

“Let’s TALK About Gossip”

By: Noah Olson

“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. I flourish at every level of society. 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, heartache and indigestion. I spawn suspicion and generate grief. I make innocent people cry in their pillows. Even my names hisses. I am called Gossip. Office Gossip. Shop Gossip. Telephone Gossip. Church Gossip. I make headlines and headaches.”¹

One of the worst sins in God’s lists (cf. Romans 1:28-32) is gossip. While gossip may not take a physical life it can take a spiritual one. While gossip may not pull the trigger of the gun, it can pull the trigger of the spiritual one. While gossip is not a physical fire, it is a spiritual one (James 3:5-6). High schoolers gossip at lockers, women gossip at meetings, men gossip at work water fountains, preachers gossip at luncheons, and church members gossip about others right in the pews! Unfortunately, many will find out that their mouths might lead them to hell faster than their hands. Jesus said, “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).

Since gossip is hell-bound, Christians should have their tongues bound. Tongues should be handled with care and not be so quick to speak

¹<https://www.franklinchurchofchrist.com/sermons-old/date/2008/pdf/20080601AM.pdf>

(James 1:19). Dangerously often, this sin is practiced by many, and sadly, many will go to judgement being lost because of their defenses, determination, and dive into this sin. It is one of the most accepted, justified, and overlooked sin in the church.

The English word gossip is not found in some older versions (KJV, ASV, YLT), but it is found in some newer ones (ESV, NASB). What is gossip? Gossip is not just the communication of information (1 Corinthians 1:11; 2 Timothy 4:14), for some matters must be discussed (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Timothy 5:20). Gossip is “informal talk or stories about other people’s private lives, which may be unkind or not true.”² The Old English *godsibb* means”

sponsor, godparent,” from **God** + *sibb* “relative” (see [sibling](#)).

The sense was extended in Middle English to "a familiar acquaintance, a friend, neighbor" (c. 1300), especially to women friends invited to attend a birth, later to "anyone engaging in familiar or idle talk" (1560s).³

While not every word is gossip, it could be gossip if:

- One’s motive is wrong (selfishness, marring reputation, etc.).
- Facts are not accurate.
- Consequences of words are not pondered.

Let’s TALK about the sin of gossip looking at five Bible words.

Whisperer.

The word “whisperer”, whisperers,” “whisper”, and “whispers” occur 5 times in the Bible (Psalm 41:7; Proverbs 16:28; Isaiah 29:4; Romans 1:29; 2 Corinthians 12:20). The Hebrew words are *lâchash* and *nirgân*. The first word describes one who is a charmer and the second word literally means to roll in pieces. The Greek words *psithurismos* and *psithuristês* describe one who is a secret culminator. The words are an

²Oxford Dictionary.

³<https://www.etymonline.com/word/gossip>

onomatopoeia, which is “the formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named.”⁴ What does a whisperer do?

Whisperers do their work in the dark. Tom Wacaster wrote: 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.”⁵

Whisperers **secretly** defame another’s character. They want to know all the details found in the light, but always ask and research in the dark. They may use phrases like:

- “Did you hear about this...”
- “shhh can I tell you something away from everyone else?”
- “Don’t tell people I told you this but...”

They say, “If you don’t have anything nice to say, here, come sit by me.”⁶

Whisperers do their work to destroy. David said that those that hate him “whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt” (Psalm 41:7). The outcome of a whisperer is always negative, especially to character or reputation. Even subtle jabs or passive aggressive comments may be considered as gossip. Whisperers like to ignite division and divide unity (Proverbs 16:28). Some whisperers use truth as ammunition; however, they forget that maliciousness behind the sharing of truthful information is still gossip.

Whisperers do their work with defenses. Most whisperers excuse their whispering. Since it is subtle, private, and behind closed doors, they reason with “its not a big deal.” They may excuse it by concluding:

⁴Online dictionary.

⁵Tom Wacaster, *Studies in Romans A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the church at Rome*, Sain Publications, 2016, Ed. 2, 54.

⁶PTP lesson.

- “Well I’m just concerned.”
- “This isn’t really gossip”
- “I have a right to tell a friend when we are alone.”
- “Everyone knows about it.”

