

THE LIES WE'RE MOST TEMPTED TO TELL - Exodus 20:16 - "You shall not *bear false witness against your neighbor.*" Exodus 23:1 - "You shall not *spread a false report.* You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness." Psalm 101:7 - "No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; *no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes.*" Proverbs 6:16-19 - "There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: [17] haughty eyes, *a lying tongue,* and hands that shed innocent blood, [18] a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, [19] *a false witness who breathes out lies,* and one who sows discord among brothers." Romans 1:28-29 - "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. [29] They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, *deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips....*" Ephesians 4:25 - "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you *speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*"

- 1) **THE LIES WE'RE MOST TEMPTED TO TELL ARE LIES THAT MAKE US LOOK GOOD** - *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn* said that pride grew in the human heart like lard on a pig. The Bible traces sin to this same root. The fall finds its source in human pride. We may, on occasion, lie about our age or our shoe size. But those aren't the areas where we have the greatest battles in terms of integrity. *We lie mostly when we want to save face and look better than we really are.* And that's where gossip and slander come in. *The quickest way to feel better about myself is to lower you in both my own mind and also the minds of others.*

I say we "lie." Of course, not *everything* we say is untrue. Some of it is usually fact. There are few human beings who don't provide enough raw material for slander, even in their best moments. But even when the tale-bearer uses the truth, he uses it in *hate*, not *love*. And he uses it to *tear down*, not to *redeem and restore*. *So we slander to justify our anger and fortify our pride. We know the intent of our own heart when we gossip.*

- 2) **SLANDER AND GOSSIP ARE SINS THAT GROW DEEP ROOTS IN THE LIFE THAT COMMITS THEM** -

They are sins that are particularly hard to repent of. They bring so much pleasure and self-satisfaction that they blind the heart to their wicked nature. These are sins that are *almost impossible to see from God's perspective* - Psalm 62:3-4 - "How long will all of you attack a man to batter him, *like a leaning wall, a tottering fence?* [4] They only plan to thrust him down from his high position. They *take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse.*"

- a) *There is someone whose life is almost falling apart at the seams.* Note the victim is described like a "leaning wall" and a "tottering fence." In other words, someone who is about to fall over - someone who isn't going to be capable of standing on his or her own for long.
- b) *The deception of the attacker is carefully noted.* Two things are happening at the same time: *First, there is outward blessing and praise. "They bless with their mouth."* Nothing but kindness is visible. No ill intention is ever made public. But *secondly, under the surface and out of the light of public eye, there's another sinister agenda.* The text says, they "delight in falsehood" and they "counsel together." Nobody else sees all of this going on. It's a kind of satanic espionage. And that's why this particular Psalm closes the way it does: Psalm 62:11-12 - "Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that *power belongs to God,* [12] and that *to you, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For you will render to a man according to his work.*"

Because God is *kind*, the victim doesn't have to strike back. God will sustain and revive him in kindness. Because God is *powerful*, the talebearer will bear the wrath of God. That wall that he pushed over - that fence he kicked down under the cover of his slander - that *belongs to God.* And God won't tolerate spiritual vandalism. *Power belongs to God.*

- 3) **JESUS DIAGNOSES THE CAUSE OF GOSSIP AND SLANDER IN THE HUMAN HEART** - Matthew 7:1-6 - "Judge not, that you be not judged. [2] For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. [3] Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? [5] 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. [6] Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."

The ninth commandment says I must not bear *false* witness against my neighbor. In other words, if there *is* some legitimate complaint, and if it really *is* my business, and something really *must* be addressed for the *good of the cause of Christ* (and not just my *personal revenge*), then I must be certain that *everything I say will stand up under verification.* That's why, in addition to the instruction about not bearing *false witness*, the Old and New Testaments also include the safeguard that no one ever be charged on the words of just *one witness.* Other unbiased people must verify what one mean spirited enemy may say about a brother. The point here is that *there must be certainty as to the words any person brings against another.* And because this is so important, Jesus says there are certain areas of another person's life that are *off limits to my personal criticism.* I *am* able to recognize when a person's *actions* are contrary to God's Word. I *do* have the duty to *pray for a wayward brother*, and I *do* have the chance to *go privately and gently to help a brother caught in a fault.*

