

Articles and Sermons :: One of You Is a Gossip by Francis Frangipane

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A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends. ---Proverbs 16:28

Jesus made a remarkable statement concerning Judas. He said, "â€Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?"â€™ Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him" (John 6:70-71).

To what was Jesus referring when He identified Judas as "a devil"? Was He speaking figuratively or factually? Is Jesus saying that a human being could not only host an evil spirit in his soul, but that a person could actually become a demon? Some teach that Judas had become so perfectly possessed by Satan that he actually lost his humanity. Before we accept this interpretation, let us remember that after Judas delivered Jesus to His enemies, he felt such remorse that he committed suicide. Could a demon feel remorse for sin? I do not think so.

What I believe Jesus is identifying in Judas Iscariot as a "devil" is something that, today, exists unchecked among many Christians. Iâ€™m talking about slander. In the New Testament the Greek word diabolos, which is translated "devil" in this text, is translated impersonally elsewhere as a "false accuser," "slanderer" or "malicious gossip." In fact, 1 Timothy 3:1 and 2 Timothy 3:3 both translate diabolos (Strongâ€™s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, #1228) as "malicious gossip(s)."

In other words, Jesus is not saying "one of you is a devil" in an organic or theological sense, but that one of you is "a slanderer, a malicious gossip." So while the disciples were almost bragging about their loyalty to Christ, Jesus corrected them, in effect saying, "Yes, I chose you, but even among you there is one who is a malicious gossip, whose words will eventually betray Me to My enemies."

#### Gossip in the Last Days

This problem of gossip in the Church, Paul tells us, will continue right into the end of the age. Listen carefully to what Paul wrote to Timothy about the last days: "Men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips" (2 Tim. 3:2-3), and the list goes on. In the midst of this list of great sins, the apostle includes "malicious gossips." This is the exact same word translated "devil" in John 6:70.

Perhaps you know people who always have something negative to say about others, who are a sewer system of negative information about people. Do you see how "malicious gossip" is kin to the nature of Satan himself?

#### By Your Words . . .

The Scriptures say that we will be justified or condemned by our words. Yes, our words -- even those spoken in secret with a spouse or intimate friend -- are used by God to measure our obedience to His will. James writes, "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man" (James 3:2).

Words have power. Scripture reveals that "death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21). Our words, expressed as a confession of faith, bring us into salvation; but words rooted in bitterness can defile many, even an entire congregation.

James 3:8 warns, "The tongue . . . is a restless evil . . . full of deadly poison." "The tongue," he says, "is a fire, the very world of iniquity" (v. 6). And James reveals one of the most profound truths in the Bible. He says that the tongue "sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell" (v. 6).

Satan gains access to our world, to destroy all that is good and holy in it, through our words. The very course of our life, the direction and quality of life, is "set on fire by hell" through the words we speak. If we talk negatively about someone or maliciously spread gossip, the destructive fire of hell itself is released into our world. Lord, help us to understand the power of our words!

I believe God wants to break the power of gossip and negative speaking from the Church. We may have a perfect analysis of what is wrong and why it is evil, yet if all we do is talk about it, we have yet to disavow our allegiance to hell. God c

alls us to be a house of prayer for all nations -- a spiritual community that is mature, fully capable of seeing what is wrong, but positioning itself to release redemption into the world.

Finally, as we enter the election season here in America, let us guard against the mudslinging and slander that accompany this period. Yes, in a humble spirit, let's discuss and debate policies, and pray for guidance for ourselves and the candidates. But do not lose sight of your higher standing in God. Remember also the words of James: "The seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:18).