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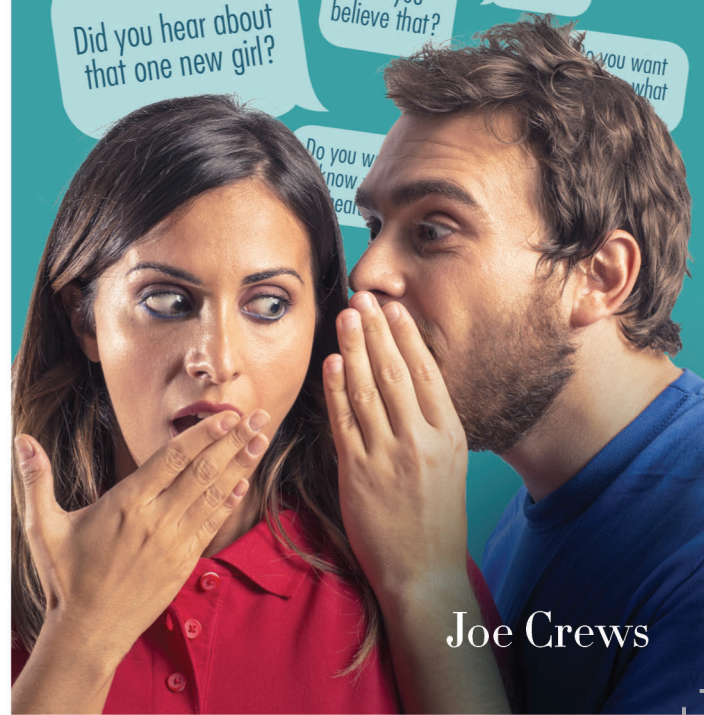


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Tiny Troublemaker



Joe Crews

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Tiny Troublemaker

The nuclear bomb is a world of iniquity and sets on fire the course of nature. It is set on fire of hell, full of deadly poison.”

Those strong words about the world’s most destructive weapon surprise no one. But, if we should make one small change in the first sentence and insert the word “tongue” instead of “nuclear bomb,” would it still be true? God evidently thought so, because He inspired one of His disciples to write those very words about the tongue (James 3:6, 8).

We seldom think in terms of anything being more evil or destructive than a hydrogen bomb, but the Bible seems to indicate that the unsanctified words which roll

so glibly from a chattering tongue can do more harm than an atomic explosion!

The Bible uses a variety of colorful words to describe the fruit of this rampageous little member of the body. Among them is one that surely has earned a reputation as the most cruel word in the inspired record—*whisperers*. It has the hiss of the serpent in it, and very few people feel entirely comfortable with the word for reasons we shall soon discover.

It doesn't take a profound insight to understand what the wise man meant when he wrote these words: "A whisperer separateth chief friends." Proverbs 16:28. Even the earliest Levitical laws gave specific commandment against the practice of gossip and slander. "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people." Leviticus 19:16. Does this injunction carry as much weight in our day as it did then? Let's find out.

There are many types of sin that God despises, many of them associated with

abominable perversions and deviations. Yet, it is obvious that God does not classify sin as we often do. We have a disposition to look upon certain sins as quite respectable. They are generally the refined sins of the spirit such as pride, envy, jealousy, etc. Since they do not make embarrassing physical displays, we tend to tolerate them as personality quirks.

On the other hand, we recoil from another category of sins with justifiable disdain and even revulsion. Those fleshly indulgences like adultery, homosexuality, and stealing, are viewed as positively disrespected and intolerable.

Do we have any reason to believe that God draws such distinctions in the qualifying of sin? The answer is found right in the middle of the Bible where we find listed the seven deadly sins which God hates. Among the depressing catalog of offenses we find this one: "A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." Proverbs 6:19. This is just another way

of describing a whisperer. Think about that word for a moment. It has a soft, pleasing sound to it, but it has the noisiest, harshest echo of any word in the English language. It has also broken more homes and more hearts than any other word. Think, also, of the friendships which have been shattered in the wake of its influence.

