



THE POWER OF GOSSIP

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(Proverbs 26:20-26)



Have you heard about what happened to her?" "If they didn't want people to know, they shouldn't have done it." "I'm just concerned about her marriage. I wanted others to know what I heard was happening so we could all pray about it."

Gossip embroils at least three people in a harmful activity: the speaker, the listener, and the person who is the topic of conversation. Gossip sneaks into conversations under the guise of innocent information, truthful facts, or even as a misguided matter of prayer. Gossip is not an innocent pastime. It is sin.

THE MATTER OF GOSSIP

Gossip, as opposed to innocent conversation, typically involves rumors, opinions, or "inside" information. The matter of gossip may even be truthful facts. However, the subject of the facts must be examined. Is it personal and private? Would the subject of the gossip consider the information intimate? Oftentimes, the very allure of gossip is its sensational subject matter that exploits another person's personal issues.

THE MANNER OF GOSSIP

Listeners can recognize the warning signs that a conversation is about to go downhill. Usually, gossip is shared in lowered tones among a select few people. In fact, Proverbs refers to a gossip as a "whisperer" (Prov. 16:28). Often, gossips feel inclined to add a caveat to their conversation with a demand for secrecy. "Don't tell anyone I said this but . . ." or a similar introduction should be a signal that the information should not be shared. Listening to the information will encourage the gossip to keep talking—to the next person and the next and the next.

THE MOTIVE OF GOSSIP

There are several common reasons why people succumb to the urge either to gossip or listen to gossip. Gossips often feel important that they have the inside story; it is their way of getting much-desired attention. Listeners may listen to the scoop for the same reason. They feel flattered to be included as part of the "in-the-know" group. Some people enjoy contention, and gossip becomes a means of fanning the flame. Some try to make up for their own sense of inadequacy by cutting down others. Discrediting another person offers a quick, although not permanent, fix for envious feelings. Boredom can also tempt the gossip into destructive conversation.

LISTENING TO GOSSIP

A nod or even silence is often taken as agreement to the rumor at hand. It's easy to get one's name passed along as a conspirator in the gossip: "Susan and I were talking about that yesterday. Frankly, we think . . ." Merely listening can embroil a person in the harmful effects of gossip. Another danger in listening to gossip is that it takes time away from important activities like family or a job. Gossip also becomes dangerous when we, as the listeners, become the targets to be influenced. One may be tempted to believe something untrue, thereby coloring one's judgment without all the facts.

RESPONDING TO GOSSIP

"I don't believe what you've heard is true."
"I don't know about you, but I really don't pay much attention to the grapevine—things get so twisted." "Have you checked that out? Things like that have a way of being misinterpreted." Responses like these can discourage a gossip from continuing. Body language can also indicate one's disinterest.

When people discover themselves to be the object of gossip, they probably will want to set the record straight. The first inclination may be revenge. Instead, if the hurt is minor, they should ignore what they can. However, if personal integrity, credibility, job, or Christian witness may be in jeopardy, they must take action by going to the source of the gossip and setting the record straight with the appropriate truthful information. It should be clear to the gossips that they should discontinue saying anything more about the situation in light of the true facts. Many gossips will deny that they said what was heard, but most of them will stop once they know they have been identified as the source.

If Christians think their reputation may be damaged with others (a boss, spouse, neighbor) because of the rumor, they also may want to talk to those people to set the record straight. Without tattling on the gossip, they can explain the full situation and circumstances. Then they can take comfort in God's promise that He will take care of the situation in the big picture (Rom. 12:19). Graciousness is the best response to gossip.

QUITTING THE HABIT

A gossip must enlist the help of others in order to break the habit. Letting family and close friends know that one sincerely wants to stop gossiping helps stop gossip before it starts. Their gentle reminders (either

verbally or with a subtle cue) will help curb the conversation when it gets dangerously close to gossip. Over time, they can learn to change the subject and go on to something else. Philippians 4:8 gives foolproof advice for getting over the habit of gossip: "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things."

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of gossip include:

- Leviticus 19:16
- Proverbs 11:9, 13; 16:28
- Ecclesiastes 7:21
- 2 Corinthians 12:20
- 1 Timothy 5:13
- 1 Peter 4:15

➤ **Learn More:** Turn to the key passage note on gossip at James 3:5–18 on page 1648. See also the personality profile of Diotrefes on page 1691.

