



Discernment-Part 4

Reputations & Vital Responsibilities

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, I think we all have to admit that we, we care what people think about us. Might be nice if we didn't, but we'd have to admit that we, we do care. And the reason you care is because you innately know that the composite of what all the people you know think of you constitutes your reputation. And you inherently know your reputation is important. Your reputation, or what people think about you, determines whether or not people like you or dislike you, whether they trust you or don't trust you, whether they're going to listen to you or tune you out, whether bosses will promote you or fire you, whether clients buy from you or move on. I mean, you get the point—your reputation is important. And what people think of you then is important. And that's why we, we care about it.

Now, if you're a thief or a thug and people know about it, that's what they think of you. Well, there you go. That's your fault. Not much I can do about that. But here's the deal: when it comes to the things that bug us about the fragility of our reputation, an annoying thing is when people begin to believe things about us that are not true but are damaging—things that damage our reputation. The Bible says that happens when people go about this thing—it's what the Bible calls slander. Slander, Book of Proverbs: it defines slander as when people, motivated by hatred—albeit cloaked hatred, camouflaged hatred—say things about you based on facts in your lives, but they twist those facts. And they put those facts out there to make you look bad. And of course, because it's slander, they're trying to disseminate those distorted facts as broadly as possible. And now, given that we have social media, slander has certainly found a superhighway, has it not? I mean, your reputation can be ruined in a weekend. It doesn't take long for word to get out.

Now, if you think about slander, no matter how good of a life you may lead, you're still going to be subject to it. Christ is the classic example. I mean, he lived a perfect life, and yet his reputation was, you know, attacked all the time. He had a big problem with his reputation, and he was the target of slander all the time. In our study of Luke, we've gotten to a passage where we get one scene in his life where we start to see the vehemence that people had and the frequency that they attacked him and his reputation because of the things that he did. Now, the claims they made, they weren't true. But they had taken the things that they'd seen Jesus do, and they contorted and twisted and distorted those things just enough to try to disseminate those things to damage his reputation.

Now, that may give us some empathy, I suppose. And we think, okay, we're in good company. But here's the deal: the way he responded to that slander, the way he even showed the value of his reputation, is telling and it's instructive. And so today, if you take your Bibles and turn to Luke chapter five, you might find that the way that Christ responds to the slander in his life can be real helpful for us, particularly in the area of his life that—if you follow Christ—you're going to have the same exact problems that he had.



So look at this with me. Let me read it for you, beginning in verse 27. You might remember last time, we left off in verse 26, that extraordinary thing where they said, “We’ve seen extraordinary things,” and quite a story. We looked at that scene in Christ’s life last time. Let’s start now in verse 27, Luke chapter five: “After this, he went out and he saw a tax collector named Levi”—Sunday school graduates, we know him as Matthew. You didn’t seem sure of yourself. This is the interactive service. 11 o’clock. I know, right? You were the most vocal crowd. So Levi is Matthew. We know him as Matthew, right? Wrote the first gospel. And it’s a very Jewish name that he’s called. “And he’s collecting taxes, sitting at a tax booth.” Who’s he collecting taxes for, Sunday school graduates? Not for the Jews, but for Rome. It’s why even that sentence is a bit of a, you know, frustrating read for the average Jew. They hated him. Right? And, you know, even if you work for the IRS today, you don’t lead with that at parties, right? “I work for the IRS.” “Oh, fantastic. Let me show you the door.” You know, the idea of this man being hated is easy for us to understand, but it is more so in their day because this was such a sellout, unprincipled position to have. They skimmed, they extorted. There were all kinds of reasons, as we’ve already seen in our study of Luke, for the people to hate these tax collectors, and they became a culture unto themselves.

But boldly, Jesus walks up to him and says, “Follow me.” Verse 28: he asks me—success here—and he leaves everything. Levi responds positively to the call of Christ; he arose and followed him—a very lucrative job to leave behind.

Now, here’s the scene, or the fodder, or the fuel that was used for slander. Verse 29: “And Levi”—or Matthew—“made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at the table with him”—with them, him and his disciples—“and the Pharisees and the scribes, they grumbled at his disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’” Okay, there’s the besmirching and the sullying of his reputation. And Jesus answered, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Very simple, straightforward scene: he leads Levi to Christ, Levi brings him to a reception at his house with a bunch of people just like Levi, and Jesus goes there. That was the fuel they needed to go and say, “Jesus is there—who knows what—telling who knows what kind of jokes, maybe picking up women, him and his disciples, with all those unprincipled, sordid people, the sinners and tax collectors. And look, he’s not a righteous man after all,” and off they went to disparage Christ.

Christ’s response. Now, the first thing I want you to note—we take this passage and kind of split it in half, verses 27 through 30; that’s the first half of our outline today—I just want to look at one of the things that happens. They are mad—these Pharisees, as we’re going to see in increasing measure throughout the book of Luke—at Christ. They hated him. They didn’t like him. Their cloaked, although it seemed very dispassionate, their words, whether their cloaked hatred for him, you know, came out in ways that may not be expected, because here he does his—he leads his



disciples to the reception, and it says in verse 30 that the Pharisees and their scribes didn't grumble at Jesus. Who did they grumble at? The disciples. And that's just an interesting little twist there: when they hate the head of the organization, oftentimes the slander and the criticism and the disparagement and the gossip is focused and targeted at the followers. And that's just a quick understanding of a principle we see throughout the New Testament that should be well noted in our own lives.

So let's note it on our worksheets this morning, and that is, number one, you need to expect slander—number one, or letter A, you need to expect, expect slander—because you claim to be a Christian. Because, just for being a Christian, if you claim to be with Christ in our day, you're going to receive criticism for that. You will have people say things about you that are not true, and begin to say the kinds of things that would make you less desirable as a friend, as a boss, as a manager, as a co-worker, as whatever—they're going to make you look bad just because you stand with Christ. Now, I should speak in a crowd like this to those of you that are trying to keep that all a secret at work, or in your neighborhood, or whatever. You know, I don't know—if you're a Sunday Christian, you're not much of a Christian at all, I hope you understand. You need to make sure that at least you recognize God has called you to be very vocal about standing with him. And I'd say if I could go to your office and half the people in your office don't even know that you are a Christian, then we've got a problem right there.

