

One day in a zoo a large piece of meat was thrown to the snakes in their enclosure. One snake, a small one, latched on to one end of the big hunk of meat. And a larger snake grabbed on to the opposite side. And they both started gobbling down the meal, each one working from opposite ends. When the meat was being finished off, and their mouths came close to each other, the bigger snake just kept right on going-----and devoured the smaller snake! (“Our Daily Bread”, 6/20/00) We can destroy each other, devour each other, with gossip. With gossip, little problems grow into big problems. Reputations get damaged. Resentment and anger build. It can happen in families, at work, in neighborhoods, in churches..... So, if we have that pig, that sin, in our lives we need to send it over the cliff.

How?

First, by realizing it is certainly not trivial but a very serious problem. It’s a destructive sin and not only to the person being gossiped about. It is also very spiritually destructive to the gossiper. St. Poemen, a Desert Father long ago said this about gossip---“Gossip is an insidious evil, destructive of the soul of the person gossiping.” (Like A Pelican In The Wilderness, Stelios Ramos, Holy Cross Press, p. 129)

Second---We can defeat gossip by speaking less. We don’t have to express verbally everything that comes into our mind. Others are probably much less interested in what we are thinking than we guess they are! Not every one needs to know our opinion about everything and everybody!

Some years back there was a man in Salt Lake City named Benjamin LeBaron. He thought everyone should know what he thought about himself. And what he thought about himself was that he was God. He gave himself a new name---“The Lion of Israel”. And he made sure everyone knew what he thought about himself by standing in downtown Salt Lake City and yelling to passersby at the top of his lungs---“I am God, I am the Lion of Israel”. Before long, he ended up in the Utah State Mental Hospital.

(Under The Banner of Heaven, Jon Krakauer, Anchor Press, 2004, p. 268)

Most gossipers don’t yell their gossip, but it still can get nasty. Don’t be like Benjamin LeBaron and think you have to always have something to say, that you must tell everyone your thoughts. You don’t need to. Just speak less and that will be a start on eliminating gossip.

Third---Be very strict with yourself when gossip raises its ugly head. Guard yourself against it! Whenever a conversation starts to be about someone not in the conversation, be careful—gossip may be about to start. You’ve heard words like these---“Joe is just such a good fellow, but.....” That “but” is probably leading to some gossip about Joe!

Some options for you when a conversation turns into gossip---Try to steer the conversation in a different direction. Just get silent. Or simply say, “I don’t want to talk about Joe.” Or, if nothing else works---just walk away, or hang up the phone, or click off the computer....

Fourth---Remember an important fact. You are the only person in control of your mouth. You are the only person in control of what your fingers type on the keyboard. Don’t give anyone else that control. No one can make you say anything. Be in control of your own words.

There are lots of sins, lots of pigs, to deal with! Gossip is one of the worst, perhaps because on the surface it seems small and trivial. But it is deadly. Just a few words are spoken....then it starts to spread....then people get hurt.

It's like a highly contagious disease and can spread fast. It's definitely a sin to run from, to avoid, to send over the cliff!

When tempted to gossip—pray for strength to resist, be on guard, and with God's help, stay in control of your tongue. Speak only words that bless, not words that hurt.