



# COMMUNICATING THE SINS OF OTHERS

*Why, When, & How*

Every person has shortcomings, but how many of us want our personal failures told to others? Yet, one of the easiest habits to acquire—and one of the hardest to break—is to broadcast the sins of others. On the one hand, no one likes his/her faults to be broadcast; yet, on the other hand, the world is full of broadcasters.

Since verbal communication is integral to relationships, the Bible gives clear guidelines for our speech, including the possibility of relating others' sins. In Matthew 7:12, Jesus gave *The Golden Rule*, a foundational principle for all personal interaction, which obviously includes verbal communication.

**Matthew 7:12**, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

That is easy to understand. We are to treat others as we want them to treat us. If we don't want our sins broadcast, we should not indiscriminately communicate others' failures.

That's not to say that others' sins should never be communicated. There are certain circumstances that necessitate reporting to proper authorities, especially in situations that are related to the law and public safety. (For example: child molestation, witnessing a crime or accident, family violence, threats against life or property, abuse of any kind, or responding to inquiries related to official investigations.)

## WORDS BUILD UP OR TEAR DOWN

Most of our daily communication, however, is not related to legal matters. Speech primarily occurs in the context of relationships. In addition to *The Golden Rule*, the Bible provides many guidelines that are foundational to constructive communication. Before exploring the possibility of communicating one person's sins to another, let's review a primary aspect of God-honoring speech.

**Ephesians 4:29**, *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

We cannot overlook the value of habitually building up others instead of tearing them down. We should learn to speak to the need of the moment in order to give grace

to the hearers. With others in mind, we need to think about what we should say and what we should not say. Many of us may believe that what we do say is usually constructive, but we could not prove that assertion without an examination of our speech.

## WORDS MIRROR CHARACTER

When speech is accurately evaluated, personal character is also revealed, as the following verse indicates.

**Luke 6:45** (stated by Jesus), “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, **for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**” [emphasis added]

We should not be surprised that “what we say” reveals “who we are.” Words reveal one's heart (one's true self) much like a thermometer indicates temperature.

## WORDS REVEAL AUTHENTIC LOVE ... OR NOT

In order to examine our words accurately, we need an unchanging standard of evaluation. In 1 Corinthians 13, the “love chapter,” fifteen characteristics of love provide a measure by which we can evaluate our words as well as many other aspects of life and relationships.

**1 Corinthians 13:4-8a**, *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.*

Let's make this examination personal for greater effectiveness. Do the fifteen attributes of love in 1 Corinthians 13 mirror your behavior and, specifically, your speech? While no one perfectly meets this “love standard,” does your speech indicate consistent growth as a loving person? If not, then your words will mirror “love stagnation” and reveal the primary interest of your life, which is yourself. If the primary characteristic of your life can be summarized by, “It's all about me,” then you will not be helping anyone (including yourself) if you broadcast others' sins.

With 1 Corinthians 13 in mind, the first thing you

should consider before communicating the faults of others is to ask yourself, “How loving am I?” *You can find practical steps to maximize the effectiveness of the 1 Corinthians 13 “Love Test” in the article “Are You a Loving Person?” which is at:*

<http://www.wordtruth.net/PDF/Are you a Loving Person.pdf>

When love is growing in your life, you will be able to “cover sins” (not broadcast them) in your interaction with others.

**Proverbs 17:9**, *Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.*

**1 Peter 4:8**, *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.*

### **WORDS ARE HYPOCRITICAL OR HELPFUL**

As you mature in biblical love, there is another evaluation you should undertake before responding to another’s sins. This evaluation involves judging yourself biblically and is accomplished by answering two questions: (1) What sins hinder my growth in Christ? (2) What steps am I taking to overcome these hindrances?

If you cannot identify your own shortcomings or if you know them and are not taking steps to change, then you are actually a hypocrite who highlights others’ failures while not dealing with your own. Ouch! While that conclusion is rather blunt and may even sound harsh, read the following words of Jesus on this subject.

**Matthew 7:1-5**, *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”*

This passage does not mean that it is impossible to judge whether or not a person commits a crime (for example: robbery, assault and battery, breaking and entering, kidnapping, etc.). Crimes are easily recognized, since written law is the standard by which this judgment can be made.

On the other hand, your judgment concerning a “speck in your brother’s eye” is concerned with another’s personal failures in life and relationships. If you do not remove “logs” from your own eye (your life), then you are unable to see clearly with regard to another person’s shortcomings. If you broadcast another’s sin(s) with this deficient perspective, you will not be helpful since you

are not able to speak “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

If you want to be helpful and truthful with regard to others’ sins, diligently follow Jesus as you make Christ-like changes in your own life out of your loving thankfulness to Him.

**Hebrews 12:1-2**, *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Obviously, there is more to consider with regard to communicating the faults of others than is usually considered.

If you are a believer in Christ, you have two other responses to consider when you become aware of another’s sin(s). The first response involves your willingness to forgive. The second includes your participation to help restore another believer who has been overtaken in sin.

### **WORDS AND FORGIVENESS GO TOGETHER**

You can be tempted to tell others when a person fails, especially when this failure affects you. Even though that temptation is common, you do not have to respond according to your feelings. Instead, remind yourself of the following promise from God’s Word.