A whisperer speaks in all languages, he crosses all boundaries, and he is a member of all churches. He is the bearer of false rumor and report. We cannot deny that there is a natural, perverse bent to every human mind to speak evil of other people. Probably no one will ever be able to explain it fully, but we know it is there because we have indulged in it at some time or another.

The usual explanation may not be totally adequate, but it certainly is true as far as it goes. The person who can find flaws in others is making himself look better by comparison, and the self-nature will resort to anything in order to satisfy its demand to be the center of attention.

The strangest thing about this sin is how it can so easily beset those who are saints in every other respect. Even where the entire being is brought into submission to Christ, that one wild faculty of the body often keeps running out of control.

James makes the astounding statement that the man is perfect who finally tames the organ of speech. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire

of hell. ... But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” James 3:2–8.

The Gossiper—Tool of Satan

Perhaps God hates this sin so much because it is often done with a flair of religious sanctity. Usually the gossip speaks as though he is defending some violated biblical principle, and in order to justify the conscience he only implies or intimates that the evil has been committed. Here lies the root of alienation and disaffection. One false insinuation has more power than a hundred good deeds. A slanderous whisper never dies out until it has scorched and slashed an innocent soul into the dust. No wonder the Word of God labels it one of the seven deadly sins of man.

Do you know who really originated the scheme of misrepresentation and exaggeration? Jesus called Satan the father of lies because he told the first one to Adam and

Eve, our first parents. But please take note that the form of that original granddaddy lie was very subtle and cunning. It was worded as a question, “Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree?”

Why did the devil ask such a question? He knew that God had not forbidden every tree in the Garden. Only one had been restricted—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There was a lying intimation in the question. We might not view such a practice as terribly wrong because we hear such statements almost daily from those around us, but Jesus called it a lie. To exaggerate, as Satan did, is to depart from the truth, and no amount of euphemistic language can hide the hard fact that it is a most despicable sin in God’s sight.

By the time he confronted Eve in the Garden, Satan had become a specialist in the art of covering up truth with beautiful, high-sounding words. Most of his work of rebellion in heaven had consisted of deceptive implications against God’s character.

He was the author of the first whispering campaign, and the devastating results prove what a monstrous evil it really is! One-third of the angels were subverted by the treasonous suggestions of Lucifer.

Do Satan's modern disciples still use the half-truth, gossip plan to weaken and destroy innocent people? Indeed, whisperers are still around, and their campaigns have destroyed more souls than all the military engagements fought on the battlefields of earth. They do not always appear as the enemies of God. Because their whispers contain only intimations, they always retain a legal loophole to avoid responsibility for the results of their work.

Do you understand what I'm saying? Have you heard the whispers yourself? "What an unfortunate experience that poor girl had!" or "Many people have made mistakes, but we can't hold it against her." No details, mind you, just the basic material to pique the imagination and start the rumor mill rolling. Then somebody picks

it up, adds to it, and passes it on in a more exaggerated form. By repetition the story becomes horrible in content, and a sensitive soul is left crushed and dying.

What can we say about the person who started it all? Perhaps he is one of the most faithful attenders and supporters of the missionary program in the church. His loyalty has never been questioned. He is as upright as one of the stone pillars in the sanctuary, and just as cold and hard. He would be outraged at the suggestion that he had anything to do with the tragedy. His self-righteous soul would be ready to blame anyone or anything except his own original, whispered innuendo which mushroomed so rapidly into a juggernaut of destruction.

Whisperers Condemn Themselves

In the sermon on the mount Jesus said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be

judged.” Matthew 7:1, 2. Paul expanded on that theme when he wrote, “For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.” Romans 2:1.

