

## Gossip Within the Church

By Sharri Burggraaf

God's Word is infinite, powerful and alive. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that *"the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

What about our words? Our words are finite, unlike God's word, but our words can be harmful to ourselves and to the body of Christ.

How harmful is gossip in the church; the body of Christ? To answer that question, first of all we have to know what gossip is. Does the following sound familiar?

"Did you hear what he did?" "Did you hear about what happened to \_\_\_\_\_ ? "How come \_\_\_\_\_ isn't coming to our church anymore?" "Did you hear that \_\_\_\_\_ had an affair?" And if you participate in the gossip, your response may be something like this...."No.....tell me!"

Gossip accuses people. It charges others with wrong. People love to talk about the alleged actions of others. Gossip slanders our neighbor. It destroys a person's character or personal reputation. Gossip talks indiscreetly. People who say just anything that comes into their minds spread gossip. They fail to engage their minds before they engage their tongues. They do not evaluate what they are about to say or its effect on others.

To understand why gossip is wrong, we first need to realize how much God hates gossip. Gossip-related sins appear three times on God's "hit list" of the six most abominable things He hates: *"A lying tongue... a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren"* Proverbs 6:17-19

God hates to see His children hurting one another. Yet He sees some of us day in and day out destroying one another with gossip. He wants a cease-fire of the tongues. God wants you to have the same attitude He has against gossip. So the first step toward stopping gossip is to hate gossip, because it hurts people. Once you

come to hate gossip, then...

Keep focused on living a godly life and keep your mind on the things of Christ. If we are busy serving God our lives will line up with God's word and we won't have time for gossip.

Idleness breeds gossip. People who are idle with their hands tend to be active with their tongues. Paul comments: *"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"* I Timothy 5:13

Jesus also revealed that Satan is a lying slanderer: *"For he is a liar and the father of it"* John 8:4

You may think talking about others will not hurt anything because you are just stating what you have heard as fact. But hear what God's word says about the damage our tongue can do.

*"Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."* James 3:5-8

Gossip goes against God's word about bridling our tongues. *"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."* James 1:26

According to God's word a wise man's mouth is gracious. *"Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better. The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness."* Ecclesiastes 10:11-13

God's word also says that we will be condemned by our words. *"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy*

*words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."* Matthew 12:36-37.

Speaking against or judging our brother is wrong. *"Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it."* James 4:11

When someone says something that will hurt another they are disobeying the great law in Matthew 22:39 *"Love thy neighbor as thyself."*

As James 4:11 says, when you gossip about another person you are judging them. There is only one judge and that is God. God is the only one with the authority to make the law. If you gossip about somebody and are judging them, you are basically putting yourself on the same level of God. Someone who judges also disobeys God's law and makes their own. Now not only have you hurt one of your fellow Christians but you're treading on some very dangerous ground when you think you're better than or equal to God.

What is the answer to the problem of gossip according to the bible?

1. Like any sin, first we need to repent of gossip. Perhaps you don't think about this as often as you should, but gossip is sin. Almighty God thunders in His Ninth Commandment, *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"* Exodus 20:16. A main thrust of this commandment focuses on the harm done to one's neighbor by the types of accusation and slander that make up gossip.

Gossiping is bearing false witness. Gossip is sin and that brings the death penalty as Romans 6:23 tells us, *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* Repent of the sin of gossip and determine never to gossip again.

2. Secondly we need to remember the source of gossip. As we saw earlier, Satan originated gossip. No Christian wants to be an instrument of the devil. Yet when you gossip you are being used by Satan. He not only started gossip, he perpetuates it through humans. Ephesians 2:2 says, *"Wherein in time past ye walked*

*according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:"*

The next time you are tempted to gossip, think about the source and bite your tongue.

3. Thirdly, Satan is able to put thoughts into our head, but the word of God gives us a remedy.

Make a commitment to speak only to edify. In Philippians 4:8 Paul says, *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."* Paul clearly says that we should speak words of virtue. Virtuous words are words of excellence and value, words that produce good fruits, that build up the speaker, listener and everyone else.

4. Refuse to listen to gossip. There are two ways to do this. First and foremost refuse to listen to the accuser by taking our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. II Corinthians 10:3-6 tells us, *"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled."*

Secondly, refuse to listen to gossip. After you repent of gossiping make a commitment to stop listening to gossip. Don't fool yourself. Just as it takes two to tango, it takes two to gossip ---- one to talk and one to listen. Gossip would stop instantly if everyone would refuse to listen. It's no fun gossiping to yourself!

Listen to John's instruction: *"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" II John 10-11.*

Just listening to gossip makes you an accomplice. If anyone comes to you with gossip, do not listen. As gently, lovingly and tactfully as possible, tell the person that the subject matter does not concern you and you'd rather not discuss it. Be as firm as necessary. The person may quickly get the message ---- and the gossiping will stop. With some people you may have to repeat yourself more than once.

5. Instead of gossiping speak words of praise ---- words that praise the great works of God. Talk about His great creation in all of his wonderful glory. Talk about God's work on earth today ---- the work that's spreading the good news of the Kingdom of God. Speak words of praise about the good in other people. Encourage others to do their best. Comfort other people when they are discouraged.

Next time you are about to say something about another Christian stop and think first. Is this something that would hurt them if they found out I said it? Is this something that would hurt me if it were said about me? If your answer to either question was yes, then don't say it. Christians should not be gossiping and hurting each other. The complete opposite is true. Christians should support each other and build each other up. In short, use your tongue to bring life ---- not death!

Prayer

*God, help us to edify each other and build each other up instead of tearing each other down with gossip. Keep my mind stayed on serving You, my hands busy so that I do not grow idle. Help me to keep my thoughts and my speech in line with Your word. When I find myself getting into thinking that could cause gossip, help me to use Your word to rebuke any thoughts that are coming against the knowledge of God. Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; and keep the door of my lips. May all I say give you glory and be edifying to the body of Christ. Psalm 141:3*

in Jesus' name,

Amen

