

# "Gossip"

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## Introduction:

This morning, I would like for us to consider a request from several of our members. The question has come in several forms over the past few years, and the question goes back to the sin of GOSSIP. We know from the book of **James 3** that the human tongue is extremely difficult to control. In fact, James says in **James 3:2**, that, **"...we all stumble in many ways,"** however, **"If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well."** And so James seems to think that it all goes back to the tongue.

This past week, I got on the Internet and Googled the word **"gossip,"** and what I found was quite disturbing! **»PPT»** When I typed in the word **"gossip,"** I discovered that the top ten results were positive in nature! In other words, there were no sermons on the sin of gossip, there were no warnings about the dangers of being involved in gossip, but for the most part, the top ten results pointed to gossip pages! The second result was basically neutral—it referred to the Wikipedia article. But the other nine were all positive.

- Result #1 referred to the gossip section in the online edition of the New York Post.
- Result #3 referred to a band by the name of Gossip, based down in Arkansas.
- Result #4 referred to **"Tabloid Tidbits,"** the online gossip section of MSNBC.
- Result #5 referred to the Perez Hilton gossip blog, specializing in gossip from Hollywood.
- Result #6 referred to celebrity-gossip.net, a gossip website for the entertainment world.
- Result #7 was the official site of the Gossip band, operated by Columbia Records.
- Result #8 takes you to TMZ.com, specializing in **"entertainment news, celebrity gossip, and Hollywood rumors."**
- Result #9 takes you to thehollywoodgossip.com, **"a celebrity gossip blog with the latest entertainment news, pictures and videos of your favorite stars and celebrities."**
- And finally, result #10 referred to the Gossip Girl television show.

In our society, therefore, the word **"gossip"** no longer carries the stigma that it did at one time. In fact, it seems that gossip has been given a promotion in our society! We see it all around us!

This morning, though, I would like for us to consider the word gossip in the way that the Bible uses it and in the way that we should be thinking about it. When we look up the definition of gossip on Dictionary.com, we find the true meaning of the word as it is used today. Please consider the definitions that are given:

- The revealing of intimate or sensational facts.
- A report, often malicious, about the doings of other people.
- A person who habitually spreads intimate or private rumors or facts.

One author has defined it this way, **"When we are talking about a situation with somebody who is neither part of the problem nor part of the solution, then we are probably gossiping"** (Rick Warren). A very wise statement!

As we think about those definitions, I would like for us to notice that a piece of gossip might actually be true. In fact, there is nothing in the definition of the word itself that demands that a piece of gossip is false. In many cases, gossip is true—it is simply the retelling of something that is none of our business, whether it is true or false.

The Bible uses another closely related word for false gossip. I am referring to the sin of SLANDER. According to the dictionary, slander is, **"the utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another's reputation."** Slander and gossip, therefore, are very closely related. Slander is the spreading of false information, and gossip is the spreading of information (whether it is true or false) that is none of our business.

These two sins sound so terrible, and at first we might be tempted to say, **"Well, I have never done these things!"** This morning, though, I would like for us to lower our guard, I would like for us to open our hearts, and I would like for us to reconsider what the Bible says on this subject. When speaking of the sins that we commit with our tongues, the Lord's own half-brother, James, a leader in the church in Jerusalem, had something rather frightening to say. In **James 1:26**, James wrote these words, **"If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless."** James knew that there was a special danger with this sin in particular—that we will think we are okay, when actually we are not.

This morning, then, as we study the sin of gossip, I would like for us to actually go to the book of **Proverbs** and study three basic passages from that book that summarize what God wants us to know about the sin of gossip. At this time, I would invite you to turn with me to the book of Proverbs. In our pew Bibles, the book starts on **page 1002**. We know that the book of **Proverbs** was written by King Solomon, and we know that because of Solomon's request to God, that King Solomon was actually the wisest person who ever lived. This morning, then, we will consider what the world's wisest man had to say about the sin of gossip.

**I. If you will, please turn with me to Proverbs 26:22, because we are about to discover, first of all, that THE SIN OF GOSSIP IS A REAL TEMPTATION. »PPT»**

Gossip is a very real danger, and the first step in understanding this sin is to understand just how tempting and just how widespread this sin really is. Why is it so appealing? The Bible addresses the nature of this particular sin in Proverbs 26:22. If you will, please look with me there. »PPT» The Bible says in Proverbs 26:22, ***"The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body."*** And so we find here, first of all, that the sin of gossip is a very real temptation. It is widespread in the world—we see it all around us—at work, at school, in the home, and even in the Lord's church—and Solomon seems to understand the reason. Gossip is widespread because it gives us pleasure. Gossip is compared to a ***"dainty morsel"*** that goes down ***"into the innermost parts of the body."*** Gossip feels good. When we have some information to share that no one else has considered, it makes us feel important. It makes us feel full. It gives us a feeling of pleasure. After all, if sin was not pleasurable, we would not do it, would we! Gossip is compared, therefore, to eating a good meal—to eating a ***"dainty morsel,"*** to eating a tasty piece of food. And we love eating food, don't we!

