

Taming the Tongue

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As I'm sure you're probably all aware, all of us in our individual Christian lives have our own personal struggles. And what I mean by that is we all have our own failings, our own faults and personal sins that we have to struggle with to overcome to try to develop the character of God and Jesus Christ in our own lives and to try to model Jesus Christ's example. And those struggles that we go through tend to be unique to each individual. What I mean by that is we all have our own unique backgrounds and our own strengths and weaknesses. So, we tend to struggle with various issues and not everybody struggles with the same faults.

But as we're going to see today in the sermon, the Bible tells us there's one particular area that pretty much all of us tend to fall short in. We all tend to have struggles with. And it's something that if we don't get under control, it can really kind of negate every other area that we've been successful at. And what I'm referring to is when it comes to taming our tongues. In other words, keeping our tongue under control so we don't sin with our mouth. We don't say things that we shouldn't say. Either speaking out in anger and lashing out and saying things that we regret. Or just letting our carnality get to us and saying inappropriate things or sharing things that we shouldn't share with others. It's an area that all of us tend to fall short in in one way or another.

So, what we're going to do today in the sermon is to look at what the Bible says about taming our tongues. Keeping ourselves from sinning with our mouths. So, if you'd like a title for this sermon, it's:

Taming the Tongue

And to start off with, let's turn over to James 3. Because we'll see here -- as I mentioned in the introduction -- James tells us that this is pretty much an area that all of us fall short in regardless of what our background is or what our individual personality is or our strengths and weaknesses. When it comes to taming our tongues, we all tend to fall short. So, let's start off in James 3 in verse 1.

James 3:1 *"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. 2) For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body."* (NKJV)

He directly says here we all have our individual struggles. And again, those tend to be unique depending upon our personal backgrounds and our personalities and individual strengths and weaknesses. But when it comes to keeping our tongue under control, that tends to be an area that all of us are lacking in in one way or another. So, picking up in verse 3.

“3) Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. 4) Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. 5) Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! 6) And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. 7) For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. 8) But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” (NKJV)

In other words, again, it is an area that we all tend to fall short in in one way or another.

“9) With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. 10) Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. 11) Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? 12) Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.” (NKJV)

He's saying, unlike these other things in nature, the tongue can accomplish great good and it can do great evil as well. In fact, the book of Proverbs warns us, if we don't tame our tongues, it can be the source of destruction to our own lives, and it also can be a source of destruction to others that we know. In other words, it can cause damage to others, to innocent bystanders. And to see this, turn over to the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 13. And we'll see here in verse 3 how our tongues can be our own doom.

Prov 13:3 *“He who guards his mouth preserves his life, But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.” (NKJV)*

In other words -- just to kind of put it in modern-day terminology -- the person who doesn't know when to shut up. When to tame their tongue. That can be the source of their own personal destruction. But see, it can not only be a source of destruction for our own lives. It can also be something that destroys the lives of our friends and neighbors. Other people that we know simply because we shoot our own mouths off, to put it in modern-day terminology. We can wind up doing great damage to other people. And to see that, turn over to Proverbs 11 and we'll read here in verse 9.

Prov 11:9 *“The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor, But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.” (NKJV)*

So, we can see it can be very important for us if we're going to live a Christian life and follow the example of Jesus Christ. One of the things we've got to get under control is controlling our tongue. Knowing when to shut up or just to restrain ourselves. To not lash out in anger. To not say things that we shouldn't say. To not share things that we shouldn't share. Things that should be kept confidential.

And we'll see as we go through this sermon, these are all issues that the Bible addresses. We started off in the book of James. And if you'll turn back over to the book of James, we'll see here that he directly tells us that if we don't tame our tongues, it can pretty much negate every other area that we've successfully overcome in. And see this, turn over to James 1. We'll read here in verse 26.

James 1:26 *"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless."* (NKJV)

See, it's a very serious issue. And we're going to see later in this sermon the sins that we can commit with our tongues -- oftentimes we think of that as more of a minor offense. But we're going to see that God classifies it right up there in the same category with murder, adultery and sexual immorality, and other serious sins that we tend to see as very severe, horrible sins. Well, the things that we can do with our mouths -- just not being able to know when to keep our mouths shut -- God classifies those sins in the same category. And we'll see that later in this sermon.