But let me just encourage you that when you do, you'll be slandered. "That doesn't sound like encouragement, Pastor Mike." No, I understand that. But this is the thing: when Christ connects with us, there's a kind of profound connection there that should, in our minds, get us ready to recognize that whatever values, whatever benefits come with being with Christ, those are all ours—along with all the downside and the criticism and the difficulty and the disparagement and the gossip. It goes hand in hand.

Turn real quickly with me. Keep your finger here in Luke five and go over to Matthew chapter 10. I just want to show you this connection using the words that Jesus is using of his disciples in Matthew 10. He calls them his followers, his learners—"math atoss," the Greek word—someone who, you know, is there learning from, following, ingesting the teachings of this leader. Jesus puts it this way when it comes to disciples and teachers, verse 24—verse 24—"A disciple"—Matthew 10:24—"is not above his teacher, obviously, nor is a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher"—well, that's what we want—"and a servant like his master"—well, that's the goal, the Christian life—become increasingly like Christ. But there's a downside: "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul"—and think of that, that's the word for the evil leader of hell, right? I mean, this is the idea of one who is the head-honcho evil person, wicked person—"if they call the head of the house or the master that, how much more will they malign those of his household?" That's true. It just needs to settle in.



And if you're going to sign up to be a follower of Christ, I hope that someone who talked to you about becoming a Christian certainly put that on the table as one of the things—as we learn there in Luke 14—that is required to count the cost. The cost of following Christ will be that when you're identified with him in this sinful, fallen world, you're going to have hostility directed at you just for saying, "I'm with him." You just got to get used to that. That's part of the counting of the cost. Building a tower—going to sit down, will calculate whether you're not good enough to fit. I mean, that's part of it. Are you ready to sacrifice some popularity for solidarity with Christ? That's a good question for us. And you shouldn't become a Christian unless you're ready to say, "I'm going to be in solidarity with Christ, and I know that's going to hurt my popularity in various circles."

And usually we stop reading there because it's the end of the paragraph in most translations, but keep reading, because there's a pronoun in verse 26 that makes us tie these two sentences together. Verse 26, Matthew 10—are you still there? "So have no fear of them"—well, there's your pronoun. Of who? Well, of the people that malign you. Why? "For nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known." Now think about that. What's the maligning all about? What's slander? Slander is a distorting of the facts—calling you things and names and saying things about you that are not true. The Bible says all those things will be uncovered. In other words, if they're calling you things that are not true, they'll be reversed in one day. There'll be vindication.

And put it this way, in terms of Wednesday. Most of you know I'm on the radio every day. And the reason you don't listen is because you come here and you've already heard all the sermons, so I get that. But every now and then I'm on the radio doing things—interviews or whatever—and you'll hear me on the radio, if you're in tune. And—I don't know, I guess Twitter is the best way—if you don't want—on the radio, I try to blast out that I'm going to be on the radio for whatever reason on a live show. And Wednesday had one of those. Twitter—Pastor Mike's, I guess—is weird, but you can follow me on Twitter. Sounds like a commercial: @PastorMike. And I'll let you know when I'm on the radio. Well, I got a text from Frank Sontag, who's now taking over the "The Dr. Show" on KTLA—biggest station in the country, Christian station. And he says, "Mike, hey, you want to be on the show at five o'clock?" And I texted him back, "Well, sure. You know, I can make that work in my schedule. Be happy to." And he texted back, says, "I want to talk about homosexuality for an hour." And I texted him back, "I'm really busy this afternoon." I'm thinking, "No, I do that." Why? Because I understand that if I bring the biblical position to the millions of people in Southern California about homosexuality—and every time they, you know, send me, "Oh, Mike, tomorrow's Compass Bible," which I'm thinking—you know, I am going to be disparaged. I'm going to be maligned with what kind of statements? "Well, you Christians, you are bigoted. You're hatemongers. You're homophobic." Those are the accusations.

So even thinking that through, and with this passage even coming up this weekend, I'm thinking one of the goals I should have in this hour—and if some of you heard it from five to six last Wednesday—I was trying to respond to even that charge. Number one, we're not bigoted. Number two, we don't hate you. As a matter of fact, if we hated you, we would keep quiet about the topic so you'd incur more wrath on the day of God's wrath. I mean, and "phobic"—not afraid. There's no fear involved in this. So, I mean, I wanted to deal with the accusation, because in reality, Christians,



if we rightly understand who we are in Christ, we are humble about the rules of God. We're not bigoted. We're loving when we tell people about the problems that God has with sin. We're not hatemongers. And, you know, we're not phobic. God has called us, certainly as we grow in Christ, to be fearless, right? We're not afraid of anyone—even if you kill the body, I shouldn't be afraid of you. So we're not fear. It's not hate. It's not bigotry. So I wanted to spend the time as I tried to say—those things are not true.

Now, the reality in this passage is when they do those things, and calling you names like they called Christ names—clearly, Christ is not Beelzebul—and the things that they say about you won't be true either. And the vindication there in verse 26 is, don't fear them. Don't be afraid when this happens. Don't stress as much as you would naturally tend to because we have such an inclination to protect our reputation. And we love to have that kind of good name, as Proverbs says. Look, don't freak out when it gets besmirched, because really, in the end, your reputation will be salvaged. Nothing that's covered won't be revealed, and nothing that's hidden that will not be known.

So we've got to be ready for this slander and not freak out about it, counting the cost as a Christian to say, "If I stand with Christ, because the world hates him," as John put it—as Jesus put it in the Gospel of John—if they hated me, they're going to hate you. And just be ready to say, "Okay, I don't want to stoke the coals of that. I don't want to be disrespectful. I don't want to be a jerk. But the bottom line is if I say what Christ said, or if I stand with Christ and say I'm aligned with him, this God of the Bible, then I'm gonna have some slander."

