

## **Sermon Series: Necessary Sins – “Gossip”**

**Scripture:** Psalm 139: 23, 24; Rom. 12: 2, 17, 21; Eph. 4:29; Prov. 16:28, 17:4, 18:8, 25: 9,10, 26:22; 1 John 1:9

**Summary:** Words do hurt; use them wisely when speaking of another person; we can leave long lasting scars with our words; we can actually murder the reputation of another. Gossip is unacceptable behavior within God’s culture.

### **Opening**

**Video Clip – Andy Griffith, “Those Gossipin’ Men” 1961. (2:00 to 3:18)**

Looks like a few of the ladies in Mayberry understand the definition of gossip. Do you know someone who was hurt by gossip or maybe you have firsthand experience on how devastating gossip can be? I hate gossip I despise it! Why, because my wife Gail and I are victims of gossip. A few years back, we lived in different community, it was a smaller town with good-hearted loving people. Our situation was a little bit like Mayberry. Private personal information was shared and each time it was repeated it got embellished.

The information started with the phrase, “I am not supposed to be telling you this, but do you know...?” A couple of weeks later, at a men’s meeting at the church, not in a private place, no, in the middle of a men’s meeting I was confronted with the information that had been told about Gail and me. My reply was, “You got to be kidding me!” Sadly enough, some of those good-hearted loving people in that community actually believed the malarkey being said about us. People we had known for several years would turn and walk the other way when they would see us out in public. I saw the heartache gossip caused my wife and it actually caused me to step away from ministry.

Gossip hurts! It hurts the teller, it hurts the listener, and it hurts the person being gossiped about. Gossip is a lose – lose - lose situation.

Do you know someone who is a gossip? Have you been the person gossiped about? Do you have a juicy story you wish you could tell someone, right now?

In our culture gossip is acceptable behavior, one of those “Necessary Sins”. - Two weeks ago, Doc, began a series entitled “Necessary Sins”.

Doc spoke on “Lying” and then on “Anger” he chose those topics because he is good at both of them. And he asked me to cover “Gossip” because I’m good at that. Next week is Lust and I’m not sure who is better at that! (That’s humor)

Even though our culture may think these “Necessary Sins” are acceptable, in God’s culture, gossip is an UNacceptable sin. As Jesus-followers, we are not to conform to the culture of this world.

*Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God.*

Do you see what happens when we accept the way our culture thinks? We can become so used to lying – so used to justifying our anger – so used to gossiping and listening to gossip that it seems to be normal behavior for a Jesus-follower. Pay close attention to what Paul said, when we, Jesus-followers... **“become so well adjusted to our culture”** ... our hearts become callous to these sins and we are no longer convinced they are detestable sins before God. That being said...

Do you remember this childhood chant – “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never harm me”?

My technical response to that chant is -BALONEY! - The tragedy is that we have grown up behaving like such a statement is true. We tell ourselves that gossip is okay because words cannot harm, Again I say, BALONEY!

Some people may say, “But it is only words”, - suck it up buttercup – get over it - shake it off and move on, ya big wimp! Scars from sticks and stones eventually heal. But scars from hurtful words can take an entire lifetime to overcome, and in some cases, will plague a person forever. Do you remember a time when words hurt you? Do you still remember what was said to you? I do. I remember harsh words said to me from my childhood and that’s a long time ago.

Before we dive any deeper into our subject matter, I want us to revisit Psalm 139: 23 and 24. Each week, during this series, we have read, and some have made this their prayer. If we seriously don’t want to, “...*become well adjusted to your culture...*” God will show us where we need to change if we ask Him. Please read aloud or pray aloud these verses with me again this morning...

### Scripture

*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Now, let's make sure we are all on the same page with the term. I could give you a clinical definition, but I want it to be understandable. So, I turned to Mom. You know mom's definition of things is always applicable. One Mom said...

“You can share something true and it still be gossip, because there are true things, private things, that should not be shared, but most gossip, is usually never the full truth. And it is only one side of the story, remember, there are two sides to every story.” (Sounds like a mom, doesn't it?)

King Solomon, the wisest man ever, confirms how deep people are hurt from gossip. He writes in Proverbs 18:8 and again in Proverbs 26:22. Twice he pens this proverb so it must be important. He writes...