Now, one of the areas where we typically tend to fall into transgressing with our mouths -- not appropriately keeping our mouths shut -- is what we oftentimes refer to in our modern-day terminology as "gossip". Engaging in gossip or even just facilitating gossip as we're going to see. Now, the Bible oftentimes uses a different term for this. Particularly in the Old Testament you'll oftentimes see the term a "talebearer". Again, that's not a term that we typically use in our modern-day English. We oftentimes refer to someone who's a "gossip" or a "busybody", but we don't tend to use the term "talebearer". But as we're going to see when we dig into what the Bible means with the term "talebearer", it covers a number of concepts that we tend to kind of put under the category, in modern day terminology, of a "gossip".

And to see this, turn over to Leviticus 19. We're going to see here that Moses passes on instructions from God here in terms of what we would typically refer to as "gossip" in our modern-day terminology. He's going to refer to it as a "talebearer". But what we're going to see here is he covers it from both angles. And what I mean by that is it's not just the individual who actively engages in the gossip, in gossiping about other people. It's also a prohibition that we shouldn't facilitate it or stand by idly and basically enable others who are gossiping. And to notice this, let's look in Leviticus 19 in verse 16.

Lev 19:16 *"You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD."* (NKJV)

Now, as we're going to see as we go through this sermon, in the Old Testament, the word "talebearer" is used a number of times. However, even though it's always the same word in English, in Hebrew there are three different words that are oftentimes translated as "talebearer". And they have a variety of meanings. The word that's used here in verse 16, the Hebrew is transliterated into English as "rakiyl". It's Strong's # 4700. And the definition I'm going to share to you comes from The Complete Word

Study Dictionary of the Old Testament by Warren Baker and Gene Carpenter. And they define it as:

“A masculine noun referring to gossip. It refers to spreading rumors or falsities about someone. It is always used in a negative manner. Such a practice was prohibited by the Mosaic Law.... Wisdom Literature condemns it. It entails revealing things that should not be made public.”

And notice in particular that last sentence there mentions “revealing things that should not be made public”. And the reason I mention that is you could tell from the emphasis of the first part of the definition, it was focusing on things that are false. In other words, they're not really true in the first place. In other words, either just outright lies that have been made up about somebody or taking a situation and distorting the truth to the point that you're basically just promoting a falsehood. In other words, the conclusions that you're putting forward because you've distorted what actually took place is really just tantamount to a lie. Oftentimes that's how we think of gossip.

But the reason I point out that it also includes sharing things that should not be shared is because oftentimes you'll hear people say, "Well, this isn't gossip because it's true." Because the information may be factually true that somehow shields it from being gossip. And we're going to see as we go through this sermon that that's not the case. Again, gossip does certainly include things that are just fabricated falsehoods or things where it was based upon truth, but you've distorted it to the point that you basically just turned it into a lie. What's being prohibited here is gossip. But let's also notice the second half of the verse here. Now, the way that this is worded in the New King James doesn't really give you a real clear idea of exactly what it's saying. And again, just to read this again, the second half of the verse from the New King James here.

“...nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor:...” (NKJV)

That's not exactly real clear and you go, "Okay, how exactly does that connect with the first half of the verse?" Well, the key to understanding this is there's a Hebrew idiom here, kind of a figure of speech in Hebrew that we have to unpack to really understand what it's saying. And once we understand that you'll see that the second half of the verse is directly connected to the meaning of the first half of the verse.

And to clarify this, I'd like to quote from Hebrew scholar Nehemia Gordon. You've probably heard me mention him in a number of my sermons if you've listened to many of my sermons over the years. As I've mentioned in previous sermons, he's a Karaite Jew. What that means is he's not a Rabbinical Jew that believes in the Rabbinical law. He's someone that just follows the Old Testament but doesn't accept the New Testament as scripture as we in Christianity do. But he is an expert in Hebrew, and oftentimes he can be helpful in clarifying what Hebrew words and phrases are getting at. And what I'd like to quote is from a transcript of a discussion he had with several other individuals, specifically giving commentary on Leviticus 19. And the section I'm

going to read to you is his direct commentary specifically about verse 16, and particularly the second half of the verse.

