



Does Gossip Really Hurt Anyone?

James 3:8-9: (NASB) ⁸But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;



Gossip - is it ever useful or good or is it always a waste of time and bad? Have you ever stopped to consider just how much of our present culture not only accepts gossip but places it in the enviable and important position of being a core and driving value of our everyday existence? Think about just how many publications, TV programs, talk shows and news items are driven by gossip. Now think about how much of our conversations at our workplace or with our friends revolve around gossip. If you see it as I do, we are relentlessly inundated with gossip at every turn. So, what can we do about it? What should we do about it? How can we reduce the role of gossip in our lives and what should we replace it with?

As we begin, let us be clear on what gossip is and its relationship to slander:

Gossip (noun) Dictionary.reference.com

1. Idle talk or rumor, especially about the personal or private affairs of others:
 2. Light, familiar talk or writing.
 3. A person given to tattling or idle talk.
- Synonyms: blab, dish, talk, tattle, wag, spill the beans

Slander: Merriam Webster Dictionary

1. The utterance of false charges or misrepresentations, which defame and damage another's reputation
2. A false and defamatory oral statement about a person – compare libel

What is the difference? *Gossip* is more along the lines of idle and careless talk. It is the creating or repeating of things that should not be said because they are not true, not the whole story or because they are no one else's business. Gossip can and does happen easily and sometimes unintentionally.

Slander is more in line with a spoken misrepresentation of someone that has the intention of damaging that person's character, reputation or record. It is much harder (though not impossible) to slander someone without intention.

Both of these things are spoken of in Scripture and both are NEVER in a positive light: Romans 1:28-31

James 3 reveals how gossip works and how to stop it.

Gossip can be a defense mechanism - perhaps you feel inferior to someone and as comparisons arise you let a little unverified story slip out about them to give others reason for doubt.

James 3:1-2: (NASB) ¹Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. ²For we all stumble in many ways. **If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.**

Gossip can be a feeding of one's own ego - you have a need to establish your own importance so you do so, not by drawing attention to your own accomplishments but by creating attention on another's perceived (or made up) faults or shortcomings.

How are we using the social media tools of Facebook, Twitter, etc.? Today it is easy to say something without any accountability. Even though they are written words and not spoken, *they are still your words and can be hurtful to others.*

James 3:3-5: Sometimes it is the smallest things that can cause the biggest problems. The warning here started with those who have the most responsibility - with great responsibility comes great temptation...

Song of Solomon 2:15: Perhaps one of these *little foxes* can be gossip - being loose and creative with information about others that might be a stretching of truth or should just not be spoken, even if true.



Ephesians 4:14-16: (NRSV) It is so easy to fall prey to the subtle suggestions that may arise, especially if those suggestions are in line with the thinking of our baser nature. Sowing seeds of doubt about people means we do not respect them. Gossip drives our natural inclination of lifting ourselves up.

Speaking the truth in love - In so doing, we can grow up from silly children to mature Christians. Love changes how, when and what we speak. We are supposed to favor others instead of our own ego.

Gossip can be a passive-aggressive weapon - you may be engaged in a difficult debate (politics is a good example) and as you are trying to solidify your perspective as being the correct one, you slide a little gossip in as an emotional barb against your opponent.

James 3:6: James is pinpointing the most volatile and contagious factor in our lives - our tongue - our words. They can become the adornment of wrongfulness and a soiling stain upon our very being if we are trying to be Christ-like. They can begin a course in our lives that leads directly to our own destruction, not to mention the damage it does to others.

Matthew 15:11-14: What we say truly does reveal our thoughts and our actions - where am I leading others?

Gossip can be a deflector of attention - when the focus is not where you are comfortable, revealing a dramatic sounding "tidbit" about someone else can ease that discomfort.

James 3:7-10: Our thoughts and words have power. James continues by showing the magnitude of the task of taming the tongue. It is a *restless evil* - an unstable and destructive force dripping with poison. We use our words to bless God and then to curse His human creation - what hypocrisy! We need to be respectful of others, even if we do not agree with them. Rise above the pettiness of gossip.

This next text is written by Paul quoted from several Old Testament verses. **Paul compares Jews called to Christ to Gentiles called to Christ. He concludes that all are captive under sin:** Romans 3:13-18: (NASB) ¹³*their throat is an open grave, (Psalms 5:9) with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips;* (Psalms 140:3) ¹⁴*whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness;* (Psalms 10:7) ¹⁵*their feet are swift to shed blood,* ¹⁶*destruction and misery are in their paths,* ¹⁷*and the path of peace they have not known. (Isaiah 59:7,8)* ¹⁸*There is no fear of God before their eyes. (Psalms 36:1)*

Words bring results. Words of gossip if unchecked will bring us to actions of unrighteousness, which will bring us to a state of rationalizing and acceptance towards godless behavior. Words often start as an emotional reaction without our thinking the situation through.

We have a choice as to what we feed to those around us: Proverbs 26:18-23
Compare and choose! Proverbs 10:17-23

Gossip can be the result of idleness - because things can tend to get boring and monotonous, you begin to gravitate towards stories or hearsay that have some spice to it and now you have something to focus on, share and be a part of.

Now it is time for a solution! **James now begins to develop the solution for the rabid results of words spoken without true godliness:** James 3:11-13

Look hard at your words - Are they a reflection of the desires of your spiritual heart?

Sometimes we are just not thinking, or we are too emotional. Perhaps there is too much stress in our lives and gossip is an outlet. But it is an outlet that leads to the sewer!

Try this: Stand in front of a mirror and repeat to yourself the gossip you just said about another. Do you want those words said about you? How do those words reflect your desire to be like Jesus?

