

The Sins Of The Tongue

Introduction. Robert Frost once said, "Half the world is composed of people who have something to say and cannot, and the other half who have nothing to say and keep on saying it." Dynamite is stored, and moved with great caution, because of the knowledge we have of the power that it possesses to destroy. Likewise, Christians have something as powerful as dynamite; yet, very often it is handled as if there is no danger at all (Psalm 39:1).

The tongue is dangerous and we need to examine the importance of keeping this weapon under control (James 3:5-8). The scriptures speak on the subject of the tongue in no less than 31 passages, speaking of God's disapproval of the danger of uncontrolled tongues.

Although many Christians would never dream of using profanity, taking the Lord's name in vain, or of even using euphemisms, they will gossip, backbite, slander, and whisper. May God help us if the church is made up of such people who call upon the name of the Lord with the same lips that destroy another brother or sister in Christ. As we study today, we must have an honest heart to examine our lips and speech to see that we are not guilty of participating in the sin of gossip.

I. ***The Old Testament Usage***

A. Backbiter.

1. Ragal: "One who goes about maliciously as a slanderer, one who speaks maliciously about another" (Psalm 15:1-3).
2. Sether: "A secret slanderer, or hidden gossip, one of a sly tongue" (Proverbs 25:23).

B. Slanderer.

1. Dibbah: "Whispering, defamation, evil report, to spread a rumor, to slander" (Proverbs 10:18).
2. Lashan: "To use the tongue boldly (in an evil sense); hence, to slander, to backbite" (Psalm 101:5).

C. Talebearer.

1. Nirgan: "Wrong speech (evil secret) hence; a whisperer, a backbiter, a gossip" (Proverbs 18:8).
2. Rakil: "A slanderer, defamer, detractor" (Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 11:13; 20:19).

D. Whisperer.

1. Again, the Hebrew word "Nirgan" which means "a backbiter, a talebearer, a gossip" (Proverbs 16:28).
2. Therefore, in the King James Version there are four English words translated from six Hebrew words.

II. ***The New Testament Usage***

A. Whisperer.

1. Psithurismos: "Lit., to speak into one's ear (in an evil sense); hence, secret slander, backbiting."
2. This word is used only in Romans 1:29-30 and 2 Corinthians 12:20. Pierre de Marivaux said, "Some people will believe anything if it is whispered to them."

B. Backbite.

1. Katalalos: "To slander, to speak evil of, to backbite; synonymous to whisperer, only more open."
2. Again, this word is used only in Romans 1:29-30 and 2 Corinthians 12:20.

C. Busybody.

1. Periergazomia: "Lit., to be working round about, instead of at one's own business; signifies, to take more pains than enough about a thing, to waste one's labor, to be meddling with or bustling about other people's matters."
2. This word is used in 2 Thessalonians 3:11 and 1 Timothy 5:11-15.

D. Meddler.

1. Allotrioepiskapos: "Lit., another's overseer; an overseer of the business belonging to another, a busybody."
2. This word is only used in 1 Peter 4:15.

E. Prating.

1. Phluareo: "To bring unjustified charges against, malicious gossip, unfounded rumors."
2. This word is used only in 3 John 10 in speaking of Diotrephes.

F. Tattler.

1. Phluaros: "The adjective of phluareo (prating), and means: to prat against another; to raise false accusations; to gossip about another."
2. This word is used in 1 Timothy 5:13.

III. ***When Does My Speech Condemn Me?***

A. Is talking about someone or relaying a fact about someone always gossip? No, not all speech about others is considered gossip in the sight of God.

B. So when does my speech become wrong? The following list of questions will help us to determine when our speech has condemned us.

1. Will I help or hurt the person's character by repeating this information?

2. Would it be better left untold, even if true?
3. Will anyone be edified if I repeat this information (Proverbs 11:13)? Will anyone be made better by telling it? An old saying states, "You can never build yourself up by tearing others down."
4. What is my motive for telling it? Am I really seeking to build or destroy?
5. Is the information true? Is there any basis for it? Is it rumor or innuendo?
6. Is the information about something which has been repented of and stopped? If so, it should be left alone.
7. Will I help the one who is spreading the rumors by receiving what he is telling (Proverbs 26:23)?
8. Will I feel better towards the one being talked about by hearing what is spread by a gossip?
9. Am I assisting in strengthening the character of one whom I allow to gossip about others?
10. Can I, in good conscience, say that I am a friend of one from whom I receive information about the wrong doing of another?
11. When I hear about the wrong doing of another, am I not obligated to go to that person (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1)? Do I not do much evil by, instead of going to that person, mentioning his wrong doing to others?
12. Am I not responsible for the unfaithfulness of others when they have been hardened through my spreading unfounded charges about them, or by listening to others who do it (Proverbs 18:19)?

Conclusion. The gossip or backbiter does much evil. Let us seek to not be guilty ourselves. Let us not sanction those who do it. Proverbs 21:23 says, "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."