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Watchman or Gossip?

Part 7: Contentiously Contending  
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For years the evil King Saul pursued David like a man does an animal. He tried to kill him many times, broke David's marriage and caused him to live the life of a vagabond and a fugitive. There is not any good to be said for Saul, and by all estimations the sooner he died and David ascended the throne the better for the nation.

One day Saul did die. The young Amalekite man who assisted in Saul's suicide ran to bring David the good news and the crown he had taken from Saul's corpse. He thought David would be glad to hear that his tormentor was dead so that David could finally claim the throne. But instead David mourned for Saul, rent his clothes, and sang a lament over the death of the king and Jonathan (2Samuel 1). The young man who killed Saul and who carried the news was executed for his trouble. David says of the event: "When someone told me, saying, 'Look, Saul is dead,' thinking to have brought good news, I arrested him and had him executed in Ziklag—the one who thought I would give him a reward for his news" (2Samuel 4:10).

A little while later David's spoiled son, Absalom, stirred a revolt against David, went to war against the king and tried to kill his own father. When David heard the news that the rebellion was quelled and that Absalom was killed, he again mourned rather than rejoiced (2Samuel 18, 19). These are some examples of how a godly man reacts to the news of the fall of the wicked. Even Samuel, who never wanted to anoint Saul as King, mourned at Saul's failure (1Samuel 15:35).

How do we react to the news of the fall of Christians, or to the rumor of the latest heresy that comes out of the camp of the false teachers? Do we take delight in pouncing on the latest tidbit of scandal and spreading it as wide as possible? Or do we react like David and Samuel did?

In many parts of the world tow trucks can be seen waiting at busy intersections. In our family we refer to them as "vultures" since they hang around waiting to feed on someone else's misfortune. To wait for and profit from someone else's hurt has to be one of the lowest forms of human existence. While the tow truck driver and the vulture have some purpose, any form of scavenger, as well as those who handle the dead, are declared unclean under the Law. The young man who brought the news to David was an Amalekite. The Amalekites were always waiting in the wings to profit off of Israel's weak moments and are "the people against whom the Lord will have indignation forever" (Malachi 1:4).

Jesus and Satan stand at two opposites. Satan is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). Jesus on the other hand, "makes intercession for the saints" (Romans 8:27). Thus, those who accuse support the ministry of Satan, while those who enter into the ministry of Jesus grieve and mourn and make intercession for those who sin and fall.

Watchmen who warn about impending danger have an important role throughout the Bible (Ezekiel 3:17, Acts 20:28-31). BUT, there is a huge difference between a watchman and a gossip. A watchman takes no delight in reporting the threat, while the gossip enjoys telling and re-telling the juicy stories of sin and failure. These gossips are just like the godless Athenians who "spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing" (Acts 17:21). Some who style themselves as "defenders of the faith," take extreme delight in rehearsing the latest error. I have seen the glint in their eye as they play the latest DVD or as they sit around the table seeking to tell of some greater error than the previous speaker. Some rush to the keyboard to publish the latest juicy morsel as quickly and as widely as possible

Is this the spirit of Christ or of Satan? Is this how King David would have reacted?

Even worse, many like sharks who have smelled blood, rush in for the kill without even checking if the rumor is true or false, and worse, if the accused is friend or foe. Thus they begin to feed on one another. It is very sad when anyone dies in war, and when innocent bystanders die it is a tragedy. But there are no words to describe the horror, injustice and catastrophe of someone killed by "friendly fire." Paul warns that "if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you

be consumed by one another!" (Galatians 5:15).

The Scriptures (Old and New) are clear that "two or three witnesses" are required to make an accusation stick. (Deuteronomy 17:6, Matthew 18:6, 1 Timothy 5:19). Even in the world one is not allowed to brand someone a criminal unless he has been found guilty in court, yet we Christians will accuse and execute another based on a single rumor. That makes us no different to those who conspired to crucify Jesus without any evidence of wrongdoing. (Please note that I am not against dealing appropriately with heretics, schismatics and immoral leaders, but let's get the facts first.)

Some do this for personal profit. Money is made out of books, tapes and speaking tours exposing the latest sins. Are we any better than the tabloid press? I don't think so. Some preachers will build a following of "disciples" who hang on their every word, who support them financially, feed their egos and encourage the preacher to expose even more lurid details. When these preachers cannot dish fresh dirt, some of them are not beyond inventing things, exaggerating or even blowing a minor incident into a full-blown event.

Preoccupation with sin, error or deception has a negative impact on the person so engaged. Before 1994, South Africa had a censorship board that viewed and censored every movie that came into the country. Several of these men were preachers. I often wondered what impact all the smut must have had on the minds of these men. Sin, whether the performance or the observation of it, has the same desensitizing and soiling effect on the doer as well as the spectator. Pornography is equally destructive to the audience and the performers. Thus, a preoccupation with heresy impacts the sensitivity of the heart of the one so occupied. This is why many become blind to their own sins and doctrinal shortcomings. Jesus warned about removing the log out of one's own eye before trying to remove the splint out of another's.

Which is worse: the man who, for whatever reason, does not yet understand the Trinity, but who sincerely loves the Lord with all his heart and who walks humbly with his God? Or the man who can write a treatise on the intricacies of the tri-unity of God, but who is bigoted, bitter, vengeful, proud, a divider of brethren and a gossip? I do not condone false doctrine but we can have all the right teachings and still have denied the essence of the Gospel.

The Ephesians had the right doctrine, hated those who were evil and were able to discern true apostles from the false. Yet, the Lord says they are fallen because they had left their first love (Revelation 2:1-7).

Love "does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6)

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