

What is Gossip?

Gossip is a great evil, and because of the corruption of the fallen human heart, it is a constant problem. The old sinful nature delights in hearing and spreading gossip. Gossip is not something that is confined to old women. In fact, it is a great problem among charismatic, Pentecostal and Baptist preachers.

Though the word "gossip" does not appear in the Bible, the concept does. Gossip is called tale-bearing (Lev. 19:16; Proverbs 11:13; 18:8; 20:19; 26:20-22) and backbiting (Psalm 15:3), which is talking to others about the intimate details of people's lives for injurious purposes. Gossip is called being a "busybody in other's men matters" (1 Peter 4:5). This means putting one's nose in other people's affairs which are none of my business.

Gossip is called "slander" (Numbers 14:36, 37; 2 Samuel 19:27; Proverbs 10:18; Jeremiah 9:4-6; Rom. 3:8; 1 Timothy 3:11). This means to say false things about people, especially with the objective of hurting them. For something to be slanderous, it must involve deceit and falsehood and an injurious motive. To spread rumors about someone in an attempt to hurt that person is wicked gossip. We must be extremely careful about passing along things that we hear. If there is any question about the truthfulness of something, it is essential to verify it from someone who is in a position to know the matter.

Gossip is called "tattling" (1 Timothy 5:13). This means to prattle on about other people's lives when it is none of one's business and when one has no godly motive for such talk, to gossip). God's people must guard themselves vigilantly against these sins. Gossip is extremely damaging. In fact, gossip can destroy a preacher's effectiveness and can ruin an entire church.

What gossip is not: It is very important, though, not to confuse gossip with legitimate Christian endeavors. Speaking truth to proper parties for spiritual purpose is not gossip. It is not wrong to share truthful things with those who have a right to such information.

It was not gossip for the household of Chloe to tell Paul about the problems in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11). As the founder of that church, Paul had a right to know about those problems, and the household of Chloe were not telling him these things to hurt the Lord's work but to help it. It is not gossip to talk to a pastor/teacher about matters in church members' lives that they should know about. It is not gossip to talk to a father or mother about matters affecting their children.

It was not gossip for Paul to remind Timothy that the Cretians had a poor national character which he described in such harsh-sounding terms as "liars, evil beasts, slow bellies" (Titus 1:12). What Paul said about the Cretians (quoting one of their

own poets) was true, and his motive was not to hurt them but to help them ("that they may be sound in the faith" Titus 1:13) and to further the work of Christ in Crete.

It is not wrong for a Christian to warn another person about a serious problem in a church or organization, so long as the information is true and the motive is not to hurt but to help and to warn. Oftentimes I have warned people about serious problems with certain churches that I have known about. That is not gossip and it is not slander. It is not gossip to speak the truth in love, regardless of how harsh the truth might sound.

Questioning a preacher's teaching is not gossip: It is also not wrong to question a pastor in a humble and godly manner and to test his teaching by the Scriptures. In fact, we have a responsibility before God to do that. Of course, we always must guard our hearts that we don't become bitter and that we don't develop a bad attitude and then try to hurt the pastor or the church by spreading things around the church membership or community.

We must also use wisdom about such matters. It is not usually wise and proper to question a pastor publicly about some perceived error or problem. It is best handled in private, at least at first.

That being said, the bottom line is that it is not wrong to question a pastor's teaching. Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; and 1 Corinthians 14:29 settle that. Pastors have much authority, but they are not popes and they are not to be followed blindly. Their authority is the Word of God, and if they veer from that they have no authority and should be corrected. And yet many godly Christians have been branded as gossips and troublemakers when they have attempted to question something the preacher taught. All too many pastors have wrongly defined "gossip" as saying anything negative about him and his preaching, and they create this false definition in order to manipulate the church members and to make them fearful of questioning anything he does.

This is not right and does not create a wholesome New Testament church atmosphere. The pastor must remember that he not to lord it over God's people. "Neither as being lords over Gods heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3) According to this passage, the pastor needs to be more concerned about providing a godly example to the flock than lording it over them. This does not mean, of course, that the pastor does not have more authority than others in church. He does have authority (Hebrews 13:17). What we are referring to here is the abuse of that authority. Even the Apostle Paul, who had greater authority than any pastor today, said, "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand" (2 Corinthians 1:24).

Warning of sin and errors is not gossip: Marking false teachers 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 alone. If a church leader publicly teaches error or commits a serious sin that would disqualify him or otherwise does something that people should be warned about, it is not gossip or slander for men of God to describe the problem publicly. I have often been charged with being a slanderer or a busybody when I have named men such as Billy Graham or Jerry Falwell or James Dobson and have warned about their errors.

I have the right and responsibility as a preacher to mark 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. If their error is public and persistent, my responsibility is to warn of them publicly, just as Paul did in regard to Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:20), Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Timothy 1:15), Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17), Demas (2 Timothy 4:10), and Alexander the coppersmith (2 Timothy 4:14-15).