Now, it's one thing to stand with Christ. It's another thing to speak out for Christ. And that's what's happening, is it not? Look at it—it's printed there on your worksheet, Luke chapter five. That's what they're going to do. I mean, we know that with clarity at the end of the passage in verse 32, when he says, "I've come to call not the righteous, but sinners to repent," so we know he's going to the dinner party—verse 29, the great feast in the house—to do with those tax collectors what he did with Levi, and that is to call them to stop living an unprincipled, debauched life as traitors, but become upstanding people following Christ, forsaking sin, saying no to unrighteousness and yes to following the God of the universe. That's what he's going to the dinner party to do. That is his goal—not to go there and just hang out, but to go there and to speak out.

Now, if you think you're going to get some criticism for making sure everybody in the office knows that you're a Christian, try speaking up about it. That'll make it worse. So let's put it this way, letter B, if you will: we need to expect slander not only about being a Christian, but, number two, about being an evangelist. And I chose that word purposefully, because it's getting—I mean, that is so solid as a word—I mean, that immediately is equated with something bad. But that's a biblical concept, *euangelion*—that Greek word, "good news"—to bring good news to people, that if you recognize your sin for what it is and turn from it, no matter what variety of sin that it is—you put your trust in Christ, the good news is you get to be with Christ. Think about that. That's the good news that we're willing to speak up about.

Now, here's the thing: you start speaking up about it, they immediately take that information about Christ, about heaven and hell, about God, and they put it in a category that they say, "Well, it's really not something that should be discussed publicly. That's a private matter. Religion is a private matter." Now, some of you were here from the beginning of our study of the Gospel of Luke; you might remember the very first day in Luke 1:1 we looked at this beginning of the book, the prologue, as Luke sits down and talks about the things he's going to share regarding Christ as real, factual history. And here's the problem in the modern day: they say, "Well, there are different kinds of truth—two basic categories. There's truth that's factual truth, and that's okay to discuss publicly and to debate publicly, and we can disagree and we better fight to figure out who's right and who's wrong, because there are some consequences to disagreeing on factual truth. But then there's another kind of truth that our moderns have invented. They call it values-based truth. It's truth that is not factual and objective. It's truth—it's opinion-based and subjective. And religion falls into that category." And all you're talking about—the rules of God and all the things about Christ—they all fall into the religion subjective opinion, values category. "So don't go into public talking about it. Don't mention it or discuss it as a debatable issue. What we're going to do right out of the gate in the modern day is say religion—right, subjective values-based stuff—you might as well be debating whether, you know, I don't know, Rocky Road ice cream is better than Chunky Monkey," or whatever. "It doesn't matter. You like one, you like the other. You like Islam, you like Christianity, you like Buddhism, you like Hinduism—doesn't matter. Pick your religion. Go enjoy your little private flavor of religious truth. Just don't bother us in the real world, because we're debating facts over here."

Okay? That's why you're going to be told to shut up if you go into dinner parties talking about repentance and telling people they need to be followers of Christ. If you do what the disciples did here, you're going to be slandered with a vehemence, because you're trying to talk about things that really, today, the unwritten rules of conversation—you're not allowed to talk about those things, because that's religious truth.

Well, back to the quick discussion we had at the beginning of Luke thirty-some-odd weeks ago, when we looked at the prologue of Luke and we said, "Listen, Christianity is not going to be subject to that kind of bifurcation of truth." Truth is truth. As Francis Schaeffer used to say, we're talking about true truth here, which is really the only kind of truth there is. And if you're going to know about Christianity, let me just make it as simple as I possibly can: when it comes to Christian truth, what we're claiming are things that are as factual as anything else. That is, that we believe that there is a Christ who has substantiated his authority and credentials with his life, death, and resurrection—all historical, factual things—that because of that, we can assess now a kind of authority comparison between my life and his life, that he is the Lord and we should be his subjects and be his servants and be his disciples. And the promise that he's coming back to return, and he will come, as Jesus said, and sit on his glorious throne and gather the nations before him and separate the peoples, as he put it, like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And the one, he says, "enter into the blessing because you're forgiven, because you allied with Christ," and you enter into blessing; and the others "into damnation prepared for you"—for the devil and his angels. That's the place you're going to end up. That's the claim of Christianity.



“Well, you see there, you’ve already said it—that’s religious truth; that’s opinion. Other people don’t believe.” Listen, it’d be like going on the news program tonight saying, “Listen, when it comes to truth, Christianity claims to be as factual as any other news story out there. Let’s take, for instance, someone coming on and claiming there is a country. They’re enriching uranium. They’re putting together nuclear bombs. They’ve got armies they’re assembling, and they’ve got jets that they’re putting together, and they’re fueling warheads up, and they’re getting ready—because of what they’ve done that we can research and debate whether it’s true or not—but let’s look at it and research it and figure it out.” That then puts us in a position of vulnerability. And let’s just say that I’m claiming that there’s a nation that is far more powerful than we are, and they have far more, you know, power in terms of war power—you know, firepower. “And therefore, we should be concerned. We should do something to make peace with them. And more than that, I’m going to get on the news and say, ‘Here’s the deal: they’ve made promises, and the promise is they’re going to invade the shores of the United States. We’re not sure when, but it’s coming soon.’”

So now, if I got on the news and claimed that, that would be something people want to debate. “What’s your facts? Let’s research that.” Why? Because it’s pertinent. You’re basing this on real things that happened, claiming some comparative authority that needs to be respected, and a future promise of an invasion. The same thing in Christianity: Christ has come to establish his credentials; he now says, “Understand me and submit to me,” and the comparative authority that you have is lesser. Surrender, repent, put your trust in me. And then, when I return, you will be saved—you will not incur the wrath of God. That’s the promise of Scripture: credentials, authority, return. And that’s something that we should be able to debate. And you can’t say, “That’s a discussion about what’s your favorite yogurt flavor.” This is not about opinion. This is not subjective. You want to debate whether or not Christ has the credentials—let’s do that. Let’s historically research that. But that’s truth that we should not be muzzled or silenced on. And it should be part of the marketplace debate and discussion that goes on, not only on university campuses but in the marketplace and in our workplaces and in our neighborhoods. We’re making claims that we claim are true claims—true truth, as Francis Schaeffer said.

