



with Bob Condy

HOME



What the Old Testament Says About Gossip

By Bob Condy / February 12, 2021 / 2 Comments



(<https://www.conduit.consulting/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/gossip-pop-art-men-1firlo0-1200x640.jpg>)

“In all the years I’ve been attending church, I’ve never heard my pastor preach about x.”

“I’ve never heard a sermon about x. Preachers must be afraid they’ll offend people.”

I’ve heard plenty of comments like those above; they make pastors look bad. Too weak or scared to approach certain topics; people-pleasers rather than God-pleasers.

Yes, some ministers get stuck on their favorite subjects and Scripture passages. But the Bible’s a big book; it would take a long time to preach through the whole thing and cover every subject.

I’m not going to complain that I’ve never heard a sermon about gossip. Over the years, my pastors have dealt with it in one form or another.

My issue is defining it. Many Christians use the word to cover too

much ground. A podcast episode I heard about gossip made it sound like the word refers to any speech God doesn't like. That's broad!

Of course, defining gossip is as simple as consulting a dictionary. The website [Dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com) says the noun means "idle talk or rumor, especially about the personal or private affairs of others" and the verb means "to talk idly, especially about the affairs of others; go about tattling." The two emphases are idleness and privacy. The former suggests a person wasting time with useless conversation, while the latter implies inappropriate revelations.

"Oh, pay no attention. That's just gossip!"

How many times have you heard that comeback to an inane comment? It's helpful to an extent. But the fact that it's gossip doesn't mean it's false! Spreading lies about someone is harmful and sinful, no doubt, but he or she can correct the record. How does the victim set things straight when the news is correct? The problem isn't veracity, it's decency and humiliation. This is the essence of gossip.

We observe this principle in the Old Testament book of Proverbs. The New International Version lists six verses with one of two Hebrews words for gossip. Here they are.

"A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret." – Proverbs 11:13

The Hebrew word translated “gossip” is halak and is quite common in the OT, occurring 500 times. The root meaning concerns walking, which the Bible uses to describe the course of one’s life, in particular one’s relationship with God. Two examples, one from Moses and another from Micah.

“Walk in obedience to all that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.” – Deuteronomy 5:33

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” – Micah 6:8

In the Ancient Near East, people valued travelers because they had stories to tell. Back then, news got around on foot. Getting reports might be one of the motivations behind the virtue of hospitality. If you opened up your home to a traveler, you’d hear things your neighbors didn’t know. The visitor would leave but now you’d have news everyone else wanted to find out. Your importance just shot up!

But some stories should stay private; they’re not meant for public airing. Yet the temptation presses talkers and listeners. It’s easy to make ourselves look good by disclosing something that demeans somebody else.

In this proverb, God challenges us. What’s our character? Are we worth trusting?

*"A perverse person stirs up conflict, and **a gossip** separates close friends." – Proverbs 16:28*

This verse uses a different Hebrew word than what the previous proverb had. Here, the word is nirgan and refers to whispering. In the context of this verse, it's a subtle way of dividing people. Instead of being direct and up front, a gossip tells a small tale here, and drops a provocative idea there. People pick up these clues and run with them. The gossip starts the process but other folks do most of the damage themselves. Arguments, fights, and estrangements result. The gossip then moves on, leaving behind a mess.

If we recognize the potential power of our words, we can decide to speak blessings over others. To know God's will is a delight; to share it is a joy and privilege. It's the truth people need to hear.

*"The words of **a gossip** are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts." – Proverbs 18:8; 26:22*

These two verses are copies of each other. (Not sure why it's copied, but that's what Solomon, the author of much of this book, chose to do!) The word *nirgan* occurs in both. Whispers suggest an audible delicacy, but Solomon uses taste to reinforce the point. Gossip is like fine food or an excellent dessert. We pay extra special attention to it and the memory of this verbal meal stays with us long after we've eaten.

It feels good unless we're the victim of the gossip. It still remains, only we hurt; our happiness is gone, along with our sense of dignity.

What we say endures longer than we suppose. What's worth talking about? What's best left unsaid?

*"A **gossip** betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much." – Proverbs 20:19*

This verse returns to the word *halak* which, as we noted above, conveys the idea of walking or traveling. We must be careful what we tell a literal or figurative traveler. That soul may broadcast our comments. We can't afford to make ourselves vulnerable.

We also benefit when we learn to control our tongue. It's a spiritual discipline that pays rich dividends. People discover they can trust us and the Lord uses us to help them through their trials. Gossip destroys our testimony and ministry.

*"Without wood a fire goes out; without **a gossip** a quarrel dies down." – Proverbs 26:20*

The last verse in our study uses the Hebrew word *nirgan* again. (Remember it conveys subtlety.) As this verse points out, speech is like fire. When it's fueled by the content of gossip, it gets hot real fast. But with no wood, the fire will burn itself out. It has nothing left to consume.

What are we feeding in our lives and in the lives of others? Selfishness or love for God? Flesh or spirit? We know the difference!

Jesus is the answer to the problem of gossip. As one pastor put it on [Facebook](#), we have the choice of gossip or the gospel. If we're going to talk, let's talk about Jesus. Let's talk to Jesus. The time we spend with Him will affect how we communicate with others. We'll seek their good and not their detriment. We'll take on Christ's heart for people and we'll have the courage to speak when we need to. And we'll have the power to remain silent when that's best.

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2 COMMENTS



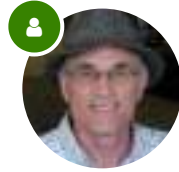
ANITA WISLER

February 12, 2021 at 12:14 pm

Thank you Bob. I pray every day for God to help me say only edifying things to one another or be quiet (hard for a woman) LOL. Pray or me; don't want to

What the Old Testament Says About Gossip - Discipleship Matters
hurt anyone with my words, so I must totally rely on
God and only say what he would say!! Thank you!!

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BOB CONDLY

February 12, 2021 at 1:09 pm

Well, James 3:2 tells us that if we can control our tongue, we're perfect! So we might have a ways to go, but at least we're on the path with Jesus. In fact, He is the path! So God will bless you, Anita:)

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