

Loving Jesus and People in the Face of Reproach and Slander

I. ALL WHO STAND FOR TRUTH WILL BE SLANDERED EVENTUALLY

- A. The purpose of this message is to help people gain a proper perspective, respond rightly when people speak negatively about them, and not be fearful or respond wrongly. To revile or slander is to share negative reports about someone to others without going through the biblical process.

¹⁶Keep a good conscience [by responding right] so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior...will be put to shame [silenced]. (1 Pet. 3:16)

I want to talk about how to respond to reproach and slander. That is a subject that every person has to deal with on an individual basis. There are seasons where spiritual families will face this in more intense ways than in other seasons. So I want to address that. I am going to give a longer introduction of things that are not on the notes, and most of the notes I will not actually cover.

Then at the end of the message, we are going to have a Q&A time, like we did last night. We had quite a lively question and answer time. Folks who want to talk about this subject and how they are to respond to it in their own lives or even corporately how we are to respond to it in various situations are free to stay for that if you want and if not, you are free to go.

This is a subject that everybody individually has to face and deal with. Corporately I would say that about eighteen months ago began what I would call a more intensified season of people slandering and bringing reproach upon us as a spiritual family. I link it to the murder trial involving Micah Moore and, of course, the great tragedy of the death that occurred in our midst. Satan wants to exploit that tragedy and complicate things and continue to go on and on with that. I see that time frame going from about eighteen months ago to about the next eighteen months just because of new media, the trial, and stuff like that. It will be covered in the news so this will be a more intensified season where people are saying negative things about us.

So I want to address this. I was going to a few months ago, but I want to now, and I will a few more times this year because we want to excel in carrying our hearts in a right way. We want to respond in the right way. We want to interpret it in the right way. We want to really excel as individuals, and we want to excel as a spiritual family.

Now as intense as this might seem to some folks, it is only a pop quiz. It is only a very small, little quiz. The Lord is giving us opportunity as individuals and as a spiritual family to work that muscle, to practice working that muscle. In the decades ahead, the reproach and slander that the Body of Christ will face as they stand for truth is going to escalate dramatically, in the years to come. So this is only a small, little pop quiz, but this is a good time to learn how to excel in this.

I am not referring today to any particular individual. There are—I do not know the number—ten or twenty what I would call little epicenters, little clusters of people. Some on the East coast, some West coast, some here locally, some just around here and there. It is small numbers, and they are just energized to generate maligning material about what we are doing here. Most of them have just a small, little following, and they just put lots of hours in it. They put this on the Internet, and it creates conversation. These are just again ten or twenty little clusters. I am not referring to one of them particularly.

This is just how we respond and carry our hearts before the Lord in this period of time. The purpose of this message is to help us respond. I have three points here. I am going to spend a little time on this and then leave most of the notes for you to read on your own if you want to.

First I want us to gain a proper perspective of what is happening. Second, I want us to respond rightly, and then third, not to yield to fear or anxiety, which leads us to respond in a wrong way. First, to have a proper perspective, it helps if we take a step back and get the biblical view and the historical view of what happens when there is a heightened season of slander or reproach.

Now again this might be for you personally or in the context of a spiritual family, just as we are in that right now. It is not so intense, but I want to prepare us again for the days ahead. Some of you will be these seasons in the future. If we see the big picture about intensified seasons of attack, reproach, and slander, it is actually an advantage for us. It is an advantage for anyone who goes through those seasons so they respond in a right way.

If you receive a big picture, you can have confidence. You have confidence in the Lord that things are good, that the Lord is in control, and things are not spinning out of control. When you have confidence, you interpret the situation entirely different. If you get intimidated, and you get fearful, and you get anxious, then you interpret the situation in a foreboding, negative way. Then you are tempted to get into the spirit of accusation. You get defensive, and you think about it all the time. The Lord is saying, “No, wrong perspective! No, do not go there. See what I see when I look at this season in your particular life or ministry context.”

*First, it is an advantage. Second, it is a tremendous learning opportunity. I mean it **really** is a learning opportunity. I am talking about us now as a corporate family, but every principle is the same in our personal lives. We all have deficiencies, and our enemies—our adversaries—I am going to call them our adversaries because when we think of enemies, sometimes we think of a guy with horns and a demon. You know a guy far away. But we all know what adversaries are, because some of them formerly were close friends, and some are family members. So the word **adversary** can maybe bring the situation closer to home. Enemies seems like such a big word, but that is what an enemy is. It is a person who is intentionally maligning you. They are twisting and distorting what you believe and what you do, with the intention to malign you; that is their intention. Many of them formerly had a close relationship with you, and that is why it can be so painful. In such a time I want you to know this: it is a learning opportunity. Even enemies can have a fragment of truth; your most accusatory critics can tell you something of your own deficiencies.*

If you will search for the tiny pearls in the midst of the mud they are slinging, I tell you our enemies can become a free research team for us. They are studying you, and they are studying me. They are studying us, or whatever situation you are in, and they are seeing blind spots that are not so apparent to you. If you have a spirit of confidence in the Lord and a teachable spirit, you can take a step back. I mean you can get some amazing insight that you would not normally have received.

