

# ***“Speaking from the Heart”***

## **Lesson Four: The Gossip Grapevine**

**Dalraida Church of Christ, Summer 2025**

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☞ *“A gossiping tongue brings an angry face” (Proverbs 25:23).*

One man walks up to another and says, “Hello! I’m surprised to see you. I heard you were dead.” The other replies, “Well, as you can see, that information is incorrect.” The first replies, “I’m not so sure. I heard it from a very reliable source.”

This lesson discusses a great evil—the gossip grapevine.

☞ “The words of a gossip are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body” (Proverbs 18:8).

☞ “Dainty morsels”— the verse describes the avidity with which people swallow tales of scandal; “sweet morsels,” which are greedily swallowed; Such words are like dainties, eagerly swallowed, because inviting to the taste.

☞ “Innermost parts of the body”—You cannot “unspeak” gossip. You cannot “unhear” slanderous innuendos. The ONLY option for Christians who are reflecting the accent of Christ and the compassion of God, is to stop the ears up and NEVER hear or shut the mouths and never speak! “Toxic talk” is a malignant cancer to one’s inner-self. The Christian must have a “no-tolerance” policy toward gossip!

☞ The word hisses (“gossSSIP”) as it is spoken indicating its poisonous intent.

- ☞ The English etymology is interesting. Its origin is in the Old English word *godsibb* which was originally used to denote a “sponsor or godparent.” It is derived from God + *sibb* “relative” (see sibling). In its earliest use it denoted an association of trusting confidence and well-being. The sense was extended in Middle English to “a familiar acquaintance, a friend, neighbor” (c. 1300), especially to women friends invited to attend a birth. This referenced those of a close community association who often were privy to intimate personal details. Later this word referenced “anyone engaging in familiar or idle talk” (1560s).
- Eventually, ☞ any association with sincere trust and concern was removed and all that remained was the action of disclosing intimate details of a person. The word that was once referred to a close and intimate associate became a term describing the vilest betrayal. So, the biblical Hebrew and Greek terms used to describe this treachery were translated with “gossip.” Evil had corrupted a godly term.

Biblically the English “gossip” refers to evil actions, attitudes, and intentions.

- “Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things” (1 Timothy 3:11).
- ☞ The “gossip” in the Greek is *διαβόλους*. *Diábolos* is the root of the English word, “Devil.”
- In secular Greek the term was used to describe a “backbiter”—one who accused or slandered another not present. It literally refers to one speaking in such a way that another is destroyed.
- ☞ The profile of a *Busybody/Tattler*. Such a person is a nosey newsmonger who delights in gathering and spreading private personal information. And then twisting it so that it communicates the most ungodly suspicions. (2 Thessalonians 3:11, “(W)e hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies.”)
- ☞ The profile of the *Whisperer*. One who breaks confidence and reveals secrets about others. The privacy and personal rights of the targeted subject are disregarded. Personal respect for the target is non-existent. The motive is often pride as one wants to appear “important.”

Proverbs 11:13, “One who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, but one who is trustworthy conceals a matter.”

- 📖 The profile of the *Slanderer*. This is the deadliest evil. One seeks deliberate damage; savagely crushing the target. The term “back-stabbing” and “character assassination” aptly describe them. The intentions are wholly murderous! The attitude is wholly ungodly! Romans 1:30—“God haters”

Even though Christians know gossip is sinful, they are addicted to it! There is an insatiable appetite for some secret insight into another’s life. Gossip has fueled anger and bitterness. Gossip has ruined lives, marred reputations, and destroyed careers. Gossip plants a seed of suspicion in another’s thoughts and there is no way the victim can erase that suspicion! Very few have never been pumped for information by a gossip and used to further devilish destruction.

NOTE: It is critical to note that one must identify those who have left the Faith, teach doctrinal error, or live contrary to God’s commands. Such must be “marked” and if they refuse admonition and correction, they should not be in fellowship. (2 Timothy 1:15; 1 Corinthians 5:11; Ephesians 5:11; etc.). 📖 “Marking” those who are contrary to God’s commands is not the evil of gossip (Romans 16:17-18). Some attempt to use the Bible’s warnings of gossip to evade the Bible’s requirements of exclusivity.

### 📖 The Rapidity of the Gossip Grapevine

Think about how the growth of the grapevine illustrates the dangerous growth of gossip.

Grapevines exhibit a distinct annual growth cycle, marked by periods of dormancy, budbreak, rapid shoot growth, flowering, fruit development, and harvest. The cycle typically begins with dormancy in winter, followed by budbreak and rapid shoot growth in spring. It is amazing at the speed with which the grapevines grow—you prune them back and the next summer they are back and stronger!

📖 The Grapevine Gossip grows faster than any other form of human communication. 📖 Gossip travels at the speed of light—especially with today’s social media!