Is it true that we are guilty of the very sins we observe and condemn in others? It certainly seemed to be the case with those men who brought the adulteress to Jesus for stoning. When He invited the ones without sin to cast the first stone, the plot against the woman fell apart. The accusers slunk away, one after the other.

This principle should not be twisted in its application to God’s watchmen, the ministers. They should not hesitate to speak out plainly against sin in every discourse. Even though Jesus saved the frightened woman from the extreme penalty of the law, He did not hesitate to label her actions as sin when talking to her alone: “Go and sin no more.”

God’s ambassadors are not being judgmental when they expound the Word of

God to condemn disobedience. The Word itself does the judging and condemning. Jesus did not hesitate to speak strong, scathing words of rebuke to the hypocritical religious leaders who had no disposition to repent. But to those who recognized their guilt and desired deliverance, He provided protection from unnecessary public scorn and condemnation. If the Master sought to spare this woman who was admittedly guilty and had been taken in the very act of adultery, how would He feel toward the innocent who have been unjustly accused on the basis of half-truths and false reports? Undoubtedly, Jesus would show the accusers a flashback of their own ugly past, causing them also to slink away in shame.

Judged by Our Words

What a solemn thought it is that each person must finally give an account of every word spoken. Christ said, “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall

speaking, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” Matthew 12:36, 37. Think of it! A record is being made in the books of heaven. Those phone conversations are being preserved with all the original inflections and nuances.

Will we be happy to face all those words in the judgment? What about the idle chatter around the house, the unkind criticism of family or friend, and the occasional flare of angry temper? Every one of us can look back in shame upon words that never should have escaped our lips—words that we would give a fortune to recall and cancel out. But, the damage is done, and no power on earth is able to neutralize the sting of their influence. As the poet described it, “Boys flying kites can haul in their white-winged birds, but you can’t do that when you’re flying words.”

The story is told of a farmer and his wife who were riding back from town in

the old country wagon. As they rode along, the wife made the observation, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could pull along together like those horses are pulling the wagon?" The husband replied, "Yes, and we could do it, too, if we only had one tongue between us."

James was right when he described the tongue as a world of evil. It has set off dissension and division in millions of homes around the world. Someone has said that the first screw which comes loose in the head is the one which controls the tongue. In his epistles, Paul commended the women who were not busybodies, and who stayed quietly at home. This does not imply that only women are afflicted with this foot-in-mouth disease. Many men, also, spend time in idle chatter and gossip.

It has been said that we should make our words as palatable as possible because someday we may have to eat them.

One of the most delightful stories I've ever heard is about an old Puritan pastor

who had just moved into a new parish. After a few weeks, one of the lady members of his congregation confronted him following the Sunday-morning sermon. "Pastor," she said, "I have my scissors here, and I wonder if you would give me permission to do something? I've observed you now for a number of weeks, and there is something about you that bothers me a great deal; I wonder if you would permit me to correct it?" She continued, "The tassel on your robe is just too long and I'd like to shorten it."

Graciously, the pastor consented to her request, and she snipped away until the tassel met her approval. Then he said, "Madam, there is something I've also been observing, and it bothers me. I wonder if I could borrow your scissors, and if you would give me permission to correct something." She answered, "Of course you may." He took the scissors in hand and said simply, "Put out your tongue."

Whisperers Worthy of Death

Besides the seven hateful sins listed by the wise man, other Bible writers give long categories of special sins that God despises. Paul provides us with an alarming collection of fleshly practices and declares that “they which commit such things are worthy of death.” What were they? “Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, . . .” Romans 1:29, 30, 32.

You will notice that the tongue is well represented in all those carnal excesses. The whisperers and backbiters are cataloged right alongside murderers and haters of God. Inspiration decrees that those who misuse the power of speech can be destroyed for it. To speak evil of others is a very, very serious violation of God’s law. Jacob identified backbiting as the special besetting sin of his son Dan. “Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path,

that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.” Genesis 49:17.