“The second half literally says, “Don’t stand by the blood of your neighbor, or your fellow.” That’s a Hebrew idiom that means, don’t stand by idly and do nothing while you see somebody else being harmed; that is, while you see their blood being spilled. So, we’re actually commanded here not to take a stance of inaction, but to actually take action when we see someone’s blood being spilled. Then, in the figurative sense, this connects to the first half of the verse, which is going about as a talebearer among your people.....When you go about gossiping about somebody.....that figuratively is spilling his blood. So “don’t stand by the blood of your neighbor” also means, don’t stand by idly when someone is gossiping. There’s the literal blood and there’s the figurative blood.”

So, what you can see here is the instruction that Moses is giving us here from God. It's not just the instruction of "don't actively be a talebearer who's out slandering other people." It's "take an active stance when you see others doing that." In other words, don't just sit back and soak it up and listen to it and encourage them to engage in this behavior. Voice objection to it. Or just simply get away from that individual if they won't stop this behavior. In other words, take an active stance against it.

Now, as I mentioned before when I was reading the definition of the Hebrew word translated as “talebearer” in Leviticus 19, I mentioned that the first half of the definition focused on something that's just completely false. But the latter part of it also mentioned not sharing something that should be kept secret. And the reason I pointed that out is oftentimes we think, "Well, this isn't gossip because it's true." Because we think that if something is factually true, well, that excuses us and now we're allowed to gossip about it. Well, that's not the case.

Because turn over to Proverbs 11. And notice here how it tells us that one of the things a talebearer does is share secrets. In other words, things that they were told in confidence. Things that when they received the information, the understanding was they were going to keep their mouth shut and not go blabbing it to everybody else. But they wind up running around and sharing it with everybody that'll listen because they think it's hot gossip. And notice this in Proverbs 11 in verse 13.

Prov 11:13 *“A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.”* (NKJV)

In other words, a person who's behaving in a Godly manner, they keep their mouth shut. They keep the matter private because they know that that was the intention when the person told them this information. And again, it may be factually true, but that doesn't excuse us sharing things that we shouldn't share with others. And just so you can see this in greater detail, let me share with you the meaning of the Hebrew word here that is translated as “secret”. Because the Hebrew word for “talebearer”, that's the same word that we covered in Leviticus 19. But just notice here the definition of the word for

“secret”. This is transliterated into English as “sod”. It's Strong's # 5475. And again, the definition I'm going to read to you comes from Baker & Carpenter. And they define it as:

“A masculine noun meaning counsel. Confidentiality is at the heart of this term. According to Proverbs 25:9, information shared in confidence should remain confidential. Yet gossip makes it difficult to do this....Elsewhere, this term reflects a more general meaning of counsel, which is viewed as essential to successful planning.”

The point I want you to see in this is just because something may be factually true doesn't excuse us. We can't fall into that excuse of, “Well, this isn't gossip because it's true.” Because that's not really the question to be asking. The question is, is this something that's appropriate to be shared? Was I told this information in confidence and the person who shared it with me requested that it not be blabbed to the world? Maybe they considered it something personal. Maybe it would be embarrassing to them. Or just something that was sensitive to that person for one reason or another and they simply requested that it not be shared. See, one of the prohibitions for not being a talebearer is just keeping our mouths shut and not sharing those things.

You might have noticed as I read through the definition there, it referred to Proverbs 25 in verse 9. So, let's just take a look at that and see another important principle here pertaining to gossip. We'll actually start reading in verse 8.

Prov 25:8 *“Do not go hastily to court; For what will you do in the end, When your neighbor has put you to shame? 9) Debate your case with your neighbor, And do not disclose the secret to another;”* (NKJV)

And again, this is the same Hebrew word for “secret”.

“10) Lest he who hears it expose your shame, And your reputation be ruined.” (NKJV)

See, what it's also illustrating here is another important principle. Because notice it says if you have an issue with another individual, go to that person and try to work it out with him rather than sharing it with everyone else. Because what so often happens with human nature is we have a beef with another person and instead of going to that individual and addressing whatever grievance or beef we have with that individual, instead we share it with everybody else except that person.

The only person who can work out that dispute or solve whatever our grievance is about is the person we have the grievance with. But instead, we tend to engage in gossip which really just winds up not helping the matter at all and makes things worse. And then just can damage our own reputation or damage the reputation of the other individual. And this is just not wise behavior and something we should avoid being a part of.

