

Gossssssip

Doing the Devil's Work for Him

You've heard the phrase, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." It's not true — like a poisonous snake, gossip can kill you!

By Earl H. Williams

We live in a notoriously violent society! Under the influence of Satan, people hurt, maim and kill fellow humans with impunity.

What about you? Do you inflict injury upon your neighbors? Could you be guilty of murder?

"How unthinkable!" you may answer. "Never!"

Yet millions of seemingly harmless people hurt and even kill their neighbors every day. Their instrument of violence is not a steely switchblade nor a silver "Saturday-night special" (an American term for a cheap handgun). It's the tongue!

"The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor," says Proverbs 11:9.

Whether the gossip is premeditated or accidental, murder is murder. And when you're dead, you're dead.

Yes, words — in the form of gossip — can hurt you and other people. But gossip can be stopped! Let's learn how to prevent this deadly crime. First, what is gossip? Many people

don't know. Many *do* know, but pretend they don't. Many know, but don't care — they go right on anyway, murdering others with their words. So let's define this instrument of death.

What is gossip?

Gossip accuses people. It charges others with wrong. People love to talk about the alleged actions of others. Does the following sound familiar?

"Did you hear what he did?"

"No — tell me!"

"Well, just between you and me, he..." and on and on it goes.

Listen to what God says about gossiping accusers: "An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire" (Proverbs 16:27).

What happens to the victim of accusations? These accusers — this lynch mob of tongues — charge him, convict him and condemn him to death! Accusation is deadly gossip.

Gossip slanders neighbor. It destroys a person's character or personal reputation.

But beware! He who lives by the sword of slander shall die by the sword of slander. Almighty God says, "Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy" (Psalm 101:5).

Gossip talks indiscreetly. People who say just any-

thing that comes into their minds spread gossip. They do not engage their minds before they engage their tongues. They do not evaluate what they are about to say or its effect on others. "A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; the babbler is no different" (Ecclesiastes 10:11).

In short, gossip is any communication that hurts people. "The words of a talebearer [a gossip!] are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Proverbs 18:8, King James Version).

What is the source?

Now you know what gossip is, but do you know where it comes from?

Whether you realize it or not, when you gossip you are involved



in an encounter with the realm of evil spirits — an encounter with the longest and vilest tongue in the universe — that of Satan the serpent!

Satan started gossip. Jesus Christ said, "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). Satan probably used gossip to assassinate God in the eyes of one third of the angels, causing them to rebel (Revelation 12:4).

Jesus also revealed that Satan is a lying slanderer: "For he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).

Satan accuses both God and humans today through unsuspecting people. He is called the "accuser of our brethren" — of God's begotten children in His Church (Revelation 12:10).

Listen as Jude describes the gossiping nature of Satan and his demons — and people who follow Satan's way: "Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. . . . But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves" (Jude 8-10).

Yes, Satan is the source of gossip. Do not allow Satan to whisper in your ear.

Gossip addicts

People gossip for many — all of them wrong — reasons. For



example, people of low self-esteem tend to gossip. They do not respect themselves, so they gossip about others and pull them down. This allows their own egos to rise on the ruins of others'. The gossipier experiences a temporary illusion of worth, but quickly descends even lower than before. He or she then yearns to gossip again, aching to experience another high. But down he or she goes again.

And another gossip addict is born! Some people are addicted to gossip just as much as some others are addicted to drugs.

Frustration produces gossipers, too. You can't have everything you want. Perhaps you are dissatisfied with your situation in life. You hunger and thirst for satisfaction. So what do you do? Well, some people eat, eat, eat, desperately desiring to devour their frustrations away. Others talk, talk, talk and devour their neighbors away. After gossiping they feel better — for a little while. Then reality hits them again and the addictive cycle of frustration and gossip starts all over again.

Idleness breeds gossip. People who are idle with their hands tend to be active with their tongues. Paul comments: "And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not" (I Timothy 5:13).

No one wants to be a gossip addict, destroying those around. Can the addiction be cured? Can



gossip be stopped? Yes — here's how!

The cure for gossip

• *First, realize 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).

God hates to see His children hurting one another. Yet He sees some of us day in and day out destroying one another with gossip. He wants a cease-fire of the tongues.

God wants you to have the same attitude He has against gossip. So the first step toward stopping gossip is to hate it, because it hurts people. Once you come to hate gossip, then . . .

• *Repent of gossip.* Perhaps you don't think about this as often as you should, but gossip is sin. Almighty God thunders in His Ninth Commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16). A main thrust of this commandment focuses on the harm done to one's neighbor by the types of accusation and slander that make up gossip.

James explains: "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge" (James 4:11).

Gossiping is bearing false witness, and that brings the death penalty (Romans 6:23). So realize that gossip is sin. Repent and determine never to gossip again.

• *Realize the source.* As we saw earlier, Satan originated gossip. No Christian wants to be an instrument of the devil. Yet when you gossip you are being used by Satan. He not only started gossip, he now perpetuates it through humans (Ephesians 2:2).

The next time you are tempted to gossip, think about the source and bite your tongue.

• *Don't listen.* Not only should

you repent of gossiping, you should stop listening to gossip.

Don't fool yourself. Just as it takes two to tango, it takes two to gossip — one to talk and one to listen. Gossip would stop instantly if everyone would stop listening. It's no fun gossiping to yourself!

Listen to John's instruction: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (II John 10-11).

Just listening to gossip makes you an accomplice.

If anyone comes to you with gossip, do not listen. As gently and tactfully as possible, tell the person that the subject matter does not concern you and you'd rather not discuss it. Be as firm as necessary. The person will quickly get the message — and the gossiping will stop.

• **Detect gossip.** To stop gossip, you must recognize it. But how? God has provided you with a gossip-detection system. Let's take a look at that system, described in Philippians 4:8.

