

Gossip – What should I do?

Last week we looked a number of verse that relate to gossip. I offered my definition and tried to explain why gossip is so destructive. While I do not like topical sermons, that was purely a topic not following the text. It was not a expository sermon. I will do penance later.

Today, I will continue on the same topic but direct to how you as an individual should respond when you think you hear gossip.

Comment

I would like to share an observation relating to this topic. Some of you may incorrectly think, this topic of gossip mainly relates to some current tensions we are experiencing. In my opinion, we – you and me – we are part of a church that struggles mightly with this problem. I care very deeply about you and the gospel. So I bring this topic up as thoughtfully, lovingly, clearly, and Biblically as I can. But I own my observations and I will not recant. So, understand, I am directing this message to this body – to all of us.

Furthermore, you do not have to agree with me. Everything comment I make, including these last few, are not dogma and written in stone. I offer them to you to engage you, prod you, and make us a better church.

I want us to grow numerically. I think we should grow numerically. I want conversions, baptisms, new believers, and the energy of growth. Maybe, we need to get our house

in order for that to happen. Thank you for allowing me to express that.

I want to review my definition of gossip but I want to expand slightly two aspects of gossip that struck me.

Our hearts

Matt 15:18-20 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person.

¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

²⁰ These are what defile a person.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

We have had the privilege of visiting a number of battlefields of the civil war. We have seen revolutionary war sites, civil war and you can drive for miles on some of them.

But do you know the smallest battlefield? Your heart.

How does Jesus describe himself:

. . . I am gentle and lowly in heart. . . (Mat 11:29 ESV)

What gossip says about God

Ps 50:19-21 "You let your mouth loose in evil, And your tongue frames deceit. ²⁰ "You sit and speak against your

brother; You slander your own mother's son. ²¹ "These things you have done, and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you;

Prov 6:16-19: ¹⁶ There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: ¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, ¹⁹ a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

Some parents do not let their children say, "I hate God says I hate haughty eyes. I hate a lying tongue. I hate a false witness who breathes out lies. I hate one who sows discord. . . ."

We say we believe that the Bible is God's word. We say we are Biblically. If God comes out and says I hate _____ we should stay as far away from that as we can. We should understand why and be taught why God hates these things.

In 1752 John Wesley and a group of Methodist leaders signed a covenant which each of them then hung on his study wall. It said:

1. That we will not listen or enquire willingly after ill concerning one another;
2. If we do hear any ill of each other, we will not believe it;
3. That as soon as possible we will communicate what we hear by speaking or writing to the person concerned;

4. That until we have done this, we will not write or speak a syllable of it to any other person;
5. That neither will we mention it, after we have done this, to any other person;
6. That we will not make any exception to any of these rules unless we think ourselves absolutely obliged, and then only in conference.

Last week, we tried to answer the question: What is gossip. My definition is

- 1) the spoken/writing word;
- 2) a listener;
- 3) hurtful or private information;
- 4) spreading the information inappropriately.

Gossip must include a writer/speaker and someone who hears the information. The information must be private and often (but not always) the news is hurtful. If I said _____ is a wonderful _____ behind _____ back and you told 50 people that would not be gossip. However, if I said Betty had a miscarriage, Joe is seeing a counselor, or Pete is in debt, that information is either private or hurtful. If I am not authorized to spread that information and I do, I am gossiping.

What makes my definition unique is the low standard I have set for what constitutes gossip. I don't think gossip must be false or salacious. Nor do I think intent is critical for the definition. In other words, even if a person claims to have no ill intent, words they should not listen to but do or words they should not spread but do is gossip. Even listening to things you shouldn't is participating in gossip.

Proverbs 17:4 An evildoer listens to wicked lips and a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue.

I think merely spreading information inappropriately is enough to meet the definition of gossip.

1. Before you gossip

2. When you hear Gossip

3. After you think you might have gossiped

I. Before you Gossip

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE YOU ENGAGE IN GOSSIP....