But the Bible also tells us that we should personally avoid people who engage in divulging secrets that they shouldn't divulge. And to see this, turn over to Proverbs 20 and we'll read verse 19.

Prov 20:19 *"He who goes about as a talebearer..."* (NKJV)

That's the same Hebrew word here that we covered in Leviticus 19 for "talebearer". We'll see later in the sermon there's two other Hebrew words that we'll cover that are also translated as "talebearer", but this one is the same.

"(19) He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets;..." (NKJV)

And again, this is the same Hebrew word for "secrets". But notice the second half of the verse.

"...Therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips." (NKJV)

Now this is another case where the New King James translation of this doesn't really give us a clear picture of exactly what this verse is getting at. Because it talks about "one who flatters with his lips". Now, if you're like me when I think about someone who flatters with their lips, you generally tend to think of someone who's just overly complimentary to someone else in an insincere manner because they're trying to butter them up because they have a personal agenda. They're trying to get on their good side because they have some agenda that's motivating their behavior. That's oftentimes how we think of someone who's just overly flattery.

Well, that's really not what this verse is getting at. Now, to give you a clearer translation of this verse, I'd like to read to you verse 19 from the Common English Bible. And here's how they translate it.

Prov 20:19 *"Gossips reveal secrets; don't associate with those who talk too much."* (CEB)

In other words, what it's saying is if you notice an individual who has a track record of wanting to reveal everybody's secrets to you. They want to tell you all about what other people told them in confidence, and they want to give you the latest hot gossip. That's somebody to avoid. Again, as we can see from what Moses told us in Leviticus 19, we should voice objection to this. We should take an active stand and let a person know, "No, you shouldn't be sharing this kind of stuff with me. If someone told you this in confidence, and they wanted it to remain confidential, this is inappropriate. I don't want to hear this. Don't share this with me." And if this individual continues to engage in this behavior, don't associate with them.

Because also think of it from a common-sense point of view. If you've heard a lot of my sermons, you probably know one of my favorite sayings is the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. We'll apply that to this situation. If you know an individual and

they're oftentimes coming to you revealing what you know from the conversation is something that was told to them in secret with an understanding of confidentiality. But they're breaching this confidentiality and they're always coming to you and wanting to share this. Well, guess what they're doing with the things that you share with them that you're asking them not to blab to everybody else? I mean, you're seeing in action, basically a commercial for how they're going to behave when you're not looking and what they're going to do behind your back.

So, the wise thing to do is, once you see someone who has a track record for this stop associating with them. Basically, voice your objection to this behavior and if they're not willing to change this behavior, well then distance yourself from them. Again, it's just for your own protection.

Another thing that we need to be aware of is that gossip can be enticing. Because if you go to like a magazine rack in a bookstore or even see sites online, what you'll oftentimes see is publications that are dedicated to gossip. There are organizations like TMZ that we have in the U.S. If you're not in the U.S., you may not be as familiar with them but that's an organization that's basically just dedicated to celebrity gossip. They're always trying to give you the latest details about some celebrity. But it's typically not, "Well, look at this individual. They've got a wonderful marriage and look how successful their kids are. What a good example they set." That's not what they want to tell you about. They want to tell you about the affair that this person is engaging in or some secret sin that they have. And try to expose all of this. One of the reasons why these kinds of sites are popular is because gossip can be very enticing to human nature.

In fact, we're going to see that the Bible refers to it as "tasty trifles". It's a term the Old Testament uses. And again, that's not necessarily a term we use in everyday terminology today but just think of it in terms of like your favorite snack or dessert. Just to share something personal, for me one of the things I tend to like is chocolate or things that are covered in chocolate. Like chocolate-covered raisins or chocolate-covered dried cranberries or chocolate-covered nuts. And I have to be careful if I get something like that because if I get a big bag of it, it just kind of becomes addictive. And I'll just wipe the whole thing out before I've even thought much about it because it's just so enticing. You can't stop eating it.

Well, what the Bible tells us is that's kind of how gossip works to our carnal human nature. If we're not guarding ourselves in this regard, we tend to get sucked into gossip because our human nature just finds it enticing. And to see that, turn over to Proverbs 18 in verse 8.

Prov 18:8 *"The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles,..."* (NKJV)

In other words, they're like your favorite dessert.

"...And they go down into the inmost body." (NKJV)

Now, another thing that we can learn from this verse -- as I mentioned previously in the sermon, there are three different Hebrew words that are all translated into English as the word “talebearer”. Now, in this case, the Hebrew word that’s translated as “talebearer” is transliterated into English as “ragan”. It’s Strong’s # 7279. And again, the definition I’m going to read to you comes from Baker & Carpenter. They define it as:

“A verb meaning to gossip, to complain. It refers to Israel’s complaining, murmuring in the wilderness against the Lord....It indicates excessive complaining in a way that evokes relational problems among persons....It means a gossip, a whisperer, a trouble causer....It describes an act of criticism, complaining, faultfinding....”

Now, notice that the definition of this one didn’t say anything about it being necessarily false, slanderous information. Because as I mentioned before, we oftentimes think of gossip in terms of things that are just lies and that are false. Because you’ll oftentimes hear people say, “Well, this isn’t gossip because this is true.”

Well, notice that this word -- these can be totally factual things that are being referred to here. It refers to the ancient Israelites just complaining. And we won’t take the time to go through those examples with ancient Israel. But you notice oftentimes what they’re griping about is, “I’m thirsty,” or “I’m hot,” or “I’m hungry,” or “Tired of wandering in the wilderness,” and such. These weren’t factually incorrect. It wasn’t a matter that they weren’t really thirsty and that was a lie or they weren’t really hungry and that was a lie. These were true. They’re just always complaining and fault-finding and always griping about their situation rather than being grateful. And what this tells us is that that falls under gossip as well.

Again, the Bible refers to this as a “talebearer”. We don’t typically use the term “talebearer” in our day-to-day English today. We oftentimes refer more often to “gossip”. But a gossip can also be just someone who’s constantly finding fault or constantly complaining about things. That’s something that we’re supposed to avoid as well.

Also turn over to Proverbs 26, because we’ll see here this verse basically repeats what we just covered here, but it also uses a different Hebrew term for the English word “talebearer”. And this is a way we can cover all three of the terms that are translated as “talebearer”. This is Proverbs 26:22.

Prov 26:22 *“The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body.”* (NKJV)

Now, as you can see, this basically says the exact same thing that we just read in Proverbs 18. But in this case, the Hebrew word that’s translated as “talebearer” is transliterated into English as “nirgan”. It’s Strong’s # 5372. And again, the definition I’m going to read to you comes again from Baker & Carpenter.

“A masculine noun indicating a gossip, a slanderer. It depicts a person who harms others by attacking them verbally falsely....It indicates a person who whispers things that will harm others, things that should be kept secret..., creating tension and strife....”

See, once again, we have both the concept of something that's just completely false, that wasn't true in the first place, or again, has been so distorted and misrepresented that it's basically a lie. It's not only that. It's including the concept of just sharing something that should be secret. That should be kept confidential. Something that was never intended to be shared. So again, we can't use the excuse that, "Well, this isn't gossip because it's true." Because things that are true can be gossip as well. And again, as we covered previously, they can be very destructive to ourselves and to other people's lives as well.

And it's important for us when we look at this subject -- because oftentimes we tend to look at gossiping when we engage in it or justify it ourselves, we look at it as a more minor issue. We don't think of it as a sin that would be equated with like murder or sexual immorality. But in reality, that's how God classifies it. And to see that, turn over to Romans 1. We'll start reading in verse 28.

Rom 1:28 *“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; 29) being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30) backbiters,...” (NKJV)*

And notice the terms “whisperers” and “backbiters”. We're going to come back here in a minute to what the Greek means here in both of these cases. It's basically terms that we refer to today as being gossips. Continuing in verse 30.

“...haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31) undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32) who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.” (NKJV)

Before we go any further, notice that in verse 32 it just gave us this list of these heinous sins. And again, we'll understand in a minute here -- “whisperers” and “backbiters”, what exactly that means. Because again, that's referring to forms of gossip. But notice here, at the end, it referred to not only those who engage in the behavior, but those who approve of such things. Again, it's not only those who are actively doing them, but those who tend to facilitate, who kind of passively facilitate this behavior. That's considered just as wrong. In other words, these are things we have to actively take a stand against.