📖 If you want news to spread, find the leading gossip and tell them and watch how fast news circulates.

Gossip’s motivations have been identified by behavioralists. Their studies are enlightening in our age of technology. The gossip is a “socially, addicted, obsessed person.” 📖 Why does gossip quickly spread?

The human desire for social connection and belonging. According to psychologist Susan Krauss Whitbourne, “Gossip is a way for people to feel connected to each other, to be in the know, not the last to know.” It’s a way for individuals to bond and feel like they are part of a community. It is a way to stroke Self’s yearning for importance.

📖 The emotional charge it carries. Author and researcher Brene Brown notes, “For many people, gossip is a way to bond with others over shared negative feelings about a third party. It’s a form of emotional connection.” This emotional charge can propel gossip forward as people seek validation from one another. “Let’s meet for lunch and ‘catch up’ on all the news.”

📖 The inherent human tendency to be curious. You may have noticed that when someone says, “I have some juicy gossip,” it’s hard not to lean in and listen. As human beings, we are naturally drawn to new and potentially provocative information. Psychologist Frank T. McAndrew explains, “Gossip is attractive because it feeds into our desire to know about others and our social environment.” The gossip cannot help but ask more and more questions. When those questions are not answered satisfactorily, the gossip presses onward. An amazing hypocrisy is seen in their comment, “Let’s not talk any more about this” and then they snap up even the slightest hint too continue.

📖 Today’s social media platforms are 📖 yesterday’s gossip grapevines! I am amazed that the popularity of such is embraced so strongly and defended so passionately by Christians (Matthew 12:36-37). Instead of keeping your family’s information just between your family members, one click sends it worldwide! They serve to bolster pride, seek and further rumors, and instantly spread news that cannot be validated. I refer to social media as the tech’s “STDs.” They are Socially Transmitted Delusions! “In today’s technologically connected world, gossip can move faster than ever. With the click of a button, a piece of gossip can be shared with hundreds, if not thousands, of people.” And the Christian is 📖 willingly CONTROLLED by this evil. “All things are permitted for me, but not all things are of benefit. All things are permitted for me, but I will not be mastered (controlled) by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

- James 3:5 uses the metaphor of a raging fire to illustrate this evil spread. “(T)he tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!”
- Hesiod (a Greek poet 700 years before Christ): “Gossip is mischievous; light and easy to raise but...hard to get rid of.”

☞ Gossip cannot be controlled. Gossip’s target cannot defend against the evil barbs and suspicions of character assassination. Gossip is “back-biting”—a lethal attack from the rear!

### The Irreparable Damage

Gossip is a great evil and bears evil fruits. It is the product of a “depraved mind” (Romans 1:28-32, “God gave them up to a depraved mind, to do those things that are not proper”).

Consider the term a “depraved mind.” This literally refers to a mind, or state of thought, rejected after test. A reprobate mind; a mind destitute of judgment; an undiscerning, or injudicious mind; a mind not perceiving or approving what is good, either in principle or practice; a mind void of all proper knowledge and relish of what is excellent. It is this depravity that embraces gossip.

☞ Gossip destroys our relationships.

Trust is critical to relationships. A sign of deep personal trust and relationship is being entrusted with secrets. The more someone entrusts their fears, loves, scars and dreams, the more vulnerable they become to you. In your hands they have placed great trust that you will keep. “I’ll open my heart and show you inside” (“*Don’t want to lose you now,*” Gloria Estafan).

Once your trust has been compromised, the victim will quickly retreat. In the place of a confident and safe relationship they find a deep emotional pain. The most discouraging aspect of communication is the gossip!

The adage is true: “*Whoever gossips TO you will gossip ABOUT you!*”

The gossip is a predator! The gossip will see others in the worst possible light. There will be no real kindness, sympathy or self-disclosure. Distrust festers. Fear grows. Loneliness deepens. And this happens quickly!

Gossip quickly destroys every good thing that God designed the Christian’s communication to do!

☞ Gossip destroys our reputation.

Proverbs 22:1, “A good name is to be more desired than great wealth; favor is better than silver and gold.”

Shakespeare’s *Othello* cites an agonized Cassio crying: “Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself and what remains is bestial.”

What value can be placed on your reputation? Once marred it cannot be retrieved. Excuses, apologies, and even complete retractions will never reclaim the lie’s damage or the broken confidence that some will harbor.

“Gossip writes itself in indelible ink!”

“The lash of a whip raises welts; but the lash of a tongue breaks bones. Many have been killed by the sword, but not as many as by the tongue” (Jewish Proverb).

☞ Gossip inflicts deep, emotional pain.

Job 5:21, “You will be hidden from the scourge of the tongue.” (See Psalm 31:20).

