GOSSIP
A study from the series
What Keeps Me from Growing
by Woodrow Kroll

Today we’re going to address gossip. What is the meaning of the word. How to recognize gossip when you hear it. How to know whether or not you are gossiping. What the Bible says about gossip. And what is the cure for gossip.

Let’s Define Gossip: So what exactly is gossip? It’s spreading idle talk or rumor, especially about the personal or private affairs of other people. It’s most often useless or spiteful tales, almost always told behind the back of the person about whom you are gossiping.

Many magazines on the news stand are gossip magazines, keeping us current on the buzz about Hollywood stars, who’s hooking up with whom, who divorcing whom. It’s little wonder gossip is a big seller; it appeals to the baser instincts of people.

Various Words Used in Scripture

A. Hebrew word rakil
Leviticus 19:16 – “you shall not go about as a slanderer”
Proverbs 20:19 – “he who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets”
Jeremiah 6:28 – “rebellious, going about as a talebearer”

B. Greek word (psy-thuris-mos) psithurismos – “to whisper,” psst...
Romans 1:29 – “filled with unrighteousness, full of deceit, gossips, slanderers”
2 Corinthians 12:20 – “slanderers, gossip”

C. Greek word phluarus – “to babble”
1 Timothy 5:13 – “gossips and busybodies”

D. Greek word diabolos – “to slander”
1 Timothy 3:11 – “malicious gossips”
Titus 2:3 – “malicious gossips”

A gossip is a person who has privileged information about people, but instead of being discreet, reveals that information to those who have no business knowing it.

Gossip is not the same as simply disseminating information. We distinguish these in two ways:

1. The type of information shared. Gossips speak of the faults and failings of others or reveal potentially embarrassing or shameful details regarding the lives of others without their knowledge or approval.

2. Intent. Gossips often have the goal of building themselves up by making others look bad, and thus their intent is to exalt themselves.

How to Recognize Gossip

Gossip is one of the most dangerous sins because it is so subtle and ambiguous—many people can’t even recognize it. So here are some tips on how to identify gossip when you hear it.
1. Be concerned when you hear “secret information” being circulated or if you hear anyone else’s name is used in a conversation connected with that information. Gossip exists whenever persons “talk about others” in less than a favorable way.

2. Gossip often masquerades as “concern” for others.

You know how it goes. “I hate to say anything about this to you, but I’m ‘concerned’ about so and so.”

3. Sometimes a gossiper will seek you out as their “confidante,” someone to unload on about their “heavy heart” for another person.

They say to you. “I’m very troubled about so and so and I don’t know who else to talk to about it.” In reality, gossips are only interested in talking about people’s problems, not solving them. Proverbs 16:28 says, “A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.”

3. A gossip thrives on the negative, the secretive and the sensational.

Any person who is genuinely concerned about solving a problem will do the biblical thing. They will go to the person privately and confront them with their concern. Or they will go privately to their pastor so he can confront the person. If they come to you, it’s likely gossip and not concern.

4. In church, gossip is often passed along as a prayer request.

Church prayer meetings usually follow pretty much the same format. The leader asks for prayer requests and then members share them with others. Where the gossip occurs is when someone is having a potentially embarrassing personal hardship and has confided in one of the church members with a prayer request. That church member then airs this person’s “dirty laundry” (or their private pain) to others present under the guise of requesting prayer. Well, prayer is needed, but giving juicy, specific, intimate details that you were told in confidence is not needed. Even if couched in spirituality, it is still gossip.

Look, there are times when people need to confide their own problems with a friend. But you need to avoid revealing anything to a person who gossips because they can’t be trusted. Proverbs 11:13 says, “A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.”

How Do You Know Whether You Are Gossiping?

When you are telling a story or sharing information about someone else, ask yourself these five questions:

1. How certain am I that the facts are correct?
2. Was the information given in confidence?
3. Have I checked the facts with the person involved?
4. Am I telling this story to help build up others in Christ Jesus?
5. Could I share this information with the Lord Jesus; would He be happy to hear it?