Not only will we see deficiencies in our character, we also see deficiencies in our heart and in our emotions. Meaning, when somebody attacks us, we find out that we have more insecurity than we thought. We thought we were doing everything for the Lord and just only for Him. We find out that our reputation was more important to us than we thought it was. The Lord says, “Well, I already knew that, but you did not know that.” It gives us a chance to work the muscle and realign ourselves with the Lord, and we actually get stronger in the process. We see our deficiencies more clearly and we see the gaps in our heart, our insecurities, and our fears more clearly.

It is not only a learning opportunity; third, it is also a season of promotion in the spirit. That is when it is an intensified season of attack because you have been standing for truth. That is the topic I am addressing right

now: standing for the truth, as Jesus would define the truth. If you are in a season of intensive attack, the Lord will often use it as a season of promotion. A few months will go by, and you will not see it. But you look back five, ten years later, and you will see that was the season where things went forward in what the Lord was entrusting to you.

Now people do not feel that on the front end. I have a little bit of perspective on this. I have been through a few of these seasons in the last thirty years. They last for a year, two, or three, and there are kind of spikes in those seasons. Then there is an ebb and flow. Then there is an ebbing, and then it kind of lifts. You look back, and every single time when I evaluate it, it was a time of going forward; it was a promotion in the spirit. You have to respond right for it to end up as a promotion.

So if you know it is a promotion amid the intensifying, that is a tip. The enemy wants to strike, to take you out before the next season of increase and promotion takes place. If you get that—I don't mean that you like the season of attack—but you look up, and you feel that you can just kind of imagine the Lord winking at you and saying, "Hey, it is going to work."

You think, "Yes, I do not like the attack. It does not feel good, but I see the fruit of it. I like the seasons of promotion."

Well, fourth, it is to our advantage because it is a privilege to stand with the Lord and to bear His reproach. What I mean by that is that when we stand for truth that is near and dear to His heart, and we bear reproach because we are standing for what is dear to Him, He takes that personally. Many things that Jesus and the apostles said in the New Testament are politically incorrect, in a major way politically incorrect.

The subject of salvation only through Jesus is a highly offensive, politically incorrect subject in this hour of history, I mean really incorrect. And the idea of hell, the idea of morality, that there are moral standards, troubles even people in the church, not just people outside the church.

The issue of Israel that the Lord has on His heart—that is one of the most politically incorrect subjects there is on the planet. The subject of the end-time story line that is in the Bible—that it is dear to Jesus; it is His plan. Most people just back away from it and say, "I do not want to mess that. That is just volatile."

The subject of God being a Bridegroom God, the subject of wholeheartedness where we bring all of our strength into the relationship and we give our all—I find that is actually the most offensive of all. The topic is not offensive if you say, "Love God with all of your heart" like everyone says; that is cool. When you start breaking it down and applying it specifically, it is invasive. It really in stirs up trouble in the Body of Christ, even that subject itself.

These are dear to the Lord, these kinds of subjects and many more as well. Not that any one group would capture everything dear to the Lord, but anything that you are standing for that is dear to Him that causes reproach because it is politically incorrect in the church and outside the church in many circles, He takes that personally. When you say to Him, "Lord, I am doing it because I love You. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to do this." I mean you are only on the earth in this life for a moment, and to have that in your story, in your history with God, that is a blessed thing.

In Acts 5:41 when the apostles were whipped for taking a stand for Jesus—they beat them with whips. You can be beaten with whips or beaten with words; both of them are real. In I Peter 4, where we will look in a moment, Peter is talking mostly about slander, reproach, and being reviled. He is talking about words, about people speaking twisted, distorted things about what you believe and what you do in order to malign you intentionally.

Three times in 1 Peter he makes a direct reference to slander, reviling, and reproach because 1 Peter is all about bearing trials. It is in the early church. Some people around the earth were being killed for Jesus. But he was mostly dealing with the subject of being maligned verbally, your reputation being hurt in the eyes of others, and the believers feeling the pain of that. Again he mentions it three different times in the book, in 1 Peter 2:23; 3:16; 4:13-14. He addresses this subject straight on.