Gill: Hidden from “Satan, the accuser of the brethren; or rather from the evil tongue of wicked men, their slanders, calumnies, and reproaches; the tongue is a small weapon, but it is a cutting one; it is like a scourge or whip, with which wicked men strike hard: the enemies of Jeremiah encouraged one another to smite him with their tongue (“Come and let’s devise plans against Jeremiah...Come, and let’s strike at him with our tongue, and let’s pay no attention to any of his words,” Jeremiah 18:18); and a sad thing it is to be under the lash of some men’s tongues, and a great mercy it is to be delivered from them: God does sometimes hide his people, and keeps them secretly, as in a pavilion, from the strife of tongues.”

### ☞ The Diabolical Motivation

God did not place other people on this earth for ☞ our entertainment. God expects His People to show respect to ALL. Respect eliminates belittling, bitterness, selfish using, and any other abusive behavior. God expects His People to be "Good Samaritans."

☞ Gossip is abuse. It is initiated by a wolfish spirit seeking to disrespect, belittle and treat savagely others. The base motive is that gossip seeks to tear down others and to build up Self! Here are some devilish attitudes that birth a gossiping (wagging) tongue!

The love of darkness. Gossip is cheap, cowardly entertainment which focuses on the negatives in someone's life. That targeted individual is viewed as a challenge to the gossip's value. The Lord exposed this attitude by saying, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

Tragically, people are entertained by the suffering of others. Many are upset by the barbaric gladiator arena where human value did not exist. But such eagerly embrace the gossip destroying victims by imagined slanderous actions; by insinuations and innuendos that plant "dark thoughts" in our minds. Many enjoy slicing and dicing another and munching on the tasty morsels of gossiping lies! Is this really understood by the Christian?

Exactly what does "juicy gossip" mean?

Remember the next time someone wants to "share" a snack of "tasty morsels" these words of Wisdom: "The words of a gossip are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body" (Proverbs 18:8).

☞ Pride. Diotrephes was a "gossip." "Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with malicious words; and not satisfied with this" (3 John 9-10). Note these highlights about ☞ Diotrephes:

- He "loved" the wrong priority. His singular ambition was ungodly!
- He was "malicious." The word describes a babbler or trifler who was known to berate idly or mischievously. He was addicted to this behavior. The word "prate," (*φλυαρέω*, *phluareō*;) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It literally means to "overflow with talk"; to talk much without purpose; to run on and on in talking, without making sense.
- He was "not satisfied."

### The Gossip is...

☞ Selfish. Gossip is a powerful tool for discrediting the competition. Satan has deceived many with this misdirected management ploy: "Lowering another's reputation will lift your reputation and advancement potential."

☞ Proud. Gossip feeds pride because the Gossip is "in the know" about secret facts. Privileged information is viewed by some as a trophy to be displayed! Flaunting one's status as one of the privileged few, the Gossip leaks just enough information to put himself in the spotlight and to assure that others will return to find out "anything new."

A heart full of pride. Luke 18:9-14 records a parable that many do not personally apply BUT they see its clear application to others. God looks at each personally. God is not in the comparison game. It does not matter what so-and-so is or does. It matters what I personally do! (Recall Isaiah 6:5 "Woe to me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips" and the uncomfortable reality that many have never, and will never, confess they have "unclean lips").

☞ A discomfoting query: Do you find it more comfortable to see what others do wrong than to admit what you do wrong? Do you feel the burden of the Lord's words? (Matthew 7:1-4, "Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and look, the log is in

your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye!").

☞ Guilty. Gossip is used to make another compromised so the Gossip does not feel guilty in being compromised. By announcing the sins of others, we gloss over our personal sins and that makes us feel the sorrow of sin less. Compared to a murderer or a fornicator, our anger and self-righteousness do not seem nearly as serious. In fact, we can congratulate ourselves! By this comparison we not only feel less guilty but even a bit self-righteous and commend ourselves on how well we speak, look, and act!

"If anyone thinks that he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting, but to himself alone, and not to another. For each one will bear his own load" (Galatians 6:3-5).

Some are so deluded they think their conversations are NEVER wrong. But at the Judgment their "unclean lips" will be announced and their eternal destiny set (Matthew 7:21-23)—"BUT LORD..."

Do not allow Satan to deceive you into thinking you are not guilty as you compare the different aspects of your life with others. "We do not presume to rank or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they have no understanding (2 Corinthians 10:12).

### **Gossip Fails the Love Test**

☞ Authentic Christianity requires confrontation. A brother or sister who is sinning ought to concern us. A brother or sister who is burdened with struggles should be encouraged by our support (Galatians 6:1-2, "Brothers and sisters, even if a person is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual are to restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you are not tempted as well. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." BUT do not forget verse 5, "each one will bear his own load").

