

Is Your Mind Poisoned by Slanderous Lies

by James Jennings

This sermon delves into Acts 13-14, focusing on the tactics of the enemy to poison minds against the truth. It emphasizes the importance of not being ignorant of the schemes of the enemy and the need to speak boldly for the Lord despite facing slander and persecution. The message highlights the damaging effects of slander and the necessity to guard our words and thoughts to prevent poisoning others' minds or being poisoned ourselves.

Scripture: Proverbs 18:21, James 3:5, 1 Peter 3:16, Proverbs 16:28, Philippians 4:8, Proverbs 6:16, Matthew 23:13

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Boldness in Faith"

Description

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Transcript

If you could turn to Acts 13 at the very end. We'll start in v. 49. I'm going to read to Acts 14, v. 7. Acts 13, v. 49, And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.

But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Now at Iconium, they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

But the people of the city were divided. Some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lyconia, and to the surrounding country.

And there, they continued to preach the Gospel. Let's pray. Father, thank You, Lord, for this book of Acts, for Your Word that we can go here and see different things that these apostles, these disciples of Yours encountered many years ago.

And Lord, we're encountering. We encounter some similar things in our own day and age. And Lord, we pray that we would see the same manifestations of Your power they saw.

We pray that we would be bold as they were. Lord, we pray that we would not be outwitted by our enemy. And so, Lord, I just ask, would You help right now? Lord, give us more of Your Holy Spirit.

Be with the lips of my mouth. Help, Lord, please. Would You give clarity and freedom right now? In Christ's name, Lord, honor Your Word.

Amen. So, Acts 13-14, Paul and Barnabas. Boy, those Jews hated them.

They hated them. They hated the Christ. They hated the message.

There's a lot of glorious stuff happening in these verses. As I was rereading the passage with a fresh mind this morning when I woke up, I thought, wow, there's a lot of glorious things happening in this text. I mean, even just verse 52.

The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. I mean, that is glorious. And then they go on to Iconium, and because they're filled, they spoke in such a way that a great number... it's not such a small number where he says ten people were saved.

A great number were converted in both Jews and Greeks. So here, Jews being brought to the light. Or verse 3, they remained a long time speaking boldly.

So these people who were filled with joy with the Holy Spirit, they were speaking boldly for the Lord. And then it says this, the Lord bore witness to the Word of His grace. You could just read over it.

Granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. And he doesn't mention all the specifics, but there's a lot here that's incredible. I pray that we'd have more reports like this with these types of things happening.

So these things should thrill our heart. They do thrill my heart. As I was reading those specific things in this passage this morning, I thought, boy, I wish in some way I was focusing on these things.

But I have considered something different I want to focus on from this passage. Rather than directly focus on the believer and these manifestations and these things they're seeing and being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking boldly, I want to not focus on the believer this morning. I want to focus on, in this passage, the enemy.

Paul said we shouldn't be ignorant of the schemes of the enemy. We should be aware of his tactics. And right here in v. 2, we have a very common tactic of the enemy.

He says here, the unbelieving Jews, they stirred up the Gentiles. They just did that in v. 50. And look what Luke records.

They poisoned their minds against the brothers. They poisoned their minds against brothers. That's what I want to consider this morning.

That tactic of the enemy to poison the mind. And if you step back, we have to think here of just the pure hatred that the Jews have for the truth. They're not content just to perish themselves.

They don't want to drag others down with them. They cannot just walk away and say we'll let these Gentiles hear the truth. They've got to get involved and try to prevent these lost people from hearing the truth.

So much they hate the truth. In this passage, our enemy attempts two different types of assassination. Both fail.

Fail to some degree. Two different types of assassination. The first is what we see in v. 2. The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds.

They tried to assassinate the character of these disciples. They wanted these lost people who were hearing them, their minds to be poisoned and affected in a way where they did not hear these people who were proclaiming the truth. They wanted them to turn away and say they're contradictions.

They're a contradiction. We're not going to listen to them. That was the first attempt.

If you go on in the passage, that didn't entirely work. So look at the second assassination attempt, v. 5, when an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to mistreat them and to stone them. So if the enemy can't strip us of our credibility and our message's credibility, what's he going to do next? Try to strip you of your life.

Try to kill you. So here we've got two assassination attempts from our enemy who we shouldn't be ignorant of his schemes. We shouldn't be ignorant of his tactics.

