

## Gossip

Coming out of church, Mrs. Smith asked her husband, "Do you think that Johnson girl is tinting her hair?"

"I didn't even see her," admitted Mr. Smith.

"And that dress Mrs. Davis was wearing," continued Mrs. Smith, "Really, don't tell me you think that's the proper costume for a mother of two."

"I'm afraid I didn't notice that either," said Mr. Smith.

"Oh, for heaven's sake," snapped Mrs. Smith. "A lot of good it does you to go to church."

*People who talk about false gods are involved in idol gossip.*

I have been praying about unity and building close relationships in the church and in that process, I felt that God was speaking to me about doing a sermon on "gossip." In the development of this sermon, I found that a lot of things can be classified as "unhealthy speech" and that I myself have been guilty of that kind of speech.

I want you all to know that I am not addressing any person here or any conduct of any person in our church with this sermon. My prayer and hope is that our church grow more personal and intimate...and that the biggest barrier to that growth, and the major tool of our enemy, will be the tongues of our members.

The apostle Paul feared the power of gossip to destroy the church (2 Cor. 12:20) and he didn't hesitate to list gossips alongside God-haters, murderers, and others. (Romans 1:29-32).

In fact, gossip is condemned from the earliest parts of the Old Testament all the way down to the last pages of the New Testament. And in spite of this condemnation of this action, it tends to be a problem in many churches among many Christians.

Why is this so?

The problem seems to crop up whenever folks get together for any reason, but most especially when the relationships grow closer and more intimate. It seems that these provide a fertile ground for discussion of those who aren't present. Add to that the good intentioned excuse of "Christian Concern" and you have the potential to kill the atmosphere of trust in a group and hurt someone deeply.

You may be observing that at Here's Hope Baptist Church we have been developing small groups that meet on Sunday nights as a part of our Sunday night experience. Our groups and people are growing

closer and closer as we get to know one another and as we pray for one another. Amid this warm and happy mix we will face the danger that some of us may grow careless in our speech and hurt someone.

It is vital that we unite around what God's word says about our conduct and speech and bring our lives into compliance with God's will and plan is for His people. So today, we will try to discover what Gossip is, how it grows and becomes dangerous, and how to stop it from spreading like a cancer in a body.

## 1. What is Gossip?

a. Gossip involves simply talking about someone who is not present at the time.

i. *Actress Susan Sarandon made reference to a personal anecdote during a TV broadcast. At a sleepover party she gave for her 11-year-old daughter, the girls were gossiping about others "really flexing their social muscles". Ms. Sarandon finally said, "Can we just try to not talk about somebody who's not here?"*

*One little girl looked up and asked, "Then what are we supposed to talk about?"*

ii. While our good intentions can be to be talking in a positive way about someone, it remains inappropriate to speak about someone in their absence. It simply should be avoided!

iii. We don't always intend to be mean spirited when we speak about someone else.

iv. In fact, oftentimes, we are simply trying to pass on valuable information that can be useful to help someone.

v. But gossip is not only about motive, it is also about "unintended consequences."

1. If a person is hurt or if another person's opinion is influenced by our words about someone else, we have gossiped. We have shared or spoken, without love.

2.

b. There are at least 4 levels of gossip.

i. Chit Chat: This is the type that says, "Did you hear that the Simmons are moving?" It is often basic information shared without harmful intent, and often without harmful results.

1. It remains, however, a dangerous element and we must be mindful of what we say.

ii. Prayer Unveiling: This is the type that is innocently phrased in a prayer request but has revelatory consequences. If we offer or ask for prayer for someone who is not present, we need to avoid identifying the person publicly and to be careful of how we phrase the need.

1. Prayer is the business of building our relationship up with God and uplifting others to further God's kingdom.

2. But prayer is not a place to share information that others do not need to know.

3. We should not share personal matters unless the person we are sharing about has agreed for us to do so.

4. We must also be careful not to just let loose with just enough information that leaves an impression.

a. "Let us pray for Brother John because he keeps losing his job."