The second reason I am addressing this issue is that not only do we want to see the advantage of it and have a right perspective, but we also want to respond rightly; we want to respond in the spirit of Christ. We want to respond with love, with blessing, and with confidence; that is the response that the Lord is after.

The third reason I am addressing this issue—and I will a number of times throughout the year, not week after week, but here and there—is that we would not be intimidated or become anxious or fearful. Those are all really saying the same thing. It means that we respond wrongly by drawing back in fear from our mandate. Because we think, “Oh no! People are all against it. This must not be good.” We can get intimidated and draw back.

The Lord says, “No, do not respond that way.”

Also, we do not want to respond by entering into the spirit of accusation. In Revelation 12:10, Satan is called the accuser. As the ultimate accuser of the brethren of the Body of Christ, Satan often uses believers to accuse other believers. He shoots these fiery missiles—it talks about this in Ephesians 6—he shoots these fiery missiles of accusation. Many times he will use a believer to release a fiery missile of accusation against another believer. Well, that is bad, but what is worst is, if you are the believer who is attacked, and you respond by shooting missiles back. So believer number one is operating in a spirit of accusation, and then now you, believer number two, are answering in the spirit of accusation. The devil says, “Excellent! That is exactly what I was after, to get the spirit of darkness in the relationship within the Body of Christ.” What happens when we get into an accusatory spirit and an argumentative spirit, we draw back from our mandate.

Another thing that happens [when we get into an argumentative spirit] is that we change the conversation. The enemy wants to change the conversation. What I mean by that is I have been asked by people over the years—because I have had several of these seasons—and I will not answer. I just never have and by the grace of God never will answer my accusers publicly. **I will meet with them one-on-one and answer, but I will not publicly answer how they have twisted and distorted what I am saying.** I will not go line-by-line and answer it. I will not name their names, I will not do it publicly, and, besides in leadership circles, I will not do it privately.

Over the years that has really frustrated some of my friends. They say, “Come on, just give us some ‘one, two, three’ of what really happened.”

I will say, “I will tell you what I believe. I will tell you what I teach. What I believe and what I teach I have done before you, and that is what I have done for years, and that is the posture I am taking.”

Some ask why. I have given a few of the reasons already. One of the reasons I do not respond is that if you answer the accusation, and this is true of your own life as well—I am just giving you my own personal example—this is true for you. If I answer those accusations, I change the conversation. The conversation of our ministry right now and for many years has been the beauty of Jesus, winning the lost, building the prayer movement, and preparing the people of God for wholeheartedness in the first commandment. There are many of these subjects. That is our message. Seeing the church function as a spiritual family is something we are really focusing on in this last season. That is our message.

The enemy wants to change the conversation so our message is, who is right? Who is wrong? Who really did it? Who really did not? I refuse to let the enemy shift our message. I am just not going to do it. I am saying that to

you, for your own personal life as well, because the enemy wants you to shift the conversation of your life by getting caught up with the spirit of accusation. Do not do it. Stay locked in and keep focused on what the Lord has put before you.

Not only does your public conversation change if you answer those accusations, but your internal conversation also changes. What I mean by that is when you start answering accusations publicly, something strange happens. That is why I always have mercy on the people who accuse other people in public formats. Because if you start answering publicly, and then you accuse back even though you did not mean to, you end up posturing yourself to have to defend those accusations. Then much of your conversation shifts around. You are defending it, then internally you are thinking about the accusations. You are talking to yourself about your accusers. You are talking to your friends about the accusers and what they said and what you said. The Lord will whisper in your heart and say something like, “You used to talk to Me. You used to talk to Me about My kingdom and who I am and about what I am doing. Now you are only talking to yourself about your enemies, and you are only talking to your friends about your enemies. What about Me? The conversation in you has shifted.”

Beloved, that is what the enemy wants, because if he can get that conversation shift, then he wins, and that is what he is all about. The Word of God is so clear about how we are suppose to respond in these kinds of ways.

¹⁶Keep a good conscience [by responding right] so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior...will be put to shame [silenced]. (1 Pet. 3:16)

Okay, let’s look at just a few of the passages here on the handout. Let’s look at 1 Peter 3:16. Again three times in 1 Peter he is referencing the issue of slander and reviling, which are really the same thing, practically the same thing. He charges them to keep a good conscience. He is appealing to how they carry their heart before God; that is what the conscience is. He is saying, “The way you and God talk and relate—that is what I am appealing to.”

He says, “Keep a good conscience so that the thing in which you were slandered and those who revile your good behavior will be put to shame, they will be.” The way that the slanderer is put to shame, it is not that some horrible thing happens in their life; that is not the point that Peter is saying. They are put to shame, meaning concerning the thing for which they slandered you, because down the road in God’s timing it becomes apparent that you were exactly the opposite of what they slandered you about. They are put to shame in the sense that they are silenced. They are put to shame in the sense that the accusation is proven wrong about your life.