And in a similar way, just as it is so easy to eat a good piece of food, it is also easy to share a piece of information that is really none of our business. After all, which is easier: To talk ABOUT someone, or to talk TO someone? We all know that it is much easier to talk ABOUT someone. If I have a problem with someone, it is much easier to sit down there at Culver's and say, ***"You know, I can't believe he did that,"*** than it is to call that person, and set up a meeting, and to express my concern face-to-face. Gossip, therefore, is as easy as eating a ***"dainty morsel."*** Gossip is as easy as eating a basket of deep-fried cheese curds. Gossip is as easy as eating a turtle sundae. Gossip is as easy as eating a bacon butter burger. Gossip brings us pleasure.

I hope that all of you read the column in Parade magazine every week that is written by Marilyn vos Savant. Ms. Savant is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records Hall of Fame for having the highest IQ ever recorded. People write in with their questions, and she gives some very interesting answers. About two years ago, someone wrote in with this question, ***"Why am I unable to keep a secret? I feel as if I am about to burst until I tell someone. Can you offer advice to help me overcome this weakness?"*** Ms. Savant gave an interesting answer. She said, ***"If you can hardly wait to tell everyone about a wonderful secret, that's not a weakness. A not-wonderful secret—such as a marital problem—is different. Many people have never heard of the term schadenfreude (SHAHDn-FROI-deh), but this old German word defines one of the most common guilty pleasures in human nature: satisfaction from the misfortune of others. If you're dying to tell someone a discomfiting secret, you're eager to share your schadenfreude. It might help to realize that when you do tell someone, you reveal your enjoyment of the news! After all, if you didn't like to hear it, you wouldn't be anxious to tell anyone, would you?"*** Very interesting! And so if we are eager to tell someone something bad about another

person, then it reveals that we are really enjoying the fact that the bad thing has happened. We think to ourselves, **"How horrible,"** and yet that is exactly what is happening. Whether we will admit it or not, there is pleasure involved in portraying someone in a negative light. And that is exactly what King Solomon points out in **Proverbs 26:22**—a real temptation, ***"The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body."***

**II. I would like for us to move on to a second basic truth about the sin of gossip, because we also find from King Solomon (just two verses earlier) that GOSSIP RESULTS IN STRIFE AND FIRE. »PPT»**

In other words, gossip fuels the fire of division and strife. As Solomon points out in **Proverbs 26:20**, »PPT», ***"For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down."*** In other words, gossip is a key ingredient in a contentious situation, and without whispering, the fire goes out. Down in Janesville, we had a woodstove and we used it to heat our home. We knew the importance of keeping wood on the fire. If we forgot to put wood on the fire, or if we did not feel like chopping, and cutting, and splitting, the house got cold. Wood was a necessary ingredient. And in the same way, King Solomon says that whispering is also necessary for a contentious situation. Gossip adds wood to the fire. We can take a good fight and add some gossip to it, and it quickly gets out of control.

We are reminded of what James writes in **James 3:5-6**, ***"So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell."*** Gossip, therefore, is extremely dangerous!

We remember what King Solomon wrote elsewhere, in **Proverbs 16:28**, ***"A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends."*** Slander and gossip can destroy a friendship. We need to remember, if someone will gossip TO you, they will not hesitate to gossip ABOUT you, ***"A slanderer separates intimate friends."*** A lifetime of friendship can be torn apart in just a moment. I am reminded about how much time it takes to fill up a wheelbarrow as opposed to how much time it takes to dump it out. When we were working on the window wells over here a few weeks ago, we had to scrape and shovel and rake and make all kinds of effort to load up the wheel barrow, but it only took a few seconds to dump that load. And if we had dumped those loads of dirt in the wrong place, it would have been so hard to correct that mistake. The same can be said of gossip, ***"A slanderer separates intimate friends."***

Perhaps we can remember what King Solomon said in **Proverbs 16:27**, ***"A worthless man digs up evil, while his words are like scorching fire."*** And there again, we see the comparison to fire. Our words can do quick and permanent damage. Over this past week, the news has covered the fires out near Yosemite National Park in California. Apparently, the fire has now destroyed more than 25

homes and more than 34,000 acres. From what I understand, two firefighters have been killed. But you know how it started? Apparently some guy was out in the woods target shooting, and a tiny spark from one of his guns fell on the ground. He called for help right away, but it was too late. The fire started on July 24 (a week ago last Thursday), and as of yesterday afternoon it was just to the point of being 80% contained. As James said, **"See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!"** 34,000 acres, 25 homes, and two lives—all from the spark of a gun! We need to realize, therefore, that gossip is extremely dangerous.