Ten of Dan’s brothers had similar weaknesses, but they, by God’s grace, overcame their sins. Their names are recorded in the book of Revelation as overcomers, who will be the spiritual representatives of all who pass through the gates of the New Jerusalem. But Dan’s name, along with Ephraim, is not there. His backbiting was never conquered, and God cannot take that sin into heaven. God had declared, “Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off.” Psalm 101:5.

David asked the question, “Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.” Psalm 15:1–3.

Dan’s name will not be inscribed on any of the twelve gates through which all

the redeemed must pass. None who fail to claim the victory over a slanderous tongue will be permitted to inhabit those mansions of light. Not one of the favored 144,000 will be identified with the tribe of Dan.

What a dramatic illustration that this sin is not just a harmless weakness of the flesh! It is a malady of soul which will cause millions to be left out of the kingdom. God's people must claim the victory over a lying tongue, an exaggerating tongue, and a backbiting tongue. There will be no gossip in heaven. You might say, "But I don't say things that aren't true about my neighbor; all I say about him is true." But why say anything if you can't find something good to say? How often do you pray for that erring neighbor? I think we can allow ourselves to speak about our erring brothers to men just as much as we pray for them to God.

Do you realize that many people treat their animals better than they treat other human beings? I've often thought what a

heaven this world could be if people only behaved to their fellow man as they do to their dog. I've observed the petted, pampered lifestyle of many a little poodle. No human neighbor would be given such consideration. I'm not criticizing dog owners, but I do make a plea for equal treatment toward members of our own genetic kind. It seems that civilized man cannibalizes his own family members by devouring them verbally and traumatizing them spiritually.

History provides some interesting glimpses of misjudgments and gross smear campaigns that were launched against innocent people—and sometimes very famous people. When we think of kind men and self-effacing men, our thoughts go to Abraham Lincoln. His moving words at the Gettysburg battlefield have been properly classified among the most memorable speeches ever delivered. But do you know how that speech was described by some of the leading newspapers who reported it on the following day? The *Chicago Times* had

this to say: “The cheek of every American must tingle with shame as he reads the silly, flat, dishwatery utterances of the man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners as the President of the United States.” The local Harrisburg newspaper reported: “We pass over the silly remarks of the President. For the credit of the nation we are willing that the veil of oblivion shall be dropped over them, and that they shall no more be repeated or thought of.”

The *London Times* gave this appraisal of Lincoln’s immortal speech: “Anything more dull and commonplace it wouldn’t be easy to produce.” You marvel, with me, that men could be so blind to truth and so insensitive to real greatness, but it’s still happening every day all around us. We speak too much and too often from the platform of our emotional biases. We allow ourselves to be blinded by passion and lash out to get even with people we don’t like. As a result, we hurt others, sometimes seriously and permanently. Our words cut and bruise.

The Bible says this kind of devouring of each other must cease, or we may despair of eternal life. God will not immortalize a cankerous spirit. Gossip and slanderous inferences will never enter the City of Light. False representation, exaggeration, and insinuations, are simply sugary descriptions of *sin*. The Bible calls it *lies*, also, and declares that none who speak them or love them will go through the gates of Paradise.

Gashmu Saith It

One of the most famous biblical records of whisperers at work is found in the Old Testament story of Nehemiah. He was one of the great heroes of the faith who set himself to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. But Nehemiah became the victim of a whispering campaign. As he struggled to carry out his divinely appointed mission, a malicious opposition program was organized against him. Three men were at the head of the effort to sabotage his

construction plans—Sanballat, Tobiah, and Gashmu, the Arabian.

Their tactics were psychologically designed to knock out the intrepid builder within a few days. Nehemiah's enemies opened their campaign with an attack of ridicule. They made a big joke out of the wall and claimed that it could be destroyed by a fox brushing against it. When that didn't work they tried an armed attack, but Nehemiah put weapons in the hands of his workmen and kept right on building. Then they tried to reach him from the inside by hiring counselors to give him dangerous advice. All of those strategies collapsed one after another as Nehemiah set his face like a flint to finish the job of restoring those walls.