The problem is there is a time delay. The Lord does not answer right away because the Lord is more interested in you and me and everybody else in this kind of situation—which is the whole Body of Christ actually—He is more interested in me aligning my heart with Him and learning to operate in love while under pressure. We are more interested in looking good and having our reputation restored. He is more interested in us aligning with Him and growing in love under pressure. Therefore there is a time delay, and I do not like the time delay, but He is committed to us growing up in Him. He says, “This is good for you.”

What I have found in thirty years of observing this—I will say this to some of our future leaders as well as those that are leaders now—if the Lord has given you a ministry assignment and you have leadership in that ministry assignment some place, one thing I have learned is that though people slander and malign you, it never ever hurts the ministry assignment long-term. It feels like it does in the short-term, like accusers rise up and it looks like everything is lost. Some supporters back away. Some advocates who were connected to you back away. Immediately it is like “Oh no. Oh no. Oh no!”

You fast-forward a few years and take a peek back; you will find out never did it hurt your ministry assignment in any long-term way. Meaning that which God has put in your hands is stronger and better. It takes a little

while, more than a few weeks or a few months, but it is always is better. Now the first couple of rounds, I have only been through a few of these rounds, but a few of them, I mean at first it was like everything is lost.

The Lord says, “Not even close. This is a time of promotion in the spirit. You are going to grow in your heart, you are going to get more connected to Me, and you are going to learn about your deficiencies.”

I looked back in a few years, and everything was stronger. I thought, “Well, wow. Where did all the bad stuff go? I mean the accusers are still there, but huh!”

Then you know a little reprieve happens. A few years go by, then there is another little swirl of attackers that rise up to twist and distort. Oh no! Then it turns out better as well again. A couple rounds of that, I mean it took me a while to figure it out. I realized, “Hey, this actually ends up better.” I mean, I would not vote for it. I would not pray for accusers [to come], but it is better, like “Wow!”

The Lord’s answer is “Yes, that is the point.”

So young leaders, when you go through a season like this, and you are in some other place, and you are new in your ministry assignment, do not, do not waste a good trial. Do not waste a good trial! Do not spin out thinking God forgot you. I assure you, a few minutes down the road you will look back, and nothing was hurt, nothing long-term. I mean, for a minute things were kind of disrupted, but you stay with it. I tell you, do not get caught up in the spirit of accusation, and you will be pleasantly surprised that there is actually increase in going forward.

- B. Every believer who seeks to be faithful to the values and message set forth in God’s Word will be persecuted, reproached, or mistreated by both believers and unbelievers who disagree with them.

¹²**Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (2 Tim. 3:12)**

¹²**Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you...**¹⁴**If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (1 Pet. 4:12-14)**

Peter goes on to say in 1 Peter 4:12, “Beloved, do not think it is strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing was happening to you.” In verse 14, he defines the trial, “If you are reproached”—he is talking about slander still—“for the name of Christ for standing for truth.” Again if you stand for what is dear to the Lord, you will be resisted and attacked outside the church and inside the church.

Because inside the church not everybody is laying hold of or believing or buying into what is dear to the Lord. They pick a few things, they do not pick some of the other things, and so they rise up and attack it. Now no group buys in or understands or lays hold of everything that is dear to the Lord. When you see a group down the road that is different, do not attack them. Just bless them and leave them alone. I mean different in terms of you do not understand what they are doing. Many times I do not get it. I think that maybe it is dear to the Lord, what do I know, you know? Because what the Lord has on His heart is bigger than any one group will lay hold of.

Here in verse 14 he says that if you are reproached for the name of Christ you are blessed because the spirit of glory will rest on you. What Peter means is that in a season of heightened attack you will have a heightened, or an increased sense of the spirit of glory resting on your life. That is if you respond rightly you will have that spirit of glory resting on you.

So what is this spirit of glory when it rests on us? I mean the Holy Spirit is in us and on us all of our days after we are born again. But we are talking about a distinct, heightened increase of the spirit of glory resting on you during seasons of unusual attack and assault against you, if you are standing for the truth.

Now this spirit of glory is distinct from what I mentioned already, that you are in a season of promotion in the spirit. You will look back and you will see that season. You will mark the calendar and look back. You will see things increase in terms of what God entrusted to you. The spirit of glory is more than that. I have experienced this a little bit over the years. You have an increased tenderness in your heart with God, an increase of understanding of the Word, an increase in feeling the nearness of God on your heart. Then, when that season of persecution or that season of attack lifts, it is not like it all goes away, but it kind of goes back to like it was.

