

Overcoming Sin (Part 8)

Gossip

James 3:2-12

I. Introduction: 1, 2

1. **3** God created man as a social being; for the most part people do not like to be alone; we like to be with other people and like to talk to other people.
2. The ability to communicate brings great blessings to mankind, but Satan also uses human communication as an avenue to spread sin, grief and heartache. We are all painfully aware of the damage that can be caused by our words.
3. God's word addresses the dangers posed by the tongue (**Jas. 3:6**: "*And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.*" **8** "*But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*"). Of all the sins committed with the tongue, there is one that is especially a problem for some Christians—the sin of gossip.
4. Webster's Dictionary defines gossip as "a person who chatters or repeats idle talk and rumors, especially about the private affairs of others" (Guralik).
 - A. Thus, gossip is idle talk and rumors about the private affairs of others.
 - B. Closely related to gossip is the word "slander" which means "the utterance in the presence of another person of a false statement or statements, damaging to a third person's character or reputation" (Guralik).
 - C. The Bible also uses the words *talebearer* (**Prov. 11:13**: "*A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.*") and *whisperer* (**Prov. 16:28**: "*A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends.*").
5. **4** Like any other sin, gossip brings a measure of satisfaction and pleasure even to the point of becoming addictive with some people.
 - A. Paul warned Timothy and Titus of the danger of some becoming gossips and busybodies (**1 Tim. 5:13**: "*And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.*"; **Titus 2:3**: "*the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things —*").
 - B. While these passages specifically mention women, we all know men can be equally guilty of the sin of gossip (worst gossip I ever knew was a man!).
6. The sin of gossip cannot be accepted, excused or overlooked. Like all other sins, one who has a problem with gossiping must make a conscious effort to overcome this sin.

II. Discussion:

1. **5** The damage caused by gossip: Gossip is not a harmless habit practiced by nice old ladies. The Bible warns of the damage that can be caused by gossip, slander, whispering, and talebearing.
 - A. **** It reveals secrets**: "*He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is trustworthy conceals a matter.*" (Prov. 11:13)
 - (1) Notice some things about this verse. First a talebearer is one who "goes about" looking to dispense his tales. There is nothing accidental about gossip or slander; it is a purposeful effort to harm another person.
 - (2) This passage also portrays the talebearer as one who has violated a trust (i.e., "reveals secrets").

- (a) He has been trusted with a secret, the contents of which can damage the individual who told the secret.
- (b) The talebearer chooses to violate this trust because he gets some sort of sordid pleasure by spreading gossip.
- (c) Such a violation of trust can damage a friendship beyond repair (**Prov. 18:19**: “A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, And contentions are like the bars of a citadel.”). A good man/woman will honor a friend’s confidence and protect their friend’s reputation.

B. 6 It kindles strife: “Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. 21 As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife.” (Prov. 26:20-21)

- (1) A talebearer is one who tells stories that shouldn’t be told. The gossip’s purpose is not to inform and forewarn men, but to kindle strife for their own amusement.
- (2) God pronounced His hatred upon those who purposely sow strife among their brethren (**Prov. 6:16-19**: “These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: 17 A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, 19 A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.”).
- (3) Christians are to be peacemakers, not troublemakers (**Matt. 5:9**: “Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.”; **Heb. 12:14**: “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”).

C. 7 It separates friends: “An ungodly man digs up evil, And it is on his lips like a burning fire. 28 A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends.” (Prov. 16:27-28)

- (1) Gossip, talebearing, and whispering all inevitably cause trouble regardless of the intent of the one spreading the tales (**James 3:5**: “See how great a forest a little fire kindles!”).
- (2) A gossip digs up “juicy” information about others, whispers it to others, and then watches the destruction it wreaks as it spreads around like a forest fire.
- (3) False tales and revealed secrets always end up turning people against one another; the damage caused by gossip is so harsh that it even can destroy the closest of relationships.

D. 8 It brings anger: “The north wind brings forth rain, And a backbiting tongue an angry countenance.” (Prov. 25:23)

- (1) A backbiter is one who does not have the courage to challenge a person to their face.
 - (a) Instead of meeting them face-to-face in honest discussion or debate, they will spread lies and rumors behind their back (“two-faced backstabber”); Christians aren’t supposed to act that way! **Matt. 18:15**: “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.”).
 - (b) When these efforts are discovered, the injured party most often responds in anger which may lead them into sin (gossip becomes a stumbling block, Matt. 18:6-7).
- (2) The KJV renders Proverbs 25:23: “The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.” This is the opposite of the rendering in newer translations, but it still states an important truth.
 - (a) A talebearer is looking to peddle his wares.
 - (b) Meeting a slanderer and backbiter with indignation rather than acceptance will often drive them away; indeed “where there is no wood, the fire goes out...” (Prov. 26:20)
 - (c) Gossips/backbiters go out of business when people are unwilling to consume their product.

