

It Is Written

*A weekly publication of the
Junction Highway church of Christ in Kerrville, TX.*

Vol. 5

October 15, 2023

No. 43

EVIL SURMISING

By Joe R. Price

Evil surmising is thinking the worst of somebody. That is a pretty good way to define evil surmising in everyday language. Surmise is defined by the lexicons "to suppose, conjecture, suspect" (Vine, 1:284; Thayer, 644; Moulton, 418). The Greek-English Interlinear by George R. Berry translates the word *huponoia* in 1 Timothy 6:4 as "wicked suspicions" (the NKJV translates it as "evil suspicions"). It conjures up, by way of conjecture, evil and injurious suspicions against another person. According to 1 Timothy 6:4, evil surmising is the product of pride and obsession over disputes and arguments. Its companions are envy, strife, reviling, and wrangling (1 Tim 6:4-5). Without question, evil surmising is a divisive, destructive sin.

Sometimes we are tempted to think badly of others. We should not, but we judge a person's motives, charge him with evil purposes, and impugn his character based on nothing more than conjecture and suspicion. Such sin is "evil surmising." It is assuming an evil motive, attitude, and/or character upon a person without adequate evidence or accurate information. "Why did she say that?" and "Why did he do that?" fill our head, and before we know it, we answer ourselves by unjustly assigning an evil intention to the person. We must abstain from this evil (1 Thess. 5:22).

Jesus said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). We must be careful not to make a judgment about a person, thing, or event unless and until we have the proper information from which to make a "righteous judgment."

The next time you wonder why someone said or did something, instead of letting evil suspicion form your decision about that person, do what Jesus commands and judge righteously.

If it involves a personal issue between you and another, go directly to that person to verify the facts and resolve every sin and disagreement in a godly way. Reconcile and, if necessary, exhort and warn the person of his sin (Matt. 5:21-26; 18:15; Gal. 5:13-15).

If it is a public matter, get the correct information and, when necessary, withstand the sinner publicly to save him and others (Gal. 2:11-14).

Do not carry around wicked suspicions of others in your heart. To do so reveals prideful arrogance that damages your relationship with God and the one you ought to love as yourself (Gal. 5:14). Holding on to evil suspicions results in a bitter heart (Eph. 4:31-32).

Do not be naïve, but give others the benefit of the doubt whenever possible. Such an act of love overcomes the sin of evil surmising (1 Cor. 13:5).

Unintended Consequences

By Jim McDonald

When Paul and Barnabas were sent by the Holy Spirit to the work God had called them to do, Luke's account of their journey adds "and they had John (Mark) as their attendant (minister)" (Acts 13:5). John was a natural choice to take: an incidental reference to a "certain young man followed with him, having a linen cloth cast about him, over his naked body: and they lay hold on him; but he left the linen cloth, and fled naked" in Mark 14:51-52 is thought to be Mark's reference to himself. And if so, Mark

was personally acquainted with Jesus; his mother was a presumed sister to Barnabas and his family had been active and faithful disciples of Jesus for several years. The three went through the whole length of the island of Cyprus, but as they continued their journey and returned to Asia they came to Perga where Luke records “and John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem” (Acts 13:13). Nothing more is said of this incident until the Acts 15 when Paul suggested to Barnabas that they return and visit the churches they had begun on their first journey. Barnabas was willing but he suggested they carry John Mark with them. The issue arose and ended with Paul and Barnabas separating from each other. Barnabas took Mark and traveled to Cyprus. Paul took Silas and traveled among those Galatian churches known as Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

Luke offered no reason why Mark separated from Barnabas and Saul on the first journey, but opinions abound. Some surmise that Mark was jealous because the leadership of the group had obviously turned from his uncle (Barnabas and Saul) to Paul leading the group (Paul and Barnabas). Others surmise that the journey was harder than Mark had supposed; perhaps he had become “homesick”. It could have been either or none of these supposed reasons. We know that for whatever reason he had chosen to return home, Paul felt the reason was insufficient. And when Paul asked Barnabas to go with him on the second journey and Barnabas was willing but wanted to carry Mark, a heated argument arose between the two. It was so intense it broke a bond between them that had previously existed for several years (Acts 15:39).

Mark’s selfish, unwise choice had a sad and unintended consequence. His actions led to the severing of a very fruitful and warm bond between Paul and Barnabas. And although the relationship between the two older men seemed to be amiable in the following years, the good relationship that once existed between them was never restored. Paul does refer to Barnabas in 1 Corinthians, but although he cites many companions of his on the journeys he made, the name of Barnabas is sadly missing from any of those lists.

There is a hint that brethren in Antioch were drawn into the disagreement. When Barnabas and Mark left for Cyprus, and Paul and Silas left to visit the churches, Luke records that “Paul and Silas went forth, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord” (Acts 15:40). Absent are the same words regarding Barnabas and Mark, which may mean nothing or speak volumes.

Some things we don’t know, but we do know that Mark’s unwise choice destroyed the confidence Paul had in him. In time that confidence was restored. When Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy, telling him the time of his “departure had come”, he not only urged Timothy to come as quickly as possible but also to bring Mark with him (2 Timothy 4:1). Even before this, the two had been working together again. Mark was with Paul in Rome when he wrote his letter to Colossae, and of him Paul wrote that he was his fellow-worker (Colossians 4:10-11). We rejoice that the two were close again, but if think of the time when it was otherwise, how much more fruit could have been borne from their labors together had the breach not existed?

We never know what effect our deeds and words may have on those who are around us. A sarcastic word about some brother or sister; an inappropriate gesture; an unbecoming action on our part may sully the opinion and respect others may have for us. Paul was conscious of such and said, “I buffet my body and bring it into subjection” (1 Corinthians 9:27). We must exercise the same care. Satan never sleeps. He is always there to tempt us so let us not “give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:27). The unintended consequence of unwise choices we make may bring not only hurt to others, but regret and remorse to ourselves.