And both of these, I would say, in large part, failed here. I say in large part because clearly, some of the people's minds were affected. Look at v. 4. The people of the city were divided.

Some sided with the Jews. Some with the apostles. So some people were still being swayed by these Jews and what they said.

Now, for us, I don't think our main concern right now is being assassinated through stoning. I don't think that's what we're facing. We're not facing being stoned in San Antonio, Texas.

When we're going out to preach the Gospel, that's not the main tactic the enemy is using trying to physically kill us. But I'll tell you, the first tactic, he's doing that all of the time. The enemy is seeking to poison the minds of those who we are speaking to in order that we might lose credibility in their mind and they would discredit the message, discredit our God, and perish in their sins.

So I want to consider this morning assassination by poisoning the mind. And you don't have to be a Christian long before you see this is happening all the time. And we need to be aware of it.

I was thinking about actual poisoning. Our government has a website where they have prevention tips to avoid poisoning. Prevention tips.

And you can think of this message in some way, I'm wanting to help prevent poisoning in your mind from happening and make you aware of the loss you're trying to reach that you have an enemy who's seeking to poison their minds. And we wrestle not against flesh and blood. We wrestle against principalities and powers.

So, our enemy wants to poison the mind of those who have yet to believe. And that's what I really believe this text deals with. He says here, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

Well, he says against the brothers, the brothers and sisters, so I think that there is referring to these lost people they're trying to reach. I don't think it's referring to people who have already been saved, but it's those who are being spoken to. It would seem that's the idea since he says poison their minds against the brothers.

But as we know it, as Christians, once we're saved, we're still vulnerable to have our own mind poisoned in some way. So, what I'm wanting to look at is the overall idea found in Acts 14, 2 of our enemy's tactic of poisoning the mind. Not just that he's doing that with the loss we're trying to reach, but that the enemy, if he does it with the loss we're trying to reach, obviously that tactic, he shifts it over and he does it on the believer and those in the church as well.

So, I have multiple questions I want to ask as we think about this. First, he uses the word poison. What is poison? What type of effect does poison have on your body? Say again? Yeah, does it have a good effect? No, there's nothing good about it.

Being poisoned, I realize nowadays some cancer treatment in a way where they're putting the bad in the body to try to help, but poison causes illness. It causes death. That's what it does.

In the King James, it says it made their minds evil-affected. So it affected their mind. In the literal version, it says it made evil the souls.

You're smiling. It made evil the souls. It affected their soul.

It affected their mind. Our minds are affected all of the time. Now, second question, what tool is used to dispense the poison? You think about movies.

People will maybe drop something in a cup and sneak the cup to the person or they'll use different things. What tool is used here to dispense the poison? Words. Where do words come from? The mouth? The tongue? Right? Words come from the tongue.

You see in Acts 13, v. 45, right before, it says here, the Jews saw the crowds. They were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul reviling him. So they're hearing truth and they begin to contradict.

How do you contradict someone? Words. You use your words. You step in there and say, hey, what they said, that's not true.

This is true. That's a lie. They're lying to you.

They're deceiving you. Reviling. We hear in James 3, the tongue is a restless, it's unstable source of evil, and the tongue is full of deadly poison.

The tongue is full of deadly poison, meaning the words you speak can poison someone. And poison has an ill effect. It can lead to death.

Obviously, we're not talking about physical death here. But you know what? Physical death? That's not what we should fear. We should fear death in the mind where our minds are taken away from the truth of who God is.

That's worse than physically dying is not thinking correctly about our precious Lord. We should fear wrongly using our words. My tongue is full.

It could have poison come out of it. James 3, verse 5, how great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire. A small tongue.

It could burn down. All sorts of things. Think about it.

This small tongue said some small words in a small corner of the world. Maybe I even said those words in a whispering voice, and it starts a forest fire. And when it's all said and done, you step back and you say, what? Those small words said in a whispering voice in that whole forest? It's gone.

How did that happen? That's what our mouths can do. One post on the Internet can reach millions in an hour. One tweet on Twitter, as you've seen recently, people are losing their jobs left and right.

One person in the middle of the night making this post, and next thing you know, they lost their job. Millions in the world know who they are, and they're being shamed on the Internet. One post, and it went that far.

The Internet makes us all more of a reality. For good or for bad, our words can spread. You hear something about someone else.

You read something about someone else. It sets ablaze in your mind of ill thoughts against the person. The Proverbs say in 1821, death and life are in the power of the ton.

Death and life. Think about the ton. It's not just the evil poison that it could dispense.

What good here did Paul's ton do? What did Paul do? Verse 1, Paul and Barnabas spoke in such a way. They spoke in such a way that what happened? Great numbers of both Jews and Greeks believed. So I can speak in such a way to poison you, or I can speak in such a way that large numbers are converted.

There is power through what we say with this little member. Next question. What is in the contents of the poison that the Jews dispensed? Was it really kind words? No.

I already kind of mentioned it. It was contradictions. It was them reviling.

It was slanderous and evil speech. It was lies. Who is the father of lies? The devil? It should not surprise us that those who do not know Christ, like their father the devil, will also be lying, be slanderers.

What is slander? Slander is saying to another person untrue information that damages someone else's character in your mind. We all have the ability to do that in a moment. I could take my phone last night, call someone, and say something untrue and totally affect that person's mind about how they think about you.

I could do that just like that. Slander is said in a malicious and spiteful intent. The Jews here, what was their intent? Was it malicious? They wanted a crowd to go and kill and stone them.

You can't get more malicious than that. Slander is purposely giving a bad report purposely. Someone might give a bad report, but it wasn't on purpose.

And they eventually come to realize that it wasn't accurate what they said. They weren't maliciously slandering. They just had misinformation and spoke too soon.

Slander is speech that wrongly discredits someone else in your mind. Slander is that which damages someone's reputation in your eyes. And thus, your perspective and perception on them has changed entirely based on something that's not even true.

Next question, what organ and member does the enemy want to poison? What's he aiming for? Your leg? Want to poison the leg? Yeah, your mind. Whereas, the literal renders it your soul. No earthly member, physical member, that's not going to do anything.

The mind. He wants to go after the mind. He wants to go after the soul.

What happens in the mind? We read throughout the Bible that people have a change of mind. So in the mind, you have thoughts there that lead you to change your mind. Change the way you perceive.

Change the way you think about something. In our soul and our mind, we're constantly changing the way we perceive and view things. So that's why the enemy wants to go to the mind.

He wants these people's minds to be changed about how they're viewing the teaching that these apostles are saying. He wants them to look at that teaching and to say that is a contradiction. He's wanting to poison their minds, discredit the apostles and the minds of these lost people that they might not be saved.

He wants slandering people's thoughts. Why the mind? What does it mean for a mind to be poisoned? When your mind is poisoned, the text says in v. 4, but the people of the city were divided and some sided with the Jews. When the enemy can get his poisonous slander in, it divides.

You've got people picking sides. You don't have unity striving side by side together for the Gospel. You've got people picking sides when it happens among believers.

When it happens among the lost, you've got people picking sides with Satan rather than with the Lord and with the truth. In either case, in the church or in evangelism, this poison in the mind is destructive. Satan wants to cause division, get people sided with him and his lies.

He wants to change your thinking to get your mind filled with lies about someone else and it affects how they view that person or ministry. A family we knew, there had been something that had happened years ago that we had never talked to them about. We didn't know what their thoughts were on this subject.

And they had never gotten another perspective. They just had one family's perspective on the issue. And we brought the topic up.

And it was amazing how many thoughts that these people had that were entirely not the truth. For years, they had been sitting there with poisoned minds against certain people that I hold dear. And it was not based upon the truth.

The enemy had poisoned their minds. And he used other professing Christians to poison their minds. You see, we don't want to be tools of the devil.

And even there, after giving clarity and saying, well, that didn't actually happen, this happened, that didn't happen, this happened, this is true, that is not true, even after that, since you've already had it for that many years in your mind, boy, it can be pretty tough to change your mind about the way you've perceived that when you've had lies in your mind for that long. So our minds are a vulnerable place. We can have destructive thoughts about a person enter our mind just like that.

And those thoughts, those slanders, they kill that person in your mind. Not physically, but we're thinking. You see, this is a deceitful assassination in that it kills the person in your mind.

It kills your view of the person in your mind. They're still physically alive, but their credibility in your mind, they're dead. They've been assassinated based upon the poison that the enemy poisoned their minds with.

So, you think about political rivals in real life. Some will seek to assassinate their rival through deadly poison placed into a drink. Our danger is assassinating someone's character with slander.

We could be a part of that. We don't want to be. I could be used of the enemy to poison someone's mind and assassinate someone's character in that other person's mind through what I say with this little member that could burn down a whole forest.