Look hard at your actions - Are they reflective of the gentleness of wisdom?

What have I done as a result of those words? Gossip never fits the description of *gentleness of wisdom* quoted by James. It is never gentle nor wise and certainly never the two of those combined. The beginning of the solution for gossip is to look hard at your words and your actions.



Jesus addresses the power of misused words right after he just spoke about blaspheming the Holy Spirit: Matthew 12:33-37: Gossip is judgmental and negative towards someone in relation to everybody else.

If we are saying and doing things unbecoming to true godliness, then how can we see ourselves as truly godly? To recognize this contradiction and NOT change is an even worse sin!

Ideally, we should go to the person we talked about and bravely ask for forgiveness. We then should go back to those we spoke to and tell them how wrong we were to gossip. This can begin the healing process and by these words, Jesus tells us we will be justified.

Proverbs 11:12-13: A nice example of this is a husband and wife never pointing out each other's faults in public, as it is personal between them. They should protect each other's character. (This does not include sharing information in private to a trusted advisor, like a pastor, in order to get help.)

Even in the justice-based system of the Old Testament, the clear instruction was - no gossip!

Gossip can be an expression of jealousy - you really have had enough of that individual who seems to outshine you and seems to get what you want or think you deserve. You “expose” them with a story or two that is exaggerated, incomplete or none of anyone's business.

James continues with the process that reveals the solution: James 3:14-16: (NASB) ¹⁴*But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.*

Look hard at your heart - What fills it? Can you honestly and humbly see what is there?

¹⁵*This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.* ¹⁶*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.*

Label what you have seen - Label it clearly so there is no mistaking what the source is, because each of our hearts are driven either by the “wisdom” of Satan or the wisdom of God.

Hebrews 4:14-16: It is a *throne of grace* for a reason - we can take heart in our frailty that we are understood. “I am broken; fix me.” Bring your ungodly actions before God.

Gossip can be the result of carelessness and opportunity - carelessness because you overhear one end of a conversation and jump to conclusions. Opportunity because there is something in your own experience that causes self-doubt or insecurity, and this carelessly adopted story can conveniently mask that self-doubt.

James 3:17-18: (NASB) ¹⁷*But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.*

Claim heavenly attributes for your heart - if you truly claim them, your actions and your words will follow suit. Claim them with unrelenting sincerity.

¹⁸*And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Plant that which you have claimed - to plant is a clear decision that requires desire, thought, planning and action.

Planting something is not an arbitrary experience. We must intentionally cultivate righteousness. It takes time, care and thoughtfulness.

James finishes the verse-by-verse solution for rooting out our cold and heartless words. Even if our words are merely the result of careless thinking, they are in need of swift correction!

Exodus 23:1-3: Be truthful, sincere and full of integrity. Stand for what is right. That is such a simple statement, but it is not easy. We often want to stand for what “feels” right. Violation of this commandment indicates a deep lack of respect for truth and for your neighbor.

To achieve a level of not bearing false witness can be a monumental task, because the terrain one must trek is not only slippery, but deceptive as well.

What would the difference be in our words if they were applied to us? This would change the “flavor” of our words. By changing the flavor, we change the content. By changing the content, we change the result - we can now glorify God in our words instead of following a demonic principle.



The seriousness of watching our words is evident. Words are not only reflective of one's condition of heart, they are also a predictor of potential action: Hebrews 12:14-17: If we make a habit of listening to or perpetuating gossip, we are planting something - a bitterness towards our fellow man. The fact you do not like someone does not give you the right to gossip about them. Use Jesus and the Apostles as our examples.

If our words are reflecting a dark condition of heart rather than a careless or reactive condition, the consequences will be necessarily difficult. But regardless of our reason why we gossiped, we still need to follow the "gossip solutions" laid out by James.

"THINK"

T - is it TRUE?

H - is it HELPFUL?

I - is it INSPIRING?

N - is it NECESSARY?

K - is it KIND?

Based on all of James 3, cultivate and nurture godliness and be transformed in heart, mind and words. Leave gossip behind.

It is great to plant, but you will not get a good crop unless you cultivate and nurture godliness and peace. T-H-I-N-K before you speak.

Philippians 4:4-8: (NASB) *⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!*

- If our rejoicing is truly in the Lord, our words will be provoked to reflect that rather than reflecting things that create damage and pain.

⁵*Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.*

- Be gentle of spirit - your words will fall in line with that gentleness. Gentleness does not know how to gossip. Gossip is an affront to others.

⁶*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

- Be prayerful and not overwrought regarding life. Telling God rather than others rarely leads to gossip!

⁷*And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

- If God's peace guards your heart and mind, then your words can only come from a place that is sanctified - set apart for a holy purpose - no gossip lives there!

⁸*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.*

- Focus your thoughts on beauty and holiness. With such focus, the mere thought of gossip becomes a bitter and repulsive taste in your mouth.

Proverbs 24:16: (NASB) *For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in time of calamity.*

Just because we have reviewed how the Bible views gossip does not mean we will not make any mistakes along these lines tomorrow. The beauty of this is we can realize we have made a mistake and can get up and begin to walk again. As long as we ask for forgiveness with a repentant heart and attempt to be godly, eventually we will grow.

We need to understand the value of our thoughts and words. When we speak and listen, we want to be part of something better and rare - positive, godly thoughts, words and actions. We should have the courage to stand up and say, "I am not going to listen to that because nothing good will come of it." Gossip destroys us. We have a choice to be able to do the godly thing.

***So, does gossip really hurt anyone?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions,
Think about it...!***