
Words of Truth

Is It Gossip To Talk About Brethren When They Are Not Present?

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As long as I have been a Christian I have both received reports about brethren in other congregations and have given them myself. Every week I talk with brethren outside of the congregation here in El Paso. In those discussions I often talk about how things are going here. I do so very openly. I don't hide anything. That was even true when we had problems we have dealt with. When we learn about Jesus we see that He was not a secretive person. John records this: *"The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing"* (John 18:19-20).

Over the years I have encountered more than a few people, proclaiming to be members of the body of Christ, that believed talking about the affairs of others when they are not present is gossip. The English word Gossip is defined as: "casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, **typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true**" (New Oxford American Dictionary). Therefore, gossip is synonymous with hearsay, having a whispering campaign against someone, a smear campaign, slander, etc. The opposite of gossip is facts, truth.

If, when talking about gossip, someone is talking about spreading slanderous reports then they are right to condemn such (Romans 3:8). What about true reports? What about discussing matters of one's faithfulness or lack thereof outside of their presence? Are these things wrong? Can they be wrong? Let's consider some things as a study here.

It Is Scripturally Right To Give True Reports About Brethren To Others

When Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch there was a great dispute there. So, they left Antioch and went to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the other apostles, the elders in Jerusalem, and the whole congregation in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-21). They did not take brethren from Antioch with them as not to "talk behind their backs". They went and reported what they had seen and heard. The congregation in Jerusalem, with the direct aid of the Holy Spirit, got involved and wrote a letter to Antioch to help resolve the situation (Acts 15:22-35). If you conclude that giving a true report about others is gossip, and that is wrong, you have just condemned the Apostles and the Holy Spirit. This answers, for the honest person, all of the questions of our study.

The Apostle Paul had a common practice of giving and sending reports (Ephesians 6:21-23, Philippians 2:25-30, and Colossians 4:7-9). He sent faithful men (Proverbs 25:13) to find out how things were with the saints and to report back to him. John wrote: *“For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth”* (III John 1:3-4). John did not condemn the people that testified about others. He rejoiced in the good news. We are supposed to mark faithful saints which are ensamples to be followed (Philippians 3:16-17). True reports about brethren are necessary if we are going to follow the pattern revealed in the New Testament. Even if the reports are not good, knowing what is going on among brethren is important.

Even If The Report Is Negative

We read in the Scriptures about a man that worked with Paul named Demas (Colossians 4:14). As time goes on, we learn that Demas fell away (II Timothy 4:10). We read about Hymenaeus and Alexander being delivered to Satan (I Timothy 1:19-20). We read about Barnabas being a faithful co-worker with Paul (Acts 13:1-3), but then he walked away from the Lord (Galatians 2:11-13). We read that some in Corinth reported to Paul about the problems there (I Corinthians 1:11, I Corinthians 5:1, and I Corinthians 11:17-18). We read in the Scriptures that we are to mark [note] those that cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned and avoid them (Romans 16:17-18). If messengers are found faithful, we are to believe them and not accuse them of being gossipers. If there are questions about motives, that is a whole different matter of consideration.

If We Are Going To Look At Motives

Paul wanted to know about how brethren were doing because he was concerned about them (Acts 15:36, I Corinthians 16:17-18, Philippians 2:19, and I Thessalonians 2:17-20). He was concerned both as a teacher and a brother in Christ. He was also considerate of how others might worry about him in all that he suffered (I Thessalonians 3:1-8). Thus, we don't question men like Paul whose fruit showed he had pure motives (Matthew 7:15-20). Let me add this too, even if a person's motives are not pure; that doesn't change facts. If someone gives a factual report, truth is not affected by motives (Philippians 1:12-17). If you suspect someone is a busybody (I Peter 4:15), deal with that on its own. Be careful what you call sin!

Conclusion

If you believe giving or reading a report about others is wrong, throw away your Bible. Our faith is rooted in testimony about what people have seen and reported about others (John 15:26-27, Acts 1:8, and I Corinthians 15:1-11). The Scriptures are the truth (John 17:17); not gossip!