

GUARDING AGAINST THE DEFILEMENT OF LISTENING TO AN EVIL REPORT

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. James 12:15

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED...

1. What causes conflicts in families, churches or organizations to flare out of control and split entire groups?
2. What causes close friendships to be broken when neither party offended the other?
3. Why attempts to restore a fallen Christian brother or sister are often met with defeat?
4. A major reason is the damage caused when an offended person brings others into their offense. This is called the defilement of an evil report.
5. Example...
 - Person A is offended with person B.
 - Instead of going to person B as commanded in Scripture, Person A goes to a friend, person C, who is not initially involved.
 - However, because persons A and C are friends, person C takes on an offense against person A.
 - This continues until the problem reaches a critical boiling point and relationships are broken.

THE ILLUSTRATION OF ABSALOM FROM 2 SAMUEL 15

1. Absalom had never fully forgiven his father for not taking more drastic action against Amnon, who had raped Tamar, Absalom's sister. This unforgiveness became a way of life and years later he found the opportunity to rebel against the authority of father, David.
2. It is obvious that 1) his offense was justified in his own eyes, and 2) that Israel was swept up in the same deceitful offense, who felt Absalom was right and actually doing the work of God! In short, here are the steps Absalom took...
 - Absalom gathered and organized a group who would be loyal to him, rather than to the one whom he served, King David, his father.
 - He made himself available to the people and was sympathetic to those who had grievances.
 - He deceived the people by appearing to have a personal interest in them.

- In time Absalom alienated people from their authority. He offered to be the representative to make sure things were done right and would use his new position to increase his loyal following.
- He sought acceptance and recognition as well as authority.
- He carried out a tragic take-over of the nation with the help of those who were defiled and infected with an evil report.
- The end of Absalom, however, was very tragic! (2 Samuel 18)

ADMONITION FROM THE BIBLE CONCERNING DEFILEMENT

1. Jesus stated that offenses would come!
 - *“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Things that cause people to sin are bound to come,...’” Luke 17:1*
2. Damage that occurs with people involved in offences is the defilement of evil speaking or an evil report. So destructive is this practice that life-long friendships can be destroyed!
 - *“A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.” Proverbs 16:28*
3. We are to be aware of and guard against bitterness defiling other people who are not directly involved in the offense.
 - *“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” Hebrews 12:14-15*
4. The consequence of defilement is the stain left on people, the suspicions and doubts about character and motives. (Hebrews 12:14-15)

“DEFILEMENT” MEANS TO STAIN OR COLOR

1. **“Defile”** means to stain with color. Satan knows that if he can get us to listen to evil or suggestive words about someone, he can insert a stained impression of that person to us. This tactic is especially effective toward spiritual authorities. Many pastors and ministers have found their effectiveness destroyed by slander. This is Satan’s purpose in planting the stain — he wants people under their care to be suspicious and hesitant to follow their leadership, or to tear down respect for the leader.
 - *“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” James 12:15*
2. Why does this subtle device work so effectively? Simply because many people are ignorant of the devil’s devices.

THE STEPS OF DEFILEMENT

Notice the process of being defiled by another's offense. We will use the illustration of being infected with a disease.

IGNORANCE - Ignorance is not being aware of the destructive power of untrue or distorted words. (2 Corinthians 2:10-11)

1. Who gives an evil report?
 - A whisperer - A person who privately passes on evil reports to others (Psalm 41:7).
 - A gossip - One who magnifies rumors or partial information (Proverbs 16:28; 18:4).
 - A slanderer - One who seeks to destroy another's credibility or reputation with damaging facts, distortion of facts, or evil suspicions (Numbers 14:36).
 - A busybody - One who digs up evil reports and makes it his/her business to spread them by means of gossip, slander, or whispering. Such an action is as great a sin as a murder or stealing. (1 Peter 4:15)
2. What motivates an evil report? (James 3:14-18)
 - Bitterness - Reacting out of personal hurts.
 - Rebellion - Justifying an independent spirit.
 - Deception - Believing that evil reports are right to give.
 - Pride - Wanting to exalt self.
 - Guilt - Justifying past action or attitudes.
 - Envy - Desiring what another has.
3. Satan uses evil reports...
 - To discredit spiritual leadership.
 - To cause Christian to close their spirit to each other.
 - To multiply conflicts and produce more ungodliness.
 - To prompt non-Christians to mock Christianity and reject Christ.

