



anti•VENOM
The Truth about Gossip and Slander

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Who Will Speak Out?

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

[Ephesians 4:29 \(NIV\)](#)

Sometimes it's just not very fun to live in a fallen universe.

During the spring of 2008, a heartrending story appeared in the news. A middle-aged woman was charged with pretending to be a 16-year-old boy on a "social networking" website aimed at teens. According to a grand jury indictment, the woman used this fake identity to "torment, harass, humiliate and embarrass" a 13-year-old girl in her neighborhood. The woman's motive? The neighbor girl was a former friend of her daughter. The woman was trying to dig up information about the young girl that she could use to "protect" her daughter. Yet the only result was the destruction of a fragile young life. After receiving a final message from the fake "boy" stating that "the world would be better off" without her in it, the girl took her own life.

Unfortunately, this abuse of internet technology to harass a victim through gossip and slander is far from an isolated incident. In fact, a new breed of anti-social website is growing rapidly on the internet, designed to call out specific individuals as "enemies" and attack them with verbal harassment.¹ The blogosphere is likewise filled with weblogs that major in invective and abuse while minoring in factual content and insightful commentary.

Slander has gone high-tech.

But the heart of the problem dates all the way back to the Garden, when instead of taking personal responsibility for sin, the man and the woman each tried to blame someone else for their problems ([Genesis 3:11-13](#)). Since then, the world has been filled with the language of blaming, attacking, and accusing as people try to protect position and pride by tearing down their neighbors. Paul aptly described human society in these words: "spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another" ([Titus 3:3, NASB](#)).

The problem is not new. What *is* new, though, is a powerful technology capable of sowing these seeds of bitterness around the world virtually instantaneously: the internet.

Amazingly, slanderous websites bearing the Christian "brand" have proliferated right alongside the openly pagan ones. Some of these attack-sites are even labeled as "ministries" and sport a prominent link that makes online donation quick and easy. The truth is that these sites have been created for the sole purpose of destroying the reputation and influence of local Christian assemblies and their leaders through innuendo, rumor mongering, name calling, and unrelentingly harsh criticism.

¹ "Facebook Backlash: Anti-Social Sites Flourish," National Public Radio Weekend Edition, Feb. 2, 2008.

There is an old saying that “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” The person who first coined that phrase obviously never experienced the all-out attack that some endure today. Bones may not be broken by words, but hearts often are. Blood-bought children of God have been hurt—some quite badly—by gossip and slander. A few have lost jobs. Others have felt forced to move far away from their homes in an effort to escape the suspicion aroused by the attacks. Friendships have been poisoned and family members divided. Children have endured years of intimidation and fear as they helplessly watch their parents face the verbal barrage of slander and gossip.

In a pagan court of law, the accused are presumed innocent until proven guilty, and their right to a fair trial is safeguarded carefully. Witnesses must appear in person and answer honest cross-examination so that the validity of their testimony can be weighed. Rumors and second-hand reports are flat-out rejected. Mere personal attacks are “out of order.” Both sides have the opportunity to present their case to an impartial judge and a jury carefully selected to be free from prejudices or personal agendas.

Not so in the court of public opinion! On attack-sites, the accused are presumed guilty unless proven innocent. In fact, a guilty verdict was decided before the “trial” ever began—that’s the whole reason for the website’s existence. “Evidence” that would be rejected by any court of law is welcomed. Witnesses are often anonymous and hearsay is the norm. “Testimonies” are filled to the brim with invective and name-calling. Accusations, whether substantiated by established fact or not, are repeated incessantly until they are simply accepted as “common knowledge.” The participants on these attack-sites—typically motivated by a desire to avenge hurts whether real or imagined—act as the judge, jury, and executioner of the accused.

Is there anyone who will speak out against this trend?

God will.

In fact, He already has—in His inspired Word. Through the Holy Spirit, God moved wise men, prophets, and apostles to warn His people about the dangers of gossip, slander, and other forms of abusive speech. Through His Son, God showed up in the flesh and used some of His precious time on earth to remind us that one day we will be judged by the words we speak. These warnings and instructions were captured in human language and recorded in the scriptures for our learning—and for our obedience.

The Greek terms *blasphēmia*, *diabolos*, and *hairesis* entered the English language as the ugly words “blasphemy,” “diabolical,” and “heresy.” But the meanings have shifted over the centuries. Originally, *blasphēmia* meant “slander, detraction, and speech injurious to another’s good name.” *Diabolos* meant “prone to slander.” It referred both to “the prince of demons...persecuting good men” and “men who resemble the devil in mind and will.” *Hairesis* originally meant “dissension” and *hairetikos* meant “schismatic or factious.”²

² Thayer, Joseph Henry. *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1889.

There are also several words translated “gossip” in our English Bibles. “The Old Testament words denote a talebearer, one who rushes around telling stories. The New Testament word is ‘whisperer’ or ‘babblers.’ The gossip whispers poisonous reports in someone’s ear in private.”³

These are the terms that **God** chose to set the limits on what is acceptable in our speech. He established clear standards by which our words will be judged when Jesus returns. It is God’s job to be clear about His expectations. He has done that. It is our job to line up our hearts and lives with His commands, regardless of what the world thinks. As Paul put it: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will” ([Romans 12:2, NIV](#)).

The purpose of this writing is to remind us about God’s perspective on our words, specifically on gossip and slander. On the pages that follow, we have collected His thoughts on these topics. We present them without further comment. We pray that each person who reads these words will apply them in very practical ways, both in the virtual world of online discussion boards, chat rooms, and weblogs, and in the real world of personal relationships. These are God’s words. They are the Truth.

