

Gossip is one of those sins often preceded by phrases like, “well I don’t want to gossip,” or “this isn’t gossip, but...” We would do well to stay away from excuses, for God does no such thing. Here are six excuses some may use to justify gossip.

“*Well, I’m just venting.*” There is a difference from venting and gossip. Venting is done with the purpose of letting off steam or seeking advice. When people use this as an excuse to continue their sin, they may as well tell the whole world. If one is to vent, he should find a trustable person who will keep the conversation confidential.

“*Well, everyone knows about it.*” Defaming another’s character is not justified because everyone knows about it. First, we do not know who knows about it and second, we may be telling someone who does not know!

“*Well its true.*” One’s adultery, homosexuality, or thievery may be true; however, such does not give one a reason to gossip. Truth of a situation does not justify gossip.

“*Well I’m concerned.*” Many gossips use concern as a crutch for their sin. If a person is truly concerned about another’s well-being they will talk TO them, not ABOUT them.

“*Well, I’m just exposing error.*” While exposing error is essential in keeping the purity of the church, some take this too far. Paul exposed error; however, he knew these men (1 Timothy 1:19-20). Sometimes we may speak before we know the details of a situation. We may expose error, but we should seek to save the soul if it is caught up in error.

“*Well gossip is easier than confrontation.*”⁹ Jesus never justifies sin because it is easier. Easiness NEVER trumps godliness.

We would never say murder is just an outlet for anger, nor homosexuality an alternative lifestyle. Why do we not do the same for gossip?

Seven Cures

In order to curb gossip, we need to perform heart surgery not mouth surgery (cf. Matthew 12:34).¹⁰ What are seven simple cures to gossip?

Stop talking. Only fools utter all their mind (cf. Proverbs 29:11). Unfortunately, man has found it “easier to learn to speak in several languages, than it is to be quiet in one.”¹¹

Memorize Ephesians 4:29. If you cannot say something nice about another, the words are not edifying, or they will cause another’s reputation to be hurt in ANY way, do not say it.

Bring in the target. One said, “Nothing makes a long story short like the arrival of the person you happen to be talking about.”¹² Many gossips will shut up when their target is close by.

Worry about your own business (1 Timothy 5:13). Some are so busy about other people’s business they forget to be busy about their own business. You will be less tempted to talk about others if your life is full of good works for God.

Do not listen to gossips (Proverbs 17:4). When a gossip’s tongue falls on dead ears, the message goes nowhere. You may lose a friend by refusing to hear their gossip, but you do not mind for if they were gossiping to you, they were gossiping about you.

Find the good in others (1 Corinthians 13:7). Believe the best about people, not the worst.

Keep things as hidden as possible (Proverbs 17:9). This is not covering sin, but we are not obligated to share everything we know or feel. Sinful situations should be kept quiet unless publicly known. The gossip likes to make private sins public and public sins global. Share little!

If you are a gossip, you may be guilty of sowing discord (Proverbs 6:19). Do not let your words of gossip lead to words of condemnation (Matthew 12:36-37). Beware!

Endnotes

¹www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/gossip.htm

²Cortland church of Christ.

³Ibid.

⁴<https://southsidechurchofchrist.com/sermons/gossip.html>

⁵Cambridge Commentary, eSWORD.

⁶Vincent Word Studies, eSWORD.

⁷Tom Wacaster, *Studies in Romans A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Church at Rome*, 2016, p. 54

⁸Robert R. Taylor, *Studies in Romans*. Quality Publications, 1996, p.29

⁹<https://www.sharonebardavid.com/2015/09/top-7-excuses-we-use-to-justify-our-gossip-habits/#:~:text=Top%20%20Excuses%20We%20Use%20to%20Justify%20Our,gain%20dominance%2C%20control%2C%20or%20a%20strategic%20advantage.%20>

¹⁰Cortland church of Christ

¹¹<https://biblehelpsinc.org/publication/seven-things-god-hates/>

¹²Michael Hodgkin, 1001 Humorous Illustrations For Public Speaking, Zondervan, 1994, 169

