

Gossip

Pastor Kelly Sensenig

Four preachers met for a friendly gathering. During the conversation one preacher said, "Our people come to us and pour out their hearts, confess certain sins, and tell us their needs. Let's do the same. After all, confession is good for the soul." In due time all agreed. One confessed he liked to go to movies and would sneak off when away from his church. The second confessed that he liked to smoke cigars and the third one confessed that he liked to gamble with playing cards. When it came to the fourth one, he wouldn't confess. The others pressed him saying, "Come now, we confessed ours. What is your secret vice?" Finally he answered, "It is gossip and I can hardly wait to get out of here!"

Scared Preachers

I believe gossip is a subject that many pastors fail to preach on or mention from the pulpit since they are often gossips themselves. Therefore, they are scared to preach on this topic. I also suppose that every pastor would rather teach on the "common salvation" (Jude 3) as the writer Jude said. However, there are times a pastor must address those issues that are rather convicting or cutting to the heart. They are issues that challenge our personal lives, change the course of our direction in life, and result in improving our Christian testimony. A pastor must sometimes probe into the lives of his people and bring the skeletons out of the closet so that their lives can be purified and renewed. One of these challenging and probing subjects deals with the area of gossip. Every person at one time or another has gossiped. Therefore, this study will have an impact on every one of us. We want to define what gossip is in this study and see the detrimental effects it has on the lives of others.

The Deadly Poison

Gossip is a deadly poison that can wreck the personal reputation and lives of other people and entire church ministries. Gossip can destroy a person's image and it can defame the character of people and entire organizations.

Gossip has destroyed many churches, many marriages, and many businesses. Gossip has destroyed people's reputations more than anything else. The book of Proverbs has over one hundred warnings against unprincipled talk. We would do well to heed what God's Word says concerning the sins of speech, particularly the sin of gossip. The Bible has much to say about the tongue and sins of speech. Two of the Ten Commandments refer to the tongue – taking God's name in vain (Exodus 20:7) and lying (Exodus 20:16).

Christians can gossip on the telephone, through emails and letters, or when sharing a meal together in the home. Many Bible studies are nothing more than gossip studies. Many fellowship times can turn into gossiping times when the hearts of people are not right. Even prayer times, counseling sessions, and sharing our burdens with another Christian can become an opportunity for gossip.

When a person wants to gossip (slander others) they will find a way to do it. They will often disguise their gossip as a spiritual concern and give themselves a sanctified reason to gossip. The point is this. All of us need to take a close look at what God's Word says about gossip and then take an inventory of our lives. If we are guilty of gossip, we need to harness our tongue and change the way we talk about others. Some people have a keen sense of humor, but others have a keen sense of rumor! They know how to talk about others behind their backs and spew out false information about them to elevate themselves and justify their own wrong choices and sinful lives.

There are several questions we must answer about gossip.

I. What is Gossip?

There are around 127 passages about gossip in the Bible. This tells me that it's an important subject to God. It should also be an important topic to us as God's children and followers. Although the word "gossip" does not appear in the King James Bible, the concept does. Gossip is described by the Biblical words "backbiting," "busybody," "evil speaking," "slander," "talebearer," "tattler," and "whisperer." We will see these words

throughout the course of our study. One thing is certain. When we speak evil of one another we become guilty of these very sins.

a. The definition of gossip

The dictionary tells us that “gossip” is “a rumor or report of an intimate or private nature,” or “idle talk about the private affairs of others.” The dictionary also describes gossip as “wagging one's tongue” and says that gossip is “a report (often malicious) about the behavior of other people.”

Proverbs 11:13

“A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.”

Proverbs 20:19

“He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.”

We might define gossip in this way. Gossip is speaking forth personal and negative things about other people in order to tear them down or cause others to think negatively about them. When the teaching of “gossip” is used in the Bible all the references are related to sin and wrongdoing. The Biblical usage of the word gossip always points to someone who is spreading information inappropriately or in an unrighteous manner.

Here are some Biblical guidelines that help us to understand the difference between “appropriate” and “inappropriate” communication or speech.

Appropriate/ Righteous Speech

- Builds up/edifies (Eph. 4:29)
- Helps (Prov. 15:4)
- Blesses (James 3:9,10)
- Heals (Prov. 12:18)
- Encourages (Heb. 3:13)

Inappropriate/Unrighteous Speech

- Tears down/destroys (Prov. 17:4)
- Hurts (Prov. 15:4)

- Curses (James 3:9-10)
- Wounds (James 3:6-8)
- Discourages (Prov. 17:8)

Someone said:

“The only difference between a buzzard and a gossip is that the buzzard waits until the person is dead before it tears him apart.”

b. The detection of gossip

We can detect gossip and know that gossip is occurring when someone talks to another person about the intimate details of people’s lives for the purpose of unleashing anger (Col. 3:8; Eph. 4:26, 31), getting revenge (Rom. 12:19; 1 Pet. 3:9), hurting them (Prov. 15:4; 18:8; 26:22), and setting oneself up as more spiritual than others (2 Cor. 10:12). A malicious gossip is someone who spreads stories, whether true or false, which bring hurt and pain to others. Gossip stems from being a busybody (2 Thess. 3:11; 1 Tim. 5:13; 1 Pet. 4:15) or someone who is nosy and wants to know all the details of a person’s life. The fact that the Scriptures link together “tattlers also and busybodies” (1 Tim. 5:13) tells us that the two work together.

The Busybody

The term “busybody” (“working all around”) is applied to someone that meddles with the affairs of others when they have no legitimate reason to be involved with their affairs. In the end a busybody gossips about the personal affairs of others. A busybody wants to know about every detail that is happening with the lives of other people and becomes the investigator for the gossips and rumormongers, seeking to uncover sensational details and to whisper the latest news. A busybody is like a peeping-tom who snoops and spies. A busybody ends up blabbing and backbiting people with the information that he has acquired from them.

The Slanderer

One form of gossip is slander or false accusations or statements about another person. Writing in the 1828 edition of his dictionary, Noah Webster defined slander as “a false tale or report maliciously uttered, and tending to

injure the reputation of another by lessening him in the esteem of his fellow citizens, by exposing him to impeachment and punishment, or by impairing his means of living.” Slander is part of gossip. Slander (lies and misrepresented facts) often strike at a person’s dignity, defames their character, and destroys their reputation, which is the most priceless asset a person can have (Eccles. 7:1).

Proverbs 22:1 says:

“A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.”

Gossip is called backbiting (Psalm 15:3) and talebearing (Lev. 19:16; Prov. 11:13; 18:8; 20:19; 26:20-22). These words speak of slandering someone or carrying tales about them. If you lie or embellish and exaggerate the truth about someone you are a talebearer. Gossip is called slander (Num. 14:36-37; 2 Sam. 19:27; Prov. 10:18; Jer. 9:4-6; Rom. 3:8). Slander is stating things about people that are false with the intent to harm them.

Exodus 23:1

“Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.”

For something to be slanderous, it must involve deceit and falsehood and a motive to hinder or hurt the person. To spread rumors about someone in an attempt to hurt a person or wreck his service and ministry for the Lord is wicked gossip. We must be extremely careful about passing along things that we hear. If there is any question whatsoever about the truthfulness of something, it is essential to verify it from someone who is in a position to know the matter. How often do we believe slander? Many times we only hear one side and it normally is candy coated with slander.

Mark Twain said:

“A lie can travel halfway across the country before truth has a chance to put its boots on.”

Responding to Gossip

Many times people will react to slander instead of wanting to hear the truth about the matter. This is normally the case. The talebearer reveals tainted secrets which are not the facts but so often people receive them as gospel truth. Consider three matters if someone gossips to you. First, what they say may be true. Second, what they say may be a distortion of the facts? Many times this is the case. There is always another side to a story. Third, what they have said may be a total lie. It's never wise to act upon the emotional cries of a talebearer. You may be getting a tale!

Someone wrote:

“When a little bird has told you something, be sure that bird was not cuckoo.”