- b. That is damaging! It sounds like there is something wrong with John.’
  - c. Better said, would be, Brother John needs a new job, can we pray for him? And it would be best that Brother John had actually requested the prayer.
  - d. And it would be better that we go to Brother John and encourage and pray WITH him.
- iii. News Flashes: This is the type that shares information that may lead someone to base his actions or judgements about another person on what you have shared.
  - 1. Such as, “Did you hear that Debbie’s parents are fighting again?”
  - 2. Or, “Kevin’s in a bad mood, you better avoid him.”
  - 3. There is a fine line between gossip and constructive criticism.
    - a. Gossip escalates a problem, it tends to be subjective, it divides people and is not based upon first hand, permission given information.
    - b. Constructive conversation seeks to lift a person up and encourage growth and improvement. It is objective, based on fact, and is said to effect positive change.
- iv. Slander: Telling or repeating a tale that may or may not be true will tear someone else down. Often, people do this to bring themselves higher.
  - 1. Eg. “that new family is only here because the father lost his job and they had to move.”
  - 2. This destroys people’s reputations, often built upon hearsay, and betray’s confidences that are not meant for other people’s ears.
  - 3. Slander often makes implications about people that is not based upon fact
  - 4. It also will presume to know a person’s intentions (when intentions are only known by God).
  - 5. God HATES slander.
  - 6. Webster’s says that slander is, “the utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage reputations.”
  - 7. These may be viewed as only water cooler/coffee break conversations, but make no mistake! Slander destroys through distortion (whether intended or not).
  - 8. Exodus 20:16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”
    - a. The word “false” can also be translated as “vain” or “empty.”
    - b. False witness, *no matter what the motive* is to charge another person with anything without substantial grounds and a basis in fact.

- c. A witness was to have personal, first hand and direct knowledge of facts, or he was to keep silent.
  - c. The disease of Diotrephes
    - i. “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us.” (3 John 9)
    - ii. Diotrephes is a symptom of a problem that can take over a church. One who desires to be important, cuts others down to build himself up. He speaks ill of the leaders when they are absent. But he is too chicken to speak to their face. Ever seen that? I hope not.
  - d. Acts 20:28-30 “Be on guard for yourselves and for the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves, men will arise, *speaking perverse things* to draw away the disciples after them.
    - i. Satan wants to cause division in the churches and even among individual people.
    - ii. He knows that he can render the church ineffective through the unbridled use of the tongue. He doesn’t have to slay us or even make us sick.
      - 1. All he has to do is to get us to speak about others when they are absent and he will succeed in destroying the unity that Jesus Christ poured His blood out to purchase!
    - iii. Savage Wolves: the most effective tool of the wolf is gossip.
      - 1. He will say, “Just between you and me...”
      - 2. And then poison your mind toward a brother or sister who are not there to defend themselves.
      - 3. He will say, “I am telling you this because ‘you need to know’” or because he is ‘deeply concerned’ about a situation.
      - 4. He may be telling you based upon truth.
      - 5. But ultimately, you will be enticed into a critical evaluation and or conversation of the other brethren and the devil will succeed in **HAMPERING** your prayers!
- 2. The power of Words:
  - a. God created the heavens and the earth with his word – His spoken word. It went forth and accomplished what He sent it forth to do.
  - b. **Isa 55:11** - *So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding {in the matter} for which I sent it.*

