

**SHARING IN WHISPERS IS DEADLY**  
**LISTENING TO GOSSIP IS LETHAL**

Proverbs 11: 13, 16: 28, 18: 8 – Pastor Richard Carlson

Who am I? I have no respect for justice. I maim without killing. I break hearts and ruin lives. I am cruel and malicious and gather strength with age. The more I am quoted, the more I am believed. I flourish at every level of society. My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face. To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become. I'm nobody's friend. Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same. I topple governments and ruin marriages. I destroy careers and cause heartache and sleepless nights. I wreck churches and separate Christians. I spawn suspicion and generate grief, and make innocent people cry on their pillows. Even my name hisses. I am gossip. Gossip is the most deadly microbe. It has neither legs nor wings. It is composed entirely of tales, and most of them have stings. Will Rogers was right in saying, "So live that you wouldn't be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip." A wise teacher sent a note home to all parents on the first day of school. It read "If you promise not to believe everything your child says happens at school, I'll promise not to believe everything your child says happens at home."

Beloved, gossip is the sizzling beef fajita of normal conversations. The words are on fire. Gossip starts burning and hurting the moment our words leave our lips and the moment we agree to listen to them. Gossip ruins friendships, destroys relationships and it can literally destroy any local church, including ours. Gossip is a rumor that goes in one ear and out many mouths. Some people will believe anything if it is whispered to them. Gossiping is really a childish act, an act of breaking a confidence and a trust. It usually begins when any of us give private information to people who are not clams, (who can't remain quiet), people who have to share it with others. Sadly, gossip in all its hurtfulness usually doesn't go on unless we are jealous or envious, covetous of another person and develop a need to feel superior to them. 99% of the time, the information passed on to us in gossip is completely false in its content and wrong in how it judges others' motives. Frankly, to preach on judging last Sunday without touching on gossip this Sunday might be one of my greatest mistakes in preaching this year. Gossip is hard to preach on, and yet it touches on what history has dubbed the eighth deadly sin.

Down deep inside, most of us know what our dad or mom or our grandparents once told us, "If you don't have something good to say about someone, don't say anything." But their advice is easy to forget. Gossip is no small sin. In fact, in Romans 1: 28-32, God lists gossip high in the list of sins making us worthy of death. Listen! "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all

manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

There is an additional biblical truth about gossip, and that is, gossip seems most often to be gender specific as far as its normal targeting. Men gossip and listen to it, but God especially warns women about gossip repeatedly. I Timothy 3: 11, is speaking to deaconesses or deacon's wives saying, “Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.” I Timothy 5: 13, 14, Paul warns Timothy about women younger than 60 years of age, saying, “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. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.” Titus 2: 3 warns older women about gossiping and slander, saying, “Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good.” Men, don't think gossip is limited to women. One of the saddest things I know is that men in leadership over the 48+ years in the ministry are capable of passing along terrible gossip and based on falsehood, have ruined the lives of pastors and fellow servants of the Lord—even fellow elders and deacons. This past year, to my horror, a dear church I love got rid of a pastor on the basis of rumors and gossip.

So what can we do about it? A good place to begin is to define gossip. “Gossip, according to Webster is “idle talk, rumors, scandal, light familiar talk or writing, or the spreading of reports about others by persons, especially a woman. It is tattling about other people. It is one who gossips as a gossip or a gossipmonger.” The old King James word for a gossip is a talebearer. The Hebrew uses two words for this gossip or talebearer or slanderer or backbiter. The first one is **nirgan**. Nirgan is translated slanderer, talebearer and whisperer. It literally means “to roll to pieces.” In Proverbs 16:28, we read—“A slanderer/whisperer, a nirgan, separates intimate friends.” Literally, gossip takes a friendship and rolls it to pieces. In Proverbs 18: 8. we read, “The words of a whisperer—a nirgan, are like dainty morsels, little pin-wheel sandwiches, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body.” These little rolled up pieces get digested by us and it becomes virtually impossible to vomit them up or to extricate them from our lives.

Two other uses of nirgan are found in Proverbs 26:20 and 22 which read, “For lack of wood, the fire goes out, And where there is no nirgan, no whisperer, contention quiets down...The words of a nirgan/whisperer are like dainty morsels. And they

go down into the innermost parts of the body.” It reminds me of a particular church with a well-known lady in it known to be the town gossip. She was always sticking her nose into other people’s business as a gossip and busybody. One day she saw a new member of their church park his truck not far from the front of a bar. She began telling people he was an alcoholic because she had seen his truck in front of the bar. The new member responded to questions of people that told him the rumor. He said he simply parked there, as it was close to the place he had gone to shop. The gossiping lady said that if his truck was parked in front of the bar, she knew he was up to no good inside. The new member, being a quiet fellow, walked away from the false accusation. He didn’t try to debate the gossip or try to talk her out of anything. He did, however, later that evening, after work, quietly park his truck in front of the gossip’s house. He then walked home and left it there all night. Are we nirgans—who spread dainty morsels, pinwheel sandwiches of slander?