A lady invited several friends to a mushroom steak dinner. When her maid opened the can of mushrooms, she discovered a slight scum on the top. Since the guests were expected at any moment, the lady suggested, “Give the dog a little, and if he eats it, it's probably all right.” The dog licked it and begged for more, so the dinner was completed and served to the guests. After the main course, the maid came in to serve the dessert, but her face was ashen white. She whispered, “Ma'am, the dog is dead.” Before she could say another word, the woman sent all the guests to the hospital and every one of them had their stomachs pumped. When the lady of the house returned she asked, “Where's the dog now?” The maid replied, “Out on the front steps, where she fell after the car hit him!”

The lesson of the story is this. Sometimes we jump to conclusions without having all the facts and the true facts. We listen to the gossip or talebearer with their “vain babblings” (2 Tim. 2:16) and think that their word is gospel truth when it may very well be a lie, cover up, or fabrication of the facts. Let us not jump to conclusions when we hear the venom of a gossip.

Paul was falsely accused of desecrating the temple in Jerusalem. He had been spotted on the street with some Gentiles and rumor started that he has brought one of the Gentiles into the temple. As a result, Paul nearly

died (Acts 21:27-32). This was all due to rumor and people jumping to a conclusion that was based upon false evidence and distorted facts.

When David came down to bring food to his brothers arrayed in battle against the Philistines, he saw Goliath strutting forth to defy the Israelites and wondered why none of the army of the Lord had gone to meet him in battle. David's brothers falsely charged the lad with coming down in pride to see the battle (1 Sam. 17:28). When the King of Ammon died, King David sent messengers to convey his sympathy to Ammon's son. But his son (Hanun) falsely concluded that the messengers had come to spy out an overthrow his kingdom. As a result, he had David's messenger shaved and partially disrobed. This resulted in David slaying thousands of Ammonites in battle (2 Sam. 10). All of this took place because one man jumped to conclusion. How often do we jump to conclusions when we hear a rumor or story and believe it? How easy it is to jump to conclusions and draw false conclusions of judgments based upon gossip.

What God Hates

Let us remember one thing. Among the seven things that God hates in Proverbs 6:16-19 is, "A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." A talebearer distorts the truth and always seeks to sow discord among the brethren and hurt the work of God. Talebearers are notorious for doing this as they spread their fiery comments among the brethren.

Foxes and Firebrands

Judges 15:4-5

"And Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails. And when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives."

You remember the story of the foxes and firebrands? Samson tied the tails of two foxes together, three hundred in all, and put a torch between the

two tails of the foxes. He then sent them off into the fields of the Philistines to burn their crops. This is what gossip or talebearers can do to people and church ministries. Gossipers are like foxes which have flaming fox tails and they run up and down in the church trying to burn and destroy the lives of other people with their tails which are set on fire of hell (James 3:6). Some of you may have fire coming out of your tails today. I can almost smell the smoke!

Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote:

“We saw in the Museum at Venice an instrument with which one of the old Italian tyrants was accustomed to shoot poisoned needles at the objects of his wanton malignity. We thought of gossips, backbiters, and secret slanderers, and wished that their mischievous devices might come to a speedy end. Their weapons of innuendo and whisper appear to be as insignificant as needles, but the venom which they instill is deadly to many a reputation.”

c. The design of gossip

Slander (false reports) is only one side of gossip. There is another side of gossip that is designed to elevate the person and tear down the individual being talked about. A person can tell the truth and gossip about others with the underlying and deceptive intent to elevate themselves while tearing down another person. Many of us think, "Well, it's true ... so I can tell anyone I want to." Not so! Telling the truth out of wrong motive, to tear down others, hurt them, and destroy their character and credibility, can be even more destructive than telling a lie. Here is an important point to remember. Regardless of whether or not the information is true, the Bible calls it gossip, when it is shared inappropriately, unrighteously, or with the intent to hurt, tear down, and defame the reputation or character of another person. Gossip is designed to elevate the gossiper and tear down the individual being gossiped about.

Many times people gossip about others to try and justify their own actions and sins. Gossip is designed to do this as well. People will often gossip of others to appease their own conscience and make themselves look better. Gossip occurs when I speak about other people behind their backs with the

intent to tear them down and elevate myself. Gossip takes place when I speak negative things about others, whether they are right or wrong, in order to seek revenge and defame a person's character and personal life. When I seek to downgrade, defame, and speak derogatory remarks about others I become a gossip.

A lady known for her gossiping came to the church altar at the end of a service. "Pastor, I'd like to place my tongue on the altar." The pastor replied, "I'd like to help you, but the altar is only 15 feet long."

The best thing we can do when a person is about to gossip is to kindly say: "I can't receive this. I can't receive what you are saying." We must understand what gossip is and refuse to receive it based upon the principles of how to resolve problems (Matt. 18:15-16), restoration (Gal. 6:1), and love (Prov. 17:9; James 5:20; 1 Pet. 4:8). Then too, outside the context of church discipline (1 Cor. 5:1-13), we must refrain speaking about another person. When asked about others we must respond, "I can't say." These are words that are well spoken (Prov. 25:11 – "fitly spoken") and words that will keep us from malicious gossip that only ruins a person's character.

d. The distinctiveness of gossip

What are the distinctive characteristics or features of gossip? I think the Bible gives us this answer.

- Gossip involves derogatory statements.

Evil Speaking

The overall characteristic of any type of gossip can be Biblically termed as evil speaking.

James 4:11 says:

"Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge."

“To walk in love with saints above
Will be a wondrous glory;
To walk below with saints we know –
Well, that’s another story!”

Dwelling together with God’s people takes much grace and love operating in our hearts. If we don’t avail ourselves to the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) we can allow bitterness to smolder in our hearts which results in evil speaking. Gossip can be defined as evil speaking. Speaking evil about someone is the general characteristic of all gossip. When James refers to speaking evil about another person, he is talking about the gossiping judge within the church who is always nitpicking and finding fault in others. Some people seem to have been born in the objective case – objecting to this, questioning that, accusing here, and criticizing there. The kind of “evil” speaking that James condemns is that of a critical and faultfinding spirit which constantly seeks to downgrade others, slander others with false charges, defame others, and tear down their character, credibility, and testimony.

James is not condemning the righteous judgment (John 7:24), exhortation (Heb. 3:13), and rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2) of God’s people but a censorious judgment that is unnecessary, unwarranted, and unkind. Even when Christians do speak they must speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). They are not to speak with a malicious intent to harm others and make themselves superior. They are not to speak evil remarks about others behind their backs to get revenge and appease themselves. This kind of gossip causes a spirit of rivalry, animosity, division, and criticism within the church. The speaking mentioned here is not instructive edification (Rom. 15:14) but criticizing remarks spoken to hurt and tear down others within ministry. James refers to the mindless, thoughtless, careless, complaining, critical, condemning, defaming, derogatory, and oftentimes untrue backbiting speech that is directed against other believers.

Inward Groaning

James 5:9

“Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.”

The word “grudge” (stenazo) means to sigh, murmur, groan or grumble. This is a very interesting word. The word suggests an inward feeling of bitterness, animosity, and smothered resentment toward another person which normally results in an outward display of gossip and slander against them. James is hitting the nail right on the head. The groaning and grumbling spirit of these saints was causing them to lash out at one another with words of critical judgment and gossip. Their groaning spirit was the source of their unwarranted attacks on other Christians. It was an inward feeling of criticism and fault finding that overran their hearts which caused them to say and do the things that they did.

We need to remind ourselves that when we harbor bitterness in our heart and “speak evil” of other people that we are judging them without any Biblical basis. We need to also remember that we will be judged for our own gossiping and critical spirit against others (“lest ye be judged”). When a judge enters a courtroom, a reverent hush moves over the audience. In a similar way we must remember that another Judge (Jesus Christ) is waiting at the door and is someday going to return to judge those who are nitpicking, backbiting, and gossiping against other believers (“behold, the judge standeth before the door”). It would be very embarrassing if the Lord would come back while you are sitting in judgment on someone else. You would suddenly find yourself in His presence with Him judging you. Here comes the Judge!

Christian Cannibalism

Galatians 5:15

“But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.”

This is what someone has called Christian cannibalism! If we are not careful, we can begin to bite and devour one another by becoming a critical

judge over the lives of the saints. When we begin to be critical of other Christians for their faults and failures and talk behind the backs of other Christians because of their inconsistencies, and when we begin to speak against one another in order to try and hurt people and destroy their reputation and character, then we become a gossip. Some Christians possess a negative and complaining spirit which seeks to do harm to others and the cause of Christ instead of good. Some people are always out to get others and they spew out their venomous poison all over the church.