Whisperers forget they are never truly alone (cf. Proverbs 15:3). “Give no approving eye and no approving ear to a malicious tongue” is a good proverb. “Two excited women who were sitting together in the front pew of church with a fiery preacher. They were in the spirit and loving the message. They were shouting out and waving their hankies. They would use their paper fan to wave for Jesus and then to cool themselves off fearing they might just ‘get the vapors.’ When this preacher condemned the sin of lust, these two ladies cried out at the top of their lungs... AMEN... BROTHER! So the preacher camped out and stomped the dickens out of those who lust. When the preacher moved on and condemned the sin of stealing, they yelled again....PREACH IT REVEREND! And he did... for 15 minutes. Then the preacher condemned the sin of lying.... and they jumped to their feet and screamed, RIGHT ON BROTHER.... TELL IT LIKE IT IS.....AMEN! After another 30 minutes of raking liars over the coals and dangling them over the flames of hell the preacher condemned the sin of gossip. The two women sat down, got quiet looked in the other direction. The preacher, fearing he was losing his audience preached even harder against the unloving, unchristian tongues that were set on fire by Satan. Still the women were quiet. Finally the preacher stopped and asked... “Ladies don’t you like to hear good old-fashioned, fire and brimstone preachin’?” One of the women responded sarcastically... O yes Reverend, we love good strong preachin’ but you done quit preaching and gone to meddlin’.”

Pierre de Marivaux said, “Some people will believe anything if it is whispered to them.” Stay away from whispering.

Talebearers.

The word “talebearer” is found 6 times in the Bible (Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 11:13; 18:8; 20:19; 26:20; 26:22). The Hebrew words from

which this word comes are *rakiyl* which means a scandal monger; one who carries tales, and *nirgan* which means to roll in pieces. The deed is in the name. Talebearers spread tales about others whether false or true.

Talebearers reveal secrets that were meant to stay hidden (Proverbs 11:13; 20:19). They may be told something in confidence only to betray it with a text in the next hour. They are the first ones to spread the “juicy” information (Proverbs 18:8; 26:22) and they feel privileged to take on the task of reporting. They are lousy journalists for they skew stories and leave out bits and pieces of important information. They like to recount a story with their own twist (Proverbs 18:17). Casting doubt in a certain area, exaggerating actions in another, or leaving out entire pieces of information that would invalidate their claims, are all traits of a talebearer. “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 war off potential indiscretions. “LOOSE LIPS, SINK SHIPS!”⁷ Talebearers need to adopt this slogan.

The absence of talebearers brings peace (Proverbs 26:20-21). The moment talebearers enter rooms, the seeds of division may already begin. Talebearers love drama and seek to create division in any way they can. Usually, they are sowers of discord (cf. Proverbs 6:19). When they cease to be present, peace is present. Stay away from talebearing.

Backbiter.

The words “backbiteth,” “backbiting,” “backbitings,” and “backbiters” occur 4 times in the Bible (Psalm 15:3; Proverbs 25:23; Romans 1:30; 2 Corinthians 12:20). The Hebrew word *sêther / sithrâh* denotes secrecy and it may be closer to whispering. *Ragal*, is a talebearer. The Greek words are similar (*katalalos, katalalia*-to speak down) and they mean

⁷Cortland church of Christ.

evil speaking.⁸ Backbiters differ from the whisperer in that they openly declare their gossip to anyone without any regard for secrecy. They are open slanderers one said. The ABP translates it as “*speaking vulgarities.*” What are characteristics of backbiters?

Backbiters have no respect for private things. Backbiters hear one thing on Sunday night and it is posted on every social media platform the next morning. This specific sect is especially harmful to character because it passes through more ears. Sins of others are laid bare to be digested by the world. **Backbiters like to like to make private sins public and public sins global.** They grow annoyed with those who do not share everything about themselves.

Backbiters spread their slander wide to make themselves feel better (2 Samuel 15:1-6). Absalom attempted to take his father’s throne and one of the tactics he used was basically gossip. He attempted to lure as much people so that he would be ushered in as the new king. Backbiters gossip to get more people on their side. Think about the following examples:

- A co-worker tries to rally against another to get him fired by pulling others in.
- Church members begin talking about another member to others to get people to agree with them.
- Two teens are at odds and one tries to get the rest of the friend group on their side.
- Political candidates attempt to get votes by talking illy of their opponent.

