Necessary Sins 4

# Gossiping (Proverbs 6:16-19)

We’re wrapping up the fourth part of our four-part message series entitled “Necessary Sins.” If you’ve missed the past few weeks, you’ll want to catch them online, but here’s what we’ve been talking about: we’ve been talking about sins that are easy to justify, to rationalize, and some people would even say they’re acceptable or necessary. And so, we’ve looked at grumbling and complaining, biting and devouring, we looked at falsehood, and we’ve realized that just because something is commonplace doesn’t mean it’s right.

We’re going to look at gossip, because we need to understand that in God’s family everything we say must be true, but not everything that’s true must be said. And yet, we all have access to a powerful weapon that can be used in just about any situation to make things better or to make things worse; and that weapon is our words. So, we’re going to look at filtering or controlling the things we say, because the Bible warns us that it’s impossible to have complete control over our tongue; that no man can tame the tongue, but the Bible also tells us how we can manage our tongue and speak in such a way that we can give glory to God. And so, we’re going to look at ways we can become better at managing the things we say.

Before we get into the message I want to pray that prayer that we’ve been praying with David from Psalm chapter 139. I would love for you to make it your prayer along with me as we read verse 23 and 24 together. David prays in verse 23,

“Search me, O 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” (Psalms 139:23-24).

In our culture today, it's almost as if gossip is a necessary part of our conversations. You know, on the job, it seems like an essential part of getting through the workday. It's like, "Hey, you're not going to believe what I heard?” Or, “Did you hear what everybody's talking about? Or, “Hey, don't tell anybody this, but you’re really gonna want to hear this!"

And so, it's like everybody does it… so is it really that big of a deal?

Well, as we begin, I want to define what gossip is and then we'll look at what God says about gossip. And so, first, I went to Saint Google; you know, it’s gotta be true if Google said it, and Google said that gossip is:

“Casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true.”

Now, that’s good, but the best working definition I found, and certainly the most practical, was this description by Pastor Rick Warren. He said,

“When we’re talking about a situation with somebody who’s neither part of the problem or part of the solution, then we’re probably gossiping.”

Basically, he says, gossiping is talking about something, sharing with others about something, when it’s none of your business, because you’re neither part of the problem or part of the solution.

Now let’s take a look at what God says. First, I want to look at Proverbs chapter 6, verse 16, because the language is so strong here. Verse 16 says,

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

So, why do you think God hates gossip? What makes it so detestable to him? Well, I think there may be several reasons, but one of them could be that it hurts his children, it makes them look bad. Proverbs chapter 16 tells us,

“A perverse man stirs up dissension and a gossip separates close friends” (Proverbs 16:28).

But also, it’s a reflection of the darkness, the sinful nature in our own hearts. It’s like when my kids are fighting and carrying on, acting selfishly and hurtfully toward one another, it grieves me and it breaks my heart. And I know that God is calling us as followers of Jesus to live by a higher standard than the culture around us, to live according to his Word, and even though everybody else maybe doing something else, we want to live in a way that’s pleasing to him. And so, that’s what we’re going to look at, we’re going to look at ways we can become better at managing the things that we say. And we’re going to discover that changing our words can literally change our lives. There are four things I want you to notice and first of all,

## 1. Be Aware That Your Words Can Cause Great Damage

You know, we’ve all heard it before, and one of the biggest lies children are told is that “Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you.” How many of you’ve heard that? And so, did you ever wonder why if that were in fact true, that words hurt so much?

Well, listen to what the Bible says,

“The tongue has the power of life and death…” (Proverbs 18:21).

And yet, those who gossip, the person who’s gossiping is speaking death. They’re actually hurting the person it’s spoken about, and we know that because we’ve all seen friendships broken up and divisions in the family because of somebody sharing something they shouldn’t have. We need to remember that our words carry tremendous weight and they can cause enormous damage as Proverbs chapter 12 says,

“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Proverbs 12:18).

And that’s exactly what James meant when he said in chapter 3, verse 6,

“The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire…” (James 3:6).

Therefore, we must be mindful of the fact that our words are weapons; they have the power to tear down and destroy, and therefore we must remember that gossip not only hurts the person that’s spoken about, but it also hurts the listener. Now, you may be surprised by that, but look at what the Bible says in Proverbs chapter 17,

“A wicked man listens to evil lips; a liar pays attention to a malicious tongue” (Proverbs 17:4).

And so, the Bible says it’s wrong; listening to those evil words, and paying attention to a malicious tongue, because your participating in their wickedness. And whatever it is that you permit, you’re also promoting, so if you listen, if you allow someone to bad-mouth your friend, your family member, your boss, your President, or whoever it may be, you’re promoting whatever they’re saying by listening.

The Bible is very clear, it’s wrong to listen to gossip, because it hurts the person who’s spoken about, it hurts the listener, and it also hurts the one who’s speaking. Proverbs chapter 25 says that,

“If you argue your case with a neighbor, don’t betray another man's confidence, or he who hears it may shame you and you’ll never lose your bad reputation” (Proverbs 25:9-10).

You see, you can spend a lifetime building a good reputation, but in a moment of carelessness, you can slander somebody, tearing them down, and betraying their confidence, destroying your reputation and losing all respect. And so, when you talk badly about people who aren’t around it says a whole lot more about you than the person you’re speaking about. But gossip hurts everybody and therefore we must remember secondly that…

## 2. Your Words Cannot Be Taken Back

Nothing we do, no matter how much we apologize, can retrieve those words once they’ve been spoken. But what’s interesting is that even though we know that gossip is wrong and hurtful, there’s still something sickeningly sweet and attractive about the sin of gossip. In fact, Proverbs chapter 18, verse eight tells us,

“The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts” (Proverbs 18:8).