*I remember talking to the man who wrote the book, **The Heavenly Man**, who was so fiercely persecuted in China. He was beaten in prison multitudes of times, and one of the things that he said in our times of conversation—he has been traveling around America the last number of years and he has come here a time or two—He said, “The spirit of glory on me when I was in prison getting beaten. I hated being beaten, but the tenderness on me was so distinct.” He went on, “I do not have that on me like it used to be because it is reserved for those times of intense season of attack.”*

Again, we have to respond rightly in order for that to happen. Just know this when somebody accuses you, even a believer, whether believer or unbeliever, because you are standing for the truth, whether it is the truth of Jesus being the only way of salvation or other truths that are within the Body of Christ, controversial but dear to the Lord, know this: none of those accusers get to vote about you in God’s court. The only Man who votes about you in God’s court has scars in His hands and was raised from the dead. His name is Jesus. He is the only Man who gets to vote on you.

So when accusers say this, that, and the other thing, I think, “You know, I would rather you did not say that, but it does not change anything, and it does not even change people.” I have not seen people change when accusations come. What I see is that whatever is in them comes to the surface. I have rarely seen people change. The people against you are just bolder to be against you, the people with you are more determined to be with you, and the people on the fence stay on the fence and wobble about for a few months. I have rarely seen anybody change substantially what they think or feel. It just comes out with greater energy, but almost nothing changes. I have looked at that over the years and I say, “What is this hoopla about how horrible everything is?” It is not, and that is the point that Peter was making.

Look at verse 12 here again, he says, “Beloved, do not think it is strange concerning this fiery trial.” Now as I have said it, Peter is focusing on the subject of slander and being reviled, verbal trials, although he is clearly including them being physically beaten. In 1 Peter 2:23 he talks about reviling; here in 4:14 he talks about reviling, and in 1 Peter 3:16 it is also the subject.

He says, “Do not think some strange thing is happening to you,” as if you are being picked on in a special way that is not fair. What Peter is really saying is, “Do not be shocked when this happens; do not be so surprised.” In other words, expect it on the front-end. Do not be offended and confused.

“Well, believers are saying this...The Word of God says...” Yes, read the Bible; that is what it says. People will do it, some born again, some not born again. It is just people will come against you.

New leaders or new believers are not thinking this, and so when it happens, it so disorients them. They cry, “Oh God, oh God, what is happening? Why?”

The Lord probably does not say it this way, but He might say, “Read your Bible. I told you all through the New Testament this is what would happen. It is in the Bible. Look at church history. Do not think it is strange.”

All through church history anyone who stood for truth got maligned; that is how it works. Now one of the reasons why we want to know this is you are going to be maligned. Jesus really says it over and over particularly in the Sermon on the Mount and all through His teachings, because He does not want our expectation in a wrong place so when it happens we are all confused, and then we get offended at the Lord and filled with fear, and we retreat, and then we accuse, and we argue and get defensive. The Lord says, “No, that is not at all what I want. It is a very different approach that I want you to have.”

For some people, their paradigm of the kingdom is that they are on a cruise ship. They think that in the grace of God and the leadership of Jesus, they will be more popular, they will be more liked, they will get more money, they will be happier, they will have more energy, and things will just be better. That’s what they think of the grace of God, the glory of God, the goodness of God.

The biblical point of view is that we are in a wartime mentality; we are not on a cruise ship. If you think you are on a cruise ship and everything is going to get just easier, happier, you are just going to have perpetually more friends, more people agree with you, then it will confuse you. If you know you are in a war, it makes sense that flaming missiles of accusation are being launched against you. Just do not launch them back. That is the big point that I am wanting to focus on. I want the spirit of glory to rest on me.

- C. Jesus taught that God’s people will be mistreated, even hated, for standing for what God values. Both believers and unbelievers are often offended and may even betray long-term relationships when they feel mistreated or see a believer embracing something with which they do not agree.

¹⁰“Many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.” (Mt. 24:10)

*In Matthew 24:10, Jesus said, “Then many will be offended and will betray one another.” Now offense is stage one; betrayal is stage two. The people who betray are only betraying because they are offended. That is why they are betraying—because they are offended. So you can see there is a progression there. Now when Jesus uses the word **then**; that is a key word. He is talking about in the generation the Lord returns. He is talking about an escalating of intensity; the intensity of offense will increase.*

*Now I have said this for many years. It is my opinion. It is not a revelation. It is not a prophecy, but it is my **opinion** that we are in the early days of that generation. It may be a little bit longer, it may be a little shorter, and maybe it is the next generation, maybe after that. It does not matter to me which it is. I do not know, I do not have a prophecy, and I do not have a revelation. I have looked at the biblical signs of the times from the lips of Jesus and the apostles, and they are escalating on a global level for the first time in history, many of them on a global level. It is a remarkable reality.*

So we may be further out or we may be not so far out. I do not know. Here is the big point; the big point is not to know exactly. The point is to know there is an escalation of the positive and the negative the closer you get, and by seeing that escalation it girds you to respond in a right way. Jesus said that there is going to be an escalation of people offended. People get offended for several reasons, and then it grows into betrayal.