☞ Speaking from the heart requires accountability. This action will protect the boundaries of God's holy People. Three texts highlight this intervention that God expects:

- "(L)et him know that the one who has turned a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).
- "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).
- "If anyone sees his brother or sister committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will, for him, give life to those who commit sin not leading to death" (1 John 5:16).

☞ Intervention seeking to bring realization and repentance follows the "love test" of 1 Corinthians 13. No Gossip can pass the "Love Test."

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, "Love is patient, love is kind, it is not jealous; love does not brag, it is not arrogant. It does not act disgracefully, it does not seek its own benefit; it is not provoked, does not keep an account of a wrong suffered, it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; it keeps every confidence, it believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

### **☞ Pruning the Grapevine**

The devilish morsels of gossip are available to all to distribute. Gossip continues to do its destructive damage. Gossip continues savagely to slice and dice as it seeks self-promotion at the expense of victims. The grapevine stalk has become thick and strong with popular acceptance. Its roots go deep into all areas of our lives. But we can prune that evil grapevine. In fact, we are biblically bound to confront and remove that evil. How can we accomplish this?

☞ Honor the individual. Respect ALL with the respect that God gives ALL. Does the conversation need to be WITH the person rather than ABOUT the person? Is the conversation honoring (Romans 12:10, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor").



- *"Be devoted"*—Barnes, "The word used here occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It properly denotes tender affection, such as what subsists between parents and children; and it means that Christians should have similar feelings toward each other, as belonging to the same family, and as united in the same principles and interests."
- *"Brotherly love"*—Meyer, "fondly affectionate; an expression purposely chosen, because Christians are brothers and sisters, as the word is also in classical Greek the usual one for family affection."
- *"Give preference"*—Gill, "In honour preferring one another; saints should think honourably of one another, and entertain an honourable esteem of each other; yea, should esteem each other better than themselves; and not indulge evil surmises, and groundless jealousies of one another, which is contrary to that love that thinks no evil. They should speak honourably of each other in Christian company, and discourage that evil practice of whisperings, backbitings, and innuendos; they should treat each other with honour and respect in their common conversation, and especially when met together as a church of Christ. They should go before each other in giving honour, and showing respect, as the word signifies: they should set each other an example; and which also may be taken into the sense of the word, should prevent one another, not waiting until respect is shown on one side to return it again."

Christians should take the lead in showing honor and not in spreading gossip. Vincent, "In honor preferring one another (τῇ τιμῇ ἀλλήλους προηγούμενοι). The verb occurs only here. It means to go before as a guide."

Is it possible that the target of the gossip could be misrepresented, betrayed, or slandered by this talk? Why do you instantly accept the negative? Christians must take the lead in countering the slanderous accusations!

☞ Identify the source. Be aware that any news that is NOT firsthand is questionable. A question that will often shut-down the wagging tongue asks, "Who told you this?" The devilish gossips often try to validate their sin with the ambiguous, "Well THEY say this..." Or, "There are MANY who..." Vague documentation should NEVER be accepted.

If the source cannot be identified or validated as fact, all should be disregarded! This applies bluntly to anonymous letters that accuse with slanderous gossip. Such sources should instantly be rejected!

☞ Guard the confidential. If someone is sharing information that you suspect is privileged you should ask: "Do I need to hear/know this? Should you be telling me this?" You can shut the mouth of the Gossip by asking, "May I quote you on this?" The Gossip needs to be confronted with the appropriateness of the rumors and insinuations being spread!

☞ Resist the temptation to pry. The devilish ploy of gossip is a strong temptation. Do not go fishing for details you do not need to know. Seek only the information about people's life that is necessary so you can help bear their burdens and gently restore them to spiritual health and fellowship (Galatians 6:1-2, "Brothers and sisters, even if a person is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual are to restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you are not tempted as well. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ").

☞ Strive to silence Gossip. Communicate God's intolerance of gossip. An amazing fact, gossip is encouraged because those listening are afraid of offending the whisperer or the busybody. When subtle suggestions are ineffective in stopping the Gossip, you must be blunt: "This is wrong. This kind of talk must stop now!"

"For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no gossip, quarreling quiets down" (Proverbs 26:20).

☞ Busy yourself serving. Idleness is a fertile seedbed for gossip. "(T)hey also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also they become gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention" (1 Timothy 5:13).

The more we work and are involved, the less time we have to listen to speaking that is careless, irresponsible, unloving and selfish.

🔑 A behavioral study concluded that when a group is speaking positively, that is a proactive maneuver that prevents gossip. But if the group is speaking negatively, the conversation devolves further. One of the amazing points from this study was that when a group is consumed with negativism, IF a person takes a strong positive position, then the negativism decreases and vanishes! This is a biblical principle.

🔑 "But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus at Damascus" (Acts 9:27).

🔑 The 2100-year-old wisdom of ben Sirach, "Do not believe everything you hear."