1. Would I still share this gossip if the person in question was standing next to me?
2. Is what I'm saying about the other person designed to build them up or discredit them?
3. What void in my life am I trying to fill by routinely gossiping about others?

4. How do I feel when I find out that someone has shared an untruth behind MY back? (Gossipers usually employ a double standard)

5. Who would I become If I made the conscious decision to let go of my need to share gossip? John Page Burton.

I found a number of questions to ask yourself.

Will it improve on the silence? Jeffrey Zaslow

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1000142405274870416050457464011681307026>

If you're not part of the plot, the problem, or the solution, it's gossip. <http://www.mannersmentor.com/only-at-work/gossip-how-to-defend-yourself-and-others#sthash.yZBx1G2T.dpuf>

II. When you hear Gossip

Here is the dilemma. I think it is hard to say when gossip begins. Gossip occurs often in a conversation. Your conversation may hop from one topic to another. You don't know if the words you hear are gossip. Few people say, "I have some juicy gossip on Bill. Want to participate in gossip?"

Second, gossip occurs in a relationship with people or a person you are close with. We don't gossip with strangers. It is awkward to say to your friend, "Hey, are you gossiping?" The answer is always something like, "Well, I know I can tell you." Or "I wouldn't really call this gossip."

The answer is “Yes, but I won’t call it what you just did.”
 “This is different b/c it is not false or I have to talk to someone and I knew you would understand.”

Often, it might not be until a mid-way through a conversation, an hour later, or even a day or more that you realize it was gossip. So what can you do?

When you start feeling uncomfortable or something in your stomach, ask questions of the person telling you this information.

1. Why are you telling me this?
2. Do you have _____ permission to talk to me?
3. Who else have you talked to about this?
4. Have you talked to (the person you have a problem with) before you talked to me?
5. How can I help you with this issue?
6. Do you want me to go with you so we can talk to _____?
7. If you are serious about resolving this, here are a few things I am going to ask you to do:
 - a. Don’t talk to anyone else
 - b. Promise me you will work on this with the responsible people only – elders, and the few people involved. Promise me that you won’t get any more people involved.
 - c. Promise me you will stop posting on facebook, texting, emailing to anyone regarding this . . . even if they reference, slander, or malign you?
 - d. Ask everyone you have spoke to about this to stop talking to people who are not involved in the problem or resolution of the problem.

That means, if you have talked to 10 people, you have ten phone calls to make as soon as possible. Do you promise to do this today?

When you hear gossip, consider this?
 Who is the source?
 Is it true?

III. After you think you might have gossiped.

What do I do if I think I slipped and gossiped? Remember, my definition is that sharing private information inappropriately is gossip whatever my intent is.

A. Talk to the people you spoke with and ask them to stop spreading the information.

Last week I shared a story as part of a prayer request. It wasn’t my story to share, and I betrayed a confidence and hurt the person. It was wrong of me, and I’m sorry. I’ve learned a lesson, and I won’t be sharing details that don’t belong to me in the future. If you’re sharing the story, I hope that you’ll stop so that my wrong won’t be further multiplied.” (manners mentor)

Doug, this is Mark. Do you remember what I said yesterday about Dave?

No, what was that?

I made some derogatory comments about his _____.

Oh, yes, I do remember that.

Did you tell anyone what I said or did you carry those words forward?

Well, I did mention it or asked about Dave to ____ and ____.

I was afraid of that Doug. I think what I said was not wise, kind and I have regrets. Could you help me out?

Yes. What do you mean help you out?

First, forgive me for telling you that.

Second, would you promise not to tell anyone else?

Third, would you mind calling those two people and asking them to do the same – not tell anyone?

Sure. I can do that for you Mark.

Maybe one more thing. Learn from me and don't repeat my mistake.

B. Ask yourself, Could you verify the veracity of your statements and would they hold up under investigation?

What is the source?

Is it true?