EXPOSURE - Exposure is entering into conversation with a carrier or an evil report. (1 Timothy 5:13)

1. How to detect a carrier of an evil report...
 - A carrier will usually test your spirit before giving you the evil report. Any evidence of a compatible spirit in you will encourage him to give you the report.
 - A carrier will usually check your acceptance of his report before giving it to you. He may do this by asking your opinion about the person or dropping a negative comment and observing your response to it.
 - A carrier will often get you to ask for the evil report by creating curiosity for it. Some starters are, "Have you heard about (name)?" "Wait till I tell you about (name)!" "Can we pray about (name)?"
 - A carrier may communicate an evil report by asking us for counsel or by sharing a "concern" for the person involved. "Can I talk to you about (name)?"
 - A carrier may use evil reports to get you to admire him or her because of being on the inside and having access to privileged information.

- A carrier is usually one who evokes vivid details of evil and will even search them out. God condemns such “detectives of darkness” whose tongues are like sharp words. (Psalm 57:4)

2. Questions to ask a carrier...

- “What is your reason for telling me?” Widening the circle of gossip only compounds the problem.
- “Where did you get your information?” Refusal to identify the source of information is a sure signal of an evil report.
- “Have you gone to those directly involved?” Spirituality is not measured by how well we expose an offender, but by how effectively we restore an offender. (Galatians 6:1-2)
- “Have you personally checked out all the facts?” Even “facts” become distorted when not balanced with other facts (out of context) or when given with negative motives.
- “Can I quote you if I check this out?” Those who give evil reports often claim that they are “misquoted.” This is because their words and overriding impressions are reported.

DEFILEMENT - Defilement is receiving an evil report from another person and believing it is true.

1. In the same way that touching a diseased person will defile one’s hands, listening to an evil report will defile one’s mind. It is a reality which must be dealt with!

INFECTION - Infection is responding to an evil report with human reasoning and emotions rather than with spiritual understanding and genuine love. (Proverbs 17:4, 26:21)

1. You are infected by an evil report when you...

- Believe that the evil report or opinion is true without personal research.
- Form your own negative opinions based upon the report.
- Focus on the negative aspects of the accused person’s character or motive.
- Interpret that person’s words and actions as “supporting evidence.”
- Judge that person’s motives based upon the evil report.
- Back away from that person in your spirit.
- Tell the evil report or the opinions (received from someone else) to others.

DISEASED - Disease is being mentally and emotionally controlled by the evil report and by the destructive spirit of the one who gave it. (Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 26:24-26)

1. The diseased Christian has grieved and quenched the Holy Spirit by taking up the offenses of others, making them his/her own, and adding to them.
 - *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. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with*

every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:29-31

2. You are diseased when you...
 - Develop bitterness and/or rebellion in your own heart, even though you are not involved.
 - Set yourself up as a judge in matters which are God's responsibility, and recruiting others to "you side".
 - Search out the evil reports and use them to give the worst possible impression.
 - Believe that your actions are actually accomplishing God's will rather than realizing that others are given the occasion to blaspheme God's Name because of a lack of genuine love. (1 Corinthians 6:5-8)

CLEANSING

1. Attempts to restore a Christian who has been overtaken in a fault will usually fail, unless the defilement of listening to an evil report is first cleansed and then replaced with the spirit of Christ's love, humility and forgiveness.
 - Ask God to cleanse your mind from the defilement of an evil report.
 - Pray for God to give you genuine love for each one involved in the evil report.
 - Cleanse your mind with appropriate Scripture.
 - Have I accepted the evil report as true? (Proverbs 14:15)
 - Has the evil report affected how I feel toward the person involved? (Romans 2:1)
 - Do I have an urge to tell someone else the evil report? (Proverbs 17:9)
2. We are admonished to bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us and pray for those who use and persecute us. (Matthew 5:11, 44)
3. We must "counteract" the evil by overcoming it with good. (Romans 12:14-21)

YOU'VE CLEANSED YOUR HEART WHEN...

1. You lose your urge to tell someone else the report.
2. You grieve over the fact that an evil report was given.
3. You have genuine love toward the person involved in the report.
4. You are prompt to examine your own life for failures.

WHEN GOD DIRECTS YOU...

1. Contact the one who have you the evil report (John 17:20-26; Philippians 2:1-4).
2. Contact the person involved in the situation and to help restore that person in the spirit of meekness (Matthew 18:15-18; Galatians 6:1).

3. Contact those who are spiritually responsible for the situation. Once they have been informed, the responsibility rest upon them.

*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!...
For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. Psalm 133*