

Whisperers & Backbiters

by Wayne Goff

While studying Romans 1, we cannot help but view the list of sinful attitudes and actions which are soundly condemned by the Lord. Sadly, some Christians not only ignore a careful study of the list, but have unwittingly been guilty of some of these dastardly deeds! Thus, we need to study carefully these things and examine our own lives.

Sins of the tongue are some of the most prominent sins committed by brethren. Often we start out meaning well, but if we are not careful we fall into a sinful habit of which we must repent. Two sins found in Romans 1 which fall into this category are “whisperers” and “backbiters.”

Whisperers

The definition from a biblical dictionary on this word is “a whisperer, secret slanderer, detractor ...: Rom. 1:29” [Thayer’s]. Another biblical dictionary says the word means “...to speak into the ear, to speak secretly” [Robertson’s]. The word only appears here in the New Testament, but it’s meaning is clear. A person who quietly goes around defaming others is a sinner. Slander is defined as “the action or crime of making a false spoken statement damaging to a person’s reputation” [Oxford American Dictionary]. We may defend our actions by saying that what we are telling is the truth, but if the accused does not have the opportunity to present his side of the story, then how do you know it is the truth?

Jesus was crucified by the Jewish nation on the **basis** of slanderous accusations (Matt. 26:59-60). After finding nothing that would work, finally two false accusers came forward and said that “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’” (Matt. 26:61). First of all, notice that such an accusation is certainly not worthy of the death penalty. However, I’m sure his accusers wanted to make Jesus sound like a rebel and traitor to His nation. Second, notice that the accusation was similar to a statement Jesus made but it was taken out of context! Jesus did say that if you put Him to death that He would rise from the dead on the third day (see Jn. 2:19-21). Third, notice that the inspired record still says these men making these accusations were “false accusers.” They were violators of one of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:16). Furthermore, they were doing the very thing Exodus 23:1 says not to do.

Satan is an accuser of our brethren night and day (Rev. 12:10). Do you really want to be practicing the same thing as Satan? How can you do that and be a follower of Christ?

Backbiters

Once again our biblical dictionaries define this word as “a defamer, evil speaker (A.V. back-biters): Rom. 1:30” [Thayer’s]. Furthermore, it means “... to talk back (James 4:11), and ... talking back (2 Cor. 12:20), talkers back whether secretly or openly.” [Robertson’s]. There is not a great deal of difference between a whisperer and a backbiter. Both are trying to defame or slander another person. Their mode of operation seems to be the only appreciable difference in these two words. A backbiter seems to be more aggressive in his accusations, and while we usually think of someone who does this as doing so behind our backs, the actual meaning of the biblical word does not limit to such. In fact, once again we see that Jesus’ accusers did it to His face when they sought to destroy Him.

Guilt By Association

We often talk about being guilty by association. Certainly the context of Romans 1 has some very heinous, depraved crimes which are associated with these two sins of the tongue. We may not think these sins are as evil as they actually are, according to the Lord. James 3:2 warns how easily it is to get caught up in the sins of the tongue. Take a look at your words to be sure that you are not guilty of these things.

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