Finally the three captains of deception put their heads together and came up with an orchestrated plan to slander Nehemiah by a false report. They felt he could be bugged out of his project by sheer force of public opinion. Created artificially by their

tissue of fabricated misinformation, was a letter they circulated which stated; “It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words.” Nehemiah 6:6.

Notice how these media experts composed their news releases. “It is reported” and “Gashmu saith it.” Does that sound familiar? Many a good man has been discouraged from his ministry for God by those kinds of clever inferences. Oh yes, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Nehemiah have been dead for a long time, but this fellow Gashmu, strangely enough, is still alive. He is the author of “They say.” Gashmu belongs to all races and languages. He has many aliases. Among them are these; “They tell me,” “Have you heard,” and “This is off the record, but ...”

Gashmu is hard to locate, also. His name is never found in the phone directory, and if you locate an address, he has

already moved on. He's the symbol of the talebearer, the defamer, the slanderer, the whisperer. The Bible says, "They that do such things are worthy of death."

Do you say that your experience is not like Gashmu? You only tell a few friends about the bad report somebody else has already circulated? Take note that the Bible also condemns those who do that: "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends." Proverbs 17:9. This inspired counsel reveals that true love for our brother would lead us to cover his transgression. By repeating the report of his error, we break up friendships and become a destroyer of love.

Chasing the Devil's Dogs

Finally, how shall we relate to that most cruel word when it is directed against us? Sooner or later each one becomes the victim of a whisperer whose vicious rumors

threaten our reputation and our peace of mind. First of all, give no cause for any true reports to be used against you. Phillip Brooks once said: "Keep clear of concealment; keep clear of the need of concealment. It is an awful hour when the first necessity of hiding anything comes. The whole life is different henceforth. When there are questions to be feared and eyes to be avoided and subjects which must not be touched, then the bloom of life is gone."

With the settled assurance that your enemies are blowing up fictitious issues and using lying reports against you, stay at your appointed mission. Like Nehemiah, do not take your precious moments to chase the devil's dogs. You could do it the rest of your life and never get the wall completed that God has assigned you. Just keep at your work and don't let your enemy prod you into retaliating. The very moment we begin reacting in kind, we have totally lost the battle and forfeited our spiritual advantage.

Let me try to explain this crucial point, because here is where the enemy usually manages to grab the balance of power. You see, as a general rule every person operates his life on the basis of either acting or reacting. Those who act are the ones who think carefully and make deep, basic plans about how they will order their lives. After deciding exactly which principles to follow in making all decisions, they allow no circumstance to divert them from following those rational plans and principles.

Those who react, on the other hand, simply live their lives from day to day on the basis of the circumstances created by other people. Most of their decisions are made emotionally in response to the way they are treated by others. They do not really have control of their own lives. Since their lives consist largely of reacting to what others do to them, in effect, they have consented for those people to determine the course they follow, and even the kind of persons they become.

Dr. Hunter was an English cardiologist who was, himself, a victim of heart disease. In great concern he commented one day to a fellow surgeon, "My life is in the hands of any rascal who chooses to annoy me." He realized that he could have a heart attack if someone made him angry. Sure enough, a short time later some stranger provoked him into a fit of rage and he dropped dead.

Here is a perfect example of living by reaction. Even with his high degree of professional training, Dr. Hunter was controlled by other people. Even the length of his life was under somebody else's control. That was an unusual case. Yet many reactor people allow others around them to determine their eternal destiny, which is even more serious. By responding in kind to the negative actions of others, the reactor is molded into the same kind of person. Thus his salvation is essentially submitted to the decisions and choices of those who mistreat him. What an irony!

