

15. Gossip

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Cyanide, a.k.a., "CN" in chemical code, is a well-known poison that does not need to be taken in large doses. A drop or two is more than sufficient to kill a person. In 2003, Al Qaeda reportedly planned to release cyanide gas into the New York City Subway system. The attack was reportedly aborted because there would not be enough casualties. Nice people with their peaceful religion, aren't they?

The tongue does not need to come up with long speeches, all it has to do is drop a well-chosen word or two to start poison in one's heart. Because of this word of poison, peace has been ruined between relatives, a reputation has been blackened, a friendship has been embittered, a life has been blasted to the point of no-turning-back.

It is so deadly that Jesus Himself gives us one of the sternest warnings in all of the NT concerning its use:

Matthew 12:36 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.

Sobering, isn't it? To think that all the things we said just yesterday, not to mention what we've said throughout our lifetime, will be repeated before the Judgment Throne of God puts real panic in our hearts. What are those idle words that are going to haunt us when we get to heaven? Let's return to Proverbs for an uncomfortable look at the wrong ways we wag our tongues.

A. TABLOID MENTALITY

Proverbs 10:18b And whoever spreads slander is a fool.

Proverbs 11:13 A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.

Gossip – let's admit it, we all love to hear it and love to spread it. It is in our genes. The Bible tells us that we are desperately wicked above all things. Gossip is malicious circulation of false or exaggerated or even truth with selfish twisted reports about another person. I don't find any good thing in gossip.

Some people make a good living by spreading gossip. If you don't believe me, just go to a grocery check-out stand. What do you see? Tabloid magazines – National Enquirer, Star Magazine, The Mirror, Globe Magazine, People Magazine, etc. All that garbage. Hope that none of you read them.

It seems as though we are living in a day of tabloid mentality. I have never seen a culture and society so obsessed with gossip, innuendos and rumors – from TV programs, magazines, social network – like Facebook, Twitter and even newspaper.

During the presidential election campaigns in 2008, the liberal media went all out to find dirt on Sarah Palin. Instead of checking the sources and verifying them, the major network reporters and newspaper journalists would rather depend on rumors and even gossips from liberal entertainers.

The tragedy of this kind of journalism is that if someone is charged with a crime today, the media try and sentence him or her long before they ever have had the opportunity to enter a court of law where evidence is presented and where they face their accusers.

Sadly, this kind of thinking can even enter the church. When we hear something about someone else, immediately our ears perk up. But what does the Bible tell us? It says that love believes the best of every person. It doesn't say that love believes the worst. This means when someone says something about a Christian brother or sister, we should not immediately have some disbelief in our hearts but we ought to believe the best of that individual.

We must be very careful, because many times we accept rumor as truth. Then to make matters worse, we start repeating what we've heard without checking the facts.

One of the things the Bible says that God hates is the one who sows discord among others according to Proverbs 6. This is the person who spreads rumors and innuendos and who slanders others. God hates this.

B. eGOSSIP

Whether you want to admit this or not, Christians are the worst offenders when it comes to making things up for the glory of God. The internet is full of made-up stories by Christians about God's miracles, what other Christians did, how unbelievers got disasters, etc. How do those lies get spread? Through E-mails by Christians.

How often do you get these kinds of e-mails from your Christian friends in a day? You probably think that since these e-mails came from your fellow believers, they must be true. In addition to that, these e-mails say at the bottom, "Do not break this e-mail chain. Let it go around the world repeatedly." So what do you do? You forward it to everyone in your mailing list.

I, too, get this kind of forwarding e-mails daily, in most cases, I don't even read and trash them. I know some of you are shocked, "Did you just say that you trashed my e-mail without reading it?" Yes. If I ever read them, I reply and ask that person if he or she checked the source and verified it. 9 out of 10 say, "No."

If you send e-mails with questions, concerns or prayer requests to me, I do read everyone of them and respond.

You can verify those circulating e-mail stories by visiting www.snopes.com or www.TruthOrFiction.com. If you just forward those untruthful e-mails without checking the authenticity of the stories, it is the same as gossiping.

When you find out you did gossip through e-mail or passed false information, the only right thing is that you contact those to whom you sent out the e-mails and let them know that you did wrong. You do that a couple times, you will stop forwarding gossip e-mails and unchecked stories altogether.

C. BUT IT IS TRUE...

Some gossips are true, absolutely true. But you have to wonder what the reason is for people to spread it. Even revealing the truth at times can be nothing more than a sneaky way to slander someone else. Private conversations aired publicly can cause irreparable damage. Not everything we hear should be shared. Please remember this, whoever gossips to you will gossip about you.

Proverbs 17:9 He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates friends.

Then, some of you may think now, "Aren't there times when confidential information ought to be shared?" Yes. It doesn't happen often, but there are times when it becomes legal and moral obligation, it must be spoken.