- 10 The great *God* who formed everything
Gives the fool *his* hire and the
transgressor *his* wages.^a
- 11 As a dog returns to his own vomit,
So a fool repeats his folly.
Do you see a man wise in his own eyes?
There is more hope for a fool than for
him.
- 13 The lazy *man* says, "*There is a lion in*
the road!
A fierce lion *is* in the streets!"
- 14 As a door turns on its hinges,
So *does* the lazy *man* on his bed.
- 15 The lazy *man* buries his hand in the
bowl;^a
It wearies him to bring it back to his
mouth.
- 16 The lazy *man* is wiser in his own eyes
Than seven men who can answer
sensibly.
- 17 He who passes by *and* meddles in a
quarrel not his own
Is like one who takes a dog by the ears.
- 18 Like a madman who throws firebrands,
arrows, and death,
- 19 *Is the man who* deceives his neighbor,
And says, "I was only joking!"
- 20 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.
- 22 The words of a talebearer *are* like tasty
trifles,
And they go down into the inmost body.
- 23 Fervent lips with a wicked heart
Are like earthenware covered with silver
dross.
- He who hates, disguises *it* with his
lips,
And lays up deceit within himself;
25 When he speaks kindly, do not believe
him,
For *there are* seven abominations in his
heart;
26 *Though his* hatred is covered by deceit,
His wickedness will be revealed before
the assembly.
- 27 Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,
And he who rolls a stone will have it roll
back on him.
- A lying tongue hates *those who are*
crushed by it,
And a flattering mouth works ruin.
- 27** Do not boast about tomorrow,
For you do not know what a day may
bring forth.
- 2 Let another man praise you, and not
your own mouth;
A stranger, and not your own lips.
- 3 A stone *is* heavy and sand *is* weighty,
But a fool's wrath *is* heavier than both
of them.
- 4 Wrath *is* cruel and anger a torrent,
But who *is* able to stand before
jealousy?

26:10 ^aThe Hebrew is difficult; ancient and modern translators differ greatly. 26:15 ^aCompare 19:24

SOUL NOTE



Burn It Out (26:20–26) Repeating Proverbs 18:8, gossip is once again described as "tasty." Talebearers love to pass along information, but such people are no more than "fervent lips with a wicked heart" (26:23). Gossips cannot be trusted: When they speak kindly, they should not be believed (26:25). A gossip who willingly passes along information to us will also be glad to pass along information about us. Believers ought to avoid gossips. Listening to a gossip adds fuel to the fire; to refuse to listen will force the fire to burn itself out. **Topic: Gossip**

- The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness,
But who can bear a broken spirit?
- 15 The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge,
And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.
- 16 A man's gift makes room for him,
And brings him before great men.
- 17 The first *one* to plead his cause *seems* right,
Until his neighbor comes and examines him.
- 18 Casting lots causes contentions to cease,
And keeps the mighty apart.
- 19 A brother offended *is harder to win* than a strong city,
And contentions *are* like the bars of a castle.
- 20 A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth;
From the produce of his lips he shall be filled.
- 21 Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue,
And those who love it will eat its fruit.

*He who finds a wife finds a good thing,
And obtains favor from the LORD.*
- 23 The poor *man* uses entreaties,
But the rich answers roughly.
- 24 A man *who has* friends must himself be friendly,^a
- But there is a friend *who* sticks closer than a brother.
- 19 Better *is* the poor who walks in his integrity
Than *one who is* perverse in his lips, and is a fool.
- 2 Also it is not good *for* a soul *to be* without knowledge,
And he sins who hastens with *his* feet.
- 3 The foolishness of a man twists his way,
And his heart frets against the LORD.
- 4 Wealth makes many friends,
But the poor is separated from his friend.

A false witness will not go unpunished,
And *he who* speaks lies will not escape.
- 6 Many entreat the favor of the nobility,
And every man *is* a friend to one who gives gifts.
- 7 All the brothers of the poor hate him;
How much more do his friends go far from him!
He may pursue *them with* words, yet they abandon *him*.
- 8 He who gets wisdom loves his own soul;
He who keeps understanding will find good.

A false witness will not go unpunished,
And *he who* speaks lies shall perish.
- 18:24 ^aFollowing Greek manuscripts, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *may come to ruin*.

SOUL NOTE



Just Between Us (18:8) Gossip wounds people. It can deeply hurt families, communities, and churches. Gossips love to take their pieces of information, their "tasty trifles," and pass them along. They have so little to occupy their minds that they feed on others' problems. Often their motive is attention, or maybe they wish to put someone down to raise themselves up. Gossip can take place when sharing prayer requests, or in blatantly divulging harmful pieces of information "just between us." Don't pass along "tasty trifles." Refuse to take part in gossip. **Topic: Gossip**

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with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh."

HEAVENLY VERSUS DEMONIC WISDOM

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. ¹⁷But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

PRIDE PROMOTES STRIFE

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your pride? ^{3:12} NU-Text reads *Neither can a salty spring produce fresh water.* ^{4:2} NU-Text and M-Text omit *Yet.* ^{4:4} NU-Text omits *Adulterers and* ^{4:6} Proverbs 3:34

KEY PASSAGE

A DANGEROUS SPARK

(3:5-18)



Gossip is idle talk or the spread of rumors about the private affairs of others. Seldom is gossip helpful and uplifting; rather, it usually centers around less-than-positive information or rumors. Even if what is being spread is true, the person passing the information along usually has less-than-positive motives. The Bible says that "a whisperer separates the best of friends," "reveals secrets," and causes "strife" (Prov. 16:28; 20:19; 26:20). The gossip's words, like a spark on dry timber, can create a firestorm that destroys friendships, relationships, and reputations. Christians can use their time and words more wisely than by listening to or spreading rumors and half-truths. When the local gossip calls to talk, we can let the person know, clearly and finally, that we will not listen. When we're talking about other people, we should pass our words through an inner filter of truthfulness, kindness, and love. We ought to train ourselves to not listen to or pass along gossip, for the consequences are far too hurtful to others.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about gossip on pages 838, 839. See also the personality profile of Diotrepes on page 1691.

