

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

Is there a difference between an accurate and necessary "report" and "tale bearing", "gossip", or "slander"? Obviously there must be a difference because Paul condemns slander and gossip in 1Cor 12:20 (NASV) and in 1Cor 1:11; 5:1 he uