

Gossip and Slander

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Gossip and Slander... Versus “Speaking the Truth in Love.”

There seems to be an inordinate amount of confusion in the church today regarding what does – and what does not – constitute the sins of gossip and slander. Make absolutely no mistake about it, gossip and slander are equivalent in God’s sight to all unrighteousness, wickedness, murder... and even hating God Him-self ([Romans 1:29-32](#))!

Conversely though, we are commanded to expose the evil deeds of darkness ([Ephesians 5:11](#)); to speak the truth in love ([Ephesians 4:16](#)); and to judge with righteous judgment ([John 7:24](#)) even those within the church, so that we can avoid their false and soul-destroying doctrines of demons by identifying, naming, and avoiding those who perpetuate them ([Romans 16:17-18](#)) through their perverting of the gospel ([II Peter 3:14-18](#)); and also so that we can expel any wicked, sexually immoral brother or sister from amongst us if and when need be ([I Corinthians 5:1-13](#)).

But how do we submit to God’s instructions and commandments involving “speaking the truth in love,” without transgressing His instructions and commandments not to gossip and slander? How can we obey the command to speak about the evil someone is doing without gossiping and slandering them in the process? Is it possible to carry out both commands simultaneously while contradicting neither even peripherally? Of course! Because while seeming to be somewhat contradictory in nature at times, these two actually act in perfect harmony, as their author is God. Our obedience to the will of God in these matters therefore, requires only a better understanding of what gossip and slander truly consist of, as well as from whence they come. It is this clearer understanding and subsequent reconciliation of these two commands which this study seeks to provide.

“The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary” lists the following under “SLANDER”:

1. The rendering of the Heb. *Diblar*, “a defaming, evil report” ([Numbers 14:36](#), KJV; [Psalms 31:13](#); [Proverbs 18:18](#)). In [I Timothy 3:11](#) the KJV translators render the Gk. *Diabolous* “slanderer” in reference to deacons’ wives.
2. The rendering ([Psalms 15:3](#)) of Heb. *Ragal*, to “run about” tattling... In the NT the Gk. *Katalaleo* is to speak evil of, to malign ([Romans 1:30](#), [2 Corinthians 12:20](#)). This sin is warned against as being destructive and utterly unworthy of the believer. KJV renders “backbite.”

The “Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words” defines SLANDERER as:

Diabolos ...an adjective, “slandering, accusing falsely,” is used as a noun, translated “slanderers” in [1 Timothy 3:11](#), where the reference is to those who are given to finding fault with the demeanor and conduct of others, and spreading their innuendos and criticisms in the church; in [2 Timothy 3:3](#), RV (KJV, “false accusers”); [Titus 2:3](#) (ditto): See ACCUSER, DEVIL.

A careful examination of the above reveals much about the true nature of slander. (Is it any wonder from whence we get the word “diabolical?”) It is an “evil report,” a “defaming report.” It is “to malign,” to “accuse *falsely*,” to spread “innuendos and criticisms in the church.” (It is similar to Absalom’s self-serving actions and attempts to undermine and treacherously erode David’s authority in order to take His place as the head of the kingdom: 2nd Samuel 15). God has always hated this type of behavior (See [Proverbs 6:12-19](#)), because it reveals a rotten, sinful, evil, arrogant, self-seeking, self-serving, and selfish soul-destroying heart ([Matthew 15:15-20](#)).

Slander then, is either to lie about someone, or to say things about them (even if true) with, and born of, an inward and heart-felt desire to defame or destroy their reputation and standing in the eyes of others, often times to elevate self instead.