### **Scripture**

*The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.*

Reading this verse from the NIV it gives the idea that gossip is good. It's like eating a piece of a big juicy steak – the aroma - the flavor – the texture – Mmmm! Can't you just taste it in your mouth?

But what Solomon is saying is just the opposite. He is saying Gossip is like acid reflux, you know the burning in your throat and that awful taste it leaves behind.

King James Version reads...

*The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.*

Look at this verse again, the “WORDS” of a gossip are “WOUNDS”! Get the picture? Your words of gossip, my words of gossip, penetrates to the heart and mind of the listener wounding their opinion of an innocent third party.

Sadly in our culture, with so much technology, we don't need a warm body to listen to our gossip we can post it on many social media platforms like Facebook – Instagram – Twitter – Snapchat – to name a few, and degrade a person's behavior or character and not be confronted.

### **Illustration**

According to Pew Research Center 32% of our teens have had gossip spread about them on social media. Cyberbullying is so bad teens will go as far as to change schools trying to get away from the bullying. Bully victims are between 2 to 9 times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims. Parents pay attention! 10 to 14 year old girls may be at even higher risk for suicide from bullying/gossip. 160,000 kids stay home from school every day because of the fear of bullying. Folks this epidemic is not only among our children.

Pew Research also found that 40 percent of adults have been victims of online/ social media abuse. That's not a statistic adults can afford to take lightly. Bullying / gossip hurts no matter what your age, no matter the avenue it is conveyed, left unchecked, can affect you mentally, emotionally, and physically for a very long time. And not only you, but your family, I know, I have felt it and you have too.

T/S Folks, let's be honest with one another, we love juicy gossip - How do I know this? Just look at the newsstands the next time you check out at Kroger - Walmart - nearly any checkout counter is loaded with Gossip magazines - "The National Enquirer" - "People" - "US Weekly" - "OK" just to name a few! -

So, why do we Jesus-followers enjoy juicy gossip just as much as non-believers do?

### Illustration

Well, I asked a few people what they thought about gossip and here is what I found out. One said, "I guess when I gossip it makes me feel kind of important. THAT'S SICK! I've got the power in the situation and all of a sudden, I feel superior." THAT'S TWISTED! Another said, "When I'm hearing gossip, it makes me feel better about myself. I mean, when someone else looks bad, it makes me feel good about myself." ARE YOU KIDDING ME! Gossip makes you feel better?

Listen, if you have gossiped or passed gossip along, I am not trying to single you out. At one time or another all of us have gossiped. Our culture may say, it's okay to gossip about one another, but in God's culture it is unacceptable behavior. God hates gossip, it hurts His children and He doesn't like it when His children are hurt. Just like we don't like it when our children, grandchildren, spouse, are hurt.

We, as Jesus-followers, are called to a higher standard than what our culture promotes. We should live in a way that is pleasing to our Savior Jesus Christ. Our culture has twisted so much bad into good it is pathetic!

### Illustration

Researchers at the University of Texas and the University of Oklahoma found that if two people share negative feelings about a third person, they are likely to feel closer to each other than they would if they both felt positively about him or her. (I have a hard time believing this, that's twisted)

T/S I am the Connections Pastor here at Cap City and I oversee the Life Group Ministry as well as our Seniors Ministry. I guess I got this Life Group thing all wrong! According to this research, if I really want to connect people to one another I need to encourage them to talk negatively about a third party. Just think of the mess Cap City would be in if we were to follow the ways of our culture rather than the culture God wants us to follow.

So how do we overcome this sin of gossip? Let's turn to a very good instructional manual we call the Bible. Inside this instruction manual we find the writings of a fellow named Paul. This dude, who used to be known as Saul, was a high-ranking Jewish leader that persecuted the church. He would go from town to town hunting down those who were Jesus-followers, placing some of them in prison and even had some of them killed.

I don't know if Paul read Psalms 139 before he left for Damascus, but God showed him the offenses he had in his life on the way there. After he understood the error of his ways, Paul became a Jesus-follower. Now can you imagine the amount of gossip coming from the Jewish and Christian community concerning Paul. The Jews verbally ripping him apart because he accepted the Way and the Christian gossip saying, "You can't trust Paul, he is just faking it to deceive us." But Paul, in his effort to help the early church, and us, to understand how to overcome gossip. He writes in Ephesians 4:29.