“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” (Ephesians 4:29).
Seven Things to Remember from the Bible about Gossip

1. Gossip is as sinful as murder and will suffer the same consequences unless there is repentance (Romans 1:32).

2. God holds you accountable for your words (Matthew 12:36-37).

3. The person who gossips to you about others, also gossips to others about you.

4. Gossip & slander disqualify you for spiritual leadership (1 Timothy 3:11; James 3:2).

5. Gossip often thrives upon secrecy. Where secrecy is removed, gossip is hampered.

6. Gossip always contributes to a problem but never to a solution.

7. Gossip always distorts and exaggerates and is never a reliable source of truth.

What to Do about Gossip

1. If you have been a gossiper, confess this as sin and ask the Lord Jesus to forgive you.

2. "Repent" of the sin of gossip by turning in a new direction and surrendering your tongue to Christ, not to gossip or bad-mouth again (1 John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 7:10).

3. If you can’t say something good or encouraging about others, then don’t say anything at all (Ephesians 4:29).

4. Never criticize another person except to their own face with the intent to help them. Criticism can never be "constructive" if expressed to anyone other than the person you are talking about.

5. If your “friends” start bad-mouthing others to you, stop them in their tracks—refuse to be a partaker of their sins (1 Timothy 5:22).

6. Expose works of darkness by reporting gossip to the pastor that he may confront and offer correction. Gossip should be treated as any other vile sin (Ephesians 5:11). “I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence” (Psalm 39:1).

Gossip Poem

(Author unknown)

My name is Gossip.
I am a direct descendant of the father of lies.
I have no respect for justice.
I maim without killing.
I break hearts and ruin lives.
I am cunning and malicious and I gather strength with age.
The more I am quoted, the more I am believed.
My victims are helpless. They cannot protect themselves against me because I have no name and no face.

To track me down is impossible. The harder you try, the more elusive I become.
I am nobody’s friend.
Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.
I topple governments and wreck marriages.
I ruin careers and cause sleepless nights, heartaches, and indigestion.
I make innocent people cry in their pillows.
I make headlines and headaches.
Even my name hisses. I am called Gossip.
Five Actions That Are the Cure for Gossip

1. First, come to grips with how much God hates gossip.
Gossip-related sins appear three times on God's "hit list" of the six most abominable things He hates: "A lying tongue ... a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:17-19).

2. Confess gossip as sin and repent of it.
Maybe you don't think about this much, but gossip is sin. God thunders in His Ninth Commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16). This commandment focuses on the harm done to one's neighbor by the types of accusation and slander that make up gossip. So realize gossip is sin. Repent and determine never to gossip again.

3. Realize the source of gossip.
Do you know who originated gossip? Satan did. When you gossip, you are both copying Satan and being used by him. He not only started gossip, he now perpetuates it through human gossipers (Ephesians 2:2). Is that what you want?

4. Don't listen to gossip.
Don't kid yourself. It takes two to tango, and it takes two to gossip—one to talk and one to listen. Gossip would stop instantly if everyone would stop listening. Just listening to gossip makes you an accomplice. If anyone comes to you with gossip, gently and as tactfully as possible, tell them what they have to say doesn't concern you and you'd rather they keep it to themselves. Watch the look on their face.

5. Avoid hanging out with people who gossip.
"Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler" (Proverbs 20:19).

Now you know what gossip is. You know its source. More importantly you know how to stop gossip. So work to stop this, one of Satan's sneakiest but most deadly tools in his tool chest. Get control of your gossiping. You can do it. The Holy Spirit will help.
A BAKER’S DOZEN OF VERSES ABOUT GOSSIP

Proverbs 11:13 “Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.”

Proverbs 16:28 “A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.”

Proverbs 20:19 “Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler.”

Proverbs 6:16-19 “There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.”

Proverbs 26:20 “For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.”

1 Timothy 5:13 “Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.”

Leviticus 19:16 “You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord.”

Romans 1:29 “They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips.”

Proverbs 10:18 “The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever utters slander is a fool.”

Exodus 20:16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

Proverbs 26:22 “The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.”

2 Corinthians 12:20 “For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.”

1 Timothy 5:12-14 “And so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.”