

**Beware! Gossip can kill!**

The sin of gossip is nowhere better illustrated than in Numbers 12: 1- 15. It warns against its evil power to destroy all kinds of relationships - also in the church of Christ.

The setting for this story is Moses' marriage to a woman from the land of Cush. Miriam and Aaron disapproved of this wedding because his bride was not an Israelite. But, instead of directly bringing their unease to Moses, they gossiped behind his back about it, attacking Moses' character as a result of what they considered an inappropriate marriage. The discussion then moved on to assess his leadership and they started to believe that it would be better if they too became leaders in Israel. God's reaction to this gossip was fierce, swift and violent. He condemned Aaron and Miriam for challenging Moses' authority and imposed leprosy on Miriam as punishment. Moses intervened and begged God to heal her. Miriam was healed, but only after she was expelled from God's people for seven days.

What do we learn about gossip from this story?

**Firstly, that gossip is a cowardly act.** Gossip discusses the victims in their absence, denying them the opportunity to defend themselves. Moses' marriage to the Cushite was not against the law and Miriam and Aaron never approached him to understand his reasons for it.

**Secondly, gossip spreads like disease.** Gossip easily develops into a more serious threat to kill relationships. What seemed to be "only Moses' personal life" ended up in challenging his call by God. Gossip seldom restrains itself but seems to have a life of its own, spreading like mortal cancer against which only God can protect us.

**Thirdly, gossip seems to build up the person responsible for the story, by destroying the injured party.** Aaron and Miriam wanted to increase their influence by challenging the uniqueness of Moses' call. Nobody gossips to help the injured party, although it is most of the time fabricated that it is the case. It always has a selfish, evil element to it.

**Fourthly, gossip is injury by a perceived friend,** relative or spiritual brother or sister! Are you upset when a total stranger insults you? I bet not as much as when someone you love dearly calls you names and question your character and the sincerity of your faith. The same is true of gossip. It is the friendly and trusted person, often close to us, that has the greatest potential to cause hurt, pain and destruction through gossip. It often is the church's own members that maim and disable her most severely.

**Lastly, never forget that God passionately hates gossip.** God's fierce judgment on Aaron and Miriam for their gossip is but one example of how God hates this sin and that it provokes his anger and punishment.

*Prov 6:16-19: "There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers."*

A congregation is not made up of perfect people. Also not of robots without feelings, but of humans who naturally respond both positively or negatively to the words we utter when we speak to them and when we discuss them behind their backs. Our spouses, friends and colleagues, children and their friends also are mere humans of flesh and blood that easily are hurt and whose lives can be effortlessly destroyed.

A strict word of reprimand cannot do even a small measure of the harm that gossip does. Specifically if it was deserved and really meant to protect against further foolishness or godlessness. If we truly have someone's best interest at heart, speak directly to him/her, without hypocrisy, while being willing to listen to their side of what occurred and while praying that you act under the guidance of the Spirit and with the love of God!

Selfish, malignant words and gossip have the potential to break people down! Encouragement, education, instruction from God's word and reassurance can build them up in the Lord!

*Psalms 19:14: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer."* What words will you speak today?