

ARE YOU SERIOUS

“*Stop It: The Remedy*”

November 5, 2023

INTRO.: We welcome you this morning to our **ARE YOU SERIOUS** sermon series on forgiveness. I want to begin by telling you that God is speaking to me as I study for, write, and share these messages. The first person I preach these messages to is me. The first five weeks we concentrated on defining forgiveness: what it is and what it isn't, why it's important, when we should forgive, and how does it work. Two weeks ago, we began our second five-week series on the *Fruits of Unforgiveness*. Our first week was *I'm Mad*, how anger is one of the fruits of unforgiveness. Last week our theme was *Let Me Tell You*, gossip as another fruit of unforgiveness. We looked at the following:

THE WARNINGS IN SCRIPTURE

THE WHAT IT IS

THE WHAT IT IS NOT

THE WHY WE DO IT

There are two conclusions that we drew from the Scriptures concerning gossip:

**Gossip is sin*

**Gossip is destructive*

Once something is identified as a sin you can also count on it being destructive.

“Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.”

Since gossip is a sin and since it is so destructive here is what we need to do: (picture of a stop sign) STOP IT!!

As we begin, I am reminded of some of the sayings that don't make sense:

*There are three kinds of people in this world: those who can count and those who can't.

*A wise man once told me to always listen carefully because...um...I can't remember.

*It is not my fault that I never learned to accept responsibility!

*You can train a cat to do anything the cat wants to do at the moment it wants to do it.

*What if there were no hypothetical questions?

*Don't believe everything you think.

*Whatever you're doing, always give 100 percent. Unless you're donating blood.

*I want to be unique! Just like everyone else.

*The hot dog is the noblest of all dogs. It feeds the hand that bites it.

*A watched pot never boils

*I slept like a baby.

*What makes no sense now, will make perfect sense later.

Here is the one that really stands out to me:

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

That is a bunch of nonsense because every one of us knows that words can be very hurtful. They can be even more hurtful than some of the physical pain that any of us have endured.

As I was working through this message, I concluded that it would be better to split it into two messages. Today we will look at how to handle gossip when it comes to me and what I should do if I am the one who is gossiping. In the next message we will look at what I should do if I am the one who is being gossiped about. Three main points this morning:

LIVE LIKE IT (biblical foundation for stopping gossip)

EXPOSE IT (when others are gossiping to me)

ADMIT IT (when I am the one gossiping)

Remember the definition by Matthew Mitchell:

“bearing bad news behind someone's back out of a bad heart.”

So, why do you and I need to be so concerned about gossip? What does the Bible have to say for the follower of Christ? Our profession of faith is intimately tied to how we live.

Romans 12:1–2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. **2** Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Our challenge as believers is to:

LIVE LIKE IT

Let's look at a few passages of Scripture. First, in Proverbs:

Proverbs 6:16–19 There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: **17** haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, **18** a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, **19** a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

We like to talk about God's love, His grace, and His mercy but maybe not nearly as much about His justice, judgment, anger, and wrath. This is a list of things that God hates, and the way it is worded, there is an implication that there could be more. The last thing that is listed is:

"a man who stirs up dissension among brothers"

Isn't that what gossip accomplishes? People don't become more unified through gossip. One of the conclusions from last week is that *gossip is sin* and what does God think of sin? God hates sin! What does God say about unity? Let's read this together.

Ephesians 4:1–3 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

"I urge you:" present tense: to exhort (this is something Paul is doing continually)

"live:" walk, way of life

"worthy:" like weight scales" living a life equal to who we are as believers. Who are we?

*children of the King

*sons of God

*co-heirs with Christ

*children of the light

*saints (November 1st was "All Saints Day")

*beloved of God

*royal priesthood

*righteous, redeemed

"of the calling you have received:" literally, "worthy of the calling to which you have been called"

"humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another:" present tense, participle: to bear with, to endure, to put up with

"make every effort:" present participle: to be zealous, eager

"keep:" present tense, infinitive: to keep, to protect

The unity of the body is something worth giving our all!

Ephesians 5:8–10 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

Ephesians 5:11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.

"live:" present tense, command

"have nothing to do with:" present tense, command

"expose:" present tense, command

So, we are exhorted to live what we say we believe in and protect the unity of the body, by bearing with or putting up with one another. Don't be like an unbeliever, walking as if I were in darkness because I am now in the light. Don't get involved in that stuff but instead, expose it for what it really is. So, if you and I are going to **Live Like It**, when preserving the unity of the church and not allowing gossip to destroy and divide the body of believers we are to Expose

It and Admit It. These points are a combination of what Matthew Mitchell shares in his book on gossip and some of my thoughts. Please get his book and read it! *“Resisting Gossip: Winning the War of the Wagging Tongue”*

EXPOSE IT

We need to have a plan for when gossip comes to us, and it will come. How do I know this? Because I know my heart. **Jeremiah 17:9** The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

What choices do I have when confronted with gossip? I can ignore it, participate in it, or leave the area. Unfortunately, none of these options deal with the issue. I must remind all of us that we will need to have someone confront us when we gossip. So, when attempting to stop someone gossiping, I must respond with love and humility. What do you think is the first thing I should do?