One of the battles that we all face during the summer months is the battle with weeds. They come up in our lawns and gardens. I have a stone area in my driveway. I've noticed that the weeds are always trying to push up through the stones. What do I do? I spray weed killer on the stones and weeds and that takes care of the weed problem. When I spray poison on the stony areas that surround my house, I'm reminded of the church gossip that spreads his deadly and destructive poison everywhere in order to discredit the truth, tear down others, and make himself look good.

Some people are constantly backbiting and finding fault with others and they are ready to tell the world about the faults of others. James's readers had fallen into the habit of criticizing one another and picking one another to pieces for the faults that were seen in their lives. This kind of evil talk resulted in slander, which is false charges or misrepresentations of others that damage a person's reputation. This negative talk also resulted in fights and wars (James 4:2) and is another illustration of worldliness (James 4:4) which comes from the lower nature and the devil (James 3:14-15).

Above All Else

James then concludes that the one who speaks evil of others has disobeyed the law (James 4:11). Since loving others is the embodiment of the law (James 2:8) and slander is failing to love others, evil speaking (slander and critical speech against others) therefore becomes a direct violation of the law of God, which is to love one another. Above all else, the law of God tells us to love one another. James says that the royal law of love speaks about loving our neighbor as ourselves and not becoming a talebearer among the people.

Leviticus 19:16-18

“Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the Lord. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord.”

James says that speaking evil (talebearing) against a brother would be the same as speaking against this law of love and talebearing. It would be as if a person is condemning it as a worthless law of God. Instead of practicing the law of love you would be judging it as untrue and putting yourself on the level of God. God has revealed in His law that we should not speak evil and untrue things about brethren which is nothing but an unloving spirit (Lev. 19:15–18).

When we choose to speak about people behind their backs with the intent to falsely accuse them, destroy their credibility, or deliberately hurt their Christian testimony and ministry, then we become guilty of breaking God’s law which forbids becoming a talebearer among the people. Here is something else to think about. If an individual is not willing to say something in front of several witnesses about another person, do not listen to them (Matt. 18:16; 1 Tim. 5:19). They are gossiping.

➤ Gossip involves deception.

Gossip can be very deceitful (Heb. 3:13 - “the deceitfulness of sin”). You never know when it is going to sneak upon you or when you will be tempted to speak forth words of gossip. People are sly, aren't they? They approach you with the intent to gossip but they come behind a false front. They'll say something like, "I'm not being critical of Mrs. So-and-so, but did you know _____?" Here's another one, "Let's pray for Mr. So-and-so because _____." If sharing a prayer request with someone poisons the person against the individual being prayed for, it is gossip! If when you seek counsel from someone and you begin to curse, wound, or tear down the individual being discussed, then you have gossiped! Many disguise their gossip in counseling sessions.

When you go to someone to help bear their burden (Gal. 6:2) you must be sure that the person's burden which they share is not a burden to gossip and fill your mind with poison. Many people have been given false information by people who are their friends. When you confront them about what they have said they make the outlandish claim, "I was only allowing my friend to help bear my burden." The truth of the matter is this. Their burden came about because of their own sin and it went forth as sin – the sin of gossip. Let us beware of trying to sanctify gossip!

Let's get more specific in our conclusions so we are not deceived about what gossip really is.

- I gossip when I speak falsely or spread rumors about someone (slander).
- I gossip when I embellish the story or exaggerate the facts (slander).
- I gossip when I tell the truth about someone with the intent to hurt them, their Christian life, ministry, and character.
- I gossip when I constantly nitpick and find fault with the brethren and talk about these faults behind their backs.
- I gossip when no one inquires about a person, but I talk about them anyway.
- I gossip when I have no Biblical reason to communicate anything about a person to someone else.
- I gossip when I know something about a brother and then go on a mission to make it known to everyone else.
- I gossip when I spread a rumor about someone to get even with them.
- I gossip when I cannot keep a secret and run around telling everything that I know to others.
- I gossip when I repeat something heard in confidence.
- I gossip if I fail to follow the Bible pattern (Gal. 2:11; Matt. 18:15-18). When necessary I need to remember this Biblical injunction.
- I gossip if I am not willing to say something in front of several witnesses about another particular person's life or actions.
- I gossip when I play the game of spirituality by saying, "I'm not judging them but _____."
- I gossip when I say, "Let's pray for Mr. So-and-so because _____."

- I gossip when I say, “Did you know...?” or “Have you heard...?”
- I gossip when I tear down somebody in a counseling session.
- I gossip when I pass off my talebearing as sharing my burden with others.

Someone has suggested that there are three questions we should answer before indulging in criticism of others.

- What good does it do for your brother?
- What good does it do for yourself?
- What glory does God receive from it?

We should remember a simple acrostic formula before speaking of any person.

- ✓ **T** - Is it true?
- ✓ **H** - Is it helpful or hurtful?
- ✓ **I** - Is it inspiring?
- ✓ **N** - Is it necessary?
- ✓ **K** - Is it kind?

If what I am about to say does not pass these tests, I will keep my mouth shut! And it worked!

Job 19:23 says: “Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book!”

I wonder if we could say this in relationship to what we have said over the course of one week. Would we want all of our words to be recorded in a book so that others could see them? This is a rather soul-searching question.

“If all that we say
 In a single day,
 With never a word left out,
 Were printed each night
 In clear black and white,
 ‘Twould prove odd reading, no doubt.

And then just suppose
'Ere one's eyes he could close,
He must read the day's record through.
Then wouldn't one sigh.
And wouldn't one try
A great deal less talking to do?
And I more than half think
That many a kink
Would be smoothed in life's tangles thread,
If one-half that we say
In a single day
Were left forever unsaid."

II. What is the confusion regarding gossip?

There seems to be some confusion regarding the matter of gossip. There are those who teach that whenever someone speaks out against the public sinfulness of someone or the open error of some organization that they have gossiped about them. This simply is not the case.

God Gossiping?

Was God gossiping when He records in the Bible the stories and tales about Pharaoh and hundreds of other lives without their permission? After all, God revealed to the entire world the sins and downfall of many people. Was Jesus gossiping when he said negative things behind the backs of Herod (Mark 8:15 – “the leaven of Herod”), the Pharisees, (Luke 12:1-3 – “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees”) the scribes of the Law (Luke 20:45-46 – “Beware of the scribes”), and the Sadducees (Matt. 16:6 – “Beware of the Sadducees”)? The answer is no for these people were public figures who had exposed themselves and their sins before all people. Public displays of error, sin, and wrongdoing need to be denounced.

Name Calling

I was driving into the church and when I came to the back I looked into the field and saw something red bopping up and down. I was curious. I wanted

to find out what it was. So I got out of my car and began walking to the edge of the field. I clapped my hands and all of a sudden a little red fox jumped out of the grass and ran away. I could see it running like a scared cat as fast as its legs could take it. Did you know that at one point Jesus called Herod a “fox” (Luke 13:32). He was bold enough to say this before others.

If God the Father and God the Son gossiped when recording down or saying these things, then God would be considered a gossip and the Bible would have to be considered a book of gossip. Of course, none of these accusations are true about God or the Bible. This is because gossip does not consist of merely talking behind someone’s back. The Bible repeatedly tells us that we can expose the sin and error that people are propagating and promoting in the open and before a community. The public promotion and persistence in sin demands a clear rebuke. This is what Jesus always did and what Paul did as well during his apostolic ministry.

a. Exposing the false

Marking

Marking false teachers (Rom. 16:17 - “mark them which cause divisions”) and warning about compromisers is not gossip or slander. Paul warned of false teachers and compromisers by name no less than ten times in 1 and 2 Timothy. If a church leader publicly teaches error or commits a serious sin that would disqualify him from ministry, then the people should be warned about it. It is not gossip or slander for men of God to describe the sinful problem publicly. A preacher has the right and responsibility to expose those who depart from the Word of God. I do not have to get their permission to do so, and I do not have to approach them first as people claim on the basis of Matthew 18. If their error is public and persistent, my responsibility is to warn people publicly, just as Paul did in regard to Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20), Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Tim. 1:15), Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2:17), Demas (2 Tim. 4:10), and Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim. 4:14-15). This is not gossip.