Now betrayal is a deeply relational word. Two strangers do not betray each other. They might attack each other, but they do not betray because there is nothing to betray. Betrayal implies a meaningful, deep relationship. We are talking about friends. Family members are what we are talking about here. Betrayal is a most painful thing. Some people would say it is more painful to be betrayed and to be slandered by dear friendships than it is for the physical persecution. I do not know. I do not know exactly how that works, but I know betrayal is very painful.

- D. Jesus stated that His people would be hated by “the world”—people who do not embrace what He values. The world “loves its own” speaks of those who love the world and espouse ungodly values loving and siding with others with similar values.

¹⁹“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world... the world hates you...²¹All these things they will do to you for My name’s sake.” (Jn. 15:19-21)

- E. Even family members and friends will betray each other because of standing for what they believe is the truth. It can be complicated, because often both sides feel betrayed by the other.

²¹“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents...²²You will be hated by all because of My name...³⁵I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law...³⁶a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.” (Mt. 10:21-36)

Look at Matthew 10, the next passage. Jesus takes this subject of betrayal, and He tells us the degree to which betrayal will go. Now betrayal will be at many levels, but this is the degree that He says—it will even be brother betraying brother, physical brothers as well as spiritual brothers. He says, “It will even go to that level, fathers betraying their children, children betraying fathers.” In other words, it is going to reach such intensity in that generation, and it has through history at times, but there is going to be great intensity about it.

In verse 35, Jesus says, “I have come to set a man against his father.” Now that is an intense statement. That is not a balanced statement; meaning Jesus would say some principles opposite of that in other contexts. So He was not giving the whole story in its full balance. He says, “There is an element of what I am doing, and it will actually set a man against his own father.” Now verse 35—that is not exactly the verse you are going to use on Christmas Sunday—but this is the teaching of Jesus.

He goes on in verse 36, and He says, “A man’s enemies will be those people in his own household.” His enemies will be in his physical family, and his enemies will be in his spiritual family; all different combinations that He elaborates on here in Matthew 10.

Now in what sense did Jesus come to set a man against his father? What He really is saying is this; “I have a message, and I have values, and I am not backing down from them,” says the Lord. “I am not going to let you back down from them either. Even if your dearest relationships do not embrace My message and My values, you cannot back down because I am not backing down, and I will not let you back down.” That is what He is saying in this passage.

Now that does not mean that every time you are in a context with somebody with whom you are in conflict you have to bring up the point of contention between you. You know last night in our Q&A time with the students, some of them thought, “I want to be a faithful witness, so every time I am there, I want to make sure I bring it up.”

I say, “No, that does not mean you push the point every time you have an interaction.” That is not what He is saying. At the same time, you are not backing down from your posture. This is important, dear, and from God.

In the sense of Jesus not backing down and not letting you back down, though you have family members and friends that do not like that message and those values. Jesus said, “That is the sense in which I have come to bring my message to the forefront. I have come to fill the earth with My message, and you are one of My messengers”—He has millions of messengers—“and I am not letting you out of this. You are going to stand for truth if you love Me.” In that setting this betrayal scenario unfolds.

F. Jesus knew that our standing for His words and values would sometimes lead to division.

⁵¹***“Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.***
⁵²***For from now on five in one house will be divided...⁵³father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother...”*** (Lk. 12:51-53)

¹⁹***For there must also be factions [divisions] among you, that those who are approved [genuinely standing for what is true] may be recognized among you.*** (1 Cor. 11:19)

In Luke 12:51-53, He says the same thing again. Look at Luke 12:51. “Do you suppose I came to bring peace on earth? I tell you not at all.”

“Not at all, Jesus? But You are the Prince of Peace.”