- c. Keep in mind that we were created in the image of God – that means He has given us some of His attributes. One of those attributes, although damaged, is the power of the spoken word.
  - i. It is for this reason that we are warned by Jesus that we will have to account for our idle words that we speak:
  - ii. *Matthew 12:33-37* “*Make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for by its fruit you will get knowledge of the tree. You offspring of snakes, how are you, being evil, able to say good things? because out of the heart's store come the words of the mouth. The good man out of his good store gives good things; and the evil man out of his evil store gives evil things. And I say to you that in the day when they are judged, men will have to give an account of every foolish word they have said. For by your words will your righteousness be seen, and by your words you will be judged.*”
    - 1. Our words come from our hearts.
      - a. They have the power to create or destroy.
      - b. You cannot “un-ring” a bell.
      - c. Illustration of man sentenced to clean up his feathers.
      - d. “Kind words can be short and easy to speak but their echoes are truly endless.” Mother Theresa
    - 2. We can tell what our hearts are full of by the words that come out.
    - 3. (Interestingly, the good man has an evil store, but he does not bring out of it, just as the evil man, by implication, has a good storehouse, but does not bring out of it. )
    - 4. By our words will our righteousness be SEEN and by our words will we be judged.
  - iii. In the book of Romans we are told that our salvation – our place in heaven is based upon what happens in our hearts and comes out of our mouths:
    - 1. *Romans 10:9-10* “*if you confess with your mouth Jesus {as} Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.*”
      - a. Confession (as it says in Romans) with the mouth means to speak out the same thing that is in the heart! Believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead and speak it out that you believe it. God promises that your life will be changed!
  - iv. The entire third chapter of James is devoted to the power of the tongue.
    - 1. *James 3:2-10* “*If a man never makes a slip in his talk, then he is a complete man and able to keep all his body in control. 3 Now if we put bits*

*of iron into horses' mouths so that they may be guided by us, we have complete control of their bodies. 4 And again ships, though they are so great and are moved by violent winds, are turned by a very small guiding-blade, at the impulse of the man who is using it. 5 Even so the tongue is a small part of the body, but it takes credit for great things. How much wood may be lighted by a very little fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire; it is the power of evil placed in our bodies, making all the body unclean, putting the wheel of life on fire, and getting its fire from hell. 7 For every sort of beast and bird and every living thing on earth and in the sea has been controlled by man and is under his authority; 8 But the tongue may not be controlled by man; it is an unrelenting evil, it is full of the poison of death. 9 With it we give praise to our Lord and Father; and with it we put a curse on men who are made in God's image. 10 Out of the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers, it is not right for these things to be so.*

- v. Feeling a little convicted? If you are like me, you know that your tongue gets you in trouble and that it is very easy to say things that you may regret or that may cause harm to someone.
- vi. Our responsibility from this passage is to submit our words to God for Him to control us.

### **3. How should we respond to Gossip?**

- a. This is the harder question to answer than really knowing what gossip is. Most of us don't want to make waves, nor do we want to accuse someone of spreading words that may not be first hand.
- b. The bible says "*We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*" (2 Corinthians 10:5)
  - i. When we listen or participate in gossip, we aren't destroying speculations, we are actually BATHING in them! We are allowing lies to spread. We are becoming tools of Satan in destroying God's work.
  - ii. Our task as Christians is to bring down every untruth and bring light wherever there is darkness. We are called to destroy lies and bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ!
  - iii. So we must oppose Gossip wherever we encounter it. Just avoiding doing it ourselves or walking away is not enough.
- c. **Gossip in the work place**
  - i. The office gossip is usually one who feels on some level very powerless.
  - ii. What can make a person powerful? When she (or he) has "information" which others may not have. If this person seems to always be in the know about things going on in the office, there is a greater tendency for others to seek her

out for the latest tidbit. This gives this person a sense of power which she wants and needs, but is unable to get in a legitimate manner.

- iii. A person who hints or makes innuendoes suggests that this person is not even confident enough to make a firm stance on the information being shared. This is also a method of baiting another person. If I toss the line out there with the bait on it and you nibble on it, I know that I have a potential "fish on the line." Also, if I am real lucky, you will take the bait and run with it, and I will then have you "hooked". Either way, I am safe.

- 1. If you choose not to nibble on the illusory tidbit, I have not exposed myself or my information to you. And you have come under my power.

**d. How do I respond?**

- i. Directly: Let this person know in no uncertain terms that you are not interested in talking about someone who isn't present to give their side of the story.