Truth vs. Gossip

When I must honestly and truthfully tell someone that a “Demas” has departed into the world and compromised (2 Tim. 4:2) then I must do so without hesitation. I cannot fabricate the facts. Being truthful is sometimes necessary to stop rumors from beginning and spreading like wildfire! Perhaps this is why Paul spoke about Demas departing into the world. Many times people within the church want to know where so-and-so has gone. It may be that they have gone into the world. Telling the truth in order to prevent rumor is not gossip. Of course, when I begin to tell more, speculate, and embellish the story I become a gossip. Slander is when I spread ill-founded and untrue things about others with the intent to injure them and their character. However, warning about false teachers, errant brethren, and false teaching for the sake of protecting God’s people and God’s house is not slander nor is it gossip.

Rebuking Error and Sin

It’s very important that we do not confuse gossip with Biblical rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2), exhortation (Rom. 15:14; Heb. 10:24-25), and the mandate to expose error (Eph. 5:11). When we speak the truth for a genuine godly reason and purpose, we have not become a talebearer or gossip. It is not wrong to share truthful things with those who have a right to hear certain information. For example, it was not gossip for the household of Chloe to tell Paul about the problems in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:11). This was their God-given right.

As the founder of this church, Paul had a right to know about those problems to help the Lord’s work. It was not gossip for Paul to remind Timothy that the Cretians had a poor national character. He described them as “liars, evil beasts, slow bellies” (Titus 1:12). What Paul said about the Cretians (quoting one of their own poets) was openly known and true. His motive for speaking about these people and their culture was to protect the Christians from the culture (“that they may be sound in the faith” - Titus 1:13) and to further the work of Christ on the island of Crete. I do not believe it is gossip when you seek to tell the truth about church institutions and colleges which are teaching our young people and who are openly

compromising and moving in a worldly direction. It is not wrong for a Christian to warn another person about a serious problem in a church or organization (Rev. 2:6,15) so long as the information is true and the motive is only to expose the error, those who are teaching it, and to warn the saints (Acts 20:31).

I do not believe it is gossip when you talk to a pastor, Sunday School teacher, or deacon about a matter in a church member's life that they should know about. If so-and-so is drinking and living in sin, while teaching a Sunday School class, the spiritual leaders of the church need to deal with this matter (Matt. 18:15-19). It is not gossip to talk to a father or mother about matters that may affect their children's lives since any godly parent would be grateful for such information (Titus 2:4; 1 Pet. 5:5). It is not wrong to question a pastor's teaching, a church teaching, or institutional teaching (Acts 17:11 – "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so" and 1 Thess. 5:21 – "prove all things" and 1 Cor. 14:29 – "let the prophets speak ... and let the others judge").

Church Discipline

Pastors have much authority, but they are not popes who drive around in pope mobiles, and they certainly are not to be followed blindly (Matt. 15:14; 1 Tim. 5:19). I do not believe it is gossip to expose a sinful brother before the congregation when a brother commits a sin worthy of church discipline (1 Cor. 5:1-13). We are never told to remain in some kind of "foggy neutrality" or "hushed silence" about every brother's sin and error that he may be propagating. There are times we must deal with sin in a congregation and there are times we must know about a sin to legitimately pray that a brother would be released from his sin. There are times the facts must be placed on the table. I do not believe it's wrong to tell someone what has happened to a brother, within the context of legitimate church discipline, so they can pray for them and their restoration to the church. As I've already stated, openness and honesty in regard to telling the truth (not embellishing the truth) stops gossip from starting and being spread.

Roast Beef

Of course, we must always guard our hearts and make sure we don't become bitter and that we don't develop a bad attitude and try to hurt a person or pastor by spreading things around the church membership or community that are not true or which are exaggerated. Did you know that many pastors become the Sunday afternoon roast beef dinner? Often it's because the people have had their toes stepped upon by the pastor and now they want to get even by slicing him with the roast beef dinner. The old adage is true: "When you throw a stone in a pack of dogs the one that yelps is the one that got hit!"

b. Example of love

Being a faithful Berean (Acts 17:11) by standing up for the absolute truth and sharing the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) is not gossip. It is not gossip to speak the truth in love, regardless of how harsh the truth might sound. Proving all things (1 Thess. 5:21) is not gossip. However, I gossip when I take the initiative to speak forth degrading things about other people in an effort to get revenge for something they said or did, or when I tear them down in some way and cause others to think negatively about them. Gossip can be a false witness (slander) or even a factual statement that is designed to destroy the credibility of a person and defame and damage the reputation of another.

When I express Biblical love toward someone, I will not knowingly go around and proclaim their sins before others so that everyone can hear about them (Prov. 17:9 and 1 Pet. 4:8 - "for charity shall cover the multitude of sins"). I will not become a siren sounding forth the faults and failures of others so that the whole world can know about them. By the way, the world will not know that we are Christians by our gossip but by our love for one another.

John 13:35

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Many times the best response we can give to people when they ask about others is this: "I can't say." This will keep our tongue in check and stop rumor from spreading like wildfire. In summary, there comes a time when speaking the truth is necessary in order to expose sin or error and carry out church discipline. But there is also a time when speaking is unnecessary. Happy is he who knows the difference! *Sometimes we must refrain from speaking about someone else since there is no Biblical reason to communicate anything about the person.* In making this decision we protect the person out of love and cover his sin. This should be our longing and desire as we live within the Christian community and church.

III. How does God view gossip?

Homosexuality versus Gossip

In the book of Romans, Paul reveals the sinful nature and lawlessness of mankind and states how God has poured out His wrath upon those who were rejecting His intuitive laws (Rom.1:19-28). Because they had turned away from God's instruction and guidance, He gave them over to their sinful natures (Rom. 1:24). Part of the same sinful nature that corrupted them with homosexuality and idolatry also corrupted them with slander. The Biblical terms "whisperers" (slanderers – Rom. 1:29) and backbiters (evil speaker, defamer - Rom. 1:30) both relate to forms of gossip. A whisperer will slander someone by giving out false information about them and a backbiter (katalalos) will speak about personal matters in the lives of others with the intent to hurt or harm them. These sins of gossip appear in a list with other terrible and wicked sins of a society that has gone away from God. Paul said that gossips and bad-mouthers were in the same league as murderers, sexual perverts, and God haters!

Romans 1:29-31

"Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful."

So how does God view gossip? He places this sin in the same vile list that causes people to become homosexuals and worshippers of idols. God's Word places slander in the same cupboard as murder and other vile sins of wickedness. This is how bad the sin of gossip is before God. Many people reject Him and His word, so God allows them to be ruled by their sinful nature and depraved minds.

Murder versus Gossip

Let me ask, as a Christian do you occasionally slip up and commit a murder (vs. 29) here or there? How about theft? Do you occasionally burglarize a home or steal things from the store? Do you hate God ("haters of God" – vs. 30)? You may think this is silly to ask. Of course, nobody would think that these sins are acceptable within the Christian life. But how about gossip or slander? Do you engage in idle talk or rumors about others? Do you participate in bad-mouthing or spreading rumors about others? According to the Bible, which sin is less severe? Murder or gossip? Hating God or slandering others? I'm sure you get the message. Paul said both sins are equally terrible before God and a stench in His nostrils.

The Apostle Peter also used murder as a comparison with another, sometimes under-rated sin. In 1 Peter 4:15 he says: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters."

Notice that a "busybody" is placed in the same company as murderers, thieves, and evildoers! As we have seen, a busybody seeks out the information of others and then relays that information to others through the medium of gossip and slander. The point is this. God and His Word place gossip and the sin which leads to gossip in the same category as theft, murder, fornication and other wicked and terrible sins. This is how God views the terrible sin of gossip.

Edward Wallis Hoch wrote:

"There is so much good in the worst of us,
And so much bad in the best of us,

That it hardly behooves any of us
To talk about the rest of us.”

IV. What is the origin of gossip?

a. A deceitful heart

Jesus said In Matthew 15:19:

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”

The origin of gossip, which is identified here as slander (“false witness”), stems from the heart of man. The heart is the spiritual realm in man where the old nature or new nature has room to function, operate, or express itself. The heart is the control center of man’s being and existence. A heart that is controlled by the dictates and impulses of the new nature is called a “new heart” (Ezek. 36:26) but a heart left to the drives and impulses of the old nature is desperately wicked and deceitful.