They’re like tasty morsels that sink deep into our hearts, and often the reason why we gossip is because we’re elevating ourselves. You know, if I can take a moment and talk about somebody else’s problems, their obsession, somebody else’s addiction, somebody else’s porn problem, somebody else’s children or bad marriage, then I don’t have to talk about mine, right? We do this all the time, we can do this in our small groups, we can do it in prayer, but it’s like if I can push somebody else down, I can make myself feel a little better, a little bigger, a little taller. Because gossip claims that I’m strong and they’re weak, but that’s not the gospel of Jesus Christ. God says, that I’m weak and he’s strong.

There was an old fable about a woman in a village who spread malicious gossip about a neighbor. Later she confessed her sin to the priest and asked what she could do to make it right. He told her to pluck a chicken and place a feather at the gate of the house of each person with whom she had shared the gossip and then report back to him the next day.

So, she did exactly what the priest had told her and reported back to him the next day. He said, “Now go to each house and pick up the feather you left there.” The woman said, “That’s impossible! By now those feathers have blown all over town.” The priest replied to her, “And so have your words.”

That’s why the Bible advises us in Proverbs chapter 21,

“He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity” (Proverbs 21:23).

In other words, keep your mouth shut, watch your tongue, and you’ll stay out of trouble. You know, there may be some of you that need to memorize that Bible verse. And so, this one’s for you. Keep your mouth shut, watch your tongue, and you will stay out of trouble. This is so important, because the fact is once words have been spoken, they can’t be taken back. And then number three we must remember that…

## 3. Your Words Reveal Much About You

As we’ve been considering those “Necessary Sins” the problem with grumbling and complaining, the problem with that biting criticism, the problem with lying and the problem with gossip isn’t as much our words as it is our broken and sin stained heart. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 12, verse 34,

“For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him” (Matthew 12:34-35).

That’s why when we’re listening to gossip, Proverbs chapter 18 tells us,

“The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts” (Proverbs 18:8).

They’re choice morsels going down into our hearts, elevating ourselves, while pushing others down, stepping on them, and over them. It's our words that reveal our character, because whatever’s in your heart will eventually come out of your mouth. If your heart is critical, cold, and bitter, your words will be too. James says it this way in chapter 3, verse 12,

“Can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water” (James 3:12)?

You see, our words reveal our character. It’s just like your accent reveals where you’re from. You know, if you’ve got a southern drawl, it’s going to betray you every time; and in the same way, your words reveal the condition of your heart.

The Bible says in Ecclesiastes chapter 10, at verse 12,

“A fool is consumed by his own lips. At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness — and the fool multiplies words” (Ecclesiastes 10:12-14).

And your words will betray you, revealing your true character, because out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. But there’s a twist to how this can be applied to our lives. You see, in Christ, by the Spirit of God, when we recognize who we are, it begins to change our heart. When we begin to understand and realize that we’re fearfully and wonderfully made, that we’re God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, we know that what God has begun in us he will complete.

And so, we’ve got to get that into our hearts, that we were created with a purpose and that God has plans to prosper us, not to harm us, but to give us a hope and a future. To help us move forward and give him the glory. And it’s in that knowledge, in our weakness, that he’s strong and we find our hearts transformed. And so, the Bible teaches that your words reveal your character, and it also teaches us…

## 4. True Change Begins with Changing Your Words

Even psychologists say that if you change the words you use to describe your emotions, you can change the way that you feel. And so, by using softer words to communicate anger, it not only helps you to control your emotions, but it helps the other person to control theirs. So, changing your character begins with changing your words. And Jesus said that your words are extremely important. In Matthew chapter 12 he said,

“But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37).

And so, we need to understand that our words have the power of life and death. That every time we speak, if we’re speaking of someone else, we want to be speaking well of them. We want to be saying things that are helpful and not hurtful. We want to be always believing the best about other people and never assuming the worst. We want to be a person who is part of the solution, building others up, and not a part of the problem tearing them down.

As we’re changing our words, and our hearts start to become transformed, we’ll soon recognize that we don’t have to try to put others down to feel like we’re accepted, or that we’re loved, but the Holy Spirit will witness to our hearts and we’ll know that we’re unconditionally loved and accepted by our Heavenly Father. And so, what’s most important as our hearts are changed and God gets a hold of our mouths is that we go from grumbling and complaining, from biting criticism, from believing and living a lie and from gossiping, to starting to speak life over other people. Speaking with grace and truth, considering others better than ourselves, and pointing them to Jesus as the one who has the power to truly change us.

You see, changing your character begins with changing your words. You have the potential to do great things with your words, but you also have the potential to do great harm. Your words are powerful weapons and their potential good or harm is not only directed at others but at yourself. And so, your spiritual health is determined to a great extent by the words you say and it’s for that reason that Peter says,

“Whoever would love life and see good days must (what?) keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech” (1 Peter 3:10).

In other words, change your words and change your life. As Paul said to the church in Ephesus,

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up…” (Ephesians 4:29).

And so, we want to speak words that would encourage people toward the things of God. We want our words to be helpful, encouraging, and full of blessing. We want to be vessels of good news, sharing the truth and the grace of what God can do in the lives of those around us. Therefore, when we’re speaking about somebody else, we want to always be speaking blessing and never cursing. As we change our way of thinking and change our words suddenly we begin to emulate Jesus, the son of God, who not only gives life, but sustains life with a word, renewing and transforming our hearts. In that transformation process, as we’re recognizing and understanding that we’re weak and he is strong, his power is literally made perfect in us. Let’s pray together.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ's Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

March 11, 2018

[www.cccemmitsburg.org](http://www.cccemmitsburg.org/)

*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, Preaching Library, and PC Study Bible.*

*Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*