- 1. If they are starting to talk about someone you can choose to walk away. They will leave you alone and will not subject you to their lies and half-truths.
  - 2. If you choose to confront them about their half-truths and distortions, focus less on the veracity of their story and more on the damage (ie. feelings) of the people that are being spoken about. A request to "talk about this story with so and so "the object of the gossip" can also be very disarming..
  - 3. IF it gets back to you that the gossip is about you....Don't confront the person who spread the gossip about you in a public place or with an angry tone in your voice. Causing a scene or going on the offensive will only make them feel they are justified in spreading venom

- ii. Clarifying: When the half-truths are being poured out, ask questions like...

- 1. How do you know this?
  - 2. Where did you hear this?
  - 3. If the person uses plurals to exaggerate, ask questions like, "exactly how many times did this person do this?"
  - 4. This will communicate to the gossip that you are not willing to be gullible and take her statements at face value. It holds her accountable for her words at a level that says "I will not be a pawn in your game."

- iii. Disarm the Group: Others often feel uncomfortable about gossip but participate in it because they are either unaware of how to escape it or they are hooked by the inside scoops that they get. Either way, they often feel badly about what they are a part of. If the group stops supporting the gossip, the gossip's power is drained.

- iv. Remove the fertile Soil: a flower can not grow in soil that is not right for it. If you and your co-workers allow this type of behavior to continue without addressing and correcting it, you have contributed to creating fertile ground in which this person's negative trait can grow and flourish

v.

e. **Nobody's Friend**

My name is Gossip.  
I have no respect for justice.  
I maim without killing.  
I break hearts and ruin lives.  
I am cunning and malicious and gather strength with age.  
The more I am quoted the more I am believed.  
My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face.  
To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become.  
I am nobody's friend.  
Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.  
I topple governments and wreck marriages.  
I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartaches and indigestion. I make innocent people cry in their pillows.  
Even my name hisses. I am called Gossip.  
I make headlines and headaches.  
Before you repeat a story, ask yourself the THINK acronym:  
    Is it true?  
    Is it harmless?  
f.    Is it Inspiring  
       Is it necessary?  
       Is it kind?  
g.    If it isn't, don't repeat it.

~ Author Unknown

So where is your heart? What words are coming from your mouth? Have you discovered the power of the spoken word? Have you confessed that Jesus is your Lord?

4. Some Scriptures (to be moved to appropriate places in this document)
- a. **Eph 4:29** Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you.
  - b. Prov. 11:12 It is foolish to speak scornfully of others. If you are smart, you will keep quiet.
  - c. Prov. 11:13 No one who gossips can be trusted with a secret, but you can put confidence in someone who is trustworthy.
  - d. Prov 11:9 People hate a person who has nothing but scorn for others.
  - e. James 3:3-11 We can make a large horse turn around and go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a tiny rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot wants it to go, even though the winds are strong. So also, the tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is full of wickedness that can ruin your whole life. It can turn the entire course of your life into a blazing flame of destruction, for it is set on fire by hell itself. People can tame all kinds of animals and birds and reptiles and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it breaks out into curses against those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Can you pick olives from a fig tree or figs from a grapevine? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty pool.
  - f. Prov. 18:8 8 What dainty morsels rumors are - but they sink deep into one's heart.
  - g. Matthew 12:34 34 You snakes-how can you say good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good person brings good things out of a treasure of good things; a bad person brings bad things out of a treasure of bad things.  
"You can be sure that on the Judgment Day you will have to give account of every useless word you have ever spoken. Your words will be used to judge you-to declare you either innocent or guilty."
  - h. Prov. 16:18 Gossip is spread by wicked people; they stir up trouble and break up friendships.
  - i. Prov. 26:20 Without wood, a fire goes out; without gossip, quarreling stops.
  - j. Prov. 25:0-10 If you and your neighbor have a difference of opinion, settle it between yourselves and do not reveal any secrets. Otherwise everyone will learn that you can't keep a secret, and you will never live down the shame.
  - k. Col 3:8-10 No insults or obscene talk must ever come from your lips. Do not lie to one another, for you have put off the old self with its habits and have put on the new self. This is the new being which God, its Creator, is constantly renewing in his own image, in order to bring you to a full knowledge of himself.

- l. Prov. 17:27-28 “A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.”
- m.