

KEEP THE DOOR OF MY LIPS

R V Court

It has been said that gossip is one of the most grievous and harmful habits that can be known in any assembly. It is, of course, harmful anywhere in the world outside, but we regard it as being normal there, just a natural display of a nature still controlled by sin. The reason it is worse among a company of God's people is because it is one of Satan's most powerful weapons to wreck the witness of that company and to set it on the level of the world to which that company should be witnessing. It cannot in any way be linked to the 'fruit of the Spirit', Galatians 5. 22 -23, but is clearly linked with the 'works of the flesh' mentioned earlier in that chapter.

Gossiping is cruel, destroying the character of others... it is usually false or, at least, grossly exaggerated. The person who indulges in it has no right to claim that he loves his brother or sister who he is defaming. Even if the thing being passed on is true it is certainly in defiance of the statement in James 5. 20 that 'love can cover a multitude of sins'. Gossip multiplies them!

This is not a new phenomenon — this is clear from the following references in the Old Testament:—

Lev. 19.16 – 'Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among the people'.

Prov. 11.13 – 'A talebearer revealeth secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter'.

Prov, 20.19 – 'He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets, therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips'.

Prov. 26. 20 – 'Where no word is, there the fire goeth out; so, where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth'.

In Psalm 119, it is obvious that the psalmist knew something of the effects of this evil practice. In Psalm 69 he says, 'The proud have forged a lie against me', and it is certain that it was being passed on. One can imagine one person meeting another, and very eagerly saying, 'Have you heard?', and out comes that lie, with embellishments, and the recipient of the message of course passes it on often with tragic results.

Years after the above quotation, the problem was still there and James found it necessary to urge restraint on the tongue because of the massive damage created by gossip.

Gossip is rightly despised by all decent minded people. A few generations ago the village ponds were used for ducking but have now largely disappeared.

Sometimes matters which are considered to be wrong must be dealt with by the assembly, but there should not be haste in dealing with a matter until it is established beyond doubt that the offence which is being considered has actually been committed. There should certainly be no idle or malicious spreading aboard of the charges. The guidance given to the elders of Israel in Deuteronomy 17. 2 - 7 is very helpful, and we do well, as those not now under the law, but under grace, to at least follow the elders who must take action. But, notice, what first must be done, verse 4, 'thou hast heard of it, and enquired diligently, and behold it is true, and the thing certain', then action must be taken. The basis for action must not be gossip, but the establishments of the facts.

In relation to this sad matter our Lord uttered some strong words in Matthew 12 34 - 36, 'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth

forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgement'. See also Matt. 15. 18 - 19.

There will be no problem with our speech if our hearts are taken up with spiritual things. Surely we need to pay very close attention to the exhortation in Philippians 4. 8, 'Whatsoever things are true... honest... pure... lovely... of good report, think on these things.

When we are tempted to pass on something we have heard we need to consider — is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?

May our constant prayer be, 'Set a watch, O Lord upon my mouth, keep the door of my lips'. (Psalm 144. 3).

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(In another address by the late Mr Court, which was a spoken address, he said that one of the commandments was Thou shalt not bear false witness... which means lying, or presenting matters which are unproved, or a false statement that degrades someone's reputation or dignity. The Lord hates a lying tongue, a heart that devises both wickedness and lies and the Lord hates anyone who creates discord among believers. False witness is not only lies, but infidelity towards the wrongly accused and it is also infidelity towards God. We are not to set a brother at nought nor are we to criticise anyone who is not in our assembly, or no longer in our assembly. We are not to make, or issue a false report or any report that cannot be established as completely true and therefore fool proof. If anyone in our assembly, or was in our assembly is to be accused. He must have the right to reply before the whole assembly. Failure to allow that defence before the whole assembly annuls any claims against him. False witness is slander if spoken, and libel if written down).

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