

A Delicious Sin

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Some joker once observed, “Christians don’t gossip, they just share ‘prayer requests.’” Gossip and slander are damnable, but the problem, as Solomon points out is, gossip is so “delicious.” Whole magazines at the checkout counter are devoted to it and, unfortunately, you can hear otherwise good Christians slandering other Christians. In hushed tones tinged with concern they begin:

- “I love brother Smith dearly but...”
- “If they were my children...”
- “You know the trouble with ...”
- “It’s so sad. I really want to help...”
- “If I were in his shoes...”

James, the brother of Jesus, wrote:

“Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbor?” (James 4:11)

What does it mean to “slander” someone? William Barclay, observes:

The word that James uses for to speak harshly of, or, to speak evil of, is the verb *katalalein*. Usually this verb means to speak evil of someone else in that person’s absence, to criticize, to insult, to slander someone when he is not there to defend himself. This sin of slander and



of insult and of evil-speaking is condemned all through the Bible. ... In the Pauline letters *katalalia*, the noun, is translated back-biting. ... *Katalalia* is the sin of those who meet in corners and gather in little groups and pass on confidential tidbits of whispered information which destroy the reputation and good name of those who are not there to defend themselves. ... People are slow to realize that there are few sins which the Bible so unsparingly condemns as the sin of irresponsible and malicious gossip.

No sin is so universally condemned! God condemns it, “Whoev-

er slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence,” (Psalm 101:5). Paul condemns it (2 Corinthians 12:20). Peter condemns it (1 Peter 2:1). James condemns it (James 4:11-12).

You can guard against gossip by asking yourself three questions before you open your mouth:

- Is it true?
- Is it kind?
- Is it necessary?

But before I close this week’s article, did you hear about sister ...