It could burn down the whole world. It may be something you read on Facebook. You heard on the Internet.

Is it true? Is it an exact representation of what is true of the person and what they believe? You have to ask that question. Is it true? And they've got the Internet at their hands to say whatever they want. And you could read it.

And your mind could be poisoned. And your perception of the leaders in the church could change based on slanderous lies. You don't want your mind to get poisoned.

You want to come and find what is the truth. What is the truth? Even 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says some of the teachers were found to be misrepresenting God. People will misrepresent God.

People will misrepresent you. Paul in Romans 3, verse 8, he said people were slanderously charging us with saying, why not do evil that good may come? Was Paul saying do evil that good may come? He wasn't. And he said people were slanderously charging me of saying that.

He didn't say that. Things he said could be misunderstood. There are things that we might say that's true, but someone could take it and twist it and misunderstand it.

Our enemy hates the advance of the Gospel. He hates unity in the church. He will seek to poison the minds of unbelievers to keep them from coming to the truth.

He will seek to poison the minds of those in the church to keep us from being side by side together advancing the Gospel. He's our adversary. He is a slanderer.

He's looking for tools that he can use to divide or to keep men from coming to the truth. Satan wants to poison your mind ultimately against God. He wants you to have a wrong perception of who God is, of who His character is.

Think about it. If you're an unbeliever here, some of you children, think of this. Recognize this.

Satan will seek to poison your mind, unbeliever, to get you to not come to Christ. You see what's happening here? They're filled with the Spirit. People are being saved.

But these Jews hated the truth. You'll have people who hate the truth. And who are the Jews? Were the Jews the atheists out there? They were the religious people.

You will have religious people who are lost professing Christians who will distort the Gospel and say it's okay. And they'll poison your mind to keep you from coming to the truth to get you divided, incited with the religious Jews who do not have the truth. Don't let that happen.

You don't want the devil to come pluck up the truth that has been sown. You want to be careful how you hear. There are demonic forces out there that don't want you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Chronicles 32, verse 17, we see the enemy. It says, they wrote letters to cast contempt on the Lord, the God of Israel, and to speak against Him. They wrote letters.

They're trying to get Israel to be afraid. That's the goal of the slander. He wants to cast disdain in someone's mind towards God, towards the brothers and sisters in the church.

It even says in 2 Chronicles, they shouted it loudly. They're making a lot of noise. They shouted it loudly to frighten and terrify them in order that they might take the city.

See, the devil, he wants you to fall in fear, not believe God. And what did they do? In Hezekiah's day, they didn't defend themselves. They prayed to God and cried to Him.

And he sent an angel, killed all the mighty men. The Lord defended them. Next question.

Who tends to carry out the poisoning? I guess I've already kind of mentioned this. Who tends to carry it out? In the passage, lost religious people. That's what the Jews are.

Lost religious people who reject Christ. Unbelieving Jews, it says. Those who hate the Lord Jesus Christ.

You think about it, the Jews, these people, they've already had their minds so poisoned against the Messiah. You see, your mind gets so poisoned against God and who He is, that you just become a tool in the devil's hand to be like the father of lies. But we ourselves could dispense poison.

We must be careful. In Charles Leiter's sermon on our adversary the slanderer, he had three main points. Number one, Satan will slander God's character to the believer and charge God with things that are not true.

Satan will slander God's character to us so we have a wrong perception of God. Secondly, Satan will slander your character to God like he did to Job with the things that are not true. Thirdly, Satan will slander your brother and sister to you with the things that are not true.

And he wants to do that. In 2016, I did a message where Paul says, I don't want to come among you and find that there perhaps may be slander. That was one of the things he listed.

That was about two years ago I brought that. We have to continue to be careful how we're walking, how we're thinking, that no place for division that should not be there happens. That no place for slander, no place for poison in our mind happens because we have an adversary.

We have to be watchful. So, next question, the seventh. What motivated them in this poisoning? What was it? Jealousy.

They were envious of the apostles' achievements. The apostles had big crowds. You could say that could be part of it.

They were jealous of the Lord. They hated the Lord. They hated Christ.

His message that condemned them. They didn't want the Jewish Messiah who was a carpenter who went to the cross and was slaughtered. They wanted some Cain to come and rule.