The more people they tell, the more confident they feel in their superiority over their enemy. Adam Clarke wrote:

He is a *knave*, who would rob you of your *good name*; he is a *coward*, that would speak of you in your *absence* what he dared not to do in your *presence*; and only an ill-conditioned *dog* would fly at and *bite your back* when your *face* was *turned*. All

⁸Note the following verses where the same Greek root words are found (James 4:11; 1 Peter 2:1, 12; 3:16).

these *three ideas* are included in the term; and they all meet in the *detractor* and *calumniator*. His tongue is the tongue of a *knave*, a *coward*, and a *dog*.

It is surely better to bite your tongue than to bite another's back. Stay away from backbiting.

Slanderer.

The words "slander," "slanders," "slanderers," "slandereth," and "slandered" occur 8 times in the Bible (Numbers 14:36; 2 Samuel 19:27; Psalm 31:13; 101:5; Proverbs 10:18; Jeremiah 6:28; 9:4; 1 Timothy 3:11). The Hebrew word *dibbah* means evil speaking, *lashan* means to lick, to wag the tongue, and accuse, and *rakyil* means a scandal monger. The Greek word is *diabolos* and it is translated "devil" and "false accusers" (2 Timothy 3:3; Titus 2:3). Slanderers then are devil talkers. What are some common characteristics of slanderers?

Slanderers work in the realm of untruth (cf. Proverbs 10:18).

Such is of no surprise since they talk like their father (cf. John 8:44). The most harmful slanderers are the ones who tell outright lies, spreading false tales to others about others. Such an action was a sin under the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 19:16-19). Others may only subtly hint at untruths, but they are just as destructive, for they may not share vital information or add details in their story to fit their narrative. They may say:

- "Well, I don't know if this is true but..."
- "This person is doing____; now I'm not 100% sure, don't quote me on that."

While they appear to be concerned and godly, they seek to destroy another's reputation and character by their devilish lies.

Slanderers work in the realm of maligning (Romans 1:29-30).

Interestingly, Paul lists malignity, whisperers, and backbiters in a line. The word comes from *kakoētheia* and it "consists in misinterpreting the words or actions of others, or putting the worst construction on their

conduct.”⁹ Slanderers run with a whisper and concoct a whole book out of it. They fail to do adequate research and always place the worst connotations on someone by saying, “I bet he is doing this...,” or “I’m sure she meant...” They always look for something negative in every situation and when they find that bit of information, despite the evidence against it (cf. Proverbs 16:27), they take it and run. Some just have a record of making inadequate, slanderous judgements.¹⁰ Israel (Numbers 14:36; cf. 13:26-33), Haman (Esther 3:5-10), the adversaries of God’s people (Ezra 4:1-16), the false witnesses against Jesus (Matthew 26:59-60), or the elders (Matthew 28:13) are examples.

Slanderers work in the realm of destroying people. Solomon said, “A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow” (Proverbs 25:18). David acknowledged the slanderers “devised to take away my life” (Psalm 31:13). These ones wait so anxiously, watch so closely, and jump so quickly when the person of interest falls, and they excitedly take their actions to the world (Jeremiah 20:10). A Japanese proverb says that although the tongue is only three inches long it can slay a man six feet high. It turns great men into small men. Gossip hurts the slander, the one being slandered, and the one to whom the slander is being told to. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, on May 9, 1994, a group of fourth graders at Fuller school on the south side of Chicago accused their substitute teacher of sexually molesting them. By this afternoon the school board promised to bring in counselors for the children. By evening the story was all over the news broadcasts. But the next day police investigators came and interviewed fourteen of the children, and authorities determined the charges were false. Apparently, the children made their false accusations because the substitute teacher threatened to report their unruliness...The teachers union president said that exonerating the teacher doesn’t always make everything better. ‘What usually happens,’ he said, ‘when a person is

⁹Albert Barnes.

