

“THE DEVIL’S NEWS REPORTERS” (2 Samuel 16:1-4; 19:24-30)

The world is full of gossipers, slanderers and meddlers. No one, really, is immune from being sucked into it – especially Christians! Because of its poisonous power, it is one of the devil’s most useful tools in dividing and damaging the work of God. The Bible makes clear that such people often attend church and create enormous mental and spiritual damage on Christians. Churches and families have been torn apart by gossip. Satan uses gossip to poison your mind toward other brothers or sisters that are not there to defend themselves. It is such a heinous sin that God declares it an abomination that He hates, “*A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.*” (Prov. 6:19)

Time spent spreading or listening to gossip is time ill-spent. A Christian lady, who for more than forty years went from house to house to earn money by taking in washing, was asked how it was she was so well liked by those who came in contact with her. She replied: “I make it a practice never to say in one house what I hear in another.”



WHAT IS A GOSSIP? A gossip inserts themselves into other people’s lives and problems in a way that is unproductive and even harmful. They act in the flesh not in the power of the Spirit of God. Their interventions are unwanted, unsolicited, and unappreciated. Gossip can be true, partially true, or completely false. It is a form of sinful curiosity and troublemaking.

The Bible has much to teach us about being a gossip or interfering in other people’s business. In Leviticus the Lord declared, “*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.*” (Leviticus 19:16) The Book of Proverbs warns, “*every fool will be meddling*” (Prov. 20:3b) and, “*He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.*” (Prov. 26:13) It was a problem for the early church. The Apostle Paul warned of those that did this, “*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.*” (1 Tim 5:13)

These Scriptures have nothing to do with correcting someone who is rebelling against God that results in unrepentant sin and self-harm, but is a rebuke those who are just nosey. For many people want to know your business not to help, but just to know it so to have something to gossip about. Gossiping is a cowardly sin because you say behind someone’s back what you would never say to their face.

The devil is the slanderer of the brethren and Satan has many disciples running around. The gossip only reveals who they really are and nothing more. We all deal with criticism by gossips sooner or later. No one can escape it. Sadly it happens among the people of God. Look beyond

the pathetic critic. Be balanced and mature. Ignore the gossip. For he or she that gossips to you will gossip about you. Socrates famously asked for double fees to teach oratory to his students. He told them this is because, “I must teach you two sciences: the one how to hold your tongue and the other how to speak.” Brian Bell gives great advice, “Great minds talk about ideas; mediocre minds talk about things; small minds talk about other people. Satan may want to use criticism as a weapon to batter us; but if we let Him God can use it as a tool to build us.”

KING DAVID – David was a man that suffered greatly from troublemakers. He was slandered and gossiped about many times throughout his life. For the most part, David chose to ignore these verbal attacks and hand them over to the Lord to deal with. In his Psalms, David often calls upon the Lord for help from the tongues of evil doers. Grady makes a helpful application,

“If you are in ministry, chances are you will be skewered sooner or later by someone who feels it is their spiritual duty to destroy your reputation. I have many pastor friends who have had to endure character assassination—either by Sauls (insecure leaders), Absaloms (unfaithful subordinates) or Shebas (rebellious critics). Still, I don't feel it is my responsibility to track down every person who has a low opinion of me. In the case of David, he trusted God to deal with those who opposed him. He did not prosecute his enemies. Don't have such a fragile ego that you have to hunt down those who don't like you. Take the high road and let God use even your enemies to build your character.

APOSTLE PAUL – Few men were slandered like the Apostle Paul. Gossip and slanders seemed to follow him everywhere. He summed up the competing stories that spread about him in his lists of sufferings, “*By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report...*” (2 Cor. 6:8a) When writing to the Christians at Rome, Paul was forced to defend his doctrine because of false rumours about his teaching, “*And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.*” (Romans 3:8) The Apostle was forced to even name the names of those who were slandering him and causing division such as in the case of Hermogenes, Phygellus, Alexander, etc. He reveals that the hateful words made many churches turn against him just before his death, including close friends and fellow workers of the faith (2 Tim.1:14-15).

FRUITS OF GOSSIP - There are some professing Christians that think that gossiping is no big deal. But it is a serious issue and must be rooted out in our lives. For gossip:

- (1) Hurts the reputation of others
- (2) Divides people
- (3) Distorts the truth
- (4) Reveals what is meant to be private and sensitive
- (5) Prolongs quarrels
- (6) Limits trust between God's people

DEALING WITH THE GOSSIP

Such individuals usually appear very sympathetic to your problems. Like the old serpent in Eden, they approach you initially as a “friend.” They often encourage you to tell them everything under the guise of “sharing” so they “can pray for you.” There are a number of things you should do to deal with such people:

(1) **DON'T TALK TO THEM** – Discouraging a culture of gossip starts with disciplining our own ears and tongue, “*Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.*” (Prov. 21:23) One of the best ways to deal with a gossip is to simply refuse to listen to them or respond to them. For if you choose not to listen, then you will be less tempted to pass on gossip. It is a fast way to shut down the problem, “*Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.*” (Proverbs 26:20) Aaron Burr was vice-president of the USA during President Thomas Jefferson's first term from 1801 to 1805. When he was dying, he lay in bed in a boarding house at Port Richmond, Staten Island. A friend visited him and began to report a rumour by saying, “They say.” Immediately, Burr interrupted her and said, “My dear, never use that word. It has broken more hearts than any other.” It is also important to recognize that you are not obliged to indulge gossipers and busybodies. They haven't been appointed by God to investigate you or anyone else. It is perfectly acceptable to politely inform them that you want to maintain your privacy and move on.