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

Here, again, is one of those imperatives Doc pointed out last week, "DO NOT It's just the opposite of the NIKE phrase, "Just Do It". Paul says, DON'T do it. So, then it is okay for me to think it? What, are you lookin' for a loop hole? CHECK THIS OUT! If you think an unwholesome thought about someone long

enough you will convince yourself, it is true. So the best thing to do is kick that unwholesome thought out of your head.

So, when we begin a conversation or thought about someone, we need to ask the question...

“Is my conversation helpful or hurtful?”

Two girls got on a bus and they started talking to each other. “Did you hear that Sarah got engaged yesterday?” “No, I never knew that!” “That’s amazing that Sarah got engaged!!” “But she is so sloppy and unorganized! How is she going to run a household?”

“She is never on time. Also, she cooked for us once and her food was terrible! Her new husband is going to starve!!” “She spends money faster than she receives it. How will she get through the month?”

So it went, on and on and on. Behind the two girls was another lady who suddenly spoke up.

“I am sorry to interrupt you girls, but I wanted to introduce myself. My son just got engaged to Sarah. Now that I know this information, I will tell my son everything that you said about Sarah and he must break off the engagement immediately. I will also tell all my friends how grateful I am to you girls for letting me know what Sarah is really like”.

The girls were shocked. They started to stutter and struggled to find the right words. “No, No,” they said with trepidation. Please do not let your son break the engagement.”

“Sarah is wonderful! She will make a great mother! She really will!” “She is so warm, friendly and caring”.

“We were just talking. We never meant her any harm”. “Please don’t break the engagement” they pleaded.

However, the woman was adamant.

“Thank you, but based on what you said, I will make every effort to break it up as soon as possible. The girl you described sounds like a terrible person. I will inform my son immediately.”

The girls were horrified and crushed. After a short silence, the lady turned to the girls and said, “I am not the boy’s mother, but imagine if I was?”

“Do you know the damage you caused to this couple? You almost destroyed a potential family just because you had nothing else to talk about?”

“Words either build or destroy, use them wisely” the woman said sternly and with that she got off the bus.

**T/S** “Is what I’m about to say helpful or hurtful?”

Or do you disguise your gossip with what Craig Groechel calls a “compliment sandwich”. That is where you say something nice about somebody and since you said something nice you add a slice of gossip and then say something nice. Let me give you an example:

Someone may ask, “Hey Vern! what do you think about the elders bringing on James Driver as our Growth Pastor? “Oh man, that was a great decision! He’s really a great guy, a good teacher, he thinks he’s athletic, he’s part of the softball team here at Cap City. He’s a tax auditor for the Feds, but he’s really not all that trustworthy, cheats on his income taxes, late for just about every event, talks too much in staff meeting – but he is really a great guy, an asset to the church staff.” You do realize I’m joking, right?

“Is what I’m about to say helpful or hurtful?” Even if I add something nice about the person it doesn’t change the fact that it is still gossip. Even if I say – bless their heart – at the end doesn’t make it right either.

Now let’s go to a whole ‘nother level – sometimes as Jesus-followers You know where the best gossip can take place? In a prayer group. Some of you know what I’m talking about, when they ask for prayer request and someone says, Oh yes, we need to pray for Linda, she’s been staying late at her boyfriend’s. I drove by around 7:00 last night and her car was there. I went back around 10:00 and her car was still there. And when I went to work, I drove by his house and her car was still there. She is shacking up with her boyfriend; she needs our prayers we need to pray God would show her the error of her ways. We need to pray for Linda.

**T/S** We know what was said about Linda was true. Her car was seen parked at her boyfriend’s house at all hours of the night. So, this truth becomes fair game for us to talk about. Right? Wrong! Scripture doesn’t say if it’s true it’s okay to share the information. It says...

*...only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

You see, the truth of the matter is Linda's car broke down and it was towed to her boyfriend's house so he could work on it for her. You know what's sad? I know of a lady who will not attend prayer groups because of the gossip that has gone on.

"Everything you say must be true, but everything that's true does not need to be said".  
(REPEAT PHRASE)

Next question to ask ourselves about our conversation is...