Jeremiah17:9 says:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

The Sewer of the Soul

Jeremiah calls it a “deceitful” heart that is seeking to mislead and deceive our lives. Gossip comes from the cesspool of a heart that is under the control or influence of the old nature or sin nature inherited from Adam. Why do people inherently like to criticize each other? It’s because of the sin nature that resides within them and which is trying to control their lives. Gossip comes from the sewage system of our soul. The carnal nature (that big EGO, the "I" problem) is continually seeking to magnify itself and take over our lives. Let’s face the truth and stop beating around the bush. It is our own wicked pride that causes us to criticize others. Gossiping is a SIN! Gossip is the most DEADLY poison on the face of the earth and the Bible gives many hazardous warning labels.

b. A devil's hell

Another source or origin of gossip is the devil and hell which is the final place of punishment for the devil. The devil works in connection with the old nature so that there is a dynamic dual of evil going on within us. The deacon's wives are not to be "slanderers" (1 Tim. 3:11). When a deacon's wife gets her tongue wagging there is trouble in the church. The word rendered "slanderers" in 1 Timothy 3:11 and 2 Timothy 3:3 and "false accusers" in Titus 2:3 is the Greek word "diabalos." This word has an interesting origin. These English words come from the same Greek word which is used to translate another name in the Bible - the devil. The devil is a slanderer in that he accuses the saints and talks about God's people behind their backs (Rev. 12:10). When we gossip about others by giving harmful reports about them behind their backs we are being just like the devil and are obviously influenced by the devil.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, slander means "malicious talk; to spread damaging information; to defame; to speak ill of." Is it no wonder where slander derives its name? Slander is the work of the Devil, and those who slander are on his team and doing His work or bidding. As already stated, the Bible says that Satan is called the "accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10). When we start to unjustly accuse the brethren and slander them before others we are acting like the devil himself.

The Devil's Postman

Are you an accuser of the brethren? If so, even though it may not be your intention, you are being used as an agent of the devil! Verbal slander is of the devil. The deadly poison of verbal slander has its source in the serpent.

This is why someone has said: "A gossip is the devil's postman."

James 3:6 says,

"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."

Set on Fire of Hell

Set on fire of hell! The source of a gossiping tongue that is out of control is hell itself. It is a devil's hell that is behind gossip! The word "hell" is "Gehenna," which was a place in the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem, where there was a continuous burning of rubbish. Hell is the place created for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41) and this place may become a way to express who is behind a tongue that is out of control! The place that will one-day house the devil and demons give us an idea who is behind the tongue that has gone wild. The word "hell" reminds us of the satanic host that will some day inherit this place and it's this same satanic host of wicked spirits that use the tongue as a tool for evil. This expression "set on fire of hell" indicates that Satan can put words in the believer's mouth by putting ideas in his mind (Mark 8:33; Acts 5:3).

J. Vernon McGee said:

"The Devil is a slanderer; he is a liar from the beginning. He is the origin of all lies today. Where does the gossip that goes on in some of our churches originate? It originates in the pit of hell, my friend. That is the last place from which anything ought to be shipped into the church!"

Devilish Wisdom

James concludes by saying in James 3:14-15 that there is a type of wisdom which promotes envying, strife, and those things that create strife, such as gossip (vv. 5-13). However, the wisdom that is behind all of these sins which cause divisiveness in a church is termed as "earthly" (patterned after the world), sensual (patterned after man's lower nature), and "devilish" (patterned after the demonic). The last description lines up with what James already said about the tongue and the sins of speech, such as gossip, which come from the tongue. The devil and demons are behind gossip. This is exactly what the Bible says. You might try and sanctify your gossip but God tells us the true source of all gossip. It comes from the devil and demons.

1 Timothy 5:13-15 says:

“And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan.”

Idle hands are still the devil's workshop. Paul was saying in this context that the young widows should remarry and become a caring mother in the home so that they do not get into trouble outside the home by meddling in the affairs of families and spreading gossip about the families abroad (1 Tim. 5:13). 1 Timothy 5:15 goes on to say, "For some are already turned aside after (to follow) Satan." In other words, some of these young widows had forsaken their vows to serve the local church and they had become involved in gossip and unruly living through the influence of Satan. They were following Satan in this type of activity. Christian commitment is important to God and living a life free from gossip is also equally important. Satan is behind all gossip and lack of Christian service. Beware lest the hiss of the serpent's tongue is heard coming from your own mouth! Are you delivering the devil's mail?

“A good thing to remember,
A better thing to do--
Work with the construction gang,
Not with the wrecking crew.”

V. Why do people gossip?

This point naturally flows out of the previous point. There are several reasons why people gossip.

- a. Because they are carnally-minded.

1 Corinthians 3:3

“For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”

The Old Man

People who live by the dictates of the sin nature think and act in a carnal (fleshly) manner and gossip is one of the traits of carnality. People gossip because they are not spiritually minded (1 Cor. 2:15). The reason people gossip and why we listen to gossip is because we are carnally minded (1 Cor. 3:3; Rom. 8:6-7) following the pattern or lifestyle represented by the “old man” (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). The old man is the person we used to be when we were unsaved. The carnally minded person loves to gossip for gossip is the natural bent of the sin nature and lifestyle that resembles the old person under sin. Gossips are only in it for themselves and the perverted pleasure it brings them to tear down others.

b. Because they are sinister-minded.

People gossip because they hold a grudge against a person or hate them for doing something to them. They have a sinister plot behind their gossip. Their gossip is one way to hide or mask their hatred or anger toward some person.

Covering Sin

Proverbs 10:18

“He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.”

The sinister plot behind gossip is this. People are trying to hide their own anger or mask their hatred with their “lying lips” and “slander.” The Bible is very clear on this. Sanctified gossip is one way to dress up anger or hatred. It’s one way a person can conceal his anger or hatred and make his sins look acceptable and honorable in God’s sight. Let us remember this. People do not gossip about those that they truly love.

c. Because they are foolish-minded.

Proverbs 10:18

“He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.”

A Fool's Paradise

The Bible clearly teaches that any person who slanders another person is a fool. They are not wise. In fact, they are living in a fool's paradise. Somehow they think that their gossip is sanctified and somehow they think God will bless them for smearing the name of another person. Somehow they think that their innocent words will help others to set the record straight. Fools!

d. Because they are lazy-minded.

1Timothy 5:13

“And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.”

The Devil's Workshop

People gossip because they are idle or lazy from a spiritual standpoint. Idle hands are the devil's workshop. Normally if you look at a person who is gossiping, they are not doing anything in the realm of spiritual service. Have you ever noticed that those who gossip normally speak against those who are doing God's true spiritual work or service? The idle crowd is normally the gossiping crowd. Watch out!

VI. What are the tragic effects of gossip?

In 1887 the coffin of Abraham Lincoln was pried open to determine if it contained his body. What makes that act so remarkable is the fact that Lincoln's body had rested in that coffin for 22 years. Yet, even more amazing is that 14 years later a rumor circulated again that Lincoln's coffin was actually empty. The furor so gripped the land that the only way to silence it was to dig up the coffin—again. This was done and the rumor silenced when a handful of witnesses viewed the lifeless body of Abraham Lincoln.

This demonstrates once again how gossip results in confusion and chaos. Gossip causes detrimental effects within a society, home, and church. The fact is this. Gossip is harmful to all parties. Whenever you and I gossip, we hurt a multitude of people, including ourselves.

a. We hurt the person talked about.

When we talk about others, their reputation is damaged, whether what we say is true or not. Proverbs 25:18 tells it like it is: "A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul (mallet or club), and a sword, and a sharp arrow." False testimony (slander) harms others. All these devices mentioned above are devices that can harm people.

Beaten with a Club

A person can be beaten with a club, stabbed with a sword, or cut by an arrow. In a similar way the words of a slanderer can do spiritual harm to others. A person can be beaten, stabbed, or cut by the cruel words that come from the mouth of a slanderer.

Proverbs 11:9

"An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered."

As we all know, gossip has a way of taking wings and it usually ends up in the ears of the one being gossiped about. The information is then permanently etched in that person's mind - whether they wanted the knowledge or not! Can you imagine the hurt and heartache that people experience who are the targets of the flaming missiles of gossip?

