

Satan's Lethal Weapon

by Bishop Eddie L. Long

One Sunday afternoon, immediately after church, a man and a woman were discussing a couple who had been members of the congregation for several years. It seemed the two busybodies couldn't wait to share the juicy news with each other. Their conversation went something like this:

"Did you see the beautiful car he drove this morning?" the woman whispered. "I wonder how he can afford that on his salary? And what about her designer dress?"

In his characteristic matter-of-fact tone, the man replied, "I heard he plays the lottery."

The two gossipers concluded that the faithful couple were involved in something, well, illegal. They began to spread lies in the name of "prayer," and before long, a beautiful family had fallen prey to the church's rumor mill. Soon, as with countless other congregants, the loving couple left the church, deeply wounded by so-called saints. No one knew they had simply inherited thousands of dollars from a deceased relative.

A fairy tale? Maybe. But even though this may be a make-believe story, these kinds of ungodly conversations do occur across the country at about the same hour each Sunday. And the underlying message is true: Gossip is a deadly poison that affects a person's life, work, marriage and spiritual relationships.

Why do people gossip? Jesus answers this question: "'But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts.'" (Matt. 15:18-19, NKJV).

Many of us treat gossip as a simple little sin. Some of us

even think there is nothing wrong with it. Compared with adultery and murder, how bad can gossip be? we think. We assume that unless we are saying something outrageous, it doesn't matter. We fail to realize that even a suggestion of impropriety is more than enough to get the gossip train rolling.

Do you remember the game you played as a child where you whispered something in another person's ear and the message went around in a circle until it came back to you? If you have played this game, then you know that once in motion, rumors rarely get better, they only get worse.

Gossip is a character assassinator—a lethal weapon. It kills a precious part of other human beings—usually a piece of their spirits and self-esteem.

No matter how we feel about gossip—whether we recognize it for what it is or if we consider it harmless—God's Word is clear. The Bible is filled with warnings about our tongues.

Psalms 34:12-15 teaches that if we want to live long, good lives, we are to watch our tongues and not tell lies. Psalm 101:5 makes an even bolder statement: “Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy; the one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure.” Proverbs 12:18 tells us about the power of words: “There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health.”

So how can you tell if you are gossiping or just passing on genuine information? How can you judge your conversation?

The book of James is an excellent place to seek help. We can avoid gossip by following a few simple guidelines: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James

3:17-18).

Does your conversation meet the above criteria? Is it pure, peaceable and gentle? Is it full of mercy and good fruits? If we follow James' example, we need not worry about hurting others with our words.

As believers, we must choose to speak blessings rather than curses. The Word reminds us that life and death are in the power of the tongue (see Prov. 18:21).

So the next time you see a couple with a mysterious new car and designer clothes, don't gossip with your friends about them. Bless them with your words.