

No Gospel In Gossip

I appreciate the integrity of many biblical translators who seek to preserve the accurate meaning of a word at the cost of threatening a seemingly contradictory belief. For example: every translation of Acts 2:38 will read "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins . . ." Not "because of the forgiveness of your sins," as some would have you believe and argue could be the case. No, the translators do their job and translate it as accurately as possible, given the word and context. Do they believe baptism is necessary? No, but they translate it anyway. I find myself in a similar situation: preaching on a topic that can be easy to justify because we've all been guilty of it. Gossip. I do appreciate this requested sermon and it will challenge us all. As James wrote long ago, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, the person's religion is worthless." And he went on to write, "For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body." (James 1:26; 3:2).

There aren't many passages dealing directly with gossip. What I mean is, if you do a search of the word, you'll only get a handful in you're using the ESV. They are:

- Ezekiel 36:3 therefore prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord God: Precisely because they made you desolate and crushed you from all sides, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became the talk and evil gossip of the people,
- Romans 1:29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,
- 2 Corinthians 12:20 For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.
- 1 Timothy 5:13 Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.

When you think of examples, the ones typically given are Miriam and Aaron (Numbers 12) and Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16). Perhaps others with a certain angle, such as Judas talking about Judas and selling Him out for silver, but you get the point. Yet, I dare say that too many do it too often. However, before we continue, it seems fair to consider what it is. I don't mean understanding the definition, but its application. We can define it, but perhaps we can't always tell if the thing we're doing is considered gossip. Questions:

- Is an older woman teaching a younger woman how to love her husband supposed to reject any specific issue a young woman has with her husband? In other words, can they talk about the particular struggle without their husband's presence?
- In marriage counseling, should we never talk to only one party? Can you give advice to one partner that you may not want the other to hear? What if their spouse isn't interested?
- Suppose there are multiple parties involved (this one hits home as a minister). Is it wrong to share information about one party without the other being present? Think our Shepherds ever encounter this?

- Should David have kept his concern about Saul to himself instead of sharing it with Jonathan? Should Jonathan not have shared inside info with David? 1 Samuel 20
- Was Paul wrong for calling out by name Alexander, Hymenaeus, and Philetus (1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:17; 4:14)?
- Should Paul have left out Audio and Syntyche when he wrote to the church in Philippi? Should it not have been reported to Paul that a man in Corinth "had his father's wife?"
- Would it be strange for the church in Laodicea to read Paul's personal remarks to those in Colossae, and vice versa? Colossians 4:16.
- It may not always be easy to answer these questions, but you see the point I'm attempting to make. What's the principle behind gossip? What are we looking to do? Why, for example, should we go to our brother if he's sinned against me? But then again, what if you're not sure about a thing, and you seek counsel from someone else about the situation, and they tell you you're overreacting and need to let it go? I've seen this many times. Sometimes, given the situation, it's not been good to know, and other times it's been unavoidable; I understand why they were asking for my opinion. I'm sure you've been in the same situation. So, I'm really trying to say, let's not look to justify gossip, but let's also not make every single situation a "gossip" scenario. Are we comparing apples to apples or oranges?

Here's where I'm at today. If my words reveal my heart, what is my speech saying about me? Have I painted a good or bad picture? Do I produce good or bad fruit? Why do we gossip? We gossip because our knowledge of a particular event can lead us to feel superior, and we want to be seen that way. We gossip out of anger and/or hurt. We gossip out of pride or jealousy. We put others down (subtly or blatantly). Sometimes, out of boredom, because we have too much time on our hands. There are many reasons WHY we do it, and many WAYS we seek to undermine or harm others. I want to consider a few other passages to prevent fires and help put them out. Notice WHO the person is. It's WHY they slander and/or gossip.

- Psalm 101:5 Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy. Whoever has a **haughty** look and an **arrogant** heart I will not endure.
- Proverbs 11:13 Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is **trustworthy** in spirit keeps a thing covered.
 - Proverbs 20:19 Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babblers.
- Proverbs 16:28 A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer **separates** close friends.
- Proverbs 17:4 An **evildoer** listens to wicked lips, and a **liar** gives ear to a mischievous tongue.
- Proverbs 17:9 Whoever covers an offense seeks **love**, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.
- Proverbs 26:20-28 For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases. As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a **quarrelsome man** for kindling strife. The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body. Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel are fervent lips with an **evil heart**. Whoever **hates** disguises himself with his lips and harbors **deceit** in his heart; when he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart; though his hatred be covered with deception, his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling. A lying tongue **hates** its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin.

Finally, while I want to protect our hearts from such evil, let me remind us to keep things balanced. Let's do better, but let's not crush one another or ourselves.

- Ecclesiastes 7:20-22 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.