**III. So we know it is a temptation and we know it is dangerous, but before we close our thoughts on this subject, we need to apply it. In other words, we need to understand that the Bible says: DON'T DO IT!**  
**»PPT»**

We need to understand that the Bible does give some very practical advice. If you will, please look with me at **Proverbs 11:12-13**. In **Proverbs 11:12-13**, **»PPT»**, King Solomon says, **"He who despises his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding keeps silent. He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter."** We find here that there are some things that should be kept silent. There are some matters that should be concealed. God considers this to be **"trustworthy"** behavior.

Sometimes we might wonder, **"Am I gossiping or not?"** After all, certainly it is not a sin to ever say anything about anyone. Does the Bible ever address this issue? Yes, it does! However, there is not just one verse that singlehandedly answers this question, but there are several basic principles that are spread out throughout the Bible. People have thought up some rather unique ways of remembering these basic ideas. One is referred to as the THINK method. The word THINK is an acronym, **»PPT»**, and it stands for five basic questions we need to ask before passing on any kind of information about another person.

**T** – **Is it TRUE?**  
**H** – **Is it HELPFUL?**  
**I** – **Is it INSPIRATIONAL?**  
**N** – **Is it NECESSARY?**  
**K** – **Is it KIND?**

Perhaps some of you have heard the short poem, **»PPT» The Three Gates...**

**If you are tempted to reveal  
 A tale someone has told  
 About another, make it pass,  
 Before you speak, three gates of gold.**

**These narrow gates: First, 'Is it true?'  
 Then, 'Is it needful?' In your mind**

***Give truthful answer. And the next  
Is last and narrowest, 'Is it kind?'***

***And if to reach your lips at last  
It passes through these gateways three,  
Then you may tell the tale, nor fear  
What the results of speech may be.***

Those, again, are some very wise words.

- 1. And if we look at these two memory devices as a summary, we notice, first of all, that before we say anything about anyone we absolutely positively have to make sure that the information is TRUE.**

And this is a Biblical concept! **»PPT»** As King Solomon says in **Proverbs 10:18**, ***"He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool."*** Remember, slander is simply gossip that is false. And so it is foolish to spread information that is not accurate.

So many times, we may see something or hear something, and we may draw an incorrect conclusion about what has happened, unless we check the facts with those involved. In my preaching, for example, I will occasionally see someone with their eyes closed. Now obviously, it could never be the preaching—that could never be the problem! But it might be very easy for me to talk to others in the church about that situation. I could make some assumptions (this person hates the church, this person does not care about the truth), and I could actually end up foolishly slandering someone with some false information. Perhaps a person has worked all night and came to worship straight from work. And so instead of being condemned, that person should actually be congratulated! Maybe that person's children were sick all night, and maybe the person did not get a wink of sleep. I know that I have had the experience of being up with a child in the Emergency Room until 1 or 2 AM on a Sunday morning. I could hardly stay awake during my own sermon that morning! Maybe the person is taking some kind of medication that causes drowsiness. I don't know—there are many possibilities (again, never the preaching itself), but the point is that it can be easy to jump to conclusions and spread some kind of false information.

Maybe you can remember from the Old Testament when Hannah prayed for a son, and the priest at Shiloh saw her lips moving but did not hear any sound. Do you remember what the priest thought? He thought she was drunk! We can understand his conclusion (we have had drunk people come to worship here before), and yet the priest would have been foolish to spread that around without first checking it out with Hannah. In the New Testament, we remember that Jesus was often the victim of false rumors. Do you remember when people were saying that He was a glutton and a drunkard? Even at Jesus' trial, the people were saying that He had told them not to pay their taxes, when, in fact, the opposite was true—He had told them to render unto Caesar that which was Caesar's. Slander, therefore, is foolish, because the rumor is not accurate in the first place.



Of course, these days we have developed new and improved ways of spreading slander. We have studied the danger of e-mail in a series on Wednesday evening a year or so ago, but we need to repeat it from time to time. Have you seen the recent e-mails coming around about how you can pop popcorn or cook an egg using a couple of cell phones? »PPT» It sounds so real. It sounds like something we need to forward to everyone in our address book—immediately, with the click of a button! Cell phones will cook your brain! But the message is totally false! And so we have Christian people blindly telling everyone in their address book that you can cook an egg with a cell phone!

