

HOW TO GUARD AGAINST THE

Defilement

OF LISTENING TO AN EVIL REPORT

THE PROBLEM:

- What causes conflicts in families, churches or organizations to flare out of control and split the entire group?
- What causes close friendships to be broken when neither party offended the other?
- Why are attempts to restore a fallen Christian brother or sister often met with defeat?

A MAJOR CAUSE: WRONG RESPONSES TO AN EVIL REPORT

DEFINITION:

An evil report involves distortion of facts, incomplete facts or false information. It is given with wrong motivations and causes the hearer to come to inaccurate conclusions and to respond with unscriptural "solutions".

Evil reports are so destructive that they can even destroy long-lasting, close friendships: "A whisperer separateth chief friends" (Proverbs 16:28).

NOTE:

Wrong doing should never be covered over. It must be brought to the attention of those who are responsible and dealt with in a Scriptural manner. This necessary process will be damaged by the defilement of an evil report.

In the medical world, there are stages in the development of a disease. In the same way, there are stages of destruction to a spiritually healthy person:

STAGES OF PHYSICAL DEFILEMENT:

1. **IGNORANCE** of "preventive" measures to avoid contamination
2. **EXPOSURE** to one who is already "infected"
3. **CONTAMINATION** (defilement) by allowing the "germs" to enter our system
4. **INFECTION** as the "germs" overcome our normal defenses
5. **DISEASE** when the infection destroys vital life-supporting functions

THE STAGES OF SPIRITUAL DEFILEMENT:

1. IGNORANCE

Satan will gain an advantage over us if we are ignorant of his devices.
(See II Corinthians 2:11.)

IGNORANCE IS NOT BEING AWARE OF THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF UNTRUE OR DISTORTED WORDS.

"The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity . . . it DEFILETH the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (James 3:6).

- A. Ignorance of how words destroy close friendships:
"He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends" (Proverbs 17:9).
- B. Ignorance of how the unclean defile the clean,
rather than the clean influencing the unclean (see Haggai 2:11-14).
- C. Ignorance of what constitutes an evil report:
It is an unauthorized, distorted, or false report which influences us to form an evil opinion about another person.
- D. Ignorance of how evil reports are given:
Evil reports are communicated by words, facial expressions, gestures, and tonal patterns. They can be subtle or obvious, quiet or angry, sweet or bitter.
- E. Ignorance of who gives evil reports:
Giving bad reports is part of the fallen nature of every person.

WHISPERER: One who secretly or privately passes on evil reports to others (see Psalms 41:7).

GOSSIP: One who magnifies and sensationalizes rumors and partial information.

SLANDERER: One who seeks to destroy another's credibility or reputation with damaging facts, distortions of facts, or evil suspicions (see Numbers 14:36).

BUSYBODY: One who digs up evil reports and makes it his business to spread them by means of gossip, slander, or whispering. Such an action is as great a sin as murder or stealing. It is classified with these by God when He warns: "let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a *busybody* in other men's matters" (I Peter 4:15).

F. Ignorance of what motivates evil reports:
(see James 3:14-18).

BITTERNESS: Reacting because 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 actions or attitudes

ENVY: Desiring what another has

G. Ignorance of how susceptible we are to evil reports:

We enjoy hearing them because they exalt us. They bring down or hurt those whom we dislike.

H. Ignorance of how Satan uses evil reports:

- To discredit spiritual leadership.
- To cause Christians to close their spirit toward each other.
- To multiply conflicts and produce more ungodliness.
- To prompt non-Christians to mock Christianity and reject Christ.

2. EXPOSURE

"A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished" (Proverbs 27:12).

EXPOSURE IS ENTERING INTO CONVERSATION WITH A PERSON WHO IS A CARRIER OF AN EVIL REPORT.

- How does God want us to respond?

"Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I cut off . . ." (Psalm 101:5).

" . . . And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret" (Ephesians 5:10-12).

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17).

We have protective physical defenses to warn us about physical contamination. We can smell it or see it or taste it. Sometimes, however, we are unaware of contamination until it is too late.

- In the same way God gives us protective spiritual defenses to warn us about spiritual contamination. We can sense the promptings of God's Holy Spirit, follow the warnings of God's Word, and obey the wise counsel of our human authorities. Sometimes, however, we are unaware of spiritual danger until it is too late.

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 for 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 (the person)?" "Wait 'til I tell you about (the person)!"
- A carrier may communicate an evil report by asking us for counsel or by sharing a concern for the person involved.
- 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 swords.

HOW TO DETECT AN EVIL REPORT:

Five questions to ask before listening to 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 3:1).
- "Have you personally checked out all of the facts?"
Even "facts" become distorted when not balanced with other facts 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.

2. DEFILEMENT

"The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Proverbs 26:22).

DEFILEMENT IS RECEIVING AN EVIL REPORT FROM ANOTHER PERSON AND BELIEVING THAT IT IS TRUE.

- 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 properly dealt with; "... Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:15).

A classic illustration of many listening to an evil report:

Absalom used an innocent sounding evil report to steal the hearts of almost an entire nation and lead it in revolt against his own father, King David. The report emphasized his "concern" for suffering people, his "deep desire" that justice be done and his "ability" to be a better administrator than his father. Actually, Absalom was bitter because his father did not bring judgment to Absalom's half brother for immorality, so he took matters into his own hands and was rejected for it.