C. Stop and think about the people you are talking about?

How do you think they feel?

What are the consequences of your words: loss of a job, upheaval of their life, rejection by others?

Wrap up and yet ask all of us to continue to think about gossip.

This sermon is much more practical than the first. The issue in this sermon boils down to your character. If you slipped and listened to gossip or if you think you might have gossiped what kind of person are you?

I don't know if you need help to say you are sorry, but I am merely prodding you, pushing you into saying what I hope you feel.

If Christ has truly changed your heart, maybe you are feeling a need to reflect, ponder, and change what you say. If you engage in gossip, so will those around you. Your children, your friends, learn how to gossip from you.

But, I want to frame this in a larger context.

I said at the beginning that I think we as a church gossip and have for many years. As you may have noticed, we neither grow nor decrease in numbers. 10 members join, 9 leave out the back door. 15 members join; 16 leave out the back door.

That is not the way the NT church grew. They grew by preaching the gospel, and when there was sin (and they had plenty) they dealt with it head-on but in a loving, Biblical fashion. The NT church was constantly reformed itself

What if each of us took inventory and examined these verses carefully and said, "I am going to look honestly at these verses and myself.

And what if we use this shortcoming, this sin we keep stumbling over and look to Jesus Christ and say, “We need help. We want our church to fulfill the 3 marks of the church

1. Faithful preaching of the Word
2. Proper administration of the sacraments
3. Exercise of Biblical discipline

What if we all took an honest inventory and asked, “What logs did I contribute to this fire?”

And what if God is using or will use this for His glory. That would be just like God.

“Shhh! Does anyone else hear that? I think it’s the clamor of gossip trying to take us over. Maybe we should change the subject before it catches up with us!”

“Does Violet know we’re talking about her son’s death? How does she feel about people knowing the details? If it was my son, I’d want to protect him from rumors about why and how. That’s all she can do for him now. Let’s help her.”

“Carla has her quirks, but she’s never been hurtful. I wouldn’t say any of these things to her, so I’m going to bow out of this conversation.”

“If this is what you say about Angelo, I can’t imagine the faults you can find with me. Should I be worried when I’m not around?”

“Today it’s Wayne, tomorrow who will it be? If you don’t mind, skip over me, and I’ll be sure to skip over all of you! I’ll see you guys at lunch!”

- See more at: <http://www.mannersmentor.com/only-at-work/gossip-how-to-defend-yourself-and-others#sthash.yZBxIG2T.dpuf+>

Gossip or words in general say so much about us. We can be bullies with our words.

What image do you conjure up in your mind when I say bully?

Is she wearing a skirt? Is she old or young?

Is he a religious leader?

Bullies come in all sizes and shapes, all genders, all professions. Some act tough, some act sweet. But in all cases: Bullying is an issue of the heart.

A Lutheran, a catholic priest, a Baptist, and a Presbyterian were out fishing.

Lutheran: We have really gotten close this last year. I have an idea. Let’s open up about something we really are struggling with.

In fact, I will start it off. I struggle with money and to be honest, I have taken a little from the offering lately. Not much but I feel terrible about it.

Catholic Priest: Well, I have a need for more money also. I work all the time; don’t have a family and for the last 3 years, - I hate to say this – but I have not been truthfully when I fill out my tax form.

Baptist: My wife and I have had our struggles and I am attracted to a lady I met. I feel horrible. I want you to keep me accountable so I want you to know her name: Kristy.

Presbyterian: Oh, I am in a terrible fix. I don’t know what to do?

Baptist: Why? You can tell us.

Presbyterian: I know I can tell. I am a gossip.

A quick story that tells you something not so flattering about me: I was thinking about serving in a church and asked to

8

preach on kindness. I did a terrible job. I knew it going in and knew it when I was done. Didn't get the job. Didn't understand kindness.

Now, the older I get the more I value love, kindness, and grace. I still think truth and theology are so very important but after being hurt over the years, I know the value of kindness.