The second Hebrew word for gossip is **rakiyl**. Rakiyl is a traveling salesman of a gossip, a scandalmonger who bears/carries tales. The word also means merchant who travels for trading purposes with overpriced merchandise. Once you pay the cost, listen to the gossip and buy into his lies, the product is not only inferior, it is worthless. One verse we read this morning from Proverbs 11: 13 says, “Whosoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.” Proverbs 20: 19 states, “He who goes about as a slanderer, a rakiyl, reveals secrets, Therefore, do not associate with a gossip.” Even the Law of Moses forbade gossiping. In Leviticus 19: 16, the Lord said, “You shall not go about as a slanderer/rakiyl among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the Lord.” The Word of God declares to us that our tongue is our worst enemy. James 3: 6 declares, “And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among out members, staining the whole body. It corrupts the whole person.” God hates this destroyer of friendships and churches.

Three questions are worth answering today. (1) What should you do if you encounter gossip? (2) What should you do when gossipers ask you to tell others? They may even come to you and ask you to recruit others to pray about this? (3) What should you do when you find out you are the victim of gossip? As I share this message with you, I urge you, don’t take it lightly and think this is cool whip material and not meat. This message, if we obey its truth, could save our life, our friendships, and even save our church. What are the answers to these three mission critical questions about gossip?

**WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU ENCOUNTER GOSSIP?** (I.) There are three possible responses that reflect the truth of the Scriptures: **Speak Out!** (1) Kindly, but firmly tell your gossiping friend or friends that gossip is hurtful and that no one benefits from it. Call it by name. Call it gossip. Ephesians 4:15 tells us, “But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is

the head, even Christ.” This is not a speaking out in pride or self-righteousness, but with a humble awareness that a part of you wants to hear the juicy morsel, but you must maintain that you are on a diet from gossip and you just can’t take any gossip intake. You are allergic to it. You break out in assassinating words and you mix real concern for others with snooping into other’s business. Did you know that we all get hurt badly by being publicly or privately discussed by others? Most of us face enough hurt and confusion without the help of a sensational gossip doing us in. But be certain, beloved, you will face resistance by speaking out. Gossipers are robbed of their fun and frolic by resisters who speak out. By ending the talk about other’s lives, you are cutting off the blood flow of a gossip’s habit.

**Be Positive!** (2) God wants us to turn a gossiping conversation around by saying good and right things about the person being talked about. Be aware that once a matter is out, we can easily become a participant or a partner. One of the things we can do when someone is being maligned and slandered by others, is to do something for them, even anonymously. Then keep their secrets, whether they are true or false and go to prayer for them. It takes a real saint to be positive when a juicy morsel is ready for chewing and sharing with others. To stop the “happy hour” of gossip with Philippians 4:8 won’t make you win friends and influence people, but it will please God. He says in His Word, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” When gossip comes running in, change the subject to speak positively of the accused person. The gossip will sense and realize your lack of interest and begin to feel uncomfortable with your lack of interest. Sometimes our presence is all it takes to stop gossip. I heard of one woman who said, “Let’s not do this, Angela doesn’t like it when we talk about people.” Angela had made a deep impression—a positive one. Silence is a deafening response that is positive. When you come across positively, silent, and unwilling to respond directly to gossip, you will be excluded in the gossip mill/the rumor mill. You may lose a long time gossip friend, but none of us need friends like that. Remember, if your friends talk about others, they will talk about you.

**Walk Away!** (3) Don’t be a part of the problem by sticking around to sip on the Gossip Float or to taste test the Gossip Shake. The ugly face of gossip gets dressed up by us as Christians by saying, “Would you pray with me for this person?” It’s a clever disguise. Walking away is better than dressing gossip up in religious clothes to make it okay. Not everything we hear is a matter for the church prayer chain. Information about someone being suicidal is not to be kept secret. Get help immediately! But for most juicy morsels, walk away! Proverbs 20: 19. Secondly,

## **WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WHEN GOSSIPERS ASK YOU TO TELL**

**OTHERS?** (II.) Being willing to listen to gossipers means we are being lit on fire. What should we do when we are on fire? Stop, drop, and roll. In many ways, that's the biblical response. How should we respond? Here are three suggestions.