¹⁰Lost Source.

accused of this kind of thing, it they're exonerated by the board publicly, but then later, quietly, they're let go."¹¹

"Is slander that big of a deal" one little boy asked his father. His father responded with a old tale: "One such man had told so many malicious untruths about the local rabbi that, overcome by remorse, he begged the rabbi to forgive him. 'And, Rabbi, tell me how I can make amends.' The rabbi sighed, 'Take two pillows, go to the public square and there cut the pillows open. Wave them in the air. Then come back.' The rumormonger quickly went home, got two pillows and a knife, hastened to the square, cut the pillows open, waved them in the air and hastened back to the rabbi's chambers. "I did just what you said, Rabbi!' 'Good.' The rabbi smiled. 'Now, to realize how much harm is done by gossip, go back to the square...' 'And?' 'And collect all your feathers.'"¹²

Truly death and life are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21). Stay away from slandering.

Busybodies.

The words "busybody" and "busybodies" occur three times in the New Testament (2 Thessalonians 3:11; 1 Timothy 5:13; 1 Peter 4:15). In each verse is a different Greek word.

- *periergazomai*- Thayer says, "to bustle about uselessly, to busy one's self about trifling, needless, useless matters...used apparently of a person officiously inquisitive about other's affairs." Here it is a verb.
- *periergos*- It describes a person busy in useless matters, in other people's affairs.

¹¹Craig Brian Larson, *750 Engaging Illustrations, for Preachers, Teachers, and Writers*, Baker Books, 2007, p. 517.

¹²<https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/gossip.htm>

- *alлотриepiskopos*-Vincent says “one who usurps authority in matters not within his province.” Barnes writes: “one who busies himself with what does not concern him; that is, one who pries into the affairs of another; who attempts to control or direct them as if they were his own.”

A busybody is a person who is busy about other people’s business, when they should be busy about their own business. Usually busybodies are gossips, for they love to share the information they have gathered and seek to gain more information by listening to gossip.

A busybody is lazy (2 Thessalonians 3:6-11). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about work, some did not want to use their hands. These idle persons were busybodies who were working with their mouths for evil instead of using their hands for good. Because of their sin, Paul admonished that they be withdrawn from (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15). Busybodies have much time on their hands because they refuse to be busy about doing the work of Jesus.

A busybody is involved in matters that do not concern him (1 Timothy 5:13). The women in Paul’s day went from house to house “speaking things which they ought not.” Busybodies want to know everything about everyone. These people involve themselves in the personal lives, sins, and actions of others in which they do not have any part. They must always be in the know and they believe they have a right to talk about what they do know (and sometimes what they do not). Peter was a busybody in John 21:21-22 and it was Jesus refused to take a personal financial of another into His hands (Luke 12:13-14).

A busybody attempts to enforce rule upon matters with which he has no business (1 Peter 4:15). Busybodies believe they can usurp authority of others or have authority in matters they have no business in. The Greek word in 1 Peter 4:15 is the word for overseer. Busybodies enforce opinions are as doctrine.

- “this is the only way to do it.”
- “that way is not right.”
- “my way or the high way.”

They criticize the work of others saying “you should do this or that” and yet they fail to take the responsibility upon themselves. They do not have a respect for boundaries.¹³ These are manipulative sneaks who attempt to usurp authority and put down others.

Stay away from busybodying.

Scripture is abundantly clear about the definitions and detriment of gossip. Let us stay away from it at all costs!

¹³Victor Eskew, *The Sin of Being a Busybody*

“Let’s TALK About How to Cure Gossip.”

Seven Practical Ways to Stop Gossiping.

By: Noah Olson

“Have you heard about...” “I don’t know if this is true but...” “He is such a...” Gossips are artists of the tongue. Their canvas’ are the ears of others, their brushes are their tongues, and they paint with specific manipulative and aggressive techniques. Gossip is the spreading of information about another or group of people for their detriment. Since gossip is a fiery sin (James 3:6); it demands correct extinguishing techniques to put it out.

Gossip is psychologically pleasing (cf. Proverbs 18:8; Proverbs 26:22). One study done 5 years ago noted that people gossip an average of 52 minutes per day.¹⁴ Gossip then must be cognitively exciting if some people do it for almost 4% of the day. Jennifer Lee Austin, in her article *Rumor Has It: Why People Gossip and How You Can Cope* cites Dr. Hallowell and Dr. Breur on the reasons for why one gossips:¹⁵

- Cowardly behavior.
- Insecure/empowerment.
- Sadistic personality.
- Anxiety and uncertainty.