***Pray**

Ask God for wisdom for how I should respond. Is every situation the same? Does it have to be a long, out loud prayer? **James 1:5** If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

God, I need wisdom in how to answer and stop this gossip. Allow them to see my heart for them, for the person they're talking about, and for the Lord.

Proverbs 15:28 The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.

***Choose Love**

When a bad report comes don't just accept it as fact. You and I should be ready to defend another brother and sister. Even if they have done wrong what good does it do to broadcast it?

Proverbs 17:9 He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

Proverbs 10:12 Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

This is not sweeping it under the rug, but what should our response be if a brother or sister sins? We should grieve and we should pray for them.

Ephesians 4:29–30 Do not let any unwholesome (rotten, worthless) talk come out (command) of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. **30** And do not grieve (command) the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

If someone says, “I really shouldn't say this, but...”, what can be my response? How about, “You're right. Thank you for being willing to not allow negative talk to begin.”

***Go**

Author Diana Kleyn shares a story about this in her book *Bearing Fruit: Stories about Godliness for Children*: There was once a minister's wife who had a very effective way of stopping a person from slander or gossip in her presence. Whenever someone would say something unpleasant about someone else, she would get her hat and coat. “Where are you going?” the person would ask. “I'm going to visit the person you mentioned and ask if what you said was true.”

Ask them if they have talked to the person about that and volunteer to go with them.

Sometimes I may have to go alone to the person who was gossiped about, but I must be careful that I don't end up gossiping about the person who gossiped to me.

I could say something like this:

“I heard this, and I just can't believe it is true, but I know if it was about me, I would want someone to come to me. If it is true, please know that I am here to help. I know that I would be grateful to have someone approach me if I was doing or saying something wrong.”

ALWAYS watch my heart in this process!

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

***Avoid**

Sometimes it may just be best to avoid someone who continues to gossip.

Proverbs 20:19 A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.

Proverbs 26:20 Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.

This includes all the places we can find gossip: online, tabloids, television gossip shows, and so on.

What should I do if I am the one guilty of gossip? How many of us have been in this spot? I have been guilty and needed to get it right.

ADMIT IT

***Agree & Repent**

I need to agree with what God says about gossip. I need to agree that it is sin and that it is destructive. This is “confessing my sin to the Lord.”

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

This is written to the believer because sin breaks our fellowship with God, our communication with Him. We don't lose our salvation, for that is secure in Him.

Psalm 51 is written by David and is a confession of his sin of adultery and murder.

Psalm 51:1–4 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. **2** Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. **3** For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. **4** Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

Does this mean he didn't sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, her husband? No, but sin is first and foremost against God.

What does it mean to repent? According to Lawrence Richards (*Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*) in the Old Testament “it indicates a turning from evil to God, from evil ways to God' ways.... And in the New Testament it emphasizes a change of mind and attitude. To repent is to make a decision that changes the total direction of one's life.”

I was talking with a brother the other day and he shared about how he and another brother helped each other deal with negative speech. They came up with a code word that they would use if one of them started to go down the trail of negative speech which could include gossip. That one word would remind them to stop.

***Get it right with others**

You might want to seek some godly counsel when proceeding with this step. Who have I sinned against when I gossip?

*I have sinned against the ones I gossiped to

*I have sinned against the one I have gossiped about

Here is the challenge and one of the reasons gossip is so insidious and awful. My words are irretrievable and sometimes go much farther than I can even know.

***Accept God's forgiveness**

If God says He forgives, I must take His word for it. The enemy wants to paralyze you and me in our walk with God. When we confess it to Him it is forgiven, and we need to move forward. It should be a lesson to make me more careful not to do it again.

Everything that I have said this morning takes courage. Am I willing to put pleasing and honoring God above the possibility of somebody getting upset with me for attempting to stop gossip? You know what it starts with in overcoming gossip? Let me illustrate.

An Object Lesson about What Fills Our Heart

Matthew Mitchell explains how he uses a simple object lesson to illustrate "the principle of overflow," which simply means that our words overflow from what's already in our hearts.

I held up a bottle of water and then poured the water out on the platform. Then I asked our church family, "Why is there now water on the floor?" Everyone laughed nervously because the answer was so obvious.

Then I asked, "But why is there water on the floor and not Pepsi or Kool-Aid?" Now besides the fact that I would have gotten into major trouble with the custodian if I had poured Pepsi or Kool-Aid on the carpet, the truth is, there was *water* on the floor because there had been *water* in the bottle. Similarly, Jesus said, "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." What's inside us determines what comes out of us.

Source: Matthew C. Mitchell, Resisting Gossip: Winning the War of the Wagging Tongue (CLC Publications, 2013), pp. 39-40

Matthew 22:37–39 Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ **38** This is the first and greatest commandment. **39** And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

SO WHAT???

STOP IT

Away with Gossip

I once formed a mutual encouragement fellowship at a time of stress in one of my pastorates. The members subscribed to a simple formula applied before speaking of any person or subject that was perhaps controversial. T -- is it True? H - - is it Helpful? I -- is it Inspiring? N -- is it Necessary? K -- is it Kind? If what I am about to say does not pass those tests, I will keep my mouth shut! And it worked!

Source: Alan Redpath in A Passion for Preaching. Christianity Today, Vol. 34, no. 11.

*Am I willing to agree with God about gossip?

*What am I willing to do to stop gossip?

By others

By me

*Have I ever come to faith in the One who gives the power to overcome sin?