Now, you have no option—we don’t need to review all this because we’ve been there—but we did a whole series on the fact that you and I are called to be messengers of this message of reconciliation. Your calling is much like verse 10 there in Luke five, where he calls Simon as he’s just—we can, we can assume—calling Levi as well. We know that to be people catching people. We want to get people into this thing, recognizing the life, death, burial, resurrection of Christ, the authority of Christ, and be prepared for and ready to meet their Maker when Christ returns. That’s what we’re getting more people aligned with. That’s the goal of evangelists. You were called to be that.

Now, if you shut up about it, you will save yourself some trouble. If you’re a Christian and they know you’re a Christian at work, but you never talk about it, I guess you’ll be off the hook in terms of increasing disparagement, but you’ve fallen down in your responsibility. The responsibility is for you to speak up about the message of Christ.

Quick passage on this—as though I needed to illustrate it—but let me show you something in Matthew five. If you're in Luke five, go back to Matthew five, Sermon on the Mount. This whole paradigm of the Beatitudes—blessed is this person, blessed is that person. Look at the last one here, when it talks about those who are speaking up for truth. And I'll make that case by verse number 12. Let's first read verse 11: "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely"—that's called slander—"on my account." Not only because you're aligned with me—keep reading, verse 12: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven"—that's going to honor that, because everything covered is going to be revealed, any kind of misunderstanding is going to be vindicated—"for so they persecuted the prophets." The Old Testament, the Hebrew word *nabi* is the word for mouthpiece. God had something to say to mankind; he picked the prophets to do it. In the New Testament, we're all prophets—small "p," right? We're not giving new revelation from heaven, but we're reiterating the message of Christ. And if you do that, like the prophets before you, not only will they say, "Ooh, you're with Christ and Christians and Bible-believing people; I don't like that," but when you speak up about it—look at the words, verse 11—revile, persecute, utter all kinds of evil against you falsely "on my account." That's going to happen.

So I need to be ready for it: expect slander about being a Christian, and then, certainly, when you open your mouth and you speak to people about the message of Christ.

Now, pause for a second. A and B all relate to the passage. That's what they were doing, and that's what was happening. Letter C: here, allow me parenthetically to step out of the passage and say, now, what's happening with all this? Why is this happening? Because in a sense, it's very irrational, right? You don't have—regardless of what it is—in the first century, Zoroastrianism or, you know, the Qumran sect or whatever, you don't have all these people so uptight about those things. And even today, I put it this way: I can get on radio this week and really represent and speak for almost any religion in the world and have a very calm time of it. As a matter of fact, I'd have a lot of people applauding me for it. Think about Buddhism, Hinduism, and whatever—everybody would be like, "Fantastic. Great diversity. Isn't it nice?" But if I want to talk about Christ, Christianity, and the message of the Bible, all of a sudden—here's this irrational onslaught, disproportional onslaught of attack against this. Why is that? What's with that?

Here's the reason. Let me make a theological statement now for letter C: we need to expect slander—letter C—because we have a slanderer. I put a capital "S" on that: a slanderer. Now, if you're really a Sunday School graduate with—graduating with high honors from Sunday School—you might recognize that word as an appellation, a title, of Satan. One of the words the Bible uses multiple times—almost 40 times—for Satan is the word that if you were to translate it, you'd have the word "slanderer." If you were to transliterate it, you'd have a different word—some of you have it in your mind already. "Satan" means "adversary" or "opponent." Here's the word in Greek: "diabolos." It means the one who slanders, one who brings up a slanderous, twisted accusation against someone. "Diabolos." So if your kids go to Mission Viejo High School, you've always



wondered why they're so slanderous—should I send them to Laguna Hills High? I'm sorry. No, I'm just—I'm sorry. If you're following, you're listening on the radio: "What are they talking about?" The Diablos. Devil. Okay, I'm sorry, I know you can't change your mascot. Maybe we should try, though. No, sorry—getting away. Very provincial talk. "Diablos"—the devil—means one who slanders, a slanderer. He's known as that; that's his job. And he is actively promoting false religion and opposing true religion.

Now think this through. Is that why I can be as rigid in rules and laws and curtailing apparent freedoms with any other religion and I still get applauded for it as "diverse," but as soon as I talk about Christianity and anything that may cramp your style coming from the Bible or Christ, now all of a sudden it's opposed like I ran my fingers on a chalkboard? What's with that? Because Satan, the slanderer, the opposition of God, is all for false religions; he's just not for the truth. There's a scheme of the enemy that should be clicked into our mind and forever remembered. He wants to oppose biblical Christianity. And therefore, if he wants to oppose it, he needs to take the followers of Christ and shut them down. How can he shut you up? If you value your reputation more than your calling, he can shut you up just by getting more people to slander you and oppose you and revile you and say all kinds of false things about you. And if that can get you to shut up, he's done his job.

We have a spiritual, cosmic, metaphysical—whatever you want to call it—spiritual enemy that wants to slander us. One passage on this—it's worth looking at; it may be insightful for you—Revelation chapter two, and the reason I want to show you this connection is because sometimes we think the battle is against people and their personalities and "Look at what they're doing on Facebook to me just because I brought up Christ at work." Listen, the reason that's happening—and I'm not excusing them from the culpability of being slanderers; I'm just saying this—they are motivated and fueled; the fires of their slander are stoked from a spiritual slanderer that wants to make sure all the spokespeople for Christianity are slandered.

As Paul put it—does this sound familiar now? Ephesians 6—what does he say? We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but—here's how he put it—"against"—now listen to this—"the authorities, the cosmic powers over the present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil." That sounds pretty mystical. Not trying to get you to see a demon behind every bush, but I am getting you to see that when you are slandered for standing with Christ and speaking up for Christ, there is a spiritual force behind that that's fueling all of that.