Gossip is luring just like any other sin, and we must avoid it at all costs. Here are seven practical suggestions to stop gossip.

Filter Your Speech Through a Thick Wall (Psalm 141:3).

“A hot-headed woman told John Wesley, ‘My talent is to speak my mind.’ Replied Mr. Wesley, ‘Woman, God wouldn’t care a bit if you

¹⁴<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/social-instincts/201905/the-truth-about-gossip>

¹⁵<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/human-kind/202103/rumor-has-it-why-people-gossip-and-how-you-can-cope>

would bury that talent.”¹⁶ “When Calvin Coolidge was President he saw dozens of people every day. Most had complaints of one kind or another. A visiting Governor once told Coolidge he didn't understand how he could see so many people. ‘Why, you finish with them by dinner time,’ the Governor remarked, ‘while I'm often at my desk till midnight.’ ‘Yes,’ said Coolidge, ‘But you talk back.’”¹⁷

Only fools utter everything on their mind (Proverbs 10:19; 13:3; 15:2; 21:23; 29:11). Believing we can say what we want and how we want to whomever we want is where we are deceived. Unfortunately, man has found it “easier to learn to speak in several languages, than it is to be quiet in one.”¹⁸ While there is a time to speak up, many times silence is better (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Man must lead the tongue, not the tongue the man (James 1:26; 3:2¹⁹). Ask these questions before you speak:

- Am I angry (Proverbs 14:17; James 1:19-20)?
- Will these words offend (1 Corinthians 8:11-12)?
- Would I be ashamed of these words later (Proverbs 8:8)?
- Would I be considered foolish or wise after I speak these words (Proverbs 17:26-28).
- Is this any of my business (1 Timothy 5:13)?²⁰

Gossip stops when people stop sharing. Keeping things as hidden as possible is wise (Proverbs 17:9). No one must say everything he knows and, in some situations, the knowledge you have could harm another's reputation if it were to be spread.²¹ If you do confide in someone about another, make sure he or she is reliable, far from the situation, and the subject remains nameless.

¹⁶Michael Hodgin, *1001 Humorous Illustrations For Public Speaking*, Zondervan, 1994, 168.

¹⁷<https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/s/silence.htm>

¹⁸<https://biblehelpsinc.org/publication/seven-things-god-hates/>

¹⁹The word in these verses is *chalinagōgeo* and is translated “brideleth” and “bridle.” The word shows that one is to lead the tongue. The tongue must not overpower him. The man must control his own tongue like an owner leads about a horse or a captain a ship.

²⁰Questions from another source.

²¹<https://gbntv.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Textual/12-Winton-Proverbs.pdf>, 290-291.

The thinner the wall, the more gossip is prone to exit out. Think before you share, and it is always good to keep something secret before it gets out in the open.

Get the Facts (Proverbs 18:13).

“Many years ago the Moody Church News carried a humorous story about a woman in a small town who was known for being a gossip. One day on vacation she visited the offices of The Chicago Daily News. She was wearing a white dress and inadvertently leaned against a wall where a freshly printed copy of the front page was hanging. It was a hot, humid day, and some of the print came off on the back of her white dress. Later, as she walked down the street to meet her husband, she noticed that people walking behind her were snickering. When she reached the place where her husband was waiting, she asked him if there was anything on her back that shouldn't be there. As she turned around, he read the large black reversed letters: *sweN ylaiD*. Realizing the appropriateness of the words, he said, "No, dear, nothing's on your back that doesn't belong there.”²²

Some people's mouths move faster than their minds. Only foolish gossips hear whispers and take them as truth. Some are in the business of quickly condemning the guiltless. If a judge were to utter a sentence without the facts, he would lose his job. No eldership should withdraw from a person without first speaking to them. Guzik wrote people are “more interested in what we hope to say than what the **matter** before us really is.”²³ Sometimes it doesn't matter who said it. As long as it is negative news, gossips will run with it as if it were truth. Some are as reliable as Wikipedia and as trustworthy as a drunk man, and gossips cite them as their sources!