E. 9 It shows one to be a fool

- (1) Our involvement in any sin committed with our words indicates to others we lack good judgment; we are indeed a fool (**Prov. 17:27-28**: “He who restrains his words has knowledge, And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. 28 Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.” NASV).
- (2) While a whisperer may try to hide his identity, he will eventually be exposed for what he is—a fool! Cora Beth

2. **10 How to Overcome the Sin of Gossip:** Gossip is not a harmless habit, it is a sin that does enormous damage. A desire to engage in gossip should not be excused by saying “that’s just the way I am,” or rationalized by claiming that “I’m doing people a favor by informing them and warning them about others.” Or, “It’s not gossip if it’s the truth!” Like all sins, the Christian must strive to overcome the temptation to engage in gossip. The key to overcoming the sin of gossip is self-control: keep our mouths shut, remove ourselves from the “grapevine”; learn to find joy in something else besides being a talebearer.

We would do good to ask ourselves the following questions before we repeat something.

A. ** Is it true?

- (1) If it is not true, it is a lie and does not bear repeating.
 - (a) Slander, by definition, is telling something that is not true (e.g., rumors, unverified info).
 - (b) A Christian is not to have anything to do with spreading such things.

Prov. 18:13: “He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.”

Prov. 18:17: “The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him.”
- (2) It is easy to draw the wrong conclusion when we only hear one side of the story.
- (3) We save ourselves a lot of embarrassment and save others a lot of grief, if we take the time to get all the facts before we act upon or repeat a matter.
- (4) AND, just because a matter is “true” does not mean it is something we can tell others!

B. **11 Is it going to build up or tear down? Rom. 14:19**: “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”

- (1) Gossip and slander bring anger, contention and strife; the tools of a talebearer will never contribute to peace and edification among brethren.
- (2) Our words have great power for good or evil; we are to pursue the things that build up our brethren, not tear them down (**Eph. 4:29**: “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”).
- (3) Sometimes negative things need to be said about others because people need to be warned (e.g., false teachers); important lessons can be learned from negative examples.
- (4) However, great care and wisdom must be exercised when talking to someone about the misdeeds of another person. Do we have the best interests of everyone in mind? Or, are we just getting a thrill by passing along “juicy” information?

C. **12 Have I talked to them first? Matt. 18:15**: “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.”

- (1) Private matters must remain private!
- (2) When someone sins against us, we usually want to talk to everyone, except the one the Lord tells us to talk to.

- (a) This is how gossip and whispering gets started.
- (b) We can avoid gossip if we will follow the Lord's instructions.
- (3) Sometimes malicious gossip can be stopped if we will take the reports to the person who is the subject of the gossip.
 - (a) The talebearer rarely wants someone to investigate the facts regarding his story; he simply wants to be believed and spread the gossip even further.
 - (b) If we care enough to spread a story, we should care enough to get our facts straight first.
 - (c) If gossips understand we will "call them" on their facts, they will stop coming to us with gossip.

D. 13 Have I examined myself?

- (1) Jesus shows the wisdom of examining ourselves before we get involved in the affairs of others (Matt. 7:3-5).
- (2) Only a hypocrite will spread stories about the faults of others while displaying even greater faults in his own life.
- (3) We need to clean our own house before we try to clean someone else's house. "People that live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones!"

E. 14 Why am I really wanting to do this?

- (1) What's motivating me in passing this information along to another?
 - (a) Am I trying to do good? Or, am I getting pleasure out of repeating this matter? Give it the "edification test" first!

Eph. 4:29: *"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."*
 - (b) Do I have the best interests of others at heart? Or, do I enjoy the misery of others? (**1 Cor. 13:6:** *"...[love] does not rejoice in iniquity,"*; "Did you hear what _____ did?").

Prov. 18:8: *"The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body."*
- (2) Some people act as if they have no choice but to repeat the matter which is simply not true! "I probably shouldn't tell you, but you need to know: _____."

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

 - (a) We cannot ignore sin, but if we love the person and want what is best for them, we will conceal private matters from public view and spare our loved one much embarrassment.
 - (b) If we derive pleasure from gossip we'll do the opposite ("blab it all over the place") and then act surprised when feelings are hurt, relationships are destroyed and souls are lost.

F. 15 Is this what I would want done to me?

- (1) Can you imagine living in a world where everyone followed the "Golden Rule"? **Luke 6:31:** *"And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."*; **Matt. 7:12:** *"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."*
 - (a) We would not want people spreading lies and rumors about us.
 - (b) We don't want friends to betray our trust and advertise our private matters or our secret struggles and transgressions before others.
 - (c) If we do not want others doing such things to us, we must not do it to them.

- (d) If we mistreat others or if we betray the trust of our friends and brethren with our words; we should expect others to do the very same thing to us.

III. Conclusion: 16

1. Gossip is a sin that destroys another person so we can gain some selfish pleasure.
2. It is never fitting for a child of God! **Lev. 19:16a:** *"You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people;"*
3. If we find we have a problem with the sin of gossip, we should not overlook it or seek to excuse it.
4. We must make a conscious effort to overcome it by confessing it, repenting of it, and asking God for His strength in overcoming it.
5. Remember, God wants and expects us as Christians to be a constant source of encouragement to others! Remember the "edification test":

Eph. 4:29: *"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."*

Adapted from *Overcoming Sin*, by Heath Rogers, 2013, One Stone Press, Bowling Green, KY (pp. 69-72).

References:

Guralnik, David B. *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*. New York, NY; 1986.