And they realized we'll either take them out by killing, or we'll take these people out by slander and character assassination. Eighth question, when does the poisoning take place? When did this poisoning take place? What was happening? Was it in the midst of a church just sitting still doing nothing? No, what was it in the midst of? Say again? Yeah, it was in the middle of a church that was actively missions-minded in preaching the Gospel and advancing the truth. I hope in some ways we're a church like that too.

We're seeking to do that. Guess what? That's the churches that the enemy will try to poison the mind of the people we're trying to reach that God is trying to reach over there in Lebanon, that John and Judy are trying to reach in Nepal, and He'll try ultimately even to divide us on the inside, to shatter the base. So we must prevent that.

The Word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. There Satan was through these Jews. Ninth question, how should we respond to poison and slander that is set against us? How should we respond to poison and slander that is set against us? In the first place, we should look at this text.

You might find what happened in the text a little different than what you would tend to say to that question. But we'll look at that. How did they respond? Verse 2, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

They were contradicting them, slandering them. So what did they do? They remained for a how long? A long time! And what did they do for that long time? Speaking boldly for the Lord. You see, what was at stake here? The Gospel.

This is the truth that's at stake here. There's nothing more important than this. They're speaking the truth.

It's not just like someone's out there necessarily saying slanderous things about one of their characters. Obviously, these Jews are trying to discredit the Messiah Himself. So the last thing you're going to do is just leave in the midst of that.

They stayed for a long time speaking boldly. And in that time when they did that, we already looked at it, the Lord bore witness to the Word of His grace granting signs and wonders. That was absolutely the right

thing to do.

God came in power with signs and wonders. It would have been a wrong thing to do to cower away and leave. Now eventually, when their lives were physically at stake, v. 6, when they learned of the stoning, v. 7, they continued to preach the Gospel.

So when they were physically trying to be assassinated, they fled to continue to preach. They didn't just stay there and die as martyrs. But when there was all this poisoning of the mind going on, they stayed.

They spoke boldly. So yes, how should we respond when slander is said against us? There is a place to stay for a long time and sit down in that person's living room for five hours and correct their misunderstandings. And it would be cowardly and unloving to say, man, this is just going to be too much work or yada yada, and just leave.

Especially here with the lost people. Souls were at stake. So they sought to shut down the spread of the poisonous things that were said.

There's a place to shut down that, especially when it deals directly with the Gospel advancing. Now, I've been reading a lot of biographies these last years, and I've tried to topically index things, and I have a couple things from these biographies that deal with slander and the mind being poisoned. I'm going to read a couple of them.

First is from Asahel Nettleton. Nettleton was the contemporary of Charles Finney. Charles Finney is the one we would say had a lot of doctrinal problems.

Nettleton was sound in the faith. He was never married. I think he died around 50 years of age.

He was marvelously used of the Lord. And in the biography, page 338, a man once said to the aged clergymen, my neighbors are slandering me and what shall I do? Do your duty, said the clergymen, and think nothing about it. If they are disposed to throw mud, let them throw mud.

But do not attempt to wipe it off lest you should wipe it all over you. Okay, I can see what Nettleton's saying. There are cases where people are slandering you.

It's not directly affecting this big group of lost people you're trying to reach. And they're throwing mud. And like it says, yeah, don't wipe that off.

You might get it all over yourself. Don't deal with that. But another situation.

When Nettleton was slandered, his friends would urge him to come out with a public testimony to defend himself. Come on, brother! Don't just let them peg you like that on the Internet. Say something.

You know, that kind of thing. But, he was very reluctant to do it, nor could he be persuaded to publish his views, but listen, till he was fully convinced that a regard to the interest of Christ's kingdom required it. And that's really the question.

People are going to throw mud. People are going to slander. People are going to try to poison others' minds against us.

We need to pick our battles wisely. Is the interest of Christ and His kingdom at stake? Or is this just all personal stuff? The next was Pastor Shee and D.E. Host. They labored together for a season.

They were in a situation, they wondered, what's the right response to the slander? Page 59 of Host's biography. What attitude should they adopt towards those who are slandering the refugee work, the author says, and sowing seeds of dissension in the church? Should they take drastic action? Separating the wheat from the tares, as it were? There seemed to be much to be said for taking such a course. Would not it hinder the poison from spreading farther? Would it not purify the church? But listen, they're wrestling.

What's the most excellent thing? And this is the conclusion they came to. But as they prayed, they became more and more convinced that this was not the best way. The exercise of authority on the part of Shee would only give Than, the guy who was slandering him and dividing, and his followers an opportunity for gaining further sympathy in their assertion.