**1 Corinthians 10:13**, *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

A primary “way of escape” with regard to the temptation of broadcasting sins is, instead, to grant forgiveness. Biblical forgiveness involves a choice on your part, since forgiveness means “to let go, send away, disregard, or to keep no longer.” You may remember sin(s) committed against you when you grant forgiveness but, thankfully, biblical forgiveness is not linked to having a blank memory about the sin(s). Instead, forgiveness follows the example of Christ and, in the process, helps to disarm sin’s power that hinders your growth in Christ. Additionally, when you grant forgiveness, you provide opportunity for relationships to be restored.

If you are a believer in Christ, you know that you are a “project under construction.” Other believers are in that same category, and unbelievers are a “project before

construction.” Would you welcome forgiveness from others when you fail? Of course you would, so *The Golden Rule* should guide you in responding to others when they fail ... forgive them.

Forgiveness is not only pivotal to on-going relationships with others, but forgiveness of others is also directly linked to your fellowship with the Lord.

**Mark 11:25-26**, “*And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*”

Due to God’s merciful forgiveness on your behalf, you and other believers have opportunity to gratefully forgive one another as the following verse indicates.

**Ephesians 4:32**, *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Forgiveness is not an option for a believer; it is a directive given by God for His children to obey. Your willingness to forgive is directly linked to your understanding and appreciation of Christ’s forgiveness to you. Even in situations that seemingly take you to the limit of your endurance, you are to respond in forgiveness.

**Luke 17:3-4**, “*Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.*”

With regard to your friends who are not yet believers, remember that their very nature is to sin. Your response of forgiveness and Christ-centered counsel to them in their shortcomings may be the avenue by which they can see the difference that Jesus has made in your life. On the other hand, if you are a believer and broadcast others’ failures simply for communication’s sake, your witness for Christ is greatly hindered. Granting forgiveness provides an avenue for others to see the life of Christ in you.

**Matthew 5:14-16**, “*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*”

## **WORDS ASSIST RESTORATION**

Forgiveness is the first response that you can give to someone who has sinned, whether that person is a

believer or an unbeliever. The second response is to restore the person who has failed.

**Galatians 6:1-2**, *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

In the above verse, notice that only believers “who are spiritual” are qualified for the ministry of restoration. Even though there is more to being “spiritual” than growing in love, granting forgiveness, and biblically evaluating one’s own life with a view to greater Christ-likeness, these characteristics are basic to those “who are spiritual.” Hopefully, this describes you. If so, then you are spiritually qualified to restore another gently, as you remain aware of your own life while you help another carry another’s burdens.

Even though it may be difficult, be ready to communicate with the one who has failed in order to help in the process of restoration. This is the subject of Matthew 18:15-17, a passage which specifically deals with a fellow believer who has sinned against you.

**Matthew 18:15-17**, “*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*”

Note the three-step communication plan that is presented in the above passage. First, you are to communicate privately to the believer who has sinned. You only bring in others when the sinning believer will not repent. Even then, only one or two other believers (those who are spiritual) are to accompany you in your second attempt to try to convince a sinning believer of his need to repent. Only after a believer fails to listen to you (with witnesses present) are you to communicate a believer’s lack of repentance to a larger group; and, in this situation, that group is the church. (The word “church” is understood differently, often meaning a membership organization that is recognized or incorporated by a governmental entity. However, in the context of restoring a fellow believer, the term “those who are spiritual”—Galatians 6:1-2—is the qualification for those in the church who help to restore another.)

Those in the larger group who hear of this situation may communicate with the one who has failed for the purpose of encouragement toward repentance. They may also

Speak with one another with regard to the progress of the restoration attempt. If the restoration process succeeds and the fallen believer confesses his sin, then those involved can give thanks to the Lord together. If the restoration process reveals a persistently unrepentant believer, then on-going communication about the matter is to cease.

#### **SUMMARY**

- **WHY should you communicate the sins of others?**

The primary reason to speak about another's sin(s) is that person's restoration to God and others. *You could seek counsel from other maturing believers to help you communicate and respond biblically with the one who is "overtaken in a fault." You do not need to tell all the details that you know of another's sins, but you should say enough to gain insight concerning your responsibilities in the situation.*

- **WHEN should you communicate the sins of others?**

Any communication about another person's sin(s) is done *after* you examine yourself biblically and have responded toward greater Christ-likeness in your own life. *This personal evaluation must include your willingness to forgive the one who has sinned. If you will not forgive, then any communication about another's shortcomings should not occur until you have repented of your own lack of forgiveness.*

- **HOW should you communicate the sins of others?**

Your communication concerning another's shortcomings is to be characterized by merciful forgiveness and is to be done privately with the person who has sinned. *If you are speaking with someone who does not yet believe in Christ, you should explain what it means to believe in Christ for salvation. If you are speaking with a professing believer, then you should explain the need for confession of sin and a return to obeying the Word of God.*

#### **CONCLUSION**

In communicating the sins of others, the key factor is not their sins but, instead, is your on-going maturity in Christ. Your devotion to Him and your love for the one overtaken in sin are the reasons behind your participation in the restoration process. As you follow Christ's example, your perspective about others' sins will echo His statement to an unnamed woman who was "overtaken in a fault." Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."