If you know your Bible, Revelation two and three—these are the seven postcards to the seven churches; at least that's what I call them. They're really short letters. The shortest one of all was to Smyrna, starting in verse number eight—just a few verses here: "The angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.'" There's the one with all authority. "I know your tribulation and your poverty"—so they're getting hit hard. He says, "but you are rich." Love that little parenthetical encouragement. You may have lost a lot and are under a



lot of pressure, but you have the things that really matter eternally. “And”—here’s our word—“the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not.” Now, who is slandering Jesus there? The religious leaders, the religious establishment in Smyrna looked at these Christians who claimed to be following the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and they slandered them constantly, these Christians. And he says, “Well, they’re not really Jews,” not in the sense that Romans talks about in those who are of the faith of Abraham—children of Abraham who are truly, by faith, those who are children. “No, they’re not. They’re from the synagogue”—the gathering—“of Satan.” Look at that. Now, the alliance of people that slander these young Christians in Smyrna—he says it’s Satan’s activity. That’s what’s fueling all this.

And once you talk about Satan and slander, it makes perfect sense in verse 10 that he now switches the name for Satan here to the word that means slanderer: “Do not fear what you’re about to suffer. Behold, the *diabolos*—the slanderer—is about to throw some of you in prison, to be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. But be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers”—now here’s the promise of the future. I talked about three phases: credentials, authority, return of Christ—“the one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.” There’s the promise for those.

You copious note-takers might want to jot down chapter 12 of Revelation where it says this slanderer goes and slanders us not once a week, not once a month—here’s how it’s put: day and night. The slanderer wants to slander you, not only through individuals through the agency of human beings, but also even to God. That’s his game.

So we’re going to encounter slander because there is a slanderer who will, every time, find anyone who wants to stand in alliance with Christ and speak up as a spokesman for Christ. He’s going to go after them. So get used to that. Be ready for it. Expect it.

And then let’s learn from the response—verses 31 and 32 of Luke chapter five. Jesus answers them: “Listen, you’re saying I’m hanging out learning the latest dirty jokes from the tax collectors and sinners. You think, you know, me and my disciples are picking up women,” or who knows what you think we’re doing. “We’re not. We’re there with a purpose. The reason we’re in that house that you would never enter into is because we’ve got a mission.” And here’s how he illustrates it. Jesus says to them—answers, number 31—“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I’ve not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Great thing about Christ: anytime you see him attacked, you never find weakness on the other side of that attack. You never find equivocating. And that’s a great question to think about. He always responds with determined resolve. Let’s put it that way. Number two—and we ought to follow the pattern—we need to respond when we’re slandered with resolve to do three things. First of all, letter



A—let’s think through what he says here—“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” He understands his calling: “I know that I’ve been sent by the Father to do a job. I want to please him, even if that doesn’t make you happy.” Let’s put it this way: letter A—to please God. Let’s follow his pattern. You should resolve in your own heart that your job on planet Earth is to please God, even if that means your reputation is going to take a beating. Even if that means you’re going to be slandered and sullied and besmirched in your reputation. You know what? I’ve got to make a decision: do I really value that more than this, or do I value pleasing God more than people’s approval?

We don’t have time to look at it, but jot it down at least: Galatians chapter one—one of the best statements from the Apostle Paul regarding the comparative value he places on pleasing people—Galatians 1:6–10. What a great text. He says even if people would drop out of the sky—even if an angel showed up and wanted me to curtail the message just to make it more palatable, even if it was an angel and I could please an angel—he says, “I wouldn’t do it.” He said, because my job on planet Earth is to please God. He said, “I would never be a servant of Christ”—how would you call me a servant of Christ if really what I cared about—here’s how he puts it—is the approval of man? Now, I’m not saying again that I’m stoking the fires to make as many people in my neighborhood hate me as possible. That’s not my goal. But my goal is to make sure that I don’t value their approval more than the approval of the Father. And the Father takes great pleasure in his children doing what they’re called to do. It may cost us jobs, friends, invitations, whatever—clients, raises—we’ve got to decide that. We’ve got to sacrifice sometimes our popularity, not only for solidarity with Christ but for a passion to please the Father.

Letter B—we can quickly move on to letter B, because we know what it means to please the Father in this context, and that is: physicians are about healing sick people, and preachers and evangelists are about calling sinners to repentance. We need to be committed to reach people—respond with resolve to reach people—just like he says there in Luke 5:10, the job is to catch people, to get people into this. Second Corinthians five says to persuade people of the validity, the veracity of the logic, the rationality of people getting ready for the return of Christ. We’ve got to be committed to that.

Now, I don’t want to get too far ahead, but clearly what’s going on here in verses 31 and 32 is a kind of response to the accusation that “You’re just going to hang out with non-Christians.” We’re not. We’re going in to help people. We’re going in to change their status before God with a message. And because of that, we recognize he wasn’t going to people that were absolutely not interested in hearing the message. Levi—Matthew—is bringing Jesus to his colleagues and co-workers—former co-workers at this point—who he thought would be responsive to the message of Christ. And Christ, we’re assuming, went into a place where people wanted to hear what he had to say.

And I guess if you want to put an asterisk or a footnote to this on letter B, we want to reach people that are receptive. Jesus keeps saying it: we want to look for the ripe part of his fields—the fields are white unto harvest. We're not here to bang our head against the wall, just argue with people over this. We're looking for people whose hearts have been prepped by the Holy Spirit. And in that regard, let's think about that: that may take me to some places that may not be, on the surface, readily understood.

We put it this way: if you work at the local, you know, jail—let's say at Theo Lacy—and you say, “Pastor Mike, I know you got your clearance at the jails and all that. I got a guy here. He's the worst and most notorious person in this jail. He is—he is, you know, not on the list—his rap sheet, all the things he's done—even among the other prisoners this guy's seen as the worst. And he's got three friends that are also, you know, the next three worst people in the jail. And these guys are notoriously bad people. I'm going to get you in and have dinner with them.” Here's the deal: I'm busy tonight—if they have no interest in what I have to say. But if the county worker at the jail says, “Listen, Mike, they want to hear about the message of Christ. They are ready. They want to know what this is all about,” then I'm having dinner tonight—not with, you know, the pastors of Compass Bible Church—I'm going to have dinner with some notorious sinners in the jail system. You see what I'm saying? Why would I go there? Well, because I don't care who you are. I don't care if you're a mass murderer. If I have a message that you are receptive to hear regarding the gospel, I'm going to go there, regardless of what my people may think of me.