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Gossip

DIOTREPHESES: TALKING TOO MUCH

(3 JOHN 9, 10)

Some people in the Bible show up only once, but lessons from their lives have lasted forever. To have been a positive example would be one thing; to go down in history as an arrogant leader who was "prating against" John and other leaders "with malicious words" is unfortunate indeed. That's what happened to this ancient church leader named Diotrephes.

Diotrephes had apparently become a leader in the church, but he liked his position a little too much. He loved "to have the preeminence," wrote John, and he felt threatened by anyone else. Thus, he refused to give hospitality to traveling preachers and forbade anyone else in the church from doing so.

Perhaps worst of all was his malicious gossip. Diotrephes spoke evil about the other church leaders and traveling preachers, but his words were no more than nonsense. Many in the church were either too untrained in Scripture to see his evil, or too afraid of him to speak up. In any case, Diotrephes's words were causing deep division and great difficulty, and he had to be stopped.

Gossip has a way of hurting and dividing people. Rumors spread like wildfire, leaving destruction in their wake. The next time a spark of gossip flies our way, we should snuff it out completely. We dare not make the mistake of setting a great fire by passing along a little spark. The only sparks we should pass along are the sparks of Christ's love. That warm and welcoming fire should burn continually.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about gossip on pages 838, 839. See also the key passage note at James 3:5-18 on page 1648.

⁵And if you offer a sacrifice of a peace offering to the LORD, you shall offer it of your own free will. ⁶It shall be eaten the same day you offer it, and on the next day. And if any remains until the third day, it shall be burned in the fire. ⁷And if it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an abomination. It shall not be accepted. ⁸Therefore *everyone* who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned the hallowed offering of the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from his people.

⁹When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD your God.

¹¹You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. ¹²And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

¹³You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning. ¹⁴You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

¹⁵You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor

the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. ¹⁶You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

¹⁷You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

¹⁹You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.

²⁰Whoever lies carnally with a woman who is betrothed to a man as a concubine, and who has not at all been redeemed nor given her freedom, for this there shall be scourging; but they shall not be put to death, because she was not free. ²¹And he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, a ram as a trespass offering. ²²The priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering before the LORD for his sin which he has committed. And the sin which he has committed shall be forgiven him.

SOUL NOTE



Living Justly (19:16). The law was designed to help God's people live justly with one another. "You shall do no injustice," God commanded (19:15). In relation to this command, God tells them not to gossip. Gossip is a form of character assassination that reflects hatred (19:17). We should confront wrongdoing directly, not gossip with others about it. God expects us to live above our frustrations and to love our neighbors as ourselves (19:18). Jesus taught this same principle (Matt. 22:39).

Topic: Gossip

SOUL NOTE



Staying Pure (19:29) How can we help our children to stay pure in a world filled with sexual deviance and abuse? In an environment of sexual promiscuity, parents are responsible for protecting their children. God gave women and children great dignity and divine respect. The law in this passage warns fathers not to prostitute their daughters, a terrible form of child abuse. Parents must take seriously their duty of guarding their children's morals, teaching them about sexual purity and helping them to maintain it. **Topic: Abuse**

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wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. ¹⁴Therefore I desire that *the* younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. ¹⁵For some have already turned aside after Satan. ¹⁶If any believing man or^a woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

HONOR THE ELDERS

¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "*You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,*"^a and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."^b ¹⁹Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. ²⁰Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.

²¹I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. ²²Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.

²³No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

²⁴Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding *them* to judgment, but those of some *men* follow later. ²⁵Likewise, the good works of *some* are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.

HONOR MASTERS

6 Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and *His* doctrine may not be blasphemed. ²And those who have believing masters, let them not despise *them* because they are brethren, but rather serve *them* because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

ERROR AND GREED

³If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, ⁴he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with dis-

5:16 ^aNU-Text omits *man or*. 5:18 ^aDeuteronomy 25:4 ^bLuke 10:7

SOUL NOTE



Taking Care of Business (5:8) To neglect one's basic responsibility of care and support of the family is the same as denying the faith. No one can claim love for and allegiance to God while neglecting to provide for their family. Paul called such an irresponsible person "worse than an unbeliever," for even unbelievers

understand family responsibility. God gives us our families and they are our first responsibility. We show our love for God through how we treat our family. We can thank God for the work He provides whereby we can take care of those who depend on us. **Topic: Work**

SOUL NOTE



Don't Pass It On (5:13) The context of this verse discusses the care of widows by the church. The truth taught, however, is that people with too much time on their hands often get into trouble. Without enough work to occupy their time, such people can become gossips and busybodies, visiting from house to house,

"saying things which they ought not." That describes gossip—saying things that shouldn't be repeated. We should be careful about what we say, seeking to make sure that our words are truthful, loving, and edifying. **Topic: Gossip**