For an example, let's say that a friend admits that he is involved in an adulterous relationship; what do you do?

Matthew 18:15-17 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and (1) tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, (2) take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' 17 And if he refuses to hear them, (3) tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

By law, if a pastor or volunteer hears a child abuse or molestation case, they must report to proper authority right away. Even so, only those who absolutely need to know should be told.

More often than not, the difficulty we all face is not with breaking confidentiality, but rather with keeping it.

D. DEFEAT OF TONGUE

Insensitive comments; thoughts that should have remained thoughts, feelings which had no business being expressed; opinions carelessly tossed like a grenade into a crowd – these thoughtless words can harm far more than all of us can imagine.

And if you confront the one who threw these thoughtless darts and caused pain to you and others, his response would be "Oh, but I had no intention... I didn't realize you were so sensitive!" or "I forgot you were here." The gossipers don't mind spreading until they become the receiving ends.

God's Word has strong medicine for those who carelessly wag their tongues.

Proverbs 10:19 In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 13:3 He who guards his mouth preserves his life, But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.

Proverbs 21:23 Whoever guards his mouth and tongue Keeps his soul from troubles.

The message is clear: we who dare to call ourselves God's ambassadors can not afford the luxury of idle words, gossips and slanders. Excuses such as "I didn't know you were here" or "I didn't realize this was so sensitive" are shallow, thoughtless, down right wrong when they come from those who claim to be followers and imitators of the Prince of Peace. We have an added responsibility to guard our tongues.

These practical steps will purge careless words from our conversations:

1) Never slander, especially mentioning about someone's outward appearances or handicaps.

2) Never criticize in public unless you have already expressed your disappointment with the other person in private, have already taken someone with you to discuss the grievance with the person, and are absolutely convinced that public reprimand is necessary and final and will be helpful.

3) Never say anything about anyone in their absence that you wouldn't say in their presence. Insensitive slurs may be accidental, but they are not excusable.

E. CHURCH GOSSIP

Time to time I get phone calls or e-mails from other Calvary Chapel pastors who are absolutely frustrated with the situations they are in due to gossips by their congregation or the people who are leaving their churches. These pastors were not gossiping about those people because they don't mention the accusers' names or their descriptions at all. It is a way of letting out steam.

Often when believers choose to leave a church because they didn't like what the pastor is doing, not in theologies, it seems that it is worse than a married couple going through a bitter divorce. They do everything they can to damage the church or the pastor. They gossip about the pastor, his wife and even his children. Just about in every case, it never is their fault, but always the pastor's fault for them to leave the church. They try to take as many people as they can with them.

When I was a member of the board of director of one Calvary Chapel which is located in another state, a handful of people did this to their pastor. It was very ugly and deceitful. The pastor and his family were heartbroken. I am sure that the Lord Jesus was not pleased, either.

I also had my share of this kind of church gossips against me in the last nine years. I need a favor from all of you. I hope that you don't, but if you ever choose to leave this church because you don't like what I do, either go quietly or tell it to my face. If I am wrong, I will apologize to you and will correct it. If it is nothing more than a difference in personal preferences, you can overlook it or go your way without gossiping and telling lies to others. If you do, you sin against God and to yourself.

F. THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

Garbled messages provides the perfect fuel for gossip sessions and just the right ingredient for slanderous slams. Exaggerate this detail or rearrange that fact, and you've got a perfect recipe that will make more mouths water than hot fudge on a rainy night.

Gossip has one purpose. It brings down the other person whom we are gossiping about. We might say, "To pray intelligently, I'd like to share this with you." There is a Greek word for that. HOG WASH!

So how do we restrain our lips from gossip and slander?

We cannot prevent others from gossiping, but we can stop what might start from our own lips. I'd like to suggest a simple formula applied before speaking of any person or subject that was perhaps controversial.

T – Is it true? Did you check the source of gossip?

H – Is it helpful? Does it build up the person whom we talk about or tear down?

I – Is it inspiring? Can I put it against the Word of God and is it OK to say?

N – Is it necessary? Is it another idle word that I am going to be accountable to God?

K – Is it kind? If I was that person, would I like to hear that?

If what you and I are about to say about others does not pass this test, we should keep our mouths shut! Then that gossip won't go anywhere.

At the beginning of this study, I said that all the idle words we have spoken would haunt us later in heaven. For some of you, that is all you can think about now. Relax, if you asked the Lord Jesus to forgive you, it was forgiven. The Lord doesn't remember them any more. He has a total Green Valley moment. Don't remind Him.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) Don't be someone who spreads rumors. Don't be someone who gossips. It's wrong. It's sinful. And it displeases God.

2) A person who thinks by inch, talks by yard should be dealt by foot on his rear end.

3) Before you speak about someone, THINK:

Is it true?

Is it helpful?

Is it inspiring?

Is it necessary?

Is it kind?