Let’s TALK About Gossip

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WORDS WRITTEN
ON THE HEART

Proverbs 3:3



Four preachers met for a friendly gathering. During the conversation one preacher said, "Our people come to us and pour out their hearts, confess certain sins and needs. Let's do the same. Confession is good for the soul." In due time all agreed. One confessed he liked to go to movies and would sneak off when away from his church. The second confessed to liking to smoke cigars and the third one confessed to liking to play cards. When it came to the fourth one, he wouldn't confess. The others pressed him saying, "Come now, we confessed ours. What is your secret or vice?" Finally he answered, "It is gossiping and I can hardly wait to get out of here." ¹ Gossip is such a dangerous sin. Gossip takes an innocent, just, and holy man and turns him into the vilest of men. It has destroyed churches, ruined preachers, and divided families. It happens in every environment, and it gains its strength from both quiet whispers and public pages. Interestingly, "During WWII our nation was fearful of important military information falling into the hands of German spies. A work-place slogan was adopted to try to ward off potential indiscretions. "LOOSE LIPS, SINK SHIPS!" ² It would be wise if many Christians adopted this slogan. God takes gossip as no light thing. Under the Law of Moses it was a sin (Leviticus 19:16) and Adam Clarke wrote: "A more despicable character exists not." God hates those who sow discord (Proverbs 6:19). What gossip does not do this? Slanderers and fools are categorized together (Proverbs 10:18). The murder and gossip are listed together (Romans 1:29). While men may keep gossip in their back pocket (cf. James 2:10), God condemns it to a devil's hell.

One said that more people will likely answer for gossip than murder on judgement because of its subtlety. Gossip is a spark that lights big forest fires (James 3:5), ³ so let us work to put it out before it is too late.

Four Areas

Where and when do people gossip? What do they gossip about? There are four areas of interest

- Gossip of action: "Did you hear what so and so did?"

- Gossip of reputation: "Did you know about so and so? He is such a bad man for..."
- Gossip of condemnation: "I don't know if he is, but I bet he is sinning."
- Gossip of rumor spreading: "This might be true, but..."

Gossipers love to tattle, talk, and treacherously slander others.

Five Words

In order to understand gossip, we must examine what it is not.

- *Praying for another* (James 5:16).
- *Venting*. Be careful though. Make sure you have a right motive, you have a godly purpose, and make sure the one you tell is not going to gossip.
- *Public withdrawal*. It is not sinful to note brethren who teach contrary to the Scriptures or who should be marked (Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Timothy 1:19-20).

All of these situations can turn into gossip though, so we must be extremely cautious.

The word gossip is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as "conversation or reports about other people's private lives that might be unkind, disapproving, or not true." Merriam Webster defined slander as "the utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another's reputation." While the English word "gossip" is not found in the KJV, its synonyms are. Note the following words.

Talebearer. It means a whisperer. A talebearer takes a secret and makes it public (Proverbs 11:13; 20:19). He or she is the town gossip. They spread tales to others about others.

Slander or slanderers. The Greek word is diabolos and it is the same Greek word translated devil. One said, gossip is talking like the devil. ⁴ This person is a false accuser (Titus 2:3), a fool (Proverbs 10:18), and the command to abstain from such a practice is evident (Ephesians 4:31; James 4:11).

Busybody or busybodies. A.T. Robertson noted that this literally means "doing nothing but doing

around." One said, they are busy minding everyone else's business but forget theirs! ⁵ The word, as Thayer says, means one who "is neglectful of important matters." Such a sin is founded in idleness (2 Thessalonians 3:11; 1 Timothy 5:13) and those engaged in this sin may attempt to usurp authority in matters with which they have no business dealing (1 Peter 4:15). Those who attempt to get in matters they should not be in, like Peter (cf. John 21:21-23) should be avoided.

Whisper and Whisperers. The definition is in the name; it is a person who goes behind someone's back, telling everyone about the person they hate or despise. One person said these are worse than public slanderers because one does not know who is doing the bidding and it is hard to catch. About these ones, one said, they "are those who are guilty of slandering men secretly. They whisper one vile tale after another, while pretending innocence themselves. They tell their evil tale as if it hurts them to do so, but in reality they delight in the telling thereof. 'Whisperers are cowardly sneaks who have not the courage to come out in the open and say damaging things about others, but secretly peddle their slanderous statements and insinuations against the object or objects of their campaign of spite. They usually add, 'Be sure not to use my name in connection with the matter, for I do not want to get mixed up in the mess.' Such characters have been aptly termed 'snakes in the grass.'" ⁷ This sin of the tongue, is as condemnable as murder (Romans 1:29).

Backbiting and backbiter (Romans 1:30). This is like the word slanderer. The person openly defames another and publicly destroys another person. Rober R. Taylor said, "Backbiters are those who kick about the character of absent people as though it were a football or soccer ball. They slander, defame and destroy the character of the objects of their calumny."⁸

Gossip's synonyms are many, mightily evil, and murderous. One should stay away from them at all costs.

Six Excuses