“That ancient serpent,” the devil, is filling planet earth with his venomous words. He is “the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night.” Now may words of Truth from the very mouth of God supply a powerful antivenom to counteract the serpent’s poison!

³ Richards, Lawrence O. “Gossip.” *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985.

Gossip

The mouths of fools are their ruin; they trap themselves with their lips. Rumors are dainty morsels that sink deep into one's heart.

[Proverbs 18:7-8 \(NLT\)](#)

Whoever shows contempt for his neighbor lacks sense, but a man with understanding keeps silent. A gossip goes around revealing a secret, but the trustworthy keeps a confidence.

[Proverbs 11:12-13 \(HCSB\)](#)

A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends.

[Proverbs 16:28 \(NLT\)](#)

He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip.

[Proverbs 20:19 \(NASB\)](#)

Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.

As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.

Like a coating of glaze over earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart.

A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit.

Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart.

His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.

If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him.

A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.

[Proverbs 26:20-28 \(NIV\)](#)

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them

[Romans 1:28-32 \(ESV\)](#)

For I am afraid that when I come I won't like what I find, and you won't like my response. I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorderly behavior.

[2 Corinthians 12:20 \(NLT\)](#)

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 Timothy 5:13 \(ESV\)](#)

Slander

“You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD.”

[Leviticus 19:16 \(NASB\)](#)

LORD, who can dwell in Your tent?

Who can live on Your holy mountain?

The one who lives honestly, practices righteousness,

and acknowledges the truth in his heart

who does not slander with his tongue

who does not harm his friend

or discredit his neighbor...

[Psalm 15:1-3 \(HCSV\)](#)

I will not tolerate people who slander their neighbors.

I will not endure conceit and pride.

[Psalm 101:5 \(NLT\)](#)

Let not the slanderer be established in the land;

let evil hunt down the violent man speedily!

[Psalm 140:11 \(ESV\)](#)

He who conceals hatred has lying lips,

And he who spreads slander is a fool.

When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable,

But he who restrains his lips is wise.

[Proverbs 10:18-19 \(NASB\)](#)

Do not slander a servant to his master,

lest he curse you, and you be held guilty.

[Proverbs 30:10 \(ESV\)](#)

But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man...

[Matthew 15:19-20 \(NASB\)](#)

But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

[1 Corinthians 5:11 \(NIV\)](#)

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

[1 Corinthians 6:9-10 \(NIV\)](#)

And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit, who sealed you for the day of redemption. All bitterness, anger and wrath, insult and slander must be removed from you, along with all wickedness.

[Ephesians 4:30-31 \(HCSB\)](#)

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

[Colossians 3:8 \(NASB\)](#)

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

[2 Timothy 3:1-5 \(ESV\)](#)

In the same way, older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not addicted to much wine. [They are] to teach what is good.

[Titus 2:3 \(HCSB\)](#)

Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone.

[Titus 3:1-2 \(NLT\)](#)

Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

[James 4:11 \(NIV\)](#)

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

[1 Peter 2:1 \(ESV\)](#)

The Tongue

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

[James 1:26 \(NASB\)](#)

We all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

[James 3:2-17 \(ESV\)](#)

*Keep your tongue from evil
And your lips from speaking deceit.*

[Psalm 34:13 \(NASB\)](#)

*I said, "I will guard my ways so that I may not sin with my tongue;
I will guard my mouth with a muzzle as long as the wicked are in my presence."*

[Psalm 39:1 \(HSCB\)](#)

*Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD;
keep watch over the door of my lips.*

[Psalm 141:3 \(NIV\)](#)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

[Ephesians 4:29 \(NIV\)](#)

Divisiveness

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.

[Titus 3:10 \(NIV\)](#)

*A worthless person, a wicked man,
goes about with crooked speech,
winks with his eyes, signals with his feet,
points with his finger,
with perverted heart devises evil,
continually sowing discord;
therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly;
in a moment he will be broken beyond healing.
There are six things that the LORD hates,
seven that are an abomination to him:
haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that make haste to run to evil,
a false witness who breathes out lies,
and one who sows discord among brothers.*

[Proverbs 6:12-19 \(ESV\)](#)

Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

[Proverbs 10:12 \(NIV\)](#)

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

[Proverbs 15:18 \(ESV\)](#)

An arrogant man stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the LORD will prosper.

[Proverbs 28:25 \(NASB\)](#)

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

[Romans 13:12-14 \(NIV\)](#)

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

[Ephesians 4:1-3 \(ESV\)](#)

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

[Galatians 5:19-21 \(NLT\)](#)

Now I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all say the same thing, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction.

[1 Corinthians 1:10 \(HCSB\)](#)

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

[Philippians 2:1-2 \(NLT\)](#)

Forgiveness and Love

Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

[Leviticus 19:18 \(HCSB\)](#)

If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

[Matthew 6:12-15 \(NLT\)](#)

“Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

[Matthew 18:21-35 \(ESV\)](#)

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

[Mark 11:25 \(NIV\)](#)

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

[Luke 6:37 \(HCSB\)](#)

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

[Colossians 3:12-13 \(ESV\)](#)

Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.

[Hebrews 12:15 \(NLT\)](#)

So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.

[James 2:12-13 \(NLT\)](#)

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

[1 John 2:9-10 \(ESV\)](#)

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

[1 John 3:14-15 \(NASB\)](#)

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

[1 Corinthians 13:4-7 \(NASB\)](#)