

Thursday, October 27, 2011 – Guess What I Just Heard...

The most tragic words I heard while preaching were, "I know I needed to respond to the Lord's invitation, but I was afraid of what everyone would be talking about afterwards." Though the weight of sin carries with it a heavy burden, often the effects (or potential effects) of gossip can cause one to fail to respond to the Lord.

All the sins of the tongue are deadly. Profanity, insults, lying, negativism, complaints, and criticism are all harmful. Gossip is a particularly deadly sin. Gossip has destroyed more people, tarnished more reputations, broken more friendships, and split more churches than any sin I'm aware of. Gossip is quickly told, quickly heard, and quickly spread. Worst of all, gossip is quickly believed.

Gossip is one of Satan's flaming arrows that he shoots at us and entices us to shoot at others. The Lord doesn't mince words in **James 3:6** when he tells us about the origin of the sins of the tongue: "**The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.**"

Satan is behind all gossip, either directly or indirectly. When we listen to gossip, we give the devil a foothold in our lives. When we speak gossip, we're speaking as Satan wants us to speak. The fires of hell ignite gossip.

The book of Proverbs warns us of the deadly allure of gossip as well as its deadly effects over and over again. **Proverbs 18:8** says, "**The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts.**" Whether we admit it or not, we have a fascination with gossip. That's why talk shows and grocery store tabloids are so popular.

The New Testament Greek word for "gossip" (psithuristes, **Rom 1:29**) is literally "a whisperer" -- a person who whispers behind your back with the intention of hurting you. A further description would be that of one who secretly, by hints and innuendoes, tarnishes the name or character of others or rouse suspicion concerning them. Such people slander other men secretly. The Bible links gossip and slander together as related sins (**Rom 1:29-30**). The New Testament word "slander" (katalalos) means "to speak evil of someone." When we gossip, we speak evil about people; we badmouth them. The King James Version describes people who gossip and slander people as "backbiters" (**Rom 1:30**). When we badmouth someone with gossip, we bite them behind their backs, whether the gossip is true or not. The vicious tale is told. The whisperer tells one vile tale after another while pretending great innocence themselves.

They tell their tales as if it hurts them greatly to do so, but in reality they delight in the telling.

Gossip is always trouble. Gossip obscures the truth. Gossip drives us from God. Gossip ruins reputations. Gossip destroys relationships. Gossip divides churches. The trouble with gossip:

- It is incredibly destructive - **James 3:6 and 8** says, "**The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.**"
- It spreads falsehood - **Ephesians 4:25** says, "**Therefore each of you must put off falsehood...**" When we gossip, facts are distorted. Lies are spoken as truth. Half-truths are heralded as truth.

So what is the answer?

Don't listen to gossipers and their gossip. When someone begins to gossip to you, tell them plainly, "I don't want to hear any gossip." Don't worry about offending them by telling them you don't want to hear any gossip. Gossipers need to be put in their place.

Confront gossipers. If someone gossips about you, Jesus tells us how to confront them in **Matthew 18:15-17**. First, speak to the person one-on-one. If that doesn't work, bring a couple of spiritually mature Christian friends with you to confront them. We must confront people with the right facts and the right spirit. **Ephesians 4:15** tells us, "Speak the truth in love."

Watch your tongue carefully. **Ephesians 4:29** says, "**Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear.**" Watch your tongue. If your words tear people down rather than building them up, keep quiet. As the old saying goes, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all."