²²<https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/gossip.htm>

²³David Guzik.

The original person will likely not lie. If someone tells you about someone, go to the someone. When people of the city were given to idolatry and knowledge about it came through, diligent research was to be conducted (Deuteronomy 13:14):

- *Enquire.* Take the time to get the right story.
- *Make search.* Take adequate effort to search for the right facts.
- *Ask diligently.* Ask the person of interest.
- *Truth.* Seek for nothing less.
- *Certain.* Be sure you are sure.

Instead of talking ABOUT someone to others, talk TO him behind close doors (Matthew 18:15). Even when you know the specific facts, have talked to the target, and are sure of a truth, this does not open the door for the justification of gossip.

When in doubt search it out!

Worry About Your Own Business (1 Thessalonians 4:9-11).

Some love to watch the television of other people's lives, especially with those whom they dislike. Gossips are usually lazy people who are only busy about doing nothing but talking. People find themselves gossiping when they find themselves investigating. Curiosity is often preceded by a desire to judge (cf. Matthew 7:1-5). A.T. Roberston said, "It is amazing how much wisdom people have about other people's affairs and so little interest in their own."

You do not have to know everything; sometimes it is better for you to NOT know. When tempted to find out information, ask "do I NEED to know?" Instead of gossiping, ask "will knowing this information help or hurt me?" It can be psychologically burdensome to take all the problems of another as your own, so be satisfied with handling your own.

Christians have work to do and gossip is not on the agenda (1 Thessalonians 5:14-21). 168 hours is not enough time to gossip, so do not waste your time with such nonsense. If you find yourself gossiping, ask yourself what is being neglected.

- Bible study?
- Prayer?
- Family time?
- Evangelism?

If you are making time for gossip, then you must not be making time for the work of Jesus. Curb gossip by staying busy (1 Timothy 5:14).

Gossips try to be invested in situations where they should not. If one is consumed with fully dedicating himself for the Lord, he will not have time for curiosity in other's lives.

Do Not Listen to a Gossip.

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."²⁴

Gossip is like fire. It needs a spark, oxygen, and its small spark ignites forest fires. Its spark is information, and the ears are the oxygen. Listening to gossip is just as dangerous as spreading the gossiping.

²⁴ www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/gossip.htm

Gossip would have nowhere to fall if ears were not present. Gossip's small spark lights great forest fires and it does so quickly.

Gossips are not the only ones worthy of death, so are listeners (Romans 1:32). The Proverbs' writer said, "a wicked doer giveth heed to false lips: *and* a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue" (Proverbs 17:4). Guy N. Woods wrote:

It would be well for all of us to remember that if there is such a thing as *evil-speaking*, there is also *evil-hearing*, a necessary accompaniment of evil speaking. Indeed, were it not for those who *listen* to calumnies regarding others, there would be no one to *speak* such. Because we *enjoy hearing* bad things about each other is a basic reason why slanderers *enjoy telling* bad things about others. We are disposed, as conversationalists, to relate matters which please our hearers; and, because many listeners delight in slander, we are tempted to satisfy this desire, and thus to tell that which we know pleases them."²⁵

Here are three suggestions when you are being told gossip:

Wisk it away. If a gossip begins to talk, attempt to change the conversation. Subtly change the conversation so that no one begins to have a 15-minute gossip session. Perhaps you reverse the motive and talk good about the person of discussion (Ephesians 4:29).

Write away. The moment a gossip begins to talk about another, take your phone or notepad and write down the gossipers' comments. Don't leave out a word so you can accurately record the message. Take

²⁵Guy N. Woods, *New Testament Commentaries James*, Gospel Advocate, 1991, p. 238.

this to the person they were talking about and have them read it. Don't forget to have the gossip sign his or her name.

Walk away. No person is obligated to listen to a gossip, in fact it is wrong to hear with pleasure. Bluntly claim, "you should not be talking about this person," or say "I can't be around you when you talk like that," and leave. Remember this: "If someone is gossiping to you, they are most likely gossiping about you."