Slander is spreading ill founded, untrue things about others with the intent to injure them. Warning about error in Christian charity for the sake of protecting God's people from that exposed or known error is not slander nor is it gossip.

Admonishing one another is not gossip: Romans 15:14 says, "And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." Christians have an obligation to admonish one another to serve the Lord. This involves watching over one another and exhorting one another about things that would hinder our walk with Christ (Heb. 3:13; 10:24, 25). If a mature church member attempts to admonish and correct other church members, he or she can be labeled as a gossip and a troublemaker and a busybody in other men's affairs.

Admonishing others requires maturity and godliness (Romans 15:14), but it is a legitimate duty of spiritually mature believers. It is not something that is to be left strictly to the pastor. Titus 2:3-5 describes how older women in the church are to teach and admonish younger women. I have known of churches, though, in which older women have gotten into trouble for attempting to exercise this ministry in a godly and scriptural manner. They were told that it was strictly up to the pastor to correct and disciple younger women about their personal lives and homes, but that is certainly not what the Bible says.

There is a ministry of correction that is to be exercised by spiritually mature believers and it is necessary to make a clear biblical distinction between gossip and legitimate Christian endeavors.

Following is a list of four categories of personal sins:

1. Emotional sins, related to fear (worry & anxiety), also related to hatred which brings about anger, violence, even murder. Emotional sins are also related to self-pity and guilt.

2. Mental Attitude sins, such as arrogance, pride, jealousy, bitterness, implacability, vindictiveness, inordinate ambition and competition, all of which are motivational sins based on sinful thoughts.
3. Verbal sins, such as gossip, maligning, slander, judging, lying, and verbal deception.
4. Overt sins, such as murder, stealing, chemical sins, sexual sins, etc.

Under the category of verbal sins there are 16 Biblical definitions noted:

- Slander - utterance of false charges or misrepresentation which defames and damages another's reputation.
- Gossip - repeating idle talk and rumors about others.
- Meddling - to concern one with or take part in other people's affairs without being asked or needed. Such a one is a trouble maker.
- Vilification - the use of abusive or slanderous speech to defame or degrade someone else.
- Judging - to criticize or censure someone's life without having the authority or facts to do so.
- Lying - a false statement with an intention to willfully deceive the hearers.
- Verbal deception - using words purposely devised to mislead and deceive others.
- Hearsay - is repeating anything based upon what someone told you and is not from your own personal knowledge of the situation.
- Defamation - the uttering of slanderous or malicious words to try and destroy someone's reputation.
- Maligning - harboring bitterness, hatred, and spitefulness against someone and expressing it by speaking evil of that individual.
- Complaining - to utter expressions of annoyance or resentment or to find fault with someone or something.
- Fabrication - to invent and form stories and lies.
- Equivocation - the use of words or expressions that are susceptible to a double significance with a view to mislead.
- Whining - complaining in a childish, undignified way.
- Whimpering - complaining with a low, whining broken voice.
- Murmuring - to utter complaints in a low, half articulate voice.

All of these verbal sins originate from the mental attitude. Mental attitude sins lead to motivational sins and sins of the tongue, designed to destroy one's life. Psalm 140:3 equates the sins of the tongue with poison. A loose or vicious tongue is evident that there is something wrong in the heart.

Sins of the tongue are always an indicator that the mental attitude is sour. The sins of the tongue are a very serious issue with God and warrants not only divine discipline for the verbal sin itself but also transferred discipline for sin mentioned on behalf of the victim whether supposed or real. The sins of the tongue are such a serious matter that three of God's top seven sins listed in Proverbs 16:16-19 are verbal sins.

These three verbal sins are:

- A Lying Tongue: A lying tongue is a deceptive tongue, a tongue which teaches false doctrine, a tongue which breaks promises, and a tongue which betrays an individual.
- A False Witness: A false witness refers to perjury, Exodus 20:16. A false witness also utters lies based on hearsay.
- One Who Spreads Strife: Those who spread strife are called perverts in Proverbs 16:28. Strife comes from those who love sin, Pro 17:19. Spreading strife is a sign of being a fool, Proverbs 18:6. Whereas, slowness to anger often reconciles a situation, Proverbs 15:18.

Hearsay, being the testimony given by a witness based on what has been heard from someone else, not what the person actually witnessed. Arrogance, power lust, and conspiratorial lust rejects evidence based on truth and readily accept hearsay. This is in direct violation of God's laws. Deut 19:15-19; Matthew 7:1-2. Procedure was and is very important when an individual receives a complaint or investigates an accusation. When there is prejudice and no evidence it must be given over to the supreme court of heaven.

Many people are very good at handing over false reports. Without even flinching they can hang up the phone and say, she said this or that!! And the stories they create from their demented sense of unhappiness actually becomes reality to them. This is a dangerous companion and one we are commanded to separate from! When we become a false witness toward any believer, we become a false witness against Jesus Christ, Act 9:1-4!