We can't have that fortress mentality that says, “I'm only going to hang out with Christians.” My idea is not hanging out with non-Christians, but it's having those purposeful connections with non-Christians, wherever they may be found, as long as they are receptive to hear the message of the gospel.

Now, I've got to deal with a textual matter here, because I think that kind of comparison between receptive and non-receptive is what's being made here, though it's a bit veiled in the passage. Read it again, verses 31 and 32: Jesus said, “It's not the well who need a physician; it's those who are sick. I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Now, let's just take the last line, because it's easiest to understand in terms of the contrast between sinners and righteous. What I'm claiming is—here's my argument—he's making a distinction between receptive and non-receptive. Well, the distinction at the face of it is between the righteous and the unrighteous.

Turn, if you would, to Luke 18. Luke chapter 18. If you just take that statement, there's a couple ways to look at it when you first read it and start studying it: righteous versus sinners. If you make the distinction in a relative sense, comparatively—does the Bible make distinctions between sinners and righteous people? Absolutely. Read the Psalms. We're going to have to read this on—read Luke chapter one. We're introduced to two people who God calls righteous and devout: Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth—remember that, way back when? Zechariah and Elizabeth. The Bible says they were righteous and devout. Now read the verse: “I have not come to call the righteous.” “I



have not come to call Zechariah and Elizabeth; I've come to call sinners like Levi and his friends." Do you think we're talking about relative righteousness? No.

As a matter of fact, you read Romans chapters one through three, the punchline of that whole thing is "There is none righteous, no, not one." That's in an absolute sense. Was anyone—when we met Zechariah and learned his story—was he a perfectly righteous man? How about those months he couldn't say anything? Why did he have laryngitis so long? Why is that? Because he was a sinner, and he failed to trust God like he should. Do you think Christ refused to come to planet Earth for Zechariah and Elizabeth? Of course he did. And he was there for them when they recognized their sin—as even when he takes that little clay tablet and he writes the name "John—his name is John"—there's even that indication of his repentance and his contrition. And even in that moment, we see the grace of God. What's the point? Of course Christ came for Zechariah. Of course Christ came for Elizabeth. It's not the relative righteousness; it's those that consider themselves to be righteous—that takes them to a place of thinking they don't need the message of repentance.

Take a look at this passage—verse 9, Luke 18: "He also told this parable"—now, you've got to catch this—"to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous," okay? Check that out. "And they treated others with contempt." I'm better than they are. I'm righteous. I don't need what that person needs. That's why they didn't come to get baptized by John; why they didn't think they needed it. Like in John 9, the people that thought they were well—they weren't wanting to be fixed from Christ. It was those who knew they were sick—spiritually sick; it's those who knew they were sinners. Then the parable starts in verse 10—we don't need to read it all: the Pharisee and the tax collector. One thinks he's righteous before God. One thinks he's not. One cries out for mercy. One's glad he's not a sinner like the tax collector. Verse 14—punchline: "I tell you, this man"—the tax collector, who, by the way, Levi is—who we're learning of his conversion; he's a tax collector—"went down to his house"—here's a big Bible word—"justified," cleansed from his sin, "rather than the other." Who's the other? The Pharisee who thought he was righteous. "For everyone who exalts himself"—says, "I'm well, I'm righteous, I don't need all that stuff"—they will be humbled. And that's not a good thing in this context; they will be judged. "But the one who humbles himself"—like the tax collector, who says, "Man, I'm a sinner. God, have mercy on me"—"he will be exalted." He will be blessed. He will be pardoned. He will be forgiven.

Now, look at that in the passage that we're reading. He said, "I didn't come for the well. I didn't come for the righteous; I came for the sinners." In a relative sense? No. In an absolute sense. But what's the problem? People that think they're righteous don't think they need the message. He's going to the receptive, not those that think they don't need the message. That's a big distinction to make, and important when we look at number—letter B here: I want to reach people. What kind of people? People who know they need the message of the gospel.

That's why your view—some of you that still refuse to talk about Christ in your circles that you run in every day—it's because you view evangelism the wrong way. I'm looking to let everyone know



that I'm a Christian and to talk to people who are ready to discuss the claims of Christ, the authority of Christ, and the promise of his coming. I want to reach people wherever that may take me—whatever setting, whatever criticism comes my way—because it's okay.

Now, letter C. I've got to deal with something here, because so often this passage is abused and misused. And I just want to end with this careful corrective, based on the analogy that Jesus uses—which is that of a physician who comes not for the well but for the sick. Unfortunately, this is like the high-schooler's favorite passage, who says, "Mom, I want to go to that party." "Come on." "Oh, you can't go to the party." "Well, Jesus hung out with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus went to parties. That's what they taught me at church, man." Okay.

Now, we can uncomfortably laugh at that because we picture the high-schooler, but I find more adults misuse this passage than high-schoolers. They make all kinds of compromises to go hang out on Friday night with their non-Christian buddies, because they think, "Well, you know, that's what Jesus did. Maybe I can be a good influence. Maybe I'll be, you know, I don't know, the designated driver here, and it'll be okay, 'cause Jesus went to parties too." You know, be super careful not to abuse this text. The analogy helps us here: physician. He comes not for the well but for the sick.