Now, as I mentioned here, it uses the words here in New King James as “whisperers” and “backbiters”. Now, what exactly are those referring to here? What we're going to

see here is this refers to slander and gossip. And it's basically the concept of those who do it kind of discreetly and privately, behind the scenes, behind other people's backs. Or those who just do it very blatantly and openly. It's just covering both ends of that is what this is getting at.

Now, to cover the Greek term here that is translated as "whisperers". It's transliterated into English as "psithuristes". It's Strong's # 558. And the definition I'm going to read to you comes from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates. He defines it as:

"to whisper. A whisperer, a secret slanderer. It is similar to katálos (2637), an accuser, a backbiter who does his slandering openly...."

Because as you'll see here, the word for "backbiter", that's the word "katalalos" that was just referred to here. This is Strong's # 2637 and Zodhiates defines this as:

"to speak against. Slanderous....a slanderer, backbiter."

So, what you can see is this is basically referring to slanderous gossip. Again, whether it's done very quietly in hushed tones behind people's backs and we're more discreet about how we do it, or if we're just very outspoken and do it very openly. He's covering both concepts.

But what I want you to notice is he ranks it among murder, among sexual immorality, all manner of evil. He considers it a very serious sin. So, this is something we need to take very seriously when it comes to taming our tongue and realizing when we should shut up. When we should just not engage in this behavior or allow our human nature to take control of our tongues.

To understand better how to do this, let's also look at some of the pitfalls that can cause us to kind of slide into engaging in gossip. Because there's some common pitfalls that if we're not aware of, that can cause us to kind of get sucked into gossiping type of behavior. Either spreading secrets or just trying to tear other people down out of our carnal human nature. And if we can kind of be aware of these motivations, we can catch ourselves before we slide into this behavior.

One of them is having envy or pride. In other words, being in one way or another jealous of something somebody else has. Or just having a desire to exalt ourselves. Because sometimes in both of these behaviors, we can find ourselves criticizing or kind of tearing other people down. Whether it's just being openly slanderous and just blatantly malicious about it, or if it's just kind of subtly through our human nature. Just trying to kind of tear them down in an effort to try to exalt ourselves. Because oftentimes human nature will look at it like that. If we kind of dig at other people and try to push them down, that somehow, we're exalting ourselves.

And to see a good example of this, turn over to Numbers 12. We'll see here a situation where Miriam and Aaron both engage in gossip about Moses. But we'll quickly see here that the issue that they're criticizing Moses over really isn't the real issue for them. That's really not what it's about. Because their real issue is some underlying envy and jealousy of the role that Moses has and his relationship with God. And they're wanting basically to kind of subtly tear Moses down to exalt themselves. Because in this situation not only can you see just group dynamics in terms of envying another person and their role in the group, these three are also siblings. So, I'm sure some sibling rivalry plays a role in this as well. Let's start off here in Numbers 12 in verse 1.

Num 12:1 *"Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman."* (NKJV)

Now it says "spoke against" there. It really means "to criticize". In fact, in my New King James, if you look in the margin, there's a little "1" next to the words "spoke against". And in the margin, it says "criticize". Basically, they're criticizing Moses over this. But pay attention to verse 2 and we'll quickly realize that the marriage is not even really the issue here. The real issue here is some envy and jealousy and pride issues that are motivating their behavior. This is in verse 2.

"2) So they said, 'Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?' And the LORD heard it." (NKJV)

Notice here, it's not really about his marriage. That's just a way for them to try to pick at Moses. What their real issue here is, "Aren't we just as good as him?" Because see, Moses had a more significant role than them. And see, if you stop and look at the roles that they played, it wasn't like they were being ignored and they didn't have significant roles as well. Aaron is High Priest. The Priesthood throughout all of Israel's history has been that they're the Aaronic Priesthood. They're descendants of Aaron. He had a very significant role. The Bible directly tells us that Miriam was a Prophetess.

It wasn't like they were being neglected and they weren't being utilized as well. No, they were, they were just envious of Moses. And because of their own pride they want to be in as exalted a role as Moses was in. And if we then just read the rest of this of how God corrects them, it becomes very obvious that the marriage issue that they're criticizing him over, that wasn't even the real issue at all. The underlying issue was their envy and their pride. That's what was causing them to criticize and to gossip about Moses. Notice here, just pick up in verse 3 here.