"Am I making private matters public?"

As a pastor, I have a wealth of private information told to me about – marriage problems – affairs - people who have turned their back on God – the heartache of a death or a divorce – the anguish and doubt of battling an injury or a disease – people healing from the hurt and scars of gossip.

When I meet with folks, I tell them there are three individuals who will know the content of our conversation. You, me, and God - the information goes no further. Why? Because I do not want to break a promise, I don't want to damage our friendship, and I don't want to be classified as a gossip and untrustworthy.

You remember Solomon, the wisest man ever, he said...

*"...don't betray another person's secret. Others may accuse you of gossip, and you will never regain your good reputation.*

When someone comes to you with a private matter, it needs to stay private.

Three preachers on fishing trip. The Methodist says, "Hey guys, since we're not catching anything, why don't we pass the time by sharing our secret sins?" The Pentecostal says, "I think that would be great!", but the Baptist says, "I don't know...I think that's a bad idea." After a half an hour of coaxing from the Methodist and Pentecostal, the Baptist finally agrees on the condition that he can go last. The Methodist begins, "I know you guys won't believe this, but every Friday night I go to the bar in the next town and get plastered!" The other two gasp and sit quietly. After about 5 minutes the Pentecostal says, "Ok. My turn. For the last 6 months, I have been having an affair with another woman." The other two gasp and sit quietly. An hour passes, and the Methodist and Pentecostal get impatient. "Brother, we told our secret sins; it's only fair

that you share yours too." The Baptist minister hangs his head, exhales deeply and says, "OK. You've got me. Here it is -- I am the worst gossip in town, and I can't wait to get back home!"

T/S Private things need to stay private.

Next question to ask ourselves is...

"Am I permitting others to gossip?"

Let's look at what Solomon says on this matter...

*Wrongdoers eagerly listen to gossip;*

Sadly enough, gossipers will easily find a listener to nibble on their "choice morsels" of fake news. A person who listens to gossip is a facilitator of sin – they even take part in sin.

In a study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found "It took the truth about six times as long as falsehood to reach 1,500 people."

T/S Research tells us there are many people who want to listen to gossip.

As Jesus-followers, we should not listen to gossip. Why? Because, when you permit - you promote.

If you are listening to gossip, then you are promoting gossip. If you listen to gossip you are participating in gossip. So, if someone comes up to you and says, "Hey I've just got to tell you this about so and so" or they say, "Have you heard this about so and so" and the coup de gra! of intros to gossip "I'm not supposed to tell you this but". When you hear opening statements like these you have a choice to make. You can listen or you can shut it down. It's going to be to be easy to turn away because of our propensity to sin – but do it – walk away – don't participate in sin.

### **Closing**

You remember I told you earlier my wife and I were victims of gossip. There is one part I left out. The seed of gossip was planted by a family member. They took what was private and twisted it and made it into a lie. Who would think it, a family member would share personal and private information? There was a lot of hurt feeling, damaged emotions and

damaged family relations. Gossip can and will leave scars which are very hard to heal. So, let me define gossip one more time.

Gossip is information shared, whether true or false, that will damage a person's emotions, self-worth, character, integrity and it demeans a child of God.

If you are caught up in gossip and looking for help? I want to share with you where you can get help. First, you need to admit it, then confess to Jesus and ask for forgiveness, and then go to the person you gossiped about and ask for forgiveness.

Let's turn again to our instructional manual, 1 John 1.9 NLT

*But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.*

What do you do if you have been hurt by gossip? First, do not try to get even.

In Romans chapter 12 verses 17 & 21 of our instructional manual reads.

*Never pay back evil with more evil. - Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.*

Gail and I did not retaliate against those who gossiped about us. Did I want to knock 'em in the head? You bet I did! But instead, we prayed for them. It has taken some time to feel whole again. The love of God, the love of good friends, and the love and grace of a God honoring church brought us healing.

You too can experience God's healing whether you sinned against someone by gossiping about them or your dealing with the hurt from gossip. Jesus died that you may find forgiveness, peace, and hope of a better life. If you want to learn more about the amazing grace God offers through His Son Jesus please come and talk to me, Doc, Steve, or one of our Elders we are more than happy to talk and pray with you. (Communion & Offering)