

12

Gossip

*When words abound, transgression is inevitable,
but the one who restrains his words is wise.*

– Proverbs 10:19

Gossip is prevalent in every corner of the earth. It is found in churches, in businesses and homes. We rarely think about gossip the way God does.

Many Christians gossip daily and have spent many years without confessing it. Gossip has an addiction to it. It is a hard habit to break for millions. Instead of entering into Christian recovery through prayer and reading the Bible, gossips often have regular meetings with others who enjoy the same sinful pleasures. For them, the proverb is true: “The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down into the person’s innermost being” (Proverbs 18:8).

For some, it is an occasional slip followed by a quick confession. These type of individuals try to give people the benefit of the doubt in situations. They do not judge situations through hearsay. They even hold others accountable when they gossip about others.

Still, others are somewhere in-between. These do not set out to embrace gossip. These individuals may only feel conviction about gossip when it becomes slander.

But most likely we have known a person who holds to a higher standard.

They will rarely slip into the sin (confession almost always follows). These individuals are disciplined, and they do not allow themselves to participate in gossip. Instead they quickly direct their thoughts to a Christ-centered resolution for the pain or offense or irritation.

I knew a person like this; her name was Sherry Murray. I never heard her say a cross word about one person during her tenure as a church secretary. She always helped keep the bar high in the office toward gossip. She was consistently graceful and hopeful in her speech of others. I worked with her for eight years.

Defining Gossip

We often like to have a sliding scale for the application of the term “gossip.” We do not like to think that we are gossiping when we talk about people. But let others talk about us in a sentence and the charge of gossip will go out in force.

The Hebrew word (Heb.: נִגְדָן *neer-gawn*) translated “gossip” in Proverbs 16:28 is from a root word that means, “to roll to pieces.” A gossip tears people down. It is further defined as one who is a slanderer, talebearer, or whisperer.

When we are a whispering gossip, we seek to hide what we are talking about from a person or persons. Some people get so used to the whispers of others that they develop a lifestyle of gossip. Certainly, some conversations need to be private; for example, a problem that needs solving. But this “whispering” involves a third, unrelated party. These are the whispers of the coffee shop.

Slandering gossip embellishes the favorite side of a problem between self or others. Slanderers do not listen to the other side of what happened in situations. Slander has chosen a side, is an unfair judge, and looks to distort the facts in its favor, whether intentionally or through ignorance.

The talebearer inflames the slander and begins to tell outright lies. Tale bearing takes form when slandering is not satisfied, when it desires to take additional reckless steps in its anger.

What is important is that whispering, slandering, and tale bearing are all the same word in the Hebrew. When one tells embellished or even outlandish

GOSSIP

stories, one is a gossip. But when one whispers to a third person, one is a gossip just the same. There is no difference.

The Cost of Gossip

Gossip alone accounts for much of the tension and standoffishness that we experience with one another. When people are always gossiping, they prove they cannot be trusted in a close relationship. No one desires to get close to a gossip.

Gossip has also torn apart innumerable relationships in the churches, families, schools, and businesses. Gossip is costly: to the person sinning (the talker), the listener, and the victim of gossip. Proverbs 16:28, “A perverse person spreads dissension, and a gossip separates the closest friends.” Gossip has great lasting potential too. It may spread and impact hundreds of people; whole churches have split over gossip! Listen to what the leader of the first century Church had to say about the muscle of gossip:

“^{5b} the tongue is a small part of the body, yet it has great pretensions. Think how small a flame sets a huge forest ablaze. ⁶ And the tongue is a fire! The tongue represents the world of wrongdoing among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the entire body and sets fire to the course of human existence—and is set on fire by hell.” Also, “But no human being can subdue the tongue; it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people made in God’s image. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. These things should not be so, my brothers and sisters” (James 3:5b, 6, 8-10).

James used powerful imagery and metaphors to describe our words (tongues): he used poison, pollutant, restless evil, and fires. Our words have the ability to destroy our lives and others.

Why We Gossip

We are especially prone to gossip when we have been hurt. When we are the original source of gossip, we have not taken the proper steps toward forgiveness. We are choosing the low road, sin.

Instead of gossiping when offended or hurt, we have two alternative biblical choices. The first choice would be to forgive the debt *quietly* without gossip and without a meeting between an offender and the offended. The second choice would be to have a meeting between the offender and the offended while looking for repentance and forgiveness.

Gossip does not even require sin as an igniter. Gossip frequently starts when people have a mere disagreement. Our culture holds to erroneous ideological views like, "If someone disagrees with you then they have attacked you." This type of immaturity is infiltrating the Church every day. We need to be on our guard for this as we work together for God's glory and hold to biblical standards.