This is why James has so much to say about controlling the tongue ([James 3:3-10](#)). However... almost immediately thereafter, James goes on to call his audience “Adulterers and adulteresses” ([James 4:4](#)), and “sinners” and “double-minded” (4:8)! How can this be? Is James contradicting the very Holy Spirit inspired instructions he’s just given? And furthermore, he then immediately reverts back to his “former” topic in verse 11 when he states, “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren...?” Did God know what he was talking about when He led James to pen every word he wrote ([John 16:12-15](#); [II Timothy 3:16-17](#))? Absolutely! So is there a contradiction here? ***NO***. You see, James was not slandering his audience in any way, shape, or form by calling them these things. He was not uttering falsehoods or half-truths designed to destroy them or their reputations, but absolute facts designed to lead them to repentance and salvation! He was not saying what he did motivated by hate, but by love! Not to hurt but to help! His intention was to stop them from heading down the road to ruin by identifying their direction in terms they could understand and so turn them back towards the road to a home in heaven! But in order to accomplish that, he had to identify the danger and direction they had taken; and he had to then speak that truth in love. This is a mission which must of necessity include no compromise of the truth, the facts, or honesty in his efforts to love them back towards heaven.

Intentions are everything! ***INTENTIONS*** from within one’s heart are what separate and make the difference between whether or not words spoken to and/or about others are gossip and slander, or speaking the truth in love in the eyes of God. Did Jesus love the Sadducees and Pharisees? Yes. Absolutely. Enough to tell them the truth in love about their sin in hopes of causing them to repent and be saved ([Matthew 22:29, 23:13-39](#)). And Jesus not only told the Pharisees the awful, cold, hard truth about themselves, but also, honestly and in love – a love that was willing to warn others by holding up the Pharisees’ actions as the example of how ***not*** to get to heaven – told others as well ([Matthew 5:20, 23:1-7](#)). Was Jesus guilty of gossip and slander at that point? No.

And the apostle Paul led by direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit – as was James – even named names ([I Timothy 1:18-20](#); [II Timothy 1:15, 2:17, 4:10](#)). Was the man who penned [Romans 1:29-32](#), [Galatians 5:13-21](#), and other similar passages, now gossiping and slandering about his brothers Hymenaeus, Alexander, Philetus, Phigellus, Hermogenes, and Demas? After all, he placed their sins – and their very names – in the eternal record! What about when John, the so-called “apostle of love,” spoke and wrote similarly of the sins of Diotrephes ([III John 9](#))? Were these very apostles of God guilty of gossiping and slandering? No; absolutely not! They were simply speaking the truth in love. Their intentions were totally based on love, being divinely directed by the Holy Spirit Himself. They did not seek to demean these brethren, but simply to warn them in hopes that they might repent and be saved... but if not, then out of nothing but the purest of loving intentions for others’ souls, they also understood that many others who might otherwise be led astray by these, had to be warned to stay away from such self-destructive and truth-denying people ([Romans 16:17-18](#); [Titus 3:9-10](#)). And so, these apostles “spoke the truth in love” as they were commanded to do, and avoided at the same time, any gossip and slander: because their intentions were pure. And that is what has always, and will always, separate the two in God’s eyes.

We must ***never*** stand guilty of the sin of gossip or slander – ***ever***. Conversely, we must also never stand guilty of failing to expose the evil amongst us ([Ephesians 5:11](#)), or of the sin of NOT speaking the truth in love either ([Ephesians 4:15](#)); that is, of failing to ascertain, assess, confront, and communicate the facts, motivated by love for their eternal souls, when a brother or sister’s soul potentially hangs in the balance due to their sin (I Corin-thians 5:1-13). Let’s make sure we study this until we understand the difference, by gaining a discerning heart, and putting that understanding into action always, making it a part of our being ([Matthew 15:10-20](#)). After all, if we aren’t willing to love someone enough to discuss the sin they are in in hopes of saving their eternal souls, then how can we say we sincerely and wholeheartedly love them as we are commanded to do ([I Peter 1:22-24](#))? How can we claim to love them like Christ, if we fail to be concerned enough for their eternal souls’ destinations to discuss their sin with them, and/or with those who might otherwise be affected by it, simply out of a heart-felt love for all?

by Doug Dingley

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