(2) **CHOOSE YOUR FRIENDS WISELY** - If there is someone you know is prone to gossip and meddle, then keep them at an arms-length, “*He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.*” (Proverbs 20:19) Don't listen to their gossip about others. For remember, the same person who gossips to you about others will gossip about you to others! The leopard doesn't change his spots! We can't choose our family or our enemies but we can choose who we hang around with as friends and companions. If you hear someone say, “I'm always the last to know about trouble in my home or church,” then that person is a good friend to have.



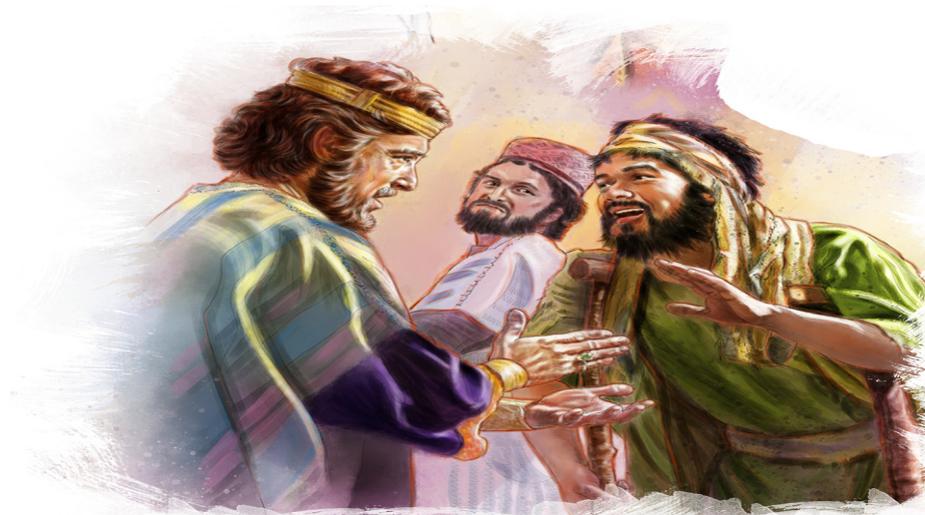
(3) **BE DISCRETE** – Sometimes we hear things directly or indirectly that we wish we hadn't. We must exercise great prudence in not passing on information. Solomon wisely observed, “*He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace. A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.*” (Prov. 11:12-13) There is an old saying, “Gossip dies when it hits a wise person's ears.” A.W. Tozer bluntly rebuked the sin of gossip:

Never pass anything on about anybody else that will hurt him. Love “*shall cover the multitude of sins.*” (1 Peter 4:8) The talebearer has no place in God's favour. If you know something that would hinder or hurt the reputation of one of God's children, bury it forever. Find a little garden out back—a little spot somewhere—and when somebody comes around with an evil story, take it out and bury it and say, “Here lies in peace the story about my brother.” God will take care of it.”

(4) **REMINDE YOURSELF OF THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF GOSSIP** – Words have the power to inspire, but the wrong kind of words can also destroy. A good name is very important, “*A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.*” (Prov. 22:1) So doing anything to undermine that in another’s life is evil. We are called to guard the reputation of our fellow believers carefully. Talking about others unfairly hurts the reputation of your fellow Christian, “*The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.*” (Prov. 26:22) And it always separates people. Even close friends and loved ones. It breaks up trusted friendships, “*a whisperer separateth chief friends.*” (Prov. 16:28b) True friends don’t let friends gossip and slander. In Matthew 15:19, the Lord Jesus Christ associated slander with the violent sins that proceed out of a wicked heart.

Gossip is addictive. For once you get a taste of these poisonous choice morsels, you crave more and more. When you get a name for gossiping it hurts your reputation as a trustworthy confidant. We all quickly work out the “gossiper” in the community and the church. This is vital as it affects others by our example, “*If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked*” (Prov. 29:12)

(5) **CHECK YOUR FACTS CAREFULLY** – It is very easy to come to the wrong conclusion about a person or situation. None of us are infallible. The Bible makes clear repeatedly that we should not make a judgment on the truth of allegations about another believer without hearing the full truth of a matter. All accusations must be properly verified before both making public statements, “*He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him*” (Prov. 18:13). The accused must have the right to a fair hearing to defend himself, “*Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?*” (John 7:51). Any allegation made in the church context must be independently verified by two objective witnesses (cf. Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1) before the ordained leadership of the church, “*I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?*” (1 Cor. 6:5). We must be “*swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*” (James 1:19). A rash speaker is worse than a fool, “*Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him*” (Prov. 29:20). It is to your shame and folly if you repeat gossip without checking facts – don’t do it