"3) (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.) 4) Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, 'Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!' So the three came out. 5) Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. 6) Then He said, 'Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD,

make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. 7) Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. 8) I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?" (NKJV)

Notice when God comes to correct them, He doesn't even bring up the marriage issue that they were criticizing Moses for. Because He knew that wasn't even the real issue to begin with. They were just envious of Moses' position. That's what was motivating their gossip. And pick up in verse 9.

"9) So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed. 10) And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper. 11) So Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned. 12) Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb!" 13) So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "Please heal her, O God, I pray!" 14) Then the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received again." 15) So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in again. 16) And afterward the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran." (NKJV)

So, you can see here what was motivating their behavior. This wasn't about a marriage. That was just an excuse to find fault with Moses because what the real issue was is they had envy of Moses' relationship with God and basically the leadership role that he had in Israel. They basically were trying to criticize him to try to kind of tear Moses down to make themselves equal with him.

That was what was causing this behavior. And to see another example of this, turn over to 3 John. We'll see here in the New Testament a very similar type of example. This is 3 John and we'll start reading here in verse 9.

3 John 9 *"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. 10) Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. 11) Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God." (NKJV)*

So, you can see what's motivating Diotrephes' behavior here is again this desire for the "preeminence". It's pride. It's a desire to exalt himself over others. And he tries to accomplish this by gossiping about the Apostles and finding fault trying to tear them down in an effort to try to exalt himself. And to see that let me share with you the Greek

word here that's translated into "preeminence" in English. This word is transliterated into English as "philoproteuo". It's Strong's # 5383. And the definition I'm going to read to you comes from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates. He defines it as:

"to be first, preeminent. To love to have preeminence...."

To put this in you might say a more modern-day terminology, Diotrephes wanted to be the "alpha male". He saw himself as someone who should be in the limelight. Who should be exalted and should be in charge. And he wants to exalt himself. So, what he does is he engages in gossip towards the Apostles.

Because notice in verse 10 where he talks about "prating against us with malicious words". Now the Greek word there for "prating against" is "phluareo". It's Strong's # 5396. And again, I'm going to read to you a definition from Zodhiates. He defines it as:

"To overflow with talk, chatter, prattle....to blabber, chatter, talk in an idle, trifling manner against someone; talking idly or falsely...."

In other words, he's gossiping. He's finding fault with them. And again, a person can do this not just from being directly slanderous and making up lies about someone. They can do this subtly. If they have an envy for someone else and again have that carnal human nature idea that if I just bring other people down -- kind of tear them down -- it somehow exalts me. What they'll oftentimes do is just find ways to take subtle jabs. Just always kind of trying to find fault in something to just try to pick at somebody. Constantly to try to tear them down to exalt themselves. But the underlying motivation that comes from this, as I mentioned, is an envy and a pride.

So, if we find ourselves at times just trying to always find fault with other people and be nitpicky about it, we need to ask ourselves where that is coming from? Because is that really what this is about or is this about my own pride. My own desire to be exalted and am I carnally thinking that if I kind of tear other people down, that that somehow exalts myself? Because oftentimes what that does is, it accomplishes the exact opposite. Because other people will see us not in a more exalted position. If they see you as the person who's always the fault finder. What happens is people just get annoyed by that and they see you as less. And it doesn't wind up making you look stronger in their eyes. It eventually makes them annoyed and not want to be around you. It just kind of accomplishes the opposite.

And another common way that we can find ourselves falling into gossip is if we're talking about other people or criticizing or complaining constantly to kind of fill a void in our life. To see an example with that, turn over to 1 Timothy 5. We'll see here the Bible uses a couple of examples of where people wind up engaging in gossip really just out of an effort to fill a void in their life rather than finding something more productive to do with their energy to fill that void. And to see an example of this is start reading here in 1 Timothy 5 in verse 11.

1 Tim 5:11 *“But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, 12) having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. 13) And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. 14) Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. 15) For some have already turned aside after Satan.”* (NKJV)

Notice how he talks about being idle and falling into being a gossip and a busybody. This is someone who's basically trying to fill a void in their life by meddling in everyone else's business and finding fault with others. Notice here how Paul says what they should be doing instead. Get married, raise children. Basically, the concept is focus your energy on something productive. Find something productive and helpful to do rather than trying to fill that void by being a busybody and wind up engaging in destructive behavior.