Reactors Can Become Actors

Is there hope for reactors to change their dangerous and unreasonable course before they are forced into a mold that they really do not want and would not choose for themselves? How could Dr. Hunter have saved himself from the fate he actually foresaw and predicted? There is only one answer to that question. By submitting personally to the spiritual authority of a totally new life in Christ, Dr. Hunter could have acquired the power to start acting again in the strength of his own surrendered will. God would have bestowed on him the ability to choose a different life pattern that could have excluded anger.

Do you see how this whole thing ties in with whisperers, who are actually agents of Satan seeking to gain control of your life? And without Christ you have absolutely no power to resist the tide of emotional feelings which others bring to bear upon you. You fall into the trap, and without realizing

it, begin to yield the reins of control and direction over your life to someone else.

How does divine power make it possible for you to start acting instead of reacting? By making you willing and able to develop new, basic principles and attitudes toward others. An unconverted person might see the need for new attitudes but would have no power to practice them.

How could new spiritual attitudes save you from the control of those who would malign you with rumors and malicious gossip? Let me answer that question with an illuminating story that will reveal what God is able to do for those who accept His salvation. It's the simple narrative account of an old Greek philosopher who was taking a walk with his friend. As the two strolled down the street together, an enemy of the philosopher dumped a bucket of water on him from an upstairs window.

The wise old man did not even slack his pace or show any reaction to the outrage. He continued his conversation as

though nothing had happened. His friend protested and offered to help him find the culprit and punish him. The philosopher gently rejected his offer and insisted that no one had thrown any water on him! “But I saw it with my own eyes,” the friend insisted. “He threw water all over you. See, you are dripping wet!”

“No, you are mistaken,” said the philosopher. “He did not throw any water on me; he threw it on the man he thought I was.” Did you catch that profound statement? “He didn’t throw it on me; he threw it on the man he thought I was.” What a spirit! What an attitude! I can’t get angry with those who hurt me. They wouldn’t do it if they had all the facts—if they really knew me, and understood me. So they are to be pitied because they don’t know. They need my prayers, not my wrath or retaliation.

An unconverted man might recognize the beauty and wisdom of that principle, but he would never be able to practice it.

That is why Dr. Hunter was helpless to save his own life. Only the Holy Spirit abiding in a man can conform him to the divine principle enunciated by the philosopher.

Every one of us has struggled on both ends of the loose tongue problem. We have given out words that made us feel guilty and ashamed, and we have been the subject of angry tirades and verbal abuse. In either case we have been driven to our knees for assurance and hope. Without the help of Jesus, we have found our minds and bodies yielding to the control of the flesh.

But thank God! Through the power of grace we have seen both words and thoughts brought under the sweet, controlling influence of the Holy Spirit. The One who promised to make us “more than conquerors” and cause us “always to triumph” has delivered our tongues from the bond of iniquity. That which was set on fire of hell is now turned into an instrument of praise for our God.

This Tidbit May Suit You To a “T”

The tongue's terrible tendency to tell tall tales totally tarnishes traditional transcommunication theories. The tempestuous tirades traceable to the tongue testify to the traumatic tactics of this tiny tab of tissue. Thousands that take the time to think, try to tame the tumultuous torrent of the too talkative tongue. Temporarily, the tide turns. Towering tempers turn to tenderness. Then, tragically, the trend tapers. The tongue trips, teeters, then takes a tumble; the temptation to trifling twaddle triumphs.

Take time to tabulate this timeless truth: to train the tongue takes the tremendous talent of trust. Theology teaches that trust thrives through toil. Therefore, throttle the testy tongue! Terminate the trivial topics that tinge the tenor of talk! Trim the trashy, tasteless terms that transgress traditions of truth! Trounce the trite themes that toady to thoughtless tattling!

Theoretically, the tantalizing target of a true, tactful, temperate tongue torments and teases those that tackle the task. To tell the truth, thrilling triumph throngs the tracks of the tough, tenacious thwarter of tawdry talk!