the body of Christ to act in such a way that he goes against God's eternal plan. By being unkind, you are going against that eternal plan of God. By obeying this command, however, you will preserve the unity of the body, which will cause supernatural beings to marvel at the wisdom of God and bring God all the glory that He deserves!

*Scott Aniol is associate pastor at First Baptist Church in Rockford, Illinois.*

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## Putting Theology Back in the Pew

January, 2005

### Changing the Garments of Sin: Slander

Steven Owen

The greatest truth a believer can ever grasp is this: when he got saved, he died to his sinful past, and the rest of his life is to be spent pursuing Christlikeness. Paul put it this way: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me" (Ga.2:20). At the believer's salvation experience he was awakened to the fact that he is a grievous sinner against God that deserves eternal damnation, but that because Christ loved him and died for him, he has escaped God's wrath and now possesses eternal life. A proper understanding of Christ's love for the believer will transform and control his life (2 Co. 5:14-15). It is a motivating truth that drives the believer to put off the old life-style with its sin, and to be remade into the image of Christ.

One of the sins that God wants us to put off is the sin of slander. Slander is serious sin. It is very hard for 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans to accept this. We live in the midst of so much slander that we have trouble even recognizing it as sin. Our consciences are seared. Our political campaigns are filled with slander. Our most popular magazines are slanderous rags. We frequently listen to it on television, on the radio, or on the internet. It is commonplace on the job. It is a way of life in America. But Paul lists it as one of the sins that obviously calls for the eternal wrath of God (Ro. 1:30). David prayed that a slanderer would not be in the millennial reign of Christ (Ps. 140:11). David vowed to God that as a righteous judge he would destroy all slanderers (Ps. 101:5). One reason God

brought judgment against Israel in Jeremiah's day was "every neighbor goes about as a slanderer" (Je. 9:4). Slander proceeds out of an evil heart and defiles a man (Mt. 15:19-20). Slander breaks our fellowship with God so that He will not hear our prayers (Ps. 15:3). It grieves the Holy Spirit and blocks spiritual growth (Ep. 4:31; 1 Pe. 2:1). Slander is one of the characteristics of the church people who in perilous times "have a form of godliness, but have denied its power" (2 Ti. 3:1-5). Again, Paul tells us that we must "avoid such men as these" (2 Ti. 3:5). He feared he would find such behavior in Corinth (2 Co. 12:20) and warned them to examine themselves to see if they were even saved (2 Co. 13:5). If American Christians could really see the truth of what slander is, we would cry out with Isaiah, "Woe is me, for

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I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips!" (Is. 6:5).

The Greek word for slander is *blasphemo*. It means "to speak evil of." Sometimes it is used of speaking evil of God, and is translated "to blaspheme." When it is used of speaking evil of men, it refers to slander. Slander is the speaking of defamatory statements injurious to the reputation or well-being of another (American Heritage Dictionary). Contrary to what most might think, just because a statement contains truth does not mean it is not slanderous. The truth can be slander when it is uttered out of evil motives. Love is to be the guiding principle behind all of our speech, both with believers (Eph. 4:15) and unbelievers (2 Ti. 2:13). The test, then, for slander is

three-fold: Is it true? Is it necessary for this person to know? Is it kind? If it fails any one of these tests, it is sin.

Slander takes many forms. It is the giving of an evil report about your fellow employee to the boss (Pr. 30:10). It is talking about others behind their backs (Ps. 50:20). It is the relaying of defamatory information about someone to others (Pr. 10:18). It is the making fun of others, either behind their backs (Ps. 35:15) or to their faces (Mt. 27:39). It is the prideful remark that demeans those who are "below" us in social standing (Ja. 2:7). Sometimes believers slander other believers whose practice in Christian liberty or convictions are different from their own (1 Co. 10:30). Tattling—the telling of a tale in order to get others in trouble—is slander (Jude 9).

**Why People Slander** Slander comes from an evil heart (Mt. 15:19-20). It is motivated ultimately by pride (Pr. 30; 1 Ti. 6:3). Secondary motivations include false doctrine(s), which actually intensify it (1 Ti. 6:4). That's why "churches" that do not preach Bible truth are not loving assemblies; instead they are filled with slander (2 Ti. 3:1-5). People are sometimes motivated to slander for money (2 Sa. 16:3-4; 19:27-30) or in jealousy to destroy another's career (Is. 32:7). Sometimes an individual is motivated by pure meanness to destroy another's friendship (Pr. 16:28). This type of individual cannot be trusted with a secret (Pr. 20:19), and believers should not associate with them. Sometimes people slander just because they have too much leisure (1 Ti. 5:13). A good job and a busy schedule helps one keep his nose in his own business. No Christian should ever meddle in other people's affairs (2 Th. 3:6-14; 1 Pe. 4:15). Unsaved people slander believers because they will not participate in their sins (1Pe. 4:4). They will make up slanderous stories as an excuse for not seeking the Lord (2 Pe. 2:2; Ro. 3:8), or regrettably, they use the failures of believers to excuse their wickedness (1 Ti. 6:1; Ti. 2:5).