I've been to a lot of hospitals. As a pastor—all of our pastors—we visit a lot of sick people. Now, I've never walked into a sick person's hospital room and found the doctor kind of nestled up next to the sick person in the bed, with his feet up on the recliner: "Hey, hand me the remote control." I walk in: "Oh, it's my pastor." "Hey, we're just watching a little TV here, man." "Oh really?" "Yeah." "Well, that's odd, you know. Get your own bed." "No, just hanging out. Just love this guy. Just a great guy. Just here—do you have any magazines?" I mean, you don't see that. As a matter of fact, when they come in, they're always so careful. They're always washing their hands. Have you noticed that? The doctors washing their hands; they come into the sick person's room. And when they leave, they're washing—do you know why? Because they're thinking about their wife and their kids that that doctor's going to go home to, and they don't want to take any of your infested juju home with them to get their family all sick. They want to make sure they sanitize and take off their coat and make sure that they get none of that into their house. Why? They're not there to hang out with you. They may have a great bedside manner—I get that. A doctor may be very polite and kind. He may touch your hand, and he may be kind, but trust me, he's putting his high-dollar soap on his hands on the way out to make sure he didn't get any of your stench on him. Think of that now. That's overkill—sorry. Your germs.

Doctors—they're there to help people get well. Or to put it in more clear terms: "He's come to call sinners to repentance." See? And for you to go to the sports bar with your buddies at work and be all exposed to all of that, and all the dirty jokes and all the things that they say and all the womanizing that they do—for you to go, "Well, I'm gonna hang out there," and in your mind it's really because they're a lot more fun than my home fellowship group—you may think that, but this passage cannot be your excuse for that. Unless, of course, you're going to call all those guys to



repentance, and then you don't get invited out next Friday. You notice that doesn't happen, because that's not what Jesus and the disciples are doing. They're not going to a party to hang out with the boys. What are they doing? They're going there as agents of a message of reconciliation with God, which comes through means of repentance.

So stop letting anybody in your hearing abuse this passage. If you want a verse for this to jot down, how about Jude 22 and 23—little book right before Revelation; one chapter, so I don't need to say what chapter, just verses 22 and 23. It says, "You need to have mercy on those who doubt. You need to save others by snatching them from the fire." It might be that you're called to have dinner with someone who is a sordid, rotten, notorious sinner. Great—do it. Snatch him from the fire. Get him saved. Now, here's how it ends: "Hating even the garment that is polluted by the flesh." What does that mean? I'm not getting it out on me. I'm not going to participate—let my hair down, hang out, kick my feet up, and just be one of the boys. I'm going into that situation to see if I can be someone—as the last question on the discussion questions calls you to look at, in Ephesians five—to call the sleeper, if you will, to rise from the dead, to let Christ shine on you. If you're bringing that message to the Friday-night sports-bar thing—fantastic. I understand building bridges and walking with a neighbor not saved, and spending time playing golf with your non-Christian friend because you're trying to get that bridge built, and not every conversation is a call to repentance—I get all that. But it isn't letting your guard down and loving the world. That's not it at all.

As a matter of fact, one passage on this I gotta turn you to: First Peter chapter two. And I never gave you the point—here it comes, letter C—at least how I worded it. You already got the point, at least the gist of it. It's this: you need to resolve not to compromise. Respond with resolve to not compromise. Not gonna compromise. God loves holiness. God loves purity. He wants us to be zealous for good works. Me doing evangelism and knowing that Christ went to dine with tax collectors and sinners is not my license to hang out with the guys. It's my calling and my pattern and my template to care enough about people to go wherever they are, as long as they're receptive, to talk to them about the message of life.

First Peter two now—you did two things at once there, I hope—First Peter chapter two, verse 11. You want a statement about identity? Here's a great passage—two verses, 11 and 12. First Peter 2:11–12. "Beloved"—talking to the church, to the Christians—"I urge you as sojourners and exiles"—there's a good place to start. You're going to go to the tax collector's house, the sinner's house, and you're going to share Christ; I guarantee you, if you're a real Christian, you should feel like a sojourner, an exile, a stranger and alien, as the other passages say. "To abstain from the passions of the flesh"—see, the things they joke about, I've got to abstain from. As a matter of fact, "they wage war against my soul." The things that they do are things that Ephesians five says are not to be named among you. "Don't let any unwholesome word proceed from your mouth." God cares about holiness and purity. And I want to make sure that I recognize the distinction. "Keep your conduct"—verse 12—"among the Gentiles honorable," why? Because when you're there with them, trying to do the work of evangelism, there's going to be people, like the Pharisees did to Jesus—look at the next phrase—"they will speak against you as evildoers." That's exactly what they were doing to Christ. "He's an evildoer. Who knows what they're in there joking and laughing



about.” That’s not what Jesus was doing. “When they speak against you as evildoers,” you’ve kept your behavior, your conduct, honorable; and you want to make sure that everybody sees your good deeds so that even if they’re saved or not saved, they can, at the end of time when Christ appears and all the truth is known and the dust is settled, everyone is going to glorify God, knowing that you weren’t a man or woman of compromise; you were honorable; you abstained; you did the right things as an agent to the message of the gospel—“on the day of visitation,” which is a very low-key way to put it. You’ve read the book of Revelation—he’s coming back. And when he shows up, we want to make sure that we weren’t men and women of compromise in the name of evangelism.

That last question—I know how home fellowship groups work. Sometimes you never get to the last questions. Maybe you should start with question five this week, because it’s such a great passage to show that contrast.

A couple weeks back, five of our seven pastors’ wives were teaching throughout the week—Christian warriors, right?—who were there fighting for what was right. On one of the days, one of our pastors’ wives taught the kids on a guy named William Tyndale—does that ring a bell to all of you? I hope. William Tyndale, 16th-century man with a passion to fight for what was right. In his regard, the great zeal that he had was for people to know the Word of God. That’s what he wanted. He was living in England where at the time it was outlawed to have the Bible in the English language, which was what everybody spoke. And he had such a passion and a gift—he learned, as a graduate of Oxford, for languages—that he said, “I want to be the agent that gets this book in the language of the people.”

And when the high-sounding, kind of stuck-up people of the religious establishment said, “Oh, you’re just trying to make a name for yourself. You’re just trying to be famous,” when they said all the kind of disparaging things about William Tyndale, he responded with one of his most famous quotes: he said, “If God spares my life”—because they hated him that much; they wanted to kill him—“I will cause the plowboy to know more of the Scriptures than the clergy.” Because the misguided clergy—they were the Pharisees of the day—who said, “We don’t want them having the Bible in their own language,” Tyndale was committed to getting it out.