Because this is what their slander was. That Pastor Shee was high-handed and had an arbitrary spirit. So they decided, therefore, in view of the slander, that would be the wrong thing to do.

They went on quietly without any retaliation. They left God to make manifest who was in the right. And the policy they adopted proved eventually to be the right one.

After some months, there were signs of disintegration in the opposing party. Than's true character became increasingly manifest. And some of the men, who sincere but mistaken, who had followed him, withdrew.

So then you've got a situation where a leader is slandering that he's high-handed, so they realize if we go and try to defend, it'll just give more ammunition in their mind that that's true. So they did nothing. They waited and said, Lord, You've got to work this out.

And the Lord did. And eventually, the other party disintegrated. The people who had been genuinely deceived came back into fellowship.

George Whitefield. An account was spread far and wide and remained fixed in the minds of many that Whitefield could not be trusted. What slanderous report about Whitefield made people not trust him? He was accused of being an unlicensed intruder into a pulpit.

He went into a pulpit to preach, and they accused him he didn't have permission and another guy was supposed to speak, and he took that guy's slot. So many people now didn't trust Whitefield because of this. Whitefield, it says, was deeply wounded, but he wrote in his journal the following, Thou shalt answer for me, my Lord and my God, a little while, and we shall appear at the judgment seat of Christ.

Then shall my innocence be made clear as the light in my dwellings as the new day. So much of slander that's said, the Lord, He makes it right in His own timing. But there is a place to remain for a long time and speak.

And there's a place to listen to what's being said and see if there's a grain of truth in what's being said and to learn and grow from that as well. Paul says, through slander and praise we go. We're going to have praise.

We're going to have slander. It's the Christian's lot. Specifically, the Christian minister's lot.

Tenth question, how do you avoid spreading poison? Now, I'm thinking of that Christian. How do I, how do you, avoid spreading poison and poisoning others' minds? I think the first thing that we have to be reminded of and I hope this message will remind you of, is we must recognize the damage words can do. We have to continue to be reminded of that.

Husbands, it might happen in the home. You say something that you didn't think about and it hurts your wife, and right there, there's a reminder that week. Man, words are deadly.

The Proverbs even say harsh words are like what? Sword thrust. If you say a harsh word to your wife, you could say, I just stabbed my wife. That's how the Bible speaks about it.

That's how serious it is. Words. You know, when we dumb things down and don't think of it how it really is, we have a bad perception, we don't take things as seriously as we should.

I mean, think about it. What if you actually caused a forest fire? Some young guy recently did on a little camping trip, ignored the signs, and he started a fire and it burned down a whole forest. And he's paying a daily fine for that.

I don't know if he has prison time. But he ignored it. Thought this isn't that big of a deal.

Burned down a forest. A young guy. He didn't take it serious.

He didn't realize this fire could spread. It could burn it all down. We did the same with our words.

You could poison someone and change their perception about someone and slander that person's character. You know how serious our words are? Proverbs 16, 28. A dishonest man spreads strife and a slanderer, the NAS puts it, separates close friends. I could separate close friends with my words.

We need to take that seriously. D.E. Host led the China Inland Mission after Hudson Taylor stepped down. Host said this, how much harm can be done by the talk of the lips? He wrote, an unguarded, ill-advised discussion by the Lord's people.

Listen, that's us. We've got to be careful. Unguarded, ill-advised discussion by the Lord's people of His work and His workers.

Looking back over these 50 years of leading the China Inland Mission, I really think that if I were asked to mention one thing which has done more harm and occasioned more sorrow and division in God's work than anything else, I should say tailbearing. You want to cause harm? You want a missionary after 50 years to look back on a work? Slander, tailbearing, gossip. It caused more problems than anything else.

We should pray, Psalms 141, set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth. Keep watch over the doors of my lips. I try to pray that verse every time I'm in a meeting with someone.

We'll pray before that meeting. I'm asking, Lord, guard the door of my lips. Put a watch over it.

Because I have the ability in that meeting to say something right there that could cause damage, that could not be helpful, that I would have regret with. Eleventh question, how do you avoid being poisoned in your mind against someone? Well, for the Christian, you get both sides of the story. Proverbs 18, 17, the one side states his case first.

He seems right. Until the other comes along and examines him. We know that proverb well.