Proverbs 18:8

"The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly."

Proverbs 26:22

"The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly."

Sticks and Stones

Have you ever heard the children's rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me?" Surely, this must be one of the biggest fallacies of all-time. Indeed, sticks and stones can break our bones, but often times, words are even more harmful to us than physical injury. The Bible teaches that our words carry tremendous power to either "build up," or "tear down."

Proverbs 18:21

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof."

Gossip usually hits deep. The topics that are "too good not to share" are generally ones that end up inflicting deep and cutting wounds to a person's inner being. And the betrayal almost always comes from someone close to the person affected. Gossip is bad enough when it comes from someone who is simply looking for a source of information they can share. But, when it begins with a trusted friend or someone who has been taken into a confidence, the betrayal cuts deep to the soul, making it even harder for the one on the receiving end to forgive.

b. We hurt our own reputation.

A Damaged Testimony

When we commit the act of sinful gossip, which is forbidden in Exodus 23:1, we bring down ourselves. We shame or lose our testimony. When once others might have thought well of us, as soon as we open our mouth to pass on a slanderous remark, our good image is dispelled instantly. Do you want to be known as talebearer? Do you want to be known as the church gossip? I don't.

1Timothy 4:12 says:

"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

Everyone likes a good story, right? Well, not necessarily. What about the person the story is about? Does that person like the story? Probably not. Spreading rumors only hurts others and destroys our credibility. Who is going to trust us with anything when they think we'll tell everyone else?

c. We hurt the Lord's body.

Cancer in the Body

Beloved, Christ died for each one of us in the church (Eph. 5:25). He gave His life for His beloved bride and church. He purchased believers by His own death and with His blood. How then could we commit the sin of gossip or slander, for which Christ died, against another person, for whom Christ died? The Bible teaches us that gossip to the body of Christ is like cancer is to the human body. Both must be dealt with immediately and decisively, if the body is to remain healthy, and become all that God has intended it to be.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:20:

“For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults.”

The word for “backbitings” refers to the evil speaking that a gossip will do to defame a person’s reputation and character. The expression “whisperings” (psithurismos) connotes secret slander or the secretive false accusations that a gossip shares about other people. This particular word was connected with the magical murmuring of a charmer of snakes. Paul knew that this kind of gossip keeps good company with “strifes” (division), “swellings” (pride or haughtiness), and “tumults” (disorder, confusion, instability) since gossip is the breeding ground for all these other sins to take place. Anytime there is strife in a congregation, look for the one running around playing the gossip.

Gossip is one of the most hurtful and destructive sins in the body of Christ today. Why? It’s because the church is meant to be a place where people are built up (“edify another” – Rom. 14:19), but gossip tears down. The

church is to be a place of blessing, but gossip brings a curse upon any church. The body of Christ is to be a place where people come to receive help, but gossip only hurts.

Heretics

Titus 3:10-11 gives us this sound advice:

“A man that is an heretick (divider) after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.”

The church is called upon to reject a factious person after a first and second warning, knowing that such an individual is sordidly twisted (perverted), secretly sinning, and self-condemned. The best thing a gossip could do is get out of church and stop gossiping about the church and its people.

The Scripture promises that when a gossip leaves the church peace can be restored and the work of the Lord can once again begin to move forward without strife and division.

Proverbs 26:20

“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.”

Putting Out the Fire

I remember watching a fire die that someone had built. At one point the fire was raging but in time it began to slowly die out. Soon it was nothing but hot ambers and then nothing but a little smoke. Eventually there was nothing at all that resembled a fire. The proverb points out that when a gossip packs his bags and leaves a church the fire of schism and strife will soon die and peace will once again be restored to an assembly.

Proverbs 26:20

“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.”

I must be honest with you at this point. I and every pastor have seen this dying fire occur over the years of ministry. Gossips come and gossips go but when they go everyone throws up their hands and says, "Praise the Lord." If you stop the gossiper, you will stop the fire.

Beyond Repair

The story is told of a woman who had gossiped about a certain man. When she realized what she had done, she went to him and apologized. She said she would do anything to make up for the cruel things that she had said. He told her to take a sack full of feathers and to go to a certain street corner and to cast the feathers to the wind. She did so and when she had finished came back and reported. The gentleman then directed her to go back and retrieve every feather. But she exclaimed that is impossible, the wind has scattered them everywhere. So it is with the things you have said, he replied, there is no way to repair the damage that you have done. How very true!

I am sure that any of you that have ever been gossiped about, have seen this happen. Someone goes about secretly making accusations. Tremendous harm is done in the church. Gossip drives people away from the church, it causes our children to grow up and leave the Lord, it breaks up the spiritual family. It destroys the work of the Lord. If on the way home you discuss Brother or Sister So-and-so, is it any reason that many times children grow up not having respect for leaders in the church and why so many children leave the Lord. Gossip has probably done more harm to the church than anything else.

d. We hurt friendships.

Lost Friendships

The book of Proverbs has a long list of verses that cover the dangers of gossip and the potential hurt that results from slander. What the proverbs say is true: "A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends" (Prov. 16:28) and "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends" (Prov. 17:9).

Proverbs 18:19 also states: “A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.” Do you value your friends? Then don't gossip about them. This includes church members and family members! Stop talking behind their backs and slandering them. Many friendships are destroyed over a misunderstanding that started with gossip. Now remember this. Nobody wants to befriend a gossip for they know that sooner or later they will be gossiped about (1 Tim. 5:13 – “from house to house).

e. We hurt our marriage partner.

1 Peter 3:8-9 says, “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.”

Getting Even

Peter instructs us that there should be no retaliation for ill treatment within the marriage relationship (“Not rendering evil for evil) nor is there to be abusive language and insults committed against one another (“or railing for railing”). The word “railing” speaks of abusive, insulting, or scolding language. It would most definitely include slander for this is part of abusive language.

Peter is telling each partner in a marriage relationship that they should not exchange insulting or abusive remarks between one another for this will only cause great harm and heartache in the marriage. Getting even in a marriage will cause great damage and turmoil. Men, when you call your wife names, condemn her all the time, and speak in a critical and criticizing manner to her then you are railing her. No wife wants a man to come home from work and rail on her. Likewise, no man wants a wife to become a railer in the marriage relationship. A wife who is constantly taking punches at her husband and who is complaining about him becomes a railer and a thorn in his side.

Proverbs 27:15

“A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.”

Destroying a Marriage Partner

Of course, railing would also apply to slandering one another in the marriage by expressing abusive language before others. A marriage partner can become a railer or a person who goes around saying bad things about their marriage partner. A railer works on the principle that the more people they tell, the more likely it is to be believed. They will also make themselves look good in the marriage when they too have their faults. A railing husband or wife is the worst type of gossip for they deliberately try to ruin the reputation of their marriage partner. Any woman who gossips about her husband before other ladies does not honor him as the head (Eph. 5:33). Likewise, any man who slanders his wife before the guys at work does not demonstrate Scriptural marital love toward his wife (Eph. 5:28).

Men, when you talk about your wife before others in a derogatory way you are gossiping about her and slandering her before others. Ladies, when you talk to the other ladies about your man’s faults and weaknesses you are slandering him before others. One of the worst things for a marriage is when the partners speak evil of one another before an audience of people. This not only shames the person speaking but puts a black spot on a Christian marriage. Shame on the marriage, where those who are wedded together, stoop to the low level of gossiping about one another or slandering one another before others.

1 Peter 3:10

“For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.”

How to Be Married and Happy

If you want a happy and blessed marriage, then don’t speak evil things to your wife or about your wife behind her back. God has promised that our marriages can be a blessing instead of a blight upon our lives. I once saw a

title of a book that said, “How to be Married and Happy.” Now listen, God has called us to “inherit a blessing” in our marriages (1 Pet. 3:9). When we are run by the Holy Spirit instead of the old nature our marriages can be a wonderful blessing and joy. We don’t have to allow the sin nature and the devil to destroy our marriage. If we will stop tearing one another down with our speech and build one another up we will receive a blessing (“let your speech be always with grace” - Col. 4:6). A good reminder for our marriages!

