

Snuff Out Gossip

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

Gossip. What an ugly word. I hate the word. It is what sells millions of cheap and tawdry magazines at the checkout line in a supermarket. I so despise them that I like to think I am above this stuff.

I may not read these magazines, but I am just as guilty as those who do read them when I myself hear with glee that a person I don't like has been found out—and I pass it on; or I repeat news of something unflattering about an enemy or a person who has wanted to hurt me in some way; or I make a person feel good that I know would relish news of their enemy's difficulty. James says the tongue is a fire (James 3:6), and when I enter into conversations like this, I grieve the Holy Spirit.

Gossip is a defense mechanism to preserve our self-esteem. It arises out of an inferiority complex; we build ourselves up by tearing others down—or enjoying hearing that they are in trouble of some kind. It is a poisonous habit that betrays our insecurity and lack of spirituality. If gossip makes us feel better, we are self-deceived.

We may claim to be Spirit-filled, sound in our theology, faithful in our commitment to the church, zealous in worship, and have devotional lives that are highly admirable. But when we grieve the Spirit by saying what comes to mind that is not honoring to God, we become the very examples James laments: we praise the Lord and curse men.

James asks, "Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?" (James 3:11). If the well in us—the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39)—overflows, one expects the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). But when the Spirit begins to speak through

us, and instead of love, joy, and peace, suddenly there emerges anger, vengeance, and envy, something has gone terribly wrong.

The Holy Spirit will not produce gossip, anger, revenge, or any other fleshly reaction any more than a fig tree can bear an olive or a grapevine bear a fig (James 3:12-16). It is impossible for the Holy Spirit to produce other than the fruit such as love, joy, peace, and self-control. If we say we are Spirit-filled, then let us display the fruit of the Spirit.

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