The first criteria for proper communication is that it be *true*. You should not listen to or say anything that is not true. In fact, you or the person telling you should be able to prove that it is true. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thessalonians 5:21, KJV). If it can't be proven, it shouldn't be listened to or spoken of.

But what if it is true? Should you get involved? Not unless it's *noble*. The information should not in any way tarnish the character, name or reputation of another person. Any hint of disrespect should set off an alarm in your mind that shouts

"Gossip!" Paul goes even further by declaring that the information must be *just*. This means you should not discuss or listen to discussions about the sins of others. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," says Romans 3:23. "He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates the best of friends" (Proverbs 17:9).

Another important part of our gossip detection system is *purity*. The words must be *pure*. In our sick society, blasphemy and profanity almost have become proper etiquette. "Their throat is an open tomb... whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Romans 3:13-14).

God does not want His people listening to or spreading dirty words or stories. Keep your ears and mouth pure.

Accept only *lovely* things into your mind — things that affect you and others in a positive, uplifting way.

Make sure the words you speak and hear are of *good report*. Bad news bombards us constantly. Human nature seems to thrive on bad news. "For their heart devises violence, and their lips talk of troublemaking" (Proverbs 24:2). Paul tells us to avoid bad reports.

Use the gossip detectors of truth, honor, righteousness, purity,

loveliness and good reports to stop gossip.

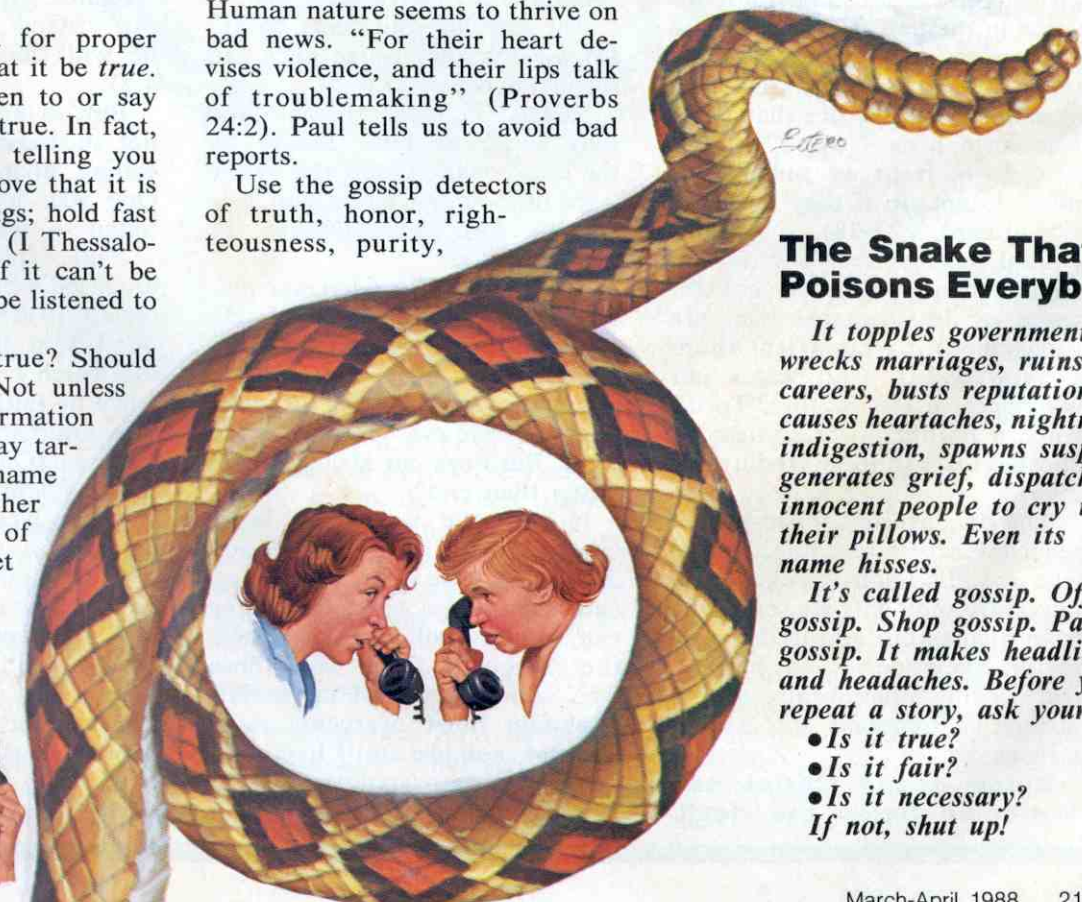
• **Speak to edify.** In the same verse 8 of Philippians 4, Paul says that we should speak words of *virtue*. Virtuous words are words of excellence and value, words that produce good fruits, that build up the speaker, listener and everyone else.

Speak words of *praise* — words that praise the great works of God. Talk about His great creation in all of its wonderful glory. Talk about God's Work on earth today — the Work that's spreading the good news of the Kingdom of God all over this world.

Speak words of praise about the good in other people. Encourage others to do their best. Comfort other people when they are discouraged.

In short, use your tongue to bring life — not death!

Now you know what gossip is. You know its source. You even know why you gossip. More importantly, you know how to stop gossip. So work to stop this heinous crime! □



The Snake That Poisons Everybody

It topples governments, wrecks marriages, ruins careers, busts reputations, causes heartaches, nightmares, indigestion, spawns suspicion, generates grief, dispatches innocent people to cry in their pillows. Even its name hisses.

It's called gossip. Office gossip. Shop gossip. Party gossip. It makes headlines and headaches. Before you repeat a story, ask yourself:

- *Is it true?*
 - *Is it fair?*
 - *Is it necessary?*
- If not, shut up!*