**Resist The Urge!--Stop** (1) Remember, someone confiding in you doesn't mean they confided in the whole church. Don't break a trust. Remember our text in Proverbs 11: 13, which reminds us "He who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered." That includes bringing someone up for public prayer. Resist the urge. It's tough. It may take **months** or years to break an old habit, but keep resisting the urge. **Start To Pray! – Drop** (2) Promise to make the matter a matter of prayer. Find a place alone soon and go to your knees in prayer. Like Daniel in Daniel 6:10, find specific times to go to prayer, even kneeling. Closet prayer can be just as effective as group prayer, and far more effective, if the sharing a matter becomes gossip. **Talk To Your Friend!—Roll** (3) Go to the friend others are speaking of and tell them of the prayer concern about them that you ran into. Gal. 6: 1—Go to them in a spirit of meekness. Ask them if it is true, if the concern is to be shared with others/prayed over. In many cases, you'll find you made a new trusted friend—as they don't want the matter spread around. Most of us don't want our dirty laundry used as a public concern for prayer. That friend may beg you to pray, but also beg you to be confidential.

A dear pastor friend of my father, Moody Church pastor Alan Redpath, once said, "I once formed a mutual encouragement fellowship at a time of stress in one of my pastorates. The members of our mutual encouragement team subscribed to a simple formula we held each other to, before we could speak of any person or subject that could perhaps be controversial. The formula was an acronym based on the word, "THINK." T--Is it true? H--Is it helpful? I--Is it inspiring? N--Is it necessary? K--Is it kind? If what you are about to say or listen to, does not pass those tests, we must keep quiet or walk away from such words. It works! Thirdly, most importantly,

## **WHAT SHOULD YOU DO WHEN YOU FIND OUT THAT YOU ARE A VICTIM OF GOSSIP?**

(III.) All of us have been at one time or another the victim of gossip. I am rarely, if ever free as your pastor from being a gossip victim. How should we react when we discover a trusted friend of ours is saying mean, accusing and false things about us? Oh, does it ever hurt! Here's 4 biblical responses: (1) **Don't Defend Yourself!** I know this biblical advice is like asking you not to scream when you hit your thumb with a hammer. Defending ourselves is so natural. Yet, it indicts us and makes what's being said seem more accurate. Isaiah 54: 15, 17 is my daily vitamin as a pastor. It is the Vitamin we all need when we are Gossip-victims. "If anyone stirs up strife, it is not from me; whoever stirs up strife with you shall fall because of you...no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.

This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, declares the LORD.” (2) **Go, Get Alone With God And Hand It To Him!** This is a tough prescription but I know it works. Go into your closet, get alone and shut the door as the Word of God commands. You can talk it out, shout it out, cry it out, scream it out, whatever it takes for you with God to resolve your hurt so you can hand it all over to Jesus. I Peter 5: 7 commands us, “Casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.” Then watch closely as you will be tempted to pick up what you have given to Jesus. If you find yourself holding the hurt again, go back and repeat this over and over—but leave the matter in God’s hands.

(3) **Forgive The Gossiper Even If He Or She Never Repents And Asks You.**

This is God’s grace at work in you. You will be tempted to punch someone’s lights out. It’s like a young girl being said to be pregnant, when it isn’t true. Live it down—nine months later, the truth will come out. Forgive the gossiper who wanted to spread their mayonnaise of gossip around. Forgiveness is a choice, not only a response to a repentant sinner. And when you start to say, “I can’t!”—then run to Matthew 6:14-15 and realize you have no choice. Jesus said, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Ask God to daub your wounds with His balm of Gilead, to kiss it well with His love and bring the healing only He can bring. Sometimes, this process is slow and must be repeated, but we must forgive the one who has made us a gossip victim so that we become victors over gossip.(4) **Only When You Are Under God’s Leading And Control, Confront The Gossiper In Love.** You may not ever need to do this, but God may lead you in His good time when you are not angry, bitter, sad, or ready to fight, to go and confront the gossiper. Tell the person, if you are certain, through witnesses, that they started the gossiping lie, that it hurt you badly. It is proper and right to let others know how it made us feel. Then, whatever their response, forgive them. This, at times, can restore a friendship. Let me remind you that step four isn’t a usual step. Without proof that the person started the gossip, don’t do this step. It may just start a new cycle. In all my 48 years of ministry and often being gossiped about with false accusation, I have never known for sure who said what when, so I have never taken step 4—which is part of Gal. 6: 1. Only twice has a gossiper ever come to me to confess—once years ago and once this year. Beloved, let’s stop gossip cold with God’s biblical remedy we’ve given you today. We can win as we obey the Word. I love you. Amen.