That's what that one family I referred to that I visited years ago, they didn't go out of their way to contact the other party involved and get clarity. Well, you know why they didn't? Because when your mind's poisoned against someone, you kind of picture them with horns out of their head, and they're the last person you want to go and talk to and get clarity from. Right? Before you heard the things about them, you could easily talk to them.

But now once the mind's been poisoned, it's like I don't want to talk to that person. But we need to not be cowards. We need to strive for unity.

It's not a walk in a park. They're striving. We also need to guard our thoughts.

How do you keep from being poisoned? You don't sit around daydreaming and pondering on thoughts that are not even reality. You don't sit there drawing a thousand assumptions about some situation, because you can easily think about something to the extent where you start to convince yourself it's reality when it's not even reality. And then all of a sudden, your mind is affected towards that person, reading something into their motives.

Who knows? We should spend our time thinking about what Philippians 4, verse 8 says. What's worthy, what's true, what's honorable, if there's anything excellent. Think about these things.

That's what we should think about. Twelfth question, how do you treat yourself if poisoned? Well, the text says the apostles, how they treated those who had been poisoned against them, they remained a long time speaking. And obviously, some of those people whose minds had been poisoned, they probably left at that point.

Some probably were wondering, let's hear both sides of the case. They sat down. You want to treat yourself if you're poisoned? Get with the other person.

Hear both sides. Talk to them. Don't make excuses.

If your mind has ill thoughts of God, go to the truth of His Word. If your mind has ill thoughts about the brethren, go and communicate to them. Not all the time.

Obviously, there's times you have ill thoughts. You need to deal with it on your own. It'd be more hurtful to go to that brother and mention I had that ill thought about you.

That would cause more division than you mortifying that thought on your own because it had no reason to be there to begin with. It's amazing. Picking up the phone, calling a specific person to get clarity is massively important to prevent ourselves from growing embittered towards the person that the false statements were made about.

I mean, I've only been a Christian 10 years, but there's times my mind has started to get poisoned against people. And you know when it got resolved? When I called the person and I talked to them. And I said, you know, this happened, this happened.

You said this. You didn't do this when you said you'd do this. This is bothering my mind.

I'm having ill thoughts. I'm losing credibility on your character. And you call them and you hear their side and it starts to make sense.

Or they say, yes, I did miss it. I was wrong. We need to, in love, put the best spin on things until communication has happened and the facts are obvious.

And if they even did truly speak evil of us, we need to love them nonetheless. Christ prayed for Peter who denied Him that his faith wouldn't fail. That's what we need to do.

Thirteenth question. How should we live so that we don't give place for slander? What do I mean? What if you were Paul and Barnabas here? What if you actually had areas in your life that they could pull out and show you were a contradiction? That wouldn't be good, would it? Because when you stay to speak for a long time, if they've actually hit on valid things, you're in trouble. So how should we live so that we don't give place for slander? We should not have glaring hypocrisies in our life that are undealt with.

Peter said, when they speak evil against you as evildoers, when it's going to happen, people are going to speak against us as evildoers, we can't avoid that happening. It will happen. The righteous will be slandered and spoken evil against.

And so Peter says, keep your conduct among the lost world honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they will see your good deeds. Again, Asael Nettleton, he said this, it was said of him, he would not expose himself or his cause to reproach by giving so much as the least occasion for the surmises of evil. He wanted any slanders to have to find their starting point to be far away from anything remotely true.

Meaning, if you're going to slander me, I want to do my best to make sure the starting point is way over there and it's not right here. So when rumors were said and sought to spread, if investigated, they always proved to be false and malicious. People could not find any foundation for those eagerly coveted slanderers.

Slanders. So how should we live? We should live in an honorable way where we're not giving place. Fourteenth question.

A little time left. A few more examples. It's kind of poisoning.

I was thinking of who were people who did get assassinated where their character was so damaged? You think about King David. What did his son Absalom do? His son Absalom stood at the gate. People came in.

He misrepresented his father to them to make them think that his dad was not judging justly and he wouldn't hear their case. But guess what? I'll hear your case. So come to me, not my dad.

And it says he stole the hearts. You see, the Jews were trying to steal the hearts of these people away from the truth of the Messiah to themselves. So Absalom accomplished a successful poisoning of his dad's character in the mind of these other Israelites where he took a whole bunch went after him.

David Brainerd. This was an unsuccessful attempt. While preaching to the Indians, he was a missionary to the Indians, what, 1700s, 1800s? Maybe 1700s? There were many attempts made by some ill-minded persons of the white people to prejudice them against or fright them from Christianity.