II Samuel 15:1-6

"And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him."

"And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate; and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him and said, 'Of what city art thou?' And he said, 'Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel.'

"And Absalom said unto him, 'See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee.'"

He gathered and organized a group that would be loyal to him, rather than to the one whom he served.

He was energetic and disciplined.

He made himself available to the people.

• He sought out those who had grievances.

He had a personal interest in people.

• He took up the offenses of those who had been hurt.

He alienated people from their authority by giving an evil report about David's leadership.

"Absalom said, moreover, 'Oh that I were made judge in the land,⁸ that every man which hath any suer or cause might come unto me,' and I would do him justice!"

"And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obessance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him."⁹

"... So Absalom stole the hearts¹¹ of the men of Israel."

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- 8 He offered to be the representative to make sure things were done right.
 - 9 He would use his new position to increase his loyal following.
 - 10 He desired acceptance and recognition as well as authority.
 - 11 He carried out a tragic take over of the nation with the help of those who were defiled and infected with an evil report.

4. INFECTION

"The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going" (Proverbs 14:15). "As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife" (Proverbs 26:21).

INFECTION IS RESPONDING TO AN EVIL REPORT WITH HUMAN REASONING AND EMOTION RATHER THAN WITH SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING AND GENUINE LOVE.

"A wicked doer giveth heed to 'alse lips" (Proverbs 17:4).

- If the defilement of an evil report is not cleansed, wrong attitudes, opinions, conclusions, and actions will follow -- even toward very close friends; "... a whisperer separateth chief friends" (Proverbs 16:28).

SYMPTOMS OF INFECTION:

- A. Believing the evil report is true
- B. Forming negative opinions based on the report
- C. Focusing on negative aspects of the person involved
- D. Interpreting the person's words and actions as "supporting evidence"
- E. Judging motives on the basis of the evil report
- F. Backing away from the person in your spirit
- G. Telling the evil report to others

5. DISEASE

"A wicked doer giveth heed to false lip." (Proverbs 17:4).

DISEASE IS BEING MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY CONTROLLED BY THE EVIL REPORT AND BY THE DESTRUCTIVE SPIRIT OF THE ONE WHO GAVE IT TO US.

"He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him; when he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart" (Proverbs 26:24, 25).

"Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people" (Leviticus 19:16).

- A diseased Christian has grieved and quenched the Holy Spirit by taking up the offenses of others, making them his own, and adding to them.

SYMPTOMS OF DISEASE:

- A. Developing bitterness and/or rebellion, even though the person involved did not directly offend us.
- B. Setting ourselves up as the judge in matters which are God's responsibility, and recruiting others to "our side."
- C. Searching out evil reports and using them to give the worst possible impression: "An ungodly man diggeth up evil and in his lips there is as a burning fire" (Proverbs 16:27).
- D. Believing that such actions are actually accomplishing God's will rather than realizing that we give non-Christians occasion to blaspheme God's name because of our lack of genuine love: "I speak to your shame . . . brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you . . . ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren" (I Corinthians 6:5-8).

Often we do not act on information when we should do so because the defilement or infection hinders God's grace in us (see Hebrews 12:25).

- Attempts to restore a Christian who has been overtaken in a fault will usually fail unless the defilement of listening to evil reports is first cleansed and then replaced with the spirit of Christ's love, humility, and forgiveness.

HOW TO CLEANSE OUR MINDS FROM AN EVIL REPORT:

1. Ask God to cleanse your mind from the defilement of an evil report.
2. Pray for God to give you genuine love for each one involved in the evil report.
3. Cleanse your mind with appropriate Scripture:
 - Have I accepted the evil report as true?

"The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going" (Proverbs 14:15). "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins . . ." (Psalms 19:13). Presumptuousness is taking a matter for granted and assuming it to be true in the absence of proof to the contrary.
 - Has the evil report affected how I feel toward the person involved?

"A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit" (Proverbs 15:4). ". . . For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest doest the same things" (Romans 2:1). "Above all things, have fervent love among yourselves, for love shall cover the multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). "Love . . . thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity . . ." (1 Corinthians 13:5, 6).
 - Do I have an urge to tell someone else the evil report?

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). "A talebearer revealeth secrets, but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter" (Proverbs 11:13). "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love, but he that repeateth a matter separateth very [close] friends" (Proverbs 17:9).
 - I know my heart is clean:
 - When I lose my urge to tell someone else the evil report
 - When I grieve over the fact that a report was given
 - When I have genuine love toward the person involved in the report
 - When I am prompt to examine my own life for failures
4. Act on what you heard:
 - Is God directing you to contact the one who gave you the evil report?
 - To ask the five questions which identify an evil report? (See page 4.)
 - To emphasize the importance of speaking the truth in love? (See John 17:20-26; Philippians 2:1-4.)
 - Is God directing you to contact the person involved in the situation?
 - Is God directing you to contact the person involved in the evil report in order to check out the facts and help to restore in the spirit of meekness? (See Matthew 18:15-18; Galatians 6:1.)
 - Is God directing you to contact those who are spiritually responsible for the situation?
 - Once they are informed, the responsibility for further action rests with them.
 - Your responsibility is to continue to pray for those involved in the situation.