**How To Avoid Uttering Slander** Believers must not slander (Co. 3:8). Preachers need to teach God's people to "malign no one" (Ti. 3:2). Instead, we need to honor "all men" (1 Pe. 2:17). That would include our leaders in government (Ro. 13:7; 1 Pe. 2:17), our employers (1 Ti. 6:1), our wives (1 Pe. 3:7), our parents (Ep. 6:2), our pastors (1 Ti. 5:17), and all of our brothers and sisters in Christ (Ro. 12:10). When others fail, do not promote their failure; the loving response is to cover their sin (1 Pe. 4:8; Pr. 17:9). Go alone to your

sinning brother and seek to correct him (Mt. 18:15-18). If he repents, forget about it. If he refuses, then others must become involved (Mt. 18:16-17). Take one or two spiritual leaders with you to seek his restoration (Ga. 6:1; Mt. 18:17). If that does not produce repentance, only then must it become a church-wide issue (Mt. 18:17). Keep secrets in love (Pr. 11:13). "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:39).

**What is Not Slander** It is not slander to report criminal activity to the authorities. It is a loving thing to stop the thief, the murderer, the extortioner, or the pervert. Neither is it slander to point out doctrinal error (e.g. the entire book of Galatians) or false teachers (Mt. 16:6; 1 Ti. 1:20). Love desires to protect potential victims and seeks the sinner's salvation and repentance. Love deals with sin.

**Even the truth can be slander when it is uttered out of evil motives.**

**Responding To Slander In A Christ-like Manner** Perhaps a few words should be said about how the believer should respond when he is slandered. Paul says that he tried to conciliate others (1 Co. 4:13). That means he sought to overcome the distrust and animosity. He didn't take it personally. Believers should know that slander from the unsaved is a reaction against their Christlikeness and is a source of great blessing (1 Pe. 4:14). Furthermore, they need to understand that Christ allowed the slander to come into their lives for a righteous reason (1 Pe. 4:19). In these situations, keeping a good testimony is essential (1 Pe. 3:14-18; 4:14-19). Whether it be in the home (Ti. 2:3-5) or at work (1 Ti. 6:1) or even in some righteous deed (Ro. 14:16), the believer must be careful of his testimony. And when we suffer for doing what is right, the believer should not be ashamed but rather glorify God in it (1 Pe. 4:16). If the slander threatens to wreck our lives, we must not fear because we know that Christ is Lord and has allowed these circumstances to develop for His glory (1 Pe. 3:14-15). We should use the occasion to gently and respectfully witness for Him (1 Pe. 3:15). It is just this gentle forbearance that God will use to bring others to Himself in salvation (1 Pe. 3:18).

For the believer, slander is part of the old life. He must put it off completely so that he

can put on the new man, which is like Christ. Let us mourn in repentance with Paul that we ever slandered (1 Ti. 1:13). Let us confess our sins that Christ may faithfully wash us clean with His blood (1 Jn. 1:7,9). And if our brother holds it against us for what we have said, we need to make it right with him before the next church service so that our God will receive our worship (Mt. 5:23-24). Let us rejoice that God could ever use sinners like us, whose mouths were venomous like a snake's (Ro. 3:13-14). And let us call upon Him whose grace is sufficient to give us grace to help us have slander-free mouths that speak from a heart of love (2 Co. 12:9; Heb. 4:16).

*Steven Owen is pastor of Liberty Baptist Church in Monroe, Wisconsin.*

## One-Body Kindness

Scott Aniol

*Ephesians 4.32 "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

This command to "be kind and compassionate to one another" is well-known. Parents especially are known to pull it out of their back pockets when rearing their children! We have often heard this command preached, but it seems like this is one command that believers seem to forget and fail to follow. Often believers are known to back-bite each other, slander one another, and propagate falsehood.

**It is easy to be unkind to one another if our motivation for kindness is centered in man and not in God.**

Why is this the case? It may be that the motivation for this command is centered somehow in man and not in God. For instance, we often hear, "We need to be kind so that we don't hurt someone's feelings," or, "We need to be kind so people don't think we're harsh." But these are motivations rooted in man, and when it comes to the heat of the moment, they really won't hold up as a motivation for us to be kind.

What we need to consider is how this command fits into the over-all context of the book of Ephesians, and we will see that there is a

much higher motivation behind this command that will encourage us to be kind to one another as believers. Instead of a man-centered motivation for kindness, the Bible teaches that *the glory of God is at stake when we are unkind to one another.*

**God established an eternal plan.** The first thing we need to understand is the overall theme of the book of Ephesians. The theme of the epistle is *God the Father's work in the church through His Son for His own glory.* The first part of the book tells how God established a plan in eternity past by which He would accomplish His own glory. So what is this plan? What did God establish before time in order that He might be ultimately glorified?

*1.11-12 "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."*

God called out a people for His name's sake. Before the foundation of the world, God chose to love individuals and called them to be His children. This is remarkable when we realize that as chapter 2 of Ephesians clearly tells us, man is in his heart a rebel against God and hates God with all of his being. So the fact that God does a supernatural work to regenerate those who hate Him is truly remarkable. And what is clear already in this text is that He did so to the praise of his glorious grace.

*God built those people into a unified body.* But that's not all. God did not only choose to love individuals and draw them to Himself, but he also chose to build these believers into one body with Christ as its head.

*1.22-23 "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."*

God takes people from every walk of life and every kind of background, calls them to be His children, and unites them together into a unified body under the headship of Christ. This might not seem particularly remarkable except when you realize how different individuals are from one another. When you understand all the differing mentalities and ways of thinking and backgrounds and personalities and tastes in a church and then realize that