No gossip has any good information anyway, so you are wasting your time by listening. Find someone who likes to talk about good things (Philippians 4:8) and covers their tongue with grace (Colossians 4:6), not filthiness (Ephesians 5:4).

Find the Good in Others (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Gossips enjoy finding the negatives in others and may even create false impressions about someone because of previous hatred or dislike. While it is sinful to judge according to the appearance (John 7:24), this matters little to the gossipers, for they attribute the worst thoughts, actions, or plans on people.

- They may assume a person is covetous because he is rich.
- They may assume someone is prideful because of the great works they do for God.
- They may assume someone hates them because they did not talk to them last time.

It was Israel who assumed the negative about Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh (Joshua 22), and Job's friends who condemned him with sin because of his suffering. Gossips are like tabloids—always reporting untruths to gain attention.

The phrase “believes all things,” describes someone who constructs the best thought about another until the evidence says otherwise. Curbing gossip demands thinking the best about others. Before assuming, ask:

- “Do I have all the facts?”
- “Is this opinion from feeling or truth?”
- “Do I assume the worst about the person because that is what I would do?”²⁶

Good people are patient with others and do not assume the worst (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13). Do you?

Bring in the Target.

Most gossips are cowardly sneaks who are weak in confrontation but strong behind closed doors. One observed

Gossip involves saying behind a person’s back what you would never say to his or her face.
Flattery means saying to a person’s face what you would never say behind his or her back.²⁷

Gossips are contradictory because while they want to tell everyone and their second-cousin, but they almost always “forget” to tell the person who is the subject of their discussion. They often cuff their gossip with “now don’t tell anyone I told you,” or “let’s just keep this between you and me.” They give everyone a free subscription to their gossip channel, but charge the person of interest exponentially for just one show!

One said, “Nothing makes a long story short like the arrival of the person you happen to be talking about.”²⁸ A good rule for talking about another is that if you would not say it to his face, then do not say it behind his back. Of course, even if you would say it to his face, such would still give

²⁶Brad Price, *First Corinthians*, www.abiblecommentary.com, 2010, p. 593.

²⁷<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/how-to-stop-church-killing-gossip/>

²⁸Michael Hodgin, 1001 Humorous Illustrations For Public Speaking, Zondervan, 1994, 169

you no right to say it behind his back. “Winston Churchill exemplified integrity and respect in the face of opposition. During his last year in office, he attended an official ceremony. Several rows behind him two gentlemen began whispering. ‘That’s Winston Churchill.’ ‘They say he is getting senile.’ ‘They say he should step aside and leave the running of the nation to more dynamic and capable men.’ When the ceremony was over, Churchill turned to the men and said, ‘Gentlemen, they also say he is deaf!’”²⁹

If you are tempted to gossip, imagine bringing in the target. If you are the one being gossiped too, say “wait let me go get _____ so he can join us since it involves him. I don’t want to leave him out.” Then—leave! You were not the subject of interest anyway.

Talk to God (Psalm 3:1-2).

One asked, “Are you talking to God about this person as much as you’re talking to your friends? If not, it’s probably gossip.” The more people talk about their problems to God, the less one will gossip. It is interesting to note the list of people gossips like to tell, but often God is not on it. Many times, David expressed his concerns about others to God; however, such was not gossip. Many times, David asked God to punish the wicked (Psalm 55:23; 109:8), such were not cases of gossip but a desire for justice and vindication.

A good rule is to pray before you speak. Since God knows exactly what you will speak before you verbalize it (cf. Matthew 6:8), take the situation to Him. Prayer will:

- Allow you to assess the situation.
- Give you an outlet to express your anger.

²⁹<https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/gossip.htm>

- Grant you the opportunity to lift up the target's name in prayer to God (Matthew 5:44).

If you are praying, then you cannot be gossiping. Always replace prayer with gossip and take matters to God before you ever express them to others.

Gossip is an old tongue sin that must be subdued (1 Peter 3:10). A dentist will not do...you need to go see the heart doctor for that³⁰ (Proverbs 6:14; Matthew 15:18-19). Truly, "how great a matter a little fire kindleth" (James 3:5).

³⁰<https://www.cortlandcoc.org/sermons/2017/06/11/lesson-4-gossip>