Even the very wisest and most faithful of God’s servants can be influenced wrongly by gossip and false allegations. This can happen easily when we are under pressure. King David was in such a scenario when he was on the run from Absalom in 2 Samuel 16. David had been very generous to

a crippled descendant of King Saul called Mephibosheth. When David was fleeing Jerusalem, an unscrupulous man called Ziba met him, who managed the royal estates that David had bequeathed to Mephibosheth. David asked him, “*And where is thy master's son?*” The crafty Ziba seized the opportunity to lie about Mephibosheth, “*And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father.*” (2 Samuel 16:3). Rather than check this accusation out, David rashly assumes the guilt of Mephibosheth and pronounces a judgement on him, “*Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth.*” (2 Samuel 16:4) David doesn't handle this well in unconditionally trusting the testimony of Ziba. That is not a good way to administer justice. No investigation of the facts. At least he could have delayed judgment for another day. There are always unscrupulous and opportunistic people who use a crisis to take advantage of others. We should not automatically take the word of the Zibas of this world against other believers who have proved faithful in the past. Beware of people bearing gifts who then try to poison you against other believers.

HOW TO REACT IF PEOPLE ARE GOSSIPING ABOUT YOU?

The best thing to do when people gossip about you is to ignore it as best you can. There may be some allegations that are best dealt with directly because they pertain to the work of God. But when it comes to personal attacks, it is best not to let Satan get a double victory in harming your spiritual and emotional state. This does not mean that we must never learn from our critics, even unkindly motivated ones, but we must never let them overwhelm us. Never allow people's opinions or attitudes distract you from God's holy calling. Remind yourself that faithful men of God have always been the object of vicious attacks from malicious people. A humble attitude also helps. For if we honestly examine ourselves we fail the Lord in so many areas. Spurgeon was deeply slandered throughout his life. He made the observation, “If any man thinks ill of you, do not be angry with him; for you are worse than he thinks you to be.”

King Solomon wrote, “*Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.*” (Ecclesiastes 7:21-22). So, we are told to be self-critical, balanced and mature in our assessment this. For we ourselves are perennially attracted to the same sin of gossiping, “*For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.*” We are all guilty of this on multiple occasions. Someone has said, “If each knew what one said about the other, there would not be two friends left in the world.” CH Spurgeon in his lectures to his Bible students revealed, “I have one blind eye and one deaf ear and they are the best ear and eye that I have.” He pointed out from James 3:8 that, “What can't be cured must be endured, and the best way of enduring it is not to listen to it.”

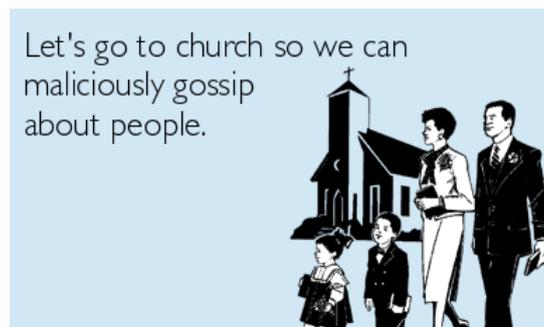
WHAT IF YOU ARE PRONE TO MEDDLING AND GOSSIPING?

Human beings were created by God to interact with each other. Sin has a way of corrupting every part of human relationships. Although some are more partial to it than others, there is an innate desire in us all to talk *with* and *about* others. A great rule of thumb is to ask yourself if the person you were gossiping about was in the next room listening would you be comfortable with them hearing what you're saying?

If you feel that you must use your tongue, then use it to pray for others and not gossip. The Apostle Paul made a great command, “*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.” (Eph. 4:29) It’s hard to find the right balance between grace and truth. We will never control our tongue on our own. We need Jesus to help us.

**Think before you speak!
Pray before you speak!
Pause before you speak!**



God takes seriously the sin of gossiping and slandering others, “*Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off.*” (Psalm 101:5a) He will hold us accountable for every careless or wrong word we speak (Matt. 12:36) In light of that we are called to cut such conversations out of our lives, “*Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings.*” (1 Peter 2:1) The Apostle Paul advised that the best way is to mind your own business, “*And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.*” (1 Thess. 4:11) We are not called to be God’s news reporters in the community but God’s servants to others. Matthew Henry noted, “If we are idle, the Devil and a corrupt heart will soon find us something to do.” We must always avoid using our words to hurt or break down others.

Have you ever been told to “mind your own business?” Are you a busy body? If you are then you have some repenting to do. Recognize that being a busy body and a gossip is sin in God's eyes. And God hates it. And we should, too. Confess it and turn from it. Ask God to give you victory over it.

***If you are tempted to reveal
A Tale to you someone has told
About another, make it pass,
Before you speak, Three gates of gold.***

***These narrow gates: First, “Is it true?”
Then, “Is it needful?” In your mind
Give truthful answer. And the next
Is last and narrowest, “Is it kind?”***

***And if to reach your lips at last
It passes through these gateways three,
Then you may tell the tale, nor fear
What the result of speech may be.***