*He knows what He is saying in this context. He says, “Let Me just be really clear what I am doing.” Because He is the Prince of Peace, and He brings unity, and He prays for unity, and we pray for unity. At the same time it is **unity based on His terms**, not just unity based on somebody else’s terms. It is unity around Him and what is dear to Him. That is the unity that He is contending for.*

He asked the question, “Do you suppose I came to bring peace on the earth?” What He is saying is, “What do you expect is going to happen if you are true to Me? You are just going to get more friends? Life is just going to get easier? You are just going to have an escalating increase of money and favor and happiness and ease?” He says, “No, that is not what is going to happen. So adjust your expectation right now.” The American dream is not in the Bible; we get our expectations from the Word of God from the lips of Jesus.

We do not look at the culture and form our dream around the culture and the media. We form our dream around what Jesus said. I am telling you that He said there will be conflict because He loves His message, and He loves His values. He is committed to filling the earth with them through people who love Him, and that is you and millions of other groups, or whatever the numbers, all over the earth, millions and millions of believers.

II. HOW TO RESPOND TO THOSE WHO SLANDER YOU

A. **Love**: Jesus set loving one another in the context of being hated for His sake. By loving people who mistreat us, we demonstrate love for Jesus.

¹⁷***“I command you, that you love one another.*** ¹⁸***If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you...***²⁵*[as it] is written...“They hated Me without a cause.”* (Jn. 15:17-25)

B. **Bless and rejoice**: Jesus called us to bless and not accuse, even those who accuse us. We are to love our enemies or adversaries by our words, deeds, and prayers (Mt. 5:44).

¹¹***“Blessed are you when they revile...you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*** ¹²***Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.”*** (Mt. 5:11-12)

²²***“Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you.”*** (Lk. 6:22)

⁴⁴***“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”*** (Mt. 5:44)

Jesus said, “Bless those who revile you when they say all kinds of evil against you falsely.” They say it falsely, and they say it intentionally; they twist and distort on purpose. They actually know they are. He says, “I get that.” Then in verse 12 He says, “Rejoice because you get rewards in eternity and you have the spirit of glory resting on you right now, in this age.” You are transformed. It is a learning opportunity. It is a promotion in the spirit. You interact with the Lord. You have the privilege of standing with the Lord in reproach. What a glorious reality!

Look what He says in Luke 6:22. He says, “Blessed are you when they exclude you.” I just wanted to point out this word. I do not know if there is anything more painful to some people than to be excluded. It is a very common feeling of pain to be excluded by a group where you were once included; that is so painful. Jesus said, “I want you to know on the front end, that is going to happen. When it happens, do not be confused, do not be mad, and do not enter into the spirit of darkness, the spirit of accusation. Understand you are bearing this because you love Me.”

Yes, you have deficiencies; we have deficiencies. It is not an issue that we do not have deficiencies, but it is an issue of standing for truth. When we see the deficiencies, we all need to be committed to excellence in our character, our doctrine, our leadership styles, our ways, and we correct the deficiencies in as much as we see them.

Now look at what He says later on in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:44. He says, “I want you to operate in the opposite spirit of accusation. I want you to love your enemies. I want you to bless them. I want you to do good for them. I want you to pray for them. I actually want you to pray for them.”

Now God has called the Church—not just prayer ministries, not just IHOP and prayer ministries—the whole Church, God has called every believer in some degree to be an intercessor. The devil wants you to be an accuser, not an intercessor. So the issue is that when you are attacked, are you going to be an intercessor, actually interceding for the one attacking you is what we are talking about or are you going to be an accuser? Are you going to answer accusatory missiles from Satan with accusatory missiles from Satan or are you going to be hit by the missile, deflect it because you know the truth, and then become the intercessor praying for the believer that is accusing you falsely? Jesus said, in effect, “That is the posture I want you in.”

If you get in that posture, number one, the accusation does not get in you, capture you, and imprison you. When accusation gets on the inside of anybody—I am talking right now about a believer—you get in bondage to it. You think about it all the time, you are answering it in your mind, all of your conversations are around it, and you get in bondage to it.

If you pray for that person attacking you, you will stay free on the inside. You pray for that person attacking you, and you will actually have tender emotions for them. On the front end you say, “There is no way I can have tender emotions for them, no way whatsoever.” I tell you, you pray for them, and you will love whomever you pray for.

I remember in my early days, the first rounds of this, even before it was in an intense time—I was in my twenties in those early days of ministry—I had some adversaries accusing me. I was teaching the Sermon on the Mount, and I thought that I might as well try it. I thought, “If I am going to teach it, I should do it. Lord, bless...ugh, that is weird...Lord, bless the guy. Well, do not bless him too much. Bless his kids; yeah, that would be good. That is the same, isn't it, Lord? He loves his kids.”

I found that it was hard, but as I prayed, my heart changed. It really does change. If you pray for a believer who is accusing you, it will shift the way you carry your heart. I remember one time the Lord whispered in my heart, that He said—this idea came to me and I knew it was from the Lord—“In the resurrection you will be dear

friends with those born-again believers that are accusing you right now. You will be great friends forever for billions of years.”