And to see another time where Paul addresses this, turn over to 2 Thessalonians 3. We'll see here again where being idle, having an empty void in our lives can cause us to wind up falling into the pitfall of gossiping about other people. And this is starting in verse 6.

2 Thess 3:6 *“But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.”* (NKJV)

Now if we keep reading through this, we'll see what he means by being “disorderly”. It's just basically being lazy and not working when you're capable of working.

“7) For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 8) nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, 9) not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.” (NKJV)

Notice he's working to support himself is basically what he's referring to here. Because again being “disorderly” is being lazy and not working.

“10) For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. 11) For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.” (NKJV)

In other words, instead of finding something gainful to do and being productive where they can support themselves, they're filling that void by being a busybody in other people's lives. Pick up in verse 12.

"12) Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. 13) But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. 14) And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15) Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." (NKJV)

So once again we see the instructions when the Bible addresses this issue of engaging in gossip. It's not just the issue of telling us not to actively engage it in ourselves. It also repeatedly commands us not to facilitate this behavior or enable this behavior in other people. In other words, if someone's coming to you constantly with gossip, voice an objection to it. I mean, try to be tactful and nice about it to reach that person but voice the fact that you think this is inappropriate and you don't want to engage in this behavior.

If they're wanting to share with you, things that you know that someone else shared with them in confidence. That it's a secret that they shouldn't be sharing. Tell them you don't appreciate them doing this and you don't want to hear it. And again, if they won't stop engaging in this behavior, we have repeated instructions throughout the Bible that what you do is you distance yourself from that person. Again, you get away from facilitating that behavior.

Because see, what we always want to remember is that God uses a scale when it comes to judging us. He basically describes it as with the same measure we use, He will measure back to us. So, we don't want to be involved in gossiping or tearing down other people. Inappropriately criticizing them and such because we don't want to be treated that way ourselves. And again, God directly tells us He's going to measure back to us how we treat other people. And to see that turn over to Matthew 7. We'll start reading in verse 1.

Matt 7:1 *"Judge not, that you be not judged. 2) For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3) And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4) Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5) Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. 6) 'Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.'" (NKJV)*

The thing to think about when we have that desire, that urge to share gossip, to be overly critical and fault finding of others is, "Do I want other people talking about me like that?" I don't want people sharing my most embarrassing moments or constantly bringing up the things I've done in my past that I'd really rather people forget about. I really rather just put that behind me and leave that in the past and be able to change my life. We always need to think about how would I want to be treated if I was on the other

side, on the other end of this? If we stop and frame it in that manner, that can cause us to pause before we shoot our mouths off. Before we start sharing things or being critical or saying things about other people that we wouldn't want said about ourselves.

Because we also have to keep in mind that God directly tells us we're going to have to give an account for every word that we say. And to see that, turn over to Matthew 12. It's Matthew 12 in verse 33.

Matt 12:33 *"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. 34) Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35) A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. 36) But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37) For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."* (NKJV)

When you stop and think of it in terms of, "I'm going to get judged for everything I let come out of my mouth," now if that's not a motivator to put a guard over our mouths, I don't know what is. Because we all need to stop and think about that. Again, how would I feel on the receiving end? If I was on the other end of this? Because if we stop and think about it in that context that could cause us to pause before we allow ourselves to slip into the behavior of engaging in gossip.

And as I mentioned in the sermon it's also helpful for us when we find ourselves wanting to be critical of other people, we see that tendency in ourselves to want to tear other people down, stop and ask ourselves, "Is that really what this is about or do I just have a desire to fill a void in my life? Or just pride that I want to exalt myself or I want to try to look good in front of others?" Because if we stop and question those motives then we can understand ourselves and catch ourselves not falling into that behavior.

But as I also mentioned throughout this sermon, when it comes to gossip, it's not just a Biblical instruction for us to not engage in this behavior. We're also commanded to actively take a stand against it. In other words, when other people come to us with gossip it's our responsibility to tell them, "No, this is not appropriate. We shouldn't be engaging this behavior. And I don't want you coming to me and sharing this. I don't want you sharing other people's secrets with me that they told you in confidence. If it was told you in confidence, well, let it stay in confidence." See, if we take that type of approach not only can we guard our own mouths from engaging in sin and falling into the sin of gossip. But if we take an active stand against it, to resist that, we can also help our brothers, our fellow Christians in not engaging in gossip as well.