The most unsightly gossip is when two people enjoy watching others fail or struggle. They relish and rejoice when people make a mess of a situation. They also seek to amuse themselves and their listeners with the juicy details of people's sins, embarrassments, errors, or failures. How ugly.

Getting off the Gossip Addiction

Below are some steps we can take to realign our thinking about gossip and to change our behavior.

1. **Remember, forgiveness is a command;** therefore, gossip should never happen. Forgiveness and restoration are the goals to work toward when there has been a wrong. Gossip does not facilitate these outcomes.
2. **Remember, gossip is a product of sin.** A gossip's hope is to tear someone down in the eyes of any trusted audience. The purpose is to lower others' views of the person being gossiped about to console the gossiper. The gossiper is willfully and sinfully choosing to inflict some level of damage

GOSSIP

to a person. Often this happens with little information and almost certainly without the other side of the story. Instead, we choose to reach conclusions while ignoring fairness. We desire to be plaintiff, attorney, judge, and jury even though we are *entirely biased toward our own opinions*. We often don't have all the information about an event, but our slanted certainties remain. Proverbs 18:17 speaks to these ideas: "The first to state his case seems right, until his opponent begins to cross-examine him."

3. **Remember what God has said about gossip.** Start to look at gossip the way God does. Read the Bible verses below to recall what God thinks about gossip. Paul's admonishment to the Church is helpful: "You must let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29). We must devote ourselves to the confession of the worldly sin of gossip and recommit ourselves to stronger devotion to words that build people up *and never tear down*. Gossip is listed with all sorts of inappropriate sins in Paul's letter to the Corinth church. He wrote, "For I am afraid that somehow when I come I will not find you what I wish, and you will find me not what you wish. I am afraid that somehow there may be quarreling, jealousy, intense anger, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder" (2 Corinthians 12:20). This is unacceptable in the Church. Parents also need to make sure they are not teaching their children to gossip by gossiping in front of them!
4. **Confess the sin of gossip.** Confess every day if necessary. Break the cycle.
5. **Ask for forgiveness** if relationships have been broken over your sin of gossip.
6. **Be accountable.**
Ask all of your close friends to hold you accountable if you gossip about people. Let them know you are serious about your desire to stop gossiping.
7. **Break off relationships if necessary.**
Learn to stop people from gossiping around you. Instead, offer to pray

THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

with the gossip for the people they are gossiping about. This will help break these habits. If they don't stop, then address the sin directly with your friend. You may have to stop your association with an unrepentant gossip as instructed by Proverbs 20:19: "The one who goes about gossiping reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with someone who is always opening his mouth."

The Bible explains the benefits of holding our tongues. "Where there is no wood, a fire goes out, and where there is no gossip, contention ceases" (Proverbs 26:20). When we stop gossiping, we will be known as a peacemaker and people will find us trustworthy. "The one who goes about slandering others reveals secrets, but the one who is trustworthy conceals a matter" (Proverbs 11:13).

Scriptures Passages

Proverbs 16:28

A perverse person spreads dissension, and a gossip separates the closest friends.

Proverbs 20:19

The one who goes about gossiping reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with someone who is always opening his mouth.

Proverbs 26:20

Where there is no wood, a fire goes out, and where there is no gossip, contention ceases.

Proverbs 26:22

The words of a gossip are like delicious morsels; they go down into a person's innermost being.

GOSSIP

2 Corinthians 12:20

For I am afraid that somehow when I come I will not find you what I wish, and you will find me not what you wish. I am afraid that somehow there may be quarreling, jealousy, intense anger, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder.

1 Timothy 5:13

And besides that, going around from house to house they learn to be lazy, and they are not only lazy, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things they should not.

Questions

- 1) What are the causes of your gossip most of the time?

- 2) What steps are you willing to take to stop gossiping?

- 3) To whom do you gossip to the most?

Aim Point

- 1) Regarding the previous question. Call that person now and ask them to hold you accountable in the area of gossip. Often we waste the opportunity to change through our interactions.

- 2) Memorize 2-3 verses that you could later quote to yourself when you are tempted to sin and tear someone down with words.

- 3) If someone has wronged you and you are tempted to start gossiping,

THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

go to them instead and work through the issues. Restoration is always the goal. Often when problems are worked through biblically, friendships are strengthened. Read Matthew 18 and Galatians 6:1 before you approach someone for correction. Keep in mind all the times God has forgiven you of sin as you confront someone.