So you have a few months or a few years where they are saying bad things about you, and you will have billions of years where you will really delight in one another. You just take a step back and you say, “You know what? I am just going to start entering into that a little bit ahead of time.”

- C. ***Entrusting ourselves to God:*** The Lord will vindicate His people in His time and way. We entrust the situation to God by trusting His leadership to answer in His way and in His timing.

²³When He [Jesus] was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. (1 Pet. 2:23)

In 1 Peter 2:23, there he is again, talking about reviling. He says that when Jesus was reviled or slandered, He did not revile in return, but He suffered and endured it. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but here is what He did: He committed His cause to the Father. He said, “Father, You judge righteously.” In other words, “You vindicate Me in Your time and in Your way. I will trust You. Vindicate Me in Your time and in Your way; I will not vindicate Myself.”

I can imagine Peter around the campfire after the leaders of Israel accused Jesus. I imagine Peter says, “You know, Jesus. Tell us the real scoop on that leader.”

Jesus said, “I am not going to revile them, not even now, Peter. I am not going to do it. My Father will vindicate Me in His time and in His way.”

So Peter said, “This is the kind of model we have going forward.”

- D. ***Privately:*** If someone slanders us, we are talk to them about it privately that we might win our brother. If we want to win the brother who is accusing us, we must talk with him in private. If we only want to win the argument, we will talk about the person in a public format.

¹⁵“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.” (Mt. 18:15, NAS)

In Matthew 18:15, Jesus tells us about how to respond to your accusers here. Someone, a believer, is accusing you. Go to the believer in private. Do not accuse your accuser publicly or do not even answer him publicly. Go to him in private. I tell you if we would obey this one command of Jesus, so much conflict would go away. So much of this unnecessary confusion would be averted if believers would go to believers in private.

“Well, they started it. They went public first.”

The Lord says, “That is their sin against you, but now you go to them in private. You do not go to them in public. Just because they violated My Word does not mean you should violate My Word. Do not do that. Go in private.” He says, “If you go in private, you have a chance to win your brother.”

What I found out is that if you really want to win your brother—I am talking about the accuser who is accusing you, the brother that is accusing you—if you want to win him, you want to restore the relationship, then go to him in private. You want to win the argument, go to him in public, or go publish it on Facebook. You may win the argument, but you will not win the relationship. You may win the argument, but your soul will not be free. You will be stuck in a defensive posture of having to defend your defense. You defended yourself; now you have to defend because the next group attacks you and then you defend, attack, defend.

The Lord says that if you will go in private, you have a chance to win your brother and restore the relationship. You go in public, then you are trying to win an argument, and that is not where restoration takes place; that is not redemptive.

Now last point I will make here is that the social media generation, a lot of young people and older as well, think, “Well, everyone is doing it.” Beloved, we do not take our instruction from what is popular in our culture. The fact that everyone is doing it on social media does not mean Jesus approves of it. Do not answer accusations by setting the record straight on social media about how bad your accuser is. Do not do that.

If you have done it, have the integrity in that sphere that you said it or wrote it. “I see the error of my way. That was not operating in love. I repent of that before God. I am done with this argument.” Back out of that sort of thing. Have the integrity to walk in love if you have done it and get out of that.

A lot of young people say, “Well, that is where it is at—in the social media.”

I say, “As for me and my house, we are doing it Jesus-style, not taking our cues from the culture.”

So if you really care to win the brother, do it in private. “Well, the guy will not meet me in private.” Well, then ask the Lord to make a way. If the Lord wants you to meet him in private, you will run into him at the grocery store. If you do not meet him there, he will have a flat tire on the road and guess who will drive by? Good old you, and you help him with his flat tire—this is a made-up story, of course. I mean that the Lord will make a way for you to meet with that guy if He wants you to. Do not answer accusers with an accusing spirit and do not answer them in public. Amen and amen.

- E. If both groups operate with accusation seeking to win an argument, they will devour each other.
¹⁵If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! (Gal. 5:15)
- F. We will surely pay the full debt for unresolved anger in us towards those who slander us. We are liberated by blessing those who mistreat us, and by repenting of bitterness when we see it in our heart. As we act in the opposite spirit of anger, our heart begins to be healed (Mt. 5:23-24).
²⁵“Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge...and you are thrown into prison. ²⁶Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.” (Mt. 5:25-26)
- G. I believe there is some relationship between harboring bitterness and stumbling in immorality.
¹⁵...looking carefully...lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; ¹⁶lest there be any fornicator...like Esau. (Heb. 12:15-16)