Do we dare venture into the world of politics? »PPT» How many of us have seen this picture? Several have passed it along to me. I mean, all you have to do is look at it, and the message is obvious, isn't it? Obviously, Barak Obama hates the United States! You can see it right there—he is stubbornly refusing to place his hand on his heart during the singing of the national anthem. No! The picture says no such thing. For a man who is photographed nearly every minute of every day, it is amazing no one has found anything worse than this! A photograph catches about 1/500<sup>th</sup> of a second. And yet we have so-called Christian people jumping to conclusions and forwarding this photograph to all of their friends and to everyone at work and to everyone in their address book, claiming that Mr. Obama hates America.

And to make it fair, we need to consider the photo that was going around a few years ago, trying to explain the delay in help being sent to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. »PPT» And obviously, by looking at the photo, our president is an incompetent man who does not even know how to hold a telephone. And this picture was passed around over and over again. But upon doing a little research, and upon finding the original photo that was released by the White House, »PPT», the photo had obviously been altered—just a little Photoshop!

I want to give a little bit of advice when it comes to some of the incredible stories that get forwarded by e-mail, and that is, go to the website [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com) and do a two minute search on the subject to find the truth of the matter, and then just delete it. Snopes collects all kinds of these stories and urban legends, and it is a site that I highly recommend. »PPT» And so instead of passing along false information, the Bible teaches us that we are to make sure that whatever we say or pass along is true. As Solomon says, ***"He who spreads slander is a fool."***

**2. And yet just because something is true does not mean that it needs to be passed along. And so we need to go further: Is it necessary? Is it kind? Is it beneficial? Is it appropriate?**

And if it is not necessary, if it is unkind, if it is not beneficial, if it is not appropriate, then we simply need to stop it before it is ever told. If someone comes to us with some kind of unnecessary, unkind, useless information, we can stop it right there. I recently read the story about a very wise king. One day one of his subjects came and complained that her husband had said things that had hurt her feelings. The king replied by saying, ***"That, ma'am, is none of my business."*** The lady then

said, **"But sir, he also says bad things about you."** And the king replied by saying, **"That, ma'am, is none of your business."** I think we can see the wisdom there.

I have told you before about one of my roommates at Freed-Hardeman who was really good about this. If we were with a group of people and if the conversation started to turn negative about another person, this guy would always speak up. He would just come right out and say it, **"I don't really appreciate hearing this. Is there something else we can talk about?"** Wow! That puts an end to gossip! We understand what King Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 17:4, »PPT», "An evildoer listens to wicked lips; a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue."**

If someone comes to us with gossip, here is something else we can try—we can say, **"You know, what I like most about that person is this...."** In other words, we can turn it positive. It has been said that a gossip is more interested in the story than in the person that the story is about. We need to consider the person, not just the story. **»PPT»** We agree with what Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:29, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."** Anything that we share needs to be helpful—it needs to be beneficial. Are we lifting up, or are we tearing down?

And here's another question: If the person we are talking about were to walk in the room, would we stop talking? If so, then perhaps the information should not be shared. Even though it is not inspired, perhaps we should think of an old Chinese proverb, **"Speak only well of people, and you need never whisper."** Very interesting!

### **Conclusion & Invitation:**

As we close the lesson this morning, we need to remind ourselves that gossip is a terrible sin. We should also remember that God hears every word that we say. In **Matthew 12:36-37, »PPT»,** Jesus gave a powerful warning about the words that we say. Jesus said, **"...every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."**

If we are guilty of the sin of gossip, let us knock it off! I am sure that some people have committed the sin of gossip without even knowing it—without meaning any harm. I would encourage all of us to look at our personal conversations in light of God's word, and let us look into God's word like a mirror. If we are guilty, I would encourage anyone to go to the one you have sinned against and to ask for their forgiveness. If you are a Christian, once you have done that, you can then go to God in prayer and ask for His forgiveness.

In **1 John 1:9**, the Bible says, **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."**



**Verse 7** of that same chapter says we can do this because, **"...the blood of Jesus His Son cleanse us from all sin."** Let us be thankful that we can be forgiven!

If you have been gossiped against, if you have been slandered, if false or misleading things have been said about you, then you should not feel alone. Jesus understands. Jesus knows what it is like to be gossiped about and slandered. And the good news is that Jesus let it happen. Jesus let Himself be slandered so that the sins of gossip and slander can be completely wiped away. And when Jesus died on the cross, He paid the price for every sin.

If you do not yet have this relationship with God, if your sins have not yet been covered by the blood of Christ in the act of baptism, if you have not yet put your faith in the working of God who raised Jesus from the dead (**Colossians 2:12**), then we would encourage you to take that step. The Bible teaches that we must be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. This is something we can help you with right away. If you have any questions, let's talk about those questions. However, if you are ready to be baptized right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)