

Sweet but deadly morsels

Introduction

We live in a culture in which information is much like gold. The more information you can possess, organize, and control, the more power you can yield. The thirst for information certainly fuels the media and entertainment industry. For example, peruse any given news media website, CNN, ABC, or FOX and you will find gads of information only a click away. People want to be informed of the latest international and local events. There is also another category of information that exists on these reputable news outlets—gossip. One can read stories about celebrities and their love interests or the most intimate details of a person’s life. It seems as though man has an insatiable desire for gossip, rumors of a personal or intimate nature, which may or may not be true. Gossip is of course to be expected of the world, the world is as the world does, and the world is sinful. Yet, sadly, the thirst for gossip also affects the church.

There are many in the church who like to be “in the know.” They not only want to be the first to know what happens in the church, they also like to be the first to tell others. The problem with the church grapevine, is that many of the grapes are often sour if not downright rotten. Seldom do people actually go to the information source but rely upon second- or third-hand information, then the information quickly degenerates from showing shades of truth to being completely obscured in falsehood. Another common practice is sharing gossip under the rubric of a “prayer request.” In truth, the one who shares gossip under the guise of a prayer request has little to no interest in prayer. What does the Bible have to say about gossip and what are some ways to avoid spreading it?

What the Bible says about gossip

We must realize where the Scriptures place gossip in the grand scope of redemptive history. Scripture speaks of two ages, “the present evil age” (Gal 1.4) and “the age to come” (Luke 18.30; Eph. 1.21; Heb 6.5). The present evil age is under the dominion of sin and death, the results of the work of the first Adam, and the age to come is under the dominion of the Holy Spirit, the results of the work of the second Adam, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15.45-49). Each age has its own characteristics. This present evil age is marked by sin and death, which produces the works of the flesh: “Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these” (Gal 5.19-21a). By contrast, the age to come, which has dawned with the first advent of Christ but especially with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) is marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5.22-23). The contrast between the two ages is stark—quite literally the two ages are completely different worlds, which is why Scripture affixes the adjective *new* to the creation that emerges with the work of Christ (2 Cor 5.17; Gal 6.15). So, then, where does gossip fit in the scope of redemptive history?

Paul places gossip squarely in the realm of this present evil age. In his rebuke of the Corinthians he writes: “For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish,

and that you may find me not as you wish- that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder” (2 Cor 12.20). Notice that gossip is a work of the flesh, or something that characterizes this present evil age. The place of gossip in redemptive history gives us a better understanding of some of the statements that the Bible makes about this sin.

The book of Proverbs has much to say about gossip: “A gossip betrays confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret” (Pro 11.13; NIV). This is straightforward—one who gossips betrays friends. The trustworthy person does not spread the intimate details of his friend’s life to others. Proverbs gets quite pointed, though, when it states, “A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends” (Pro 16.28; NIV). Notice in this synonymous parallelism, when the first and second lines of the verse contain synonymous ideas, that not only does a gossip create division between close friends but the verse identifies the one who gossips as a “perverse man.” The connection of gossip with perversity is quite literally, damning. How so? Remember what Paul said of those who perform the works of the flesh, “Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5.21c). Keeping in mind the place of gossip within the scope of redemptive history, the one who practices gossip bears the characteristics of this present evil age, not of the age to come, the Holy Spirit, and Christ. For the unbeliever, it is not out of character to gossip, he is, after all, under the dominion of sin and death. For the believer, the one who possesses the power of the age to come, the Holy Spirit, and is being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8.28-29; 2 Cor 3.18), it is completely and totally out of character to gossip. The Christian who gossips is like the Israelite who, while being liberated from the bondage of his cruel Egyptian overlords, wanted to return to his slavery to be filled with meat and bread (Exo 16.3). Like Esau, his belly would be full but at the price of his interest and place in the covenant (Gen 25.29-34; cf. Heb 12.16). Is it any wonder then that the book of Proverbs states, “The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts” (18.8; 26.22; NIV). The one who gossips will enjoy the tasty morsels, but at what price? The one who gossips eats tasty morsels of death, which go into his inmost parts. The one who gossips is like the Israelite who, does not merely talk of returning to Egypt, but actually goes back to his cruel taskmaster. The one who gossips returns to the dominion of sin and death. As we can see, then, gossip is quite deadly. How do we avoid the sin of gossip?

Avoiding the sin of gossip

Once again we can turn to the book of Proverbs to listen to its practical advice concerning gossip: “A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much” (20.19; NIV). Notice that the first part of the verse says that a gossip will betray your trust. The verse then goes on to say to avoid those who talk too much. In other words, gossip is often connected with too much talking. It is best not to discuss certain things. This is evident, for example, with personal information. If a friend trusts you with intimate details of his life, keep his trust and his secrets safe. Do not discuss them with others. The only one with whom you should discuss them is with our heavenly Father in prayer. Similarly, sometimes it is best not to discuss a situation, and for this reason Proverbs states: “Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down” (Pro 26.20; NIV). What feeds gossip? We have all heard the cliché, “Idle hands are the devil’s

workshop.” Idleness often feeds gossip as Paul’s comments regarding young widows shows: “Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not” (1 Tim 5.13). The chief way we can avoid gossip, however, is in recognizing that at its root, gossip is completely antithetical to the Christian because it involves the sin of arrogance.

The gossip wants others to see that “he knows,” or he wants to spread gossip about others so that he appears superior. By contrast, the way of humility, the way of the cross and the image of Christ, says that others are more important (Phil 2.5-11). As sons of God and children of the light (Rom 8.16; Eph 5.8) we have been brought out from under the dominion of sin and death and under the dominion of Christ and the Holy Spirit. We are being conformed to the image of Christ. Keeping this in mind, we must realize that arrogance lies at the heart of gossip, which is antithetical to the Christ-like humility that we are to bear. The one who bears Christ’s image, and who is indwelt by the power of the age to come, the Holy Spirit, therefore sows love, not dissension. He wants to protect his friends, edify them, and will surrender his desire “to know” even at the expense of the esteem of men. If we are filled with the fruit of the Spirit, then this means that we will comport ourselves in a Christ-like manner when it comes to gossip. What do Christ-like responses to gossip look like?

When someone brings a morsel of gossip, refuse to eat it. Gently, and in love, remind the gossip of the poison of which he partakes. When a friend tells us something intimate, hold it in our hearts and take it to our heavenly Father in prayer. Instead of sowing gossip and seeds of dissension, sow seeds of love. We are often quick to gossip about our brother in Christ, how often do we spread good words about him? When we are tempted by gossip, let us turn to our heavenly Father that he would further conform us to the image of Christ by the power of the age to come, the Holy Spirit—that the he would cause his fruit to abound in us.

Conclusion

We live during a period in redemptive history where two ages overlap—the present evil age and the dawn of the age to come. We therefore have a choice when it comes to gossip. We must not be conformed to the patterns of this world but must transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12.1-2). We can either yield and surrender ourselves to the present evil age and give ourselves over to the dominion of sin and death effectively hiding the light of Christ under the darkness of sin. Or, we can refuse to return to Egypt and shine the light of Christ in the midst of the darkness. Let us not return to Egypt for the tasty morsel but instead have the mind of Christ, that we would love our brothers and glorify our heavenly Father by having words of love, not gossip, in our mouths.