

Sunday, November 1, 2009—The Weight of Our Words—Maliciously Speaking: Gossip and Slander

Introduction

- This morning we are going to be having our third message in our fall series entitled, The Weight of Our Words: Measuring the Power of What We Say.
- Two weeks ago we looked at the idea of truth telling in the Scripture. We studied the difference between beguilement, lying, and false witness.
- This morning we are going to turn our attention to another problem we face regarding the tongue, the catastrophic cousins of gossip and slander.
- Ephesians 4:29-31—gossip and slander are another type of evil speaking identified in scripture.
- Have you ever heard a rumor? Have you ever spread a rumor? Rumors are the vehicles that turn life into a demolition derby, and gossip and slander are the tracks on which they travel.
- The tracks of gossip and slander are littered with careless, idle chatter, as well as malicious, and intentional bad mouthing. Rumors, whether true or false, are devastating for many reasons—one being that they are irretrievable.
- Malicious speech comes from the central source of all sin—the promotion of self.
- Gossip and slander feed off of our natural flesh programming in the following six ways:
- Curiosity—when our curiosity includes seeking, bearing, and disseminating harmful information, then we have moved into the destructive aspect of curiosity.
 - I Timothy 5:13—notice how this links gossip (tattlers) with curiosity (busybodies).
 - Tattler--of persons uttering or doing silly things, garrulous, babbling
 - Busybodies--busy about trifles and neglectful of important matters, busy about other folks' affairs, a busybody
 - Acts 19:19—same word is used to describe them who practice the curious arts.
- Idleness—Paul explains how people with time on their hands may be prone to malicious speech.
- A Desire to be the Center of Attention—it's an ego stroke to have everyone listening intently when we speak, so we learn the right phrases to captivate others:
 - “Did you hear?”

- “Well, I really shouldn’t say this, but. . .?”
- “Can you keep a secret?”
- An Opportunity to Elevate Ourselves over Others—“To speak ill of others is a dishonest way of praising ourselves.” Will Durant
- Bitterness—selfishly withholding forgiveness opens the door to a vengeful spirit, and slander is a tool of revenge.
 - Ephesians 4:31—notice the connection between bitterness and evil speaking.
- Soothes Our Own Anxieties—misery still loves company

Two Types of Malicious Speaking

- Idle Chatter/Gossip—speech that is demeaning to another’s integrity and reputation.
 - I Timothy 5:13, 6:30—vain babblings = empty discussion, discussion of vain and useless matters
 - II Timothy 2:16
- This type of speech is not always malicious in its intent, but it is always damaging. The words associated with this type of speech are frequently translated as whisper or talebearer.
 - Psalm 41:7
 - Proverbs 20:19
- Slander—this category includes the intention, malicious communication of bad reports. The words associated with this type of speech are normally translated as slander.
 - Psalm 31:13
 - Jeremiah 9:2

Gossip

- In the Old Testament there are two different Hebrew words used to describe what we commonly call gossip.
- Proverbs 11:13—the word talebearer in this verse is a translation of a compound Hebrew word.
 - The first word literally means to walk about

- The second word literally means one who carries tales. It is also translated as slander in some verses.
- The *Webster's 1828 Dictionary* offers the following definition of talebearer: “A person who officiously tells tales; one who impertinently communicates intelligence or anecdotes, and makes mischief in society by his officiousness.”
- Leviticus 19:16
- Proverbs 11:13—God’s word teaches that a person who gossips is untrustworthy and cannot keep a secret.
- Proverbs 20:19—a person who gossips is to be avoided. Hearing gossip adds unneeded information to our mental notebooks. These negative thoughts give Satan a foothold in our lives.
- Proverbs 16:28—a second Hebrew word presents the concept of whispering that is damaging. Whispering is in a negative context. The word denotes confidential communication, non-public information, exclusivism, secretive behavior, and shame. In the Bible whispering becomes a figurative expression for the sin of gossip, which unfortunately is not always done in a whisper
 - This Hebrew word is also translated talebearer elsewhere in the Old Testament.
 - Proverbs 16:28--separates the closest of friends.
 - Proverbs 26:20—gossip adds fuel to the fire created by the tongue.
 - II Corinthians 12:20
- Romans 1:28-30—whispering and gossip are the products of a reprobate mind.

Slander

- While gossip is often done in the context of idle, careless chatter, slander is the open intentional sharing of damaging information.
- Like we saw with Gossip there are multiple words that are translated slander in our King James Bibles. The first implies the idea of just general bad reports.
- Genesis 37:2—the word “report” at the end of the verse means whispering, defamation, evil report, a) whispering, b) defamation, defaming, c) evil report, unfavourable saying.
 - Numbers 13:32, 14:36-37

- Psalm 31:13
- Jeremiah 20:10
- Psalm 50:20—here the word slander come from a Hebrew word which means to blemish or to fault.
- II Samuel 19:27—here the word slander means to go on foot, spy out, foot it, go about, walk along, move the feet. This definition depicts someone actively seeking out damaging information to share with others.
- James 4:11—in the New Testament, the word for slander is comprise of two words, one meaning “against” and the other meaning “to speak.”
 - I Peter 2:1
 - I Peter 3:16
- I Timothy 3:11—the word devilish or diabolic is translated in this verse as slander and 35 other times as devil.
- Combining these various definitions we discover that slander is characterized by bad reports that blemish or defame a person’s reputation. Slander characterizes a wicked, godless heart (Psalm 50:16-23, Romans 1:28-30) and is a direct violation of God’s Law (Leviticus 19:16).
- Psalm 101:5
- Psalm 31:13—David said that fear, conspiracy, and plotting are the destructive bedfellows of slander.
- Proverbs 25:9-10—if we slander someone, we run the risk of being branded as a slandered for the rest of our lives, for bad reputations.

Four Myths About Gossip and Slander

- Myth 1: Gossip and slander are women’s sins.
 - I Timothy 3:11, 5:13—while the Bible does twice attribute these sins specifically to women nowhere does the Bible promote the notion that men are not equally guilty.
- Myth 2: If information is true it’s okay to tell it.
 - Romans 14:19
 - Ephesians 4:29—while truth is important so are confidentially and potential harm
- Myth 3: Sharing prayer concerns justifies the exchange of sensitive information.

- Myth 4: The people I tell certainly won't tell someone else.

Conclusion

- What should we do with damaging information?
 - Pray and leave the matter with God—Philippians 4:6
 - Go directly to the persons involved in a spirit of meekness and restoration—Galatians 6:1
 - Seek to protect the victim of the slander—Proverbs 10:12
- Galatians 5:13-15--If we don't eliminate gossip and slander for our conversations, we become like social cannibals who devour one another.
- The choice is clear. We can chomp down on every bit of gossip that come along and participate in all the backbiting that is involved with slander. Or we can cleanse our palate with love and practice the genuine freedom that is available only through God's grace.
- Before we speak we need to ask ourselves one simple question. Does what I am about to say minister grace.