Many accusations are either malicious rumors or a deliberate manufacturing of the conspiratorial lie to pacify jealousy and express power or approbation lust. If there is not sufficient evidence or admission of guilt, again, the matter must be dismissed and left in the supreme court of heaven. The highest form of integrity is to use the second stage of the faith-rest drill which is to turn a matter over to the rightful judge, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The third noted verbal sin in Proverbs 16 is a person who spread strife which is one who disputes and excites a situation and keeps the fire burning by way of corrupt communication in order to cause contention and trouble between people. "The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out." Proverbs 17:14. In other words, once you recognize a situation of strife, get out of it as soon as you can. Once you become a part of it by listening you are forced to take sides, and none of us ever receive all the facts! Mark 4:24 and Luke 8:18 warn us to be careful what we listen to and how we listen! The best thing to do in a bad situation is cover it; Proverbs 10:12 not repeat it and fuel it.

Those who stir up strife do so from a heart filled with hatred. Strife often results from the sin of presumption, Proverbs 13:10. The strife spreader is dealt very harshly with by God therefore the best thing for you to do is identify "the mouth" and separate from her or him. Separating from strife is a sign of integrity, Proverbs 20:3, since any fool can argue. The person who spreads strife among the brethren should be driven out if possible, Proverbs 22:10, for they are filled with arrogance, Proverbs 28:25.

Another problem which arises with the sins of the tongue is the double standard subscribed to in this category of sinning.

Self-righteousness always sets up the following double standard:

- Self vindication or self-justification (making excuses for all mistakes or sins)
- Judging and maligning of another (which by the way only serves to condemn oneself).

Under these tactics the verbal sinner flatters the immediate listener while trashing the victim of his tale at the same time elevating his/her own self (so he thinks). In reality, our arrogance never serves to vindicate self, Matthew 7:1-2; Romans 2:1. The one who listens to the flattering/gossiper is thereafter held responsible for what he has heard and must confess this before he can move on spiritually.

The key word "the mouth" will use is duty or responsibility. I feel it my duty to tell you this since we are such good friends. It's not really gossip but responsibility. Then they precede to hand you their opinion of the matter. The legalism which comes from self-righteous arrogance always rejects God's grace standards and implements one's own way of handling matters.

The carnal believer is distracted in two ways:

1. Through subjective arrogance by creating a role model and then destroying it through gossip, slander, maligning and judging.
2. He becomes a distraction to others through the function of legalism leading to the sins of the tongue.

They agree that rebound is good for their own sins, but the sins of others must be dealt with! Legalism judges the sins of other believers, whether real or imagined, and whether different from one's own sins or a matter of transference arrogance.

Respectably maligning others is one of the most evil functions in the Christian way of life! It is never our duty to act as judge or even form an opinion. It is our duty to tend to our own lives and let others live out their decisions and actions before God.

For any CAB to consider another believer with contempt leads to wanting that believer to be dealt with human viewpoint. There is a way which seems right to a man, and this way appears to be wisdom from above. Of course, deception is

always a close likeness to the real thing otherwise why would man readily receive it?!

James 3:15 on the contrary teaches us that this wisdom is not from above. The majority of self imposed self-righteous type believers consider it their "duty" or responsibility to bring up other people's sins. Where do they get this thinking from? James says "this wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly (worldly-sinful), natural (fleshly), and demonic.

"Do not speak against one another brethren, he who speaks against or slanders or maligns a fellow-believer or judges a fellow believer, slanders and judges Bible doctrine [the law of God].", James 4:11. "Do not complain, brethren, against one another that you yourselves may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing right at the door.", James 5:9.

Except for the maximum discipline of the sin unto death, there is no category of sin which brings such concentrated discipline as the believer involved in the sins of the tongue. The sins of the tongue mean complete disorientation to the grace of God and are experientially contradictory to predestination.

The sins of the tongue carry liability for triple compound divine discipline, Matthew 7:1-5.

- Divine discipline for the mental attitudes that motivate the sins of the tongue.
- Divine discipline for the verbal sin itself.
- Divine discipline for the sins that you mention. (And the sins that you name also have penalties attached to them.)

If the person accused is guilty, his discipline is removed because the judgment didn't come from heaven, and the punishment is transferred to the one who maligns. If the person is innocent and the sins are imagined, then the victim gets blessing comparable to the intensity of the discipline.

This is the perfect justice of God in action reminding us to mind our own business. The Lord teaches us this lesson in John 21:15-19, He says just follow Me and mind your own business. Busy-bodies do not follow the Lord since they are too busy pushing their nose into the affairs of others and too busy formulating opinions about others. The Supreme Court Judge, the Lord Jesus Christ, always deals with the accuser not the accused. And, the accuser ends up having done to him that which he tried to do to another (Deuteronomy 19:20).

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