If a person is *stubborn and persistent in his or her sin* I can also bring that to the attention of those who give leadership in the body of Christ. Again, provided what I say is *verifiable and certain.* So Jesus makes it clear in Matthew chapter 7 that, when He says we are not to judge others, *He doesn't mean we are to be undiscerning regarding their actions and behavior* - Matthew 7:6 - "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you." We may not like the sound of this truth, but Jesus assumes Christian people can think. They can tell *saints* from *swine.* And He urges us to note the difference.

So what does Jesus mean when He says *do not judge*, and how does this relate to the command *not to bear false witness?* The closest modern words we would use to describe the idea behind that verb *judge* would probably be "to criticize," or "to censure." In other words, Jesus isn't saying I shouldn't *recognize* a sin in another person's life. He's talking about *what I do with what I see in my brother's life.* It's not just what I know. It's what I *do* with what I know. I can easily become the *resident spiritual critic* in the church. I can develop an eye for *what people do wrong, and what everyone else should do about it.*

Now, how do these words of Jesus relate to bearing false witness? Look again at these verses: Matthew 7:3-5 - "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? [5] 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."

Verse three has to contain one of the greatest questions in the Bible. *How can anybody radar in on a speck far away, and be totally blind to a plank close up?* How can I see something tiny and distant and not something huge and close up? What's going on here to cause such *spiritual far-sightedness?*

The log in my own life is the log of faultfinding and criticism. And when you have that disease, you can *only* see the things in other lives. And that's a tragedy because I'm heading for sterner and sterner judgement as I get more and more hooked on criticizing others.

And the root of that is always **pride** - the pride that longs to look holy in the eyes of others by pointing out the spiritual flaws of someone else.

And here's how all of this relates to slander and talebearing and bearing false witness. This disease of faultfinding and criticism will never dwell quietly in my own heart and mind. ***I will share my insights with others.*** Because it's only in the sharing with others that my pride is fed. And it's pride that makes this sin feel so good and righteous.

- 4) **THE POWER JESUS GIVES TO BE TOTALLY CLEAN IN OUR WORDS** - **Ephesians 4:25** - "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." And **Colossians 3:12-14** - "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

"If anyone has a complaint against another...."(13). That's where slander and cruel speech come from - ***a complaint against someone.*** And I want the scores settled up. Paul says to stop and rethink your salvation. He says saved people are kind people. Not blind to sin or indifferent to its presence. But kind in dealing with it ***Scripturally and discretely whenever possible.***

Look at those words in **Colossians 3:13** - "....bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; ***as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.***" Now, think honestly about how rarely you've ever had Jesus talk to ***someone else*** about your sin. He always talks to me. I've never had Jesus hold a grudge after He's said I'm forgiven. I've never had Jesus ***try to get even with me for all the pain my sin caused Him on the cross.***

- 5) **HEARING THE WORD OF GOD WITHOUT SELF-DECEPTION** - I came across a great quote by **Lewis Smedes** in his book "***Mere Morality***": ***"Self-deception is a fine art. It is a balancing trick in which we hover between knowing and refusing to know. In one corner of our mind we know that something is true; in another we deny it. Or, one moment we know something and the next we deny to ourselves what we just knew. We see it for just an instant, long enough to feel its threat, and we close it off. We know, but we refuse to know."***

This is so consistent with what Paul says about the infection of the fall in our minds. He says man has this terrible tendency to ***"suppress the truth in unrighteousness"***(Romans 1:18).

So pray the gutsy prayer of David this morning - ***"Behold, you desire truth in the innermost being..."*** And this prayer - ***"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."***

That's the path to freedom and joy. Admit the truth of what God is saying by His Spirit. That's the quickest way I know to have the ***"joy of your salvation"*** restored.