The world’s understanding of marriage is summed up in this statement: “Marriage is like a cage; one sees the birds outside desperate to get in, and those inside equally desperate to get out.” I think the world often views marriage like this. They view marriage as some kind of trap. This is why many are living together and not becoming marriage partners. God says this is a terrible sin before His eyes. The point is this. Our marriage does not have to be a cage wherein we are trapped. God has designed it to be a “blessing” for those who are willing to follow God’s plan for marriage.

VII. What is the cure for gossip?

Beloved, what can we do today to eliminate gossip from our lives? The Bible gives us the answer to this question. If we have fallen into the trap of gossip we need to discover the way to get out of this devilish trap. Here is a plan to help you live a life that is free from gossip. Everybody needs a plan. Here is a Bible plan.

- a. Repent of your sin before God.

Revelation 2:5 says:

“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.”

To repent means to change your mind about your sin of gossip and slander. You are to see this sin as a terrible offense before God and His holiness. When you truly repent it means that you will possess a willingness to forsake your sin of gossip as well and “do the first works” of living righteously for God.

Isaiah 55:7 says, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

b. Recommit yourself to God.

Romans 12:1-2 says that you should “present your bodies (body) a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” The Bible teaches that we are to present or surrender our bodies to God in a decisive and once-for-all manner. There needs to be an initial surrender to the Lord of our bodies. Are we willing to give God our tongues and speech? Are we willing to make Jesus Lord of our lives in this area and in every area? Do we really want to give ourselves to the Lord or are we holding back knowing that we still want to have our own selfish and sinful way?

c. Redevelop your devotional life.

This means you need to reestablish your time with the Lord – when you read the Bible and pray to Him.

Psalm 5:1-2

“Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation. Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray.”

You must take time to read the Bible everyday and pray to God asking for His help and strength to live for Him, do what is right, and correct your gossiping tongue. Buy a good devotional book on the Bible, if you don't already have one, and start using it everyday. You need to once again allow God to speak to your heart and direct your paths (Ps. 119:105).

d. Remember how to have victory.

Here is a short outline on victory that may help you.

1. Submit to God.

James 4:7 says:

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

This means you must place yourself under God’s authority during the time of temptation. You must allow God to rule your life instead of the devil and your old nature. In the time of temptation, you must pray, “I give myself to You God, instead of this sin. I am Yours. At this very moment I place myself under your authority and command instead of the devil’s authority.” When I submit to God, I can effectively resist the devil. To resist the devil means to take a stand against the devil. Like a military soldier, I must submit myself to the Commander (God) and place myself under His allegiance. After doing this I can effectively stand against anything and everything that the devil throws at me. Those who transfer their allegiance to God will find that Satan will flee from them since he is a defeated foe. When I place myself under God’s authority and command I can stand against the devil and withstand his temptation. The promise is this. The devil with his temptation will flee from us.

2. Know the truth of God.

The truth of God is found in God’s Word. What does the Bible say about victory? The Bible says that we are victors in Christ already through what He has done for us. First, the Bible teaches that Jesus defeated the old person we used to be under the power and slavery of sin (“old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed” – Rom. 6:6). When Jesus died on the cross He died to free us from the old person we used to be under sin’s power. Christ died to defeat sin and because of His death we no longer must allow sin to defeat our lives.

Second, the Bible teaches that Jesus rose from the dead to give each one of us a living spiritual union with His own risen life (“we shall also live with him” – Rom. 6:8). Our present spiritual tie of union with Christ means that we can rely upon Him for daily power for victory (“the power of his resurrection” – Phil. 3:10). So Christ died to defeat sin and free us from the old slave or master relationship we once had with sin and rose again to provide us with daily power so we can “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

Do you know this truth? Psychology says that you are a victim but God's Word says you are a victor! You are already a victor in Christ. Now you must know it and believe it to be true. This is the starting point of all victory.

3. Yield your body to God.

Romans 6:13

“Neither yield ye your members (the members of your body – hands, eyes, feet, eyes, tongue, etc.) as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members (the members of your body) as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

When you are tempted you can yield yourself and the members of your body (the tongue) to God. You must pray, “Lord, I give my tongue to you right now during this temptation. I yield my tongue to You so that it might be used only for holy purposes.” This is the daily yielding that is needed for victory. You must do it in the time of temptation.

4. Destroy the sinful thoughts that dishonor God.

2 Corinthians 10:5

“Casting down imaginations (*demolishing evil thoughts*), and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

You must make the decision to demolish the wrong sinful thoughts in your mind which the devil places there. You can say, “Dear Lord, I give no consent to this thought of gossip. I refuse to allow these gossiping thoughts to rule my mind. I’m casting them out and will not allow them to rule me.” When you are trying to break a bad habit, you must really stay focused so you can tear down the strongholds that Satan has built up in your life. You must remember that you are in a real spiritual battle. The Bible says you can “give place (territory) to the devil” (Eph. 4:27) over a period of time and this territory needs to be reclaimed for God. If you reclaim your tongue for God, the Lord will once again bring showers of blessing upon your life.

5. Rely on the power of God.

Ephesians 6:10

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

In everything that you do you must remember to rely on God’s power. This is vital to having victory (“our sufficiency is of God” – 2 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 9:8). You need God’s power to help you surrender, submit, yield, and cast down the wicked thoughts that are seeking to destroy your spiritual life. You can’t do it on your own. You have no power. You must rely on God’s power for daily victory. God will unleash His power in your life so that you can resist the devil and have victory over His power and scheming ways.

6. Put Your faith in God.

The expression “shield of faith” (Eph. 6:16) means that each believer must express faith in God’s power, promises, and provision for victory. Faith is the victory! We must believe in God’s power and promises in the time of temptation. We must place our total confidence and faith in what God has said and promised to us (“above all else taking the shield of faith” – Eph. 6:16). Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

7. Use the Word of God.

The expression “sword of the Spirit” speaks of the Word of God (“which is the word of God”) and how the Christian must use the truth of God’s Word to have victory. Victory is a truth encounter. We must have our “loins girt about with truth” (Eph. 6:14) and know what the Bible says about victory and those Bible verses that will present God’s truth on the matter of gossip.

Ephesians 4:29 says:

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”

This is a good verse to claim when Satan tempts you to gossip. There are many others that you can use to counter devilish temptations (Ps. 19:14; 34:13; Col. 4:6; James 1:19). In “the evil day” (Eph. 6:13) of temptation we

need to bring God's Word to our mind and use it in our battle against Satan. We must believe what it says, claim its promises, and confirm it in our heart ("It is written" – Matt. 4:3-4). The Bible is a sword that can be effectively used to ward off the devil.

Here are two other Bible verses that will help us to know the truth, claim the truth, and act upon the truth in the time of temptation.

1 Peter 2:1

"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings."

Ephesians 4:31

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."

8. Stay away from the places that make you stray from God.

One of the most practical things you can do to obtain more consistent victory in your life is to stay away from those places, people, and particular objects that cause you to sin. The Bible says, "and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14). This means we should never set ourselves up to gossip and sin by fellowshiping with the wrong people, listening to wrong things, viewing or reading wrong things, and going to certain places that might feed the old nature. Many times we make it easy for ourselves to sin. We should give no chance for the flesh to have its fling!

Conclusion

Close Your Mouth

Someone said:

"The quickest way to stop gossip is for everyone to shut up!"

Actually, this is what the Bible tells us to do! The Bible gives us this sound advice in Proverb 17:28: "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding."

Proverbs 10:19 adds:

“In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.”

You can hide these verses in your heart in the time of temptation and recite them, believe them, and act upon them. Victory is a truth encounter! Let us never forget this.

Slow to Speak

James 1:19 declares:

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

God gave us two ears and only one mouth for a reason! If we are “slow to speak” it means that we will think before we speak. It certainly means that we will not quickly lash out at someone or be moved to gossip about them before others. James cautions you and me to be fully aware of the words that we speak. When James says we must be slow to speak, he is not advocating that we take a vow to be silent. Rather, he wants us to use wisdom in our speaking. We must weigh our words and use the right kind of speech that is honorable and righteous.

A Bridle

Psalms 39:1

“I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.”