Sometimes they told the Indians that I was dishonest, a deceiver. That I daily taught them lies and had no design but to impose upon them. You can imagine there's Muslims in Lebanon telling other Muslims that's what the family over there is doing.

They're just slandering. They're just telling you lies every day. Why are you going to that VBS? Why are you going to that school? And when none of these and such like suggestions would avail to their purpose, they then tried another expedient and they told the Indians my design was to gather together as a large a body of the Indians as I could and then I would sell them to England as slaves.

So you've got all these people running around telling the Indians that? Imagine the Indian going up to David Brainerd. Sir, one has presented his case. I want to hear the other side.

Are you seeking to get a large congregation to sell us as slaves? You're David Brainerd. You're like, no! And he used Acts 14 too. He says, they observed that the persons who endeavored to poison their minds against me, the Indians saw that these people were altogether unconcerned about their own souls and they saw in David a love and concern for their soul that these other people didn't have.

And they realized this is the man of God. These other people hate us. Well, we have a couple minutes left.

Spurgeon was slandered so much. The ton of the wicked has assailed Mr. Spurgeon with most abuse and lying detraction. His sentiments have been misrepresented.

His words perverted. His doctrines have been impunged. His blasphemous, profane, diabolical.

Nevertheless, the good hand of the Lord has been upon him. And he has not heeded the falsehood of the ungodly. Years ago, someone came to me and someone had just taken a trip to the Middle East and they were saying, I know why that person went there.

It was all out of selfish ambition. It was all out of vain motives. It's like, wow, you're misrepresenting this person's motives.

Because our enemy is a liar. And he wants your mind to be poisoned. And brethren, we don't want our minds to get poisoned against one another, against the Lord our God.

And brethren, we have an enemy out there who's seeking to poison the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from coming to the truth. And we should remain a long time because it is a Gospel issue and we should keep laboring with them and preaching the truth and praying what happened here that the Lord would bear witness to the Word of His grace and with great signs and wonders, these people, some of them, would be converted. That should be what we're doing.

Pleading. Lord, please. What's God's view on those who dispense poisonous slander? Proverbs 6, He hates those who sow seeds of discord.

Matthew 23, the Jews here, woe to you, you're shutting the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. God hates those who do this. So brethren, we can poison someone's mind with our words.

Am I doing that in any way? That's a question of application. Am I in any way poisoning someone else's mind about someone else by the words I'm saying? And we need to remember that so in the future, we don't fall prey to that. Again, be preventative.

Or, is my mind being poisoned against someone? Is that taking place? Is there anyone right now where my mind is losing credibility in regards to them and it's not based on something valid? Look, there are truths about some people that should affect your perception of them. Another question, how are my thoughts towards the Lord? Is Satan in any way slandering God's character to me? Believer, do you have any ill thoughts of the Lord? Any. Because the devil, he wants that.

He wants to get you with ill thoughts towards the Lord. At all costs, don't let that take root. And obviously, we don't want to overreact, become too hypersensitive, and be fearful of slandering and poisoning to the extent where we don't respond rightly when there's true criticism, true reproof is being offered.

Often things are said about people and it's not poison and it's not slander, it's just the honest truth. And we have to say it. It needs to be said as it is.

So we have an enemy. This is one of his tactics. And we need to pray for God's grace that we wouldn't fall prey to it.

And if you've not been saved long, you will find the slanderous, poisonous attacks from the enemy. They will happen. They will come.

And you don't want to give a place for that in your mind, in your thoughts. Let's pray. Father, we thank You for Your goodness towards us.

You are so good, so kind. And Lord, I just pray, would You indeed put a guard over the door of our lips? Would You help us to continue to stride side by side together for the faith of the Gospel, not frightened in anything by our opponents, that we would be a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of our salvation and that that comes from God. And so, Lord, work this in us.

This desire to be sensitive in these areas with our words, Lord, that we would say things that would not poison, but we would say things that would give life. That we would speak in such a way that people would come to know the truth. That we'd speak in such a way to edify, to build up our brothers and sisters.

Lord, thank You for Your goodness. We thank You, Lord, that there's victory, that You're all-powerful, that we can pray like Hezekiah and them did. And Lord, You can wipe all our enemies out just like that, without us even drawing our sword.

You're that powerful. And we pray that You would all the more manifest Your power even today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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