

Psst! Have You Heard...?

Leviticus 19:11-18

Skip Heitzig

February 11, 2018

connect
groups

PATH

The sin of gossip has never made it into the same lists as murder and manslaughter. It's regarded as one of the "little sins" that even Christians are unwilling to avoid. But gossip is in the same family as murder because it assassinates a person's character. It destroys reputations, disrupts families, divides friends, and causes heartbreak. And the problem isn't just in the speaking but in the hearing as well. Pastor Skip looked at a direct command *not* to gossip, sharing four practical observations about our words:

I. Words Are Personal (vv. 11-12, 14, 16)

III. Words Are Powerful (v. 16)

II. Words Have Potential (vv. 11-15)

IV. Words Should Be Purposeful (vv. 17-18)

POINTS

Words Are Personal:

- The word *you* is used fifty-four times in Leviticus 19, where God gives a direct command not to gossip along with other general rules drawn from the Ten Commandments about how to use our speech.
- The average person spends one-fifth of his or her life talking. We have incredible capability to express ourselves verbally and lots of opportunities to do so. But that brings up a challenge: because our words are also written—on paper and computers, on social media and in texts—we are moving toward progressively less personal ways of communicating.
- We must beware of thin relationships—"friends" we've never met and people we follow without knowing more than what they ate for breakfast.
- **Probe:** Pastor Skip noted that "real fellowship isn't limited to 140 characters." What are the pros and cons of social media and texting? What efforts do you make to ensure you are developing deeper relationships with people?

Words Have Potential:

- In Leviticus 19, God focused mainly on the negative potential of words, giving commands on how not to use them. We need to use restraint with our words.
- If we reverse those negative commands, we can see positive ways to speak. For example, "you shall not swear by My name falsely" (v. 12) can be seen conversely as a command to pray, worship, intercede, and bless in the Lord's name.
- Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." Proverbs 12:18 says, "There is one who speaks like the

piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health." Some words encourage; others discourage. Some impoverish; others enrich.

- James 3 describes the incredible potential of the tongue, making it clear that only God can help us control ours.
- **Probe:** Read James 3:2-12. What points stick out to you? Discuss why we should seek God's help in controlling our tongues.

Words Are Powerful:

- God directly commands us not to be talebearers. A talebearer wants you to have a negative opinion about the person they're telling you about.
- The difference between a talebearer and a concerned friend is the difference between a butcher and a surgeon; both cut the meat, but with totally different purposes in mind.
- It's easy in church circles to bear tales, couching gossip in holy-sounding language—a "concern" about someone or a prayer that casts the person being prayed about in a bad light. Because it's a prayer, people will tend to think it must be true, whether it is or not.
- How do you know if you're spreading gossip or not? Do you raise your voice to share it, or lower it? "A whisperer separates the best of friends" (Proverbs 16:28).
- **Probe:** Review the list in Proverbs 6:16-19 of things God hates. How many of them have to do with words? Which do you think is most dangerous, and why?

Words Should Be Purposeful:

- God describes gossip as "[hating] your brother in your heart" (Leviticus 19:17). Our words reflect what's going on inside

our thought life. Words are a gauge of the heart.

- As Jesus said, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).
- Washing a mouth out with soap doesn't get to the root of the problem—but love does. Love "does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6).
- Gossip comes from people who hate, not people who love their neighbors as themselves (see Leviticus 19:18). We love others when we go to them directly with the issue we have with them. Matthew 18 lays out Jesus's protocol for nipping gossip in the bud.
- The reason why so many mouths are opened in gossip is because there are so many open ears wanting to hear it.
- Review Pastor Skip's five questions to ask when someone gives you a bad report on someone else:
 - "Why are you telling me?" Have they already gone to the person directly and need your help as a witness? Or do they just want to gossip?
 - "Where did you get your info?" Direct experience or hearsay?
 - "Have you gone to that person directly?" Matthew 18 tells us to.
 - "Have you checked the facts for yourself?" Always a good idea.
 - "Can I quote you on this?" This is the real litmus test for their intentions.
- **Probe:** Have you ever applied this list to a situation? If so, what were the results? If not, what effect do you think it would've had on a gossipy conversation?

PRACTICE

Connect Up: Knowing that God hates words that are divisive, discouraging, and destructive, are you willing to ask Him if you need to work on any of these types of speaking? Read Matthew 5:11-16. If you are the light of the world, how should that affect your speech? What does it mean to bear God's image instead of being a talebearer?

Connect In: What are the effects of talebearing in the body of Christ? Read Matthew 18:15-17. What would happen to gossip if Christians put Jesus' words into practice in everyday life? Will you commit to trying it out the next time you face such a situation?

Connect Out: How you deal with gossip as a Christian can really set you apart from the pack, whether it's at work, at the gym, or in your neighborhood. And how you handle it (especially when it affects you personally) matters to God. Read 1 Peter 2:12. Discuss when to tell the truth, when to be silent (see Exodus 14:14), and when to confront (see Matthew 18)—but remember: do it all with love (see Colossians 3:14).