By 1525, he had finished the New Testament, translating it from Erasmus’s Greek New Testament into English. And by 1535, he’d finished the Old Testament—with some help. So now we had—which, by the way, was illegal. He ran to Germany to get this done on the printing presses there. I mean, for the first time ever—think of this—Tyndale, coming off of a printing press in the 16th century, came for the very first time the Bible in English. Amazing. William Tyndale. They hated him for it. He was on the run, living in secret in, you know, these houses that they would hide him in while they were printing the Bible. And then it was outlawed. You could not bring that English Bible into England—think of that. It was banned. They would sneak it in and smuggle it into the nation.



Finally—I was just finishing a biography of Tyndale—I mean, to watch the betrayal that took place when this guy wormed his way into the inner circle of Tyndale. They finally got him exposed, and one year after the Old Testament was finished—there were some final touches that needed to be done on it—they arrested Tyndale. They found him in Germany, and they brought him back for kangaroo court in England, and they were going to try him. And after that betrayal—he had a lot of betrayal there—then that great scene at the end of his life—terrible scene—and they bring him before the courts. And even while he’s in jail waiting for the trial—I mean, he had some finishing touches to put on the Old Testament—he was bold enough and zealous enough and unyielding enough to be asking for—as he passed the letter out of the jail—for his Hebrew Old Testament and some Hebrew grammar books: “I just gotta finish that translation.” Determined, zealous, unyielding.

Well, they hated him. Right up to the very end. And they reserved this kind of thing for some of the worst of the very worst: burning at the stake. They’d create a gallows and put all the wood around the bottom of it, and they’d put him up there ready to hang him. And while they hung him and broke his neck, they’d light his body on fire. And there was his charred, blackened body burning outside as a testament of the government’s hatred for this man. And everyone was threatened: if you have a copy of what this man was trying to get out—I mean, you were a criminal. It was against the law and prohibited. People at the borders searching through sacks to keep the Bible in English out of England.

Remember that passage: Jesus said, “Don’t fear them.” No matter what they say about you, whatever’s covered is going to be exposed, you know, whatever’s secret is going to be revealed. Recently, there’s only a few copies from the very first printing in 1525 of Tyndale’s English New Testament. They’re highly valued. Here’s some of the irony of it. Number one: one of the best copies of Tyndale’s—and they think there’s only three that are still existing from that first printing—one copy is held in downtown London at St. Paul’s Cathedral. And they value and cherish that document. But another one went up on the auction block not long ago. Now think about this. One of probably only three existing copies of Tyndale’s 1525 English New Testament—it was a better copy than St. Paul’s Cathedral had—and people rushed to go make bids on this. Bristol—who ended up putting in a tremendous bid that was going to get everybody out of this—they were ready, this college, to purchase this privately held copy of the 1525 New Testament. There were some Americans—well endowed financially—who got together and stepped up to go to the auction, and they called in the fact that they had a bid that far exceeded what the Bristol group was going to offer. And those Brits passed the law right there at the end of that negotiation and said, “I’m sorry; we’ve just created a new law that will not allow William Tyndale’s work to leave the country.” The Americans got snubbed so that they could keep William Tyndale’s work in the borders that it was banned from coming through to get in, in the first place.

You talk about the vindication. The mission field—the plowboys as well as the clergy and the kings—that Tyndale so badly wanted to see and hear the Word of God now cherish it as a national



treasure. I know they don't live it, they don't do it—I get that. But there's a small foretaste of the vindication that's coming for you when the people in your workroom turn around and talk when you walk in because last week you talked to someone about Christ, and they all go bent out of shape. Or when they say things on Facebook about you because of some post you put up that made it clear that you stood with Christ. The vindication is coming. Today's targets of gossip, defamation, and slander are the kingdom's heroes. And maybe in time, you can look ahead with the eye of faith and realize with the coming of the kingdom of God, you want to be on the right side of history. I say that to kind of flip that phrase on its head—quite often he's talking about being right. So I want to be on the right side of history. And when Christ comes back, I want to be known as the person that not only stood with Christ but stood up for Christ and spoke out for Christ, even if it cost me my reputation.

Let's pray. God, help us to pray as Tyndale did—as one of his other famous statements is—he stood affixed, shackled, and tied to that post. His last words, his last known words from that horrific scene was a prayer that the eyes of the King of England would be opened. In fact, they were—so much so that the lawmakers of the modern era value his work so much they won't let it leave the country. Thank you, God, for the opportunities that we have to stand with you now, in a very different day, and yet with a very similar problem of people—when we seek to advance the cause and message of Christ—they don't like it. They'll attack us personally. They'll betray us. They'll say things about us that aren't true. But God, I pray that we would be entrusting ourselves to you, a faithful Judge, a great King, a merciful Master, who always, as the text says there in the Sermon on the Mount, rewards greatly those who, like the prophets, are reviled falsely because of our speaking up for the truth.

Gotta get back to the real remedial step that just is the beginning for everyone here: if some in this room are still that kind of cloaked, undercover Christian—people in their office or their workplace or their neighbors don't even know they are Christians—I pray they would get bold. Some people want to be so secretive. Let them know that if they're ashamed of you, you'll be ashamed of them on Judgment Day. So break them out of that kind of timidity. Give them courage because of the sermon today, because of the truth of this passage. Give them courage to know, with the right kind of diplomacy and respect, when to speak. And when they're fighting the sweaty palms and the quivering stomach and they're thinking, "Oh, this is going to get me in trouble if I say this," let them know with wisdom and discernment that oftentimes, though it may cost us something, there's always great reward in standing with you and standing on the truth and speaking for you. Just give us the right attitude, as Peter said, with gentleness and respect. May you take our words and change many lives—that maybe around us we might have people in our circle of friends who are former unprincipled people like Matthew, who were willing to take a bribe, extort people, and sell out their own country—whom we can sit around knowing because we weren't quiet, we weren't silent. You've used us to be a conduit, a messenger of a life-changing gospel. Do that for us, and give us encouragement along the way. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.