What an important verse. The Psalmist reminds us to put a bridle on our mouth so we don't spew out gossiping words that destroy the reputation and lives of other people. Good advice! James also speaks about putting a bridle on the tongue and controlling it much like a horse is controlled by a bridle (James 3:3-5). The Christians must learn by God's power and grace to control their tongue. The Bible also teaches that those who guard their mouths and tongues keep themselves from calamity (Proverbs 21:23). So guard your tongue and refrain from the sinful act of gossip. Love your

neighbor as yourself and don't sin against them in any way that you wouldn't also do to yourself (Matt. 7:12).

Below are some closing summary statements that will help us focus on what we have studied in this lesson.

Dealing with gossip

- If you have been a gossip, confess this as sin and ask Christ to forgive you (1 John 1:9). “Repent” and turn in a new direction (Rev. 2:5; Isa. 55:7). Psalm 34:14, “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.
- Surrender your tongue to the Lord (Rom. 6:13).
- Keep your nose out of other people’s business (1 Tim. 5:13). Don’t become a busybody.
- If you can’t say something good or encouraging about others, then keep your mouth shut (Eph. 4:29).
- Never criticize another person, except to their own face, with the intent to help them (Prov. 25:12; Heb. 3:13; 10:25). Criticism can never be “constructive” if it’s expressed to anyone else other than the person its intended for.
- If your “friends” start bad-mouthing others to you, stop them in their tracks -- refuse to be a partaker of their sins (1 Tim 5:22; Titus 3:10; Prov. 4:15; 13:20).
- Avoid association with people who gossip (Prov. 20:19 – “meddle not with him”).
- Expose works of darkness (Eph. 5:11) by reporting gossip to the pastor that he may confront and offer correction. Gossip should be treated as any other wicked and vile sin.

Guidelines to Guard Against Gossip

- If you do not have anything nice to say, do not say anything at all (Eph. 5:4; Col. 4:6 – “speech be always with grace”).
- Never speak about a person in any way other than compliments and praise, unless they are present (Gal. 2:11; Matt. 18:15), and even when they are present, “Let all your things be done with charity” (1 Cor. 16:14).
- Never share any information about another person unless they have given you their specific permission to do so (Prov. 11:13).
- Never speak about another person in a way that you would not speak, if they were present (Matt. 7:12).
- When in doubt, keep your mouth shut (Romans 14:23; James 1:19).

Biblical Evaluation of Gossip

1. Gossip is as sinful as murder (Rom. 1:29-30).
2. Gossip destroys the lives of people (Prov. 11:9).
3. Gossip wounds people (Prov. 18:7-8; 26:22).
4. Gossip is a common sin among God’s people and the church (Lev.19:16; 1 Tim. 5:13; 2 Cor. 12:20).
5. Gossip is the opposite of righteousness (Rom. 1:29-30; Ex. 23:1).
6. Gossip is opposite of faithfulness (Prov. 11:13).
7. Gossip is used by rebellious people (Jer. 6:28).
8. Gossip is foolish and a person who does it is a fool (Prov. 10:18).
9. Gossip stirs up trouble (Jer. 9:4).
10. Gossip breaks relationships (Prov. 16:28; 17:9).
11. Gossip causes anger (Prov. 25:23).
12. Gossip causes strife or division (Prov. 26:20; 2 Cor. 12:20).
13. Gossip is meddling in the affairs of others (1 Tim. 5:13).
14. Gossip is contrary to the character of God and resembles the slander of Satan (1 Tim. 3:11; Rev. 12:10).
15. Gossip will result in accountability for our words (2 Cor. 5:10).

16. Gossip is corrupted speech (Eph. 4:29).
17. Gossip is bitter speech (James 3:10-11; Rom. 3:14).
18. Gossip is like deadly poison (James 3:8; Rom. 3:13 – “the poison of asps is under their lips”).
19. Gossip is the result of a tongue “set on fire of hell” (James 3:6).
20. Gossip defiles the entire person (James 2:6).
21. Gossip is the opposite of love (Prov. 10:12; 1 Pet. 4:8).
22. Gossip should be avoided at all costs (Ex. 23:1; Prov. 4:15; 13:20; Tit. 3:10).
23. Gossip is not confined to one person (1 Tim. 5:13 – “wandering from house to house”). The person who gossips to you about others, also gossips to others about you.
24. Gossip and slander disqualifies a person for spiritual leadership (1 Tim. 3:8, 11).
25. Gossip often masks itself as concern for others (Prov. 20:19 – “flattereth with their lips” and Rom. 12:9).
26. Gossip thrives upon secrecy instead of openness and honesty (Prov. 11:13; 20:19).
27. Gossip, when removed, brings peace and unity (Prov. 26:20).
28. Gossip often distorts and exaggerates and is never a reliable source of truth (Psalm 15:2-3).
29. Gossip proves that a person is not in right fellowship with God (1 John 1:6-7).
30. Gossip keeps a person from getting answers to prayer (Psalms 66:18).
31. Gossip causes people (those who gossip) to face persistent and unexplainable problems (Prov. 21:23; Prov. 6:12-15).
32. Gossip needs to be rooted out of our lives (1 Pet. 2:1; Eph. 4:31).
33. Gossip will not go unpunished (Prov. 19:5; Ps. 101:5; Num. 32:23).

The Gossip Questionnaire

As we finish our study of this awful subject, take these guidelines to heart. Before you share something about another person, ask yourself these questions. I call it the gossip questionnaire.

- ✓ Is this information pure? It is true?
- ✓ Do I really have the facts?
- ✓ Will it contribute to building up the other person?
- ✓ Will it create harmony and peace in the body of Christ?
- ✓ Is it the most merciful thing to do?
- ✓ Will it produce good fruit?
- ✓ Would Jesus say it?
- ✓ Does it reflect a sweet spirit on my part?
- ✓ Am I truly sincere and unselfish in wanting to share this information?
- ✓ Am I truly being considerate of this person in sharing this information?
- ✓ Am I being impartial and objective in my thinking?

Dirt for Sale

I was riding along a highway the other day and saw a sign, "Dirt for sale." I thought to myself, this is a good way to illustrate what gossip. It is dirt for sale. When gossip is passed along among Christians it is like selling dirt to others. Gossip is a dirty rotten sin and it should not be spread among God's people. We must break the habit of gossip and become a blessing to others instead of a backbiter of others.

Psalm 141:3 says:

"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

This is a daily prayer that should be upon our hearts. We should want to guard our lips from saying anything that dishonors God and others. Make this your prayer today!

Golden Apples

Proverbs 25:11 states:

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."

When we do speak we should weigh our words. What we say and how we say it is very important. When we use our tongue wisely in directing and even correcting others, it's then that our words become beautiful in their

expression. They are like apples of gold in a silver picture. We should remember this principle of speech in connection with gossip. When we change gossip into graceful speech, our words can become like apples of gold in silver pictures, instead of poison spewing forth from underneath our tongues (Rom. 3:13). I would rather be known as a silver picture full of good-looking golden apples than a snake spewing out deadly poison that kills and harms others! What would you rather be? A silver platter filled with luscious apples or a venomous snake striking people with its poison? The choice is up to you!

Now remember this:

“We will never be sorry for the things that we do not say.”

After studying God’s Word on gossip, we would do well to investigate our lives, and make sure we are riding on the Gospel Train instead of the Gossip Train which is headed for Gossip Town.

Gossip Town

“Have you ever heard of Gossip Town?
On the shore of Falsehood Bay?
Where old Dame Rumor, with rustling gown,
Is going the livelong day?
It isn’t far to Gossip Town,
For people who want to go;
The Idleness Train will take you down
In just an hour or so.

The Thoughtless Road is a popular route,
And most folks start that way.
But it’s steep downgrade; If you don’t look out,
You’ll land in Falsehood Bay.
The principal street is called They Say,
And I’ve heard at the Public Well;
And the breeze that blows from Falsehood Bay
Is laden with Don’t You Tell!

In the midst of the town is Telltale Park.
You're never quite safe while there,
For its owner is Madam Suspicious Remark,
Who lives on the street, Don't Care.

Just back of the park is Slanders' Row.
"Twas there that Good Name died.
Pierced by a dart from Jealousy's bow,
In the hands of Envious Pride.

From Gossip Town, Peace long since fled,
But Trouble, Grief and Woe,
And Sorrow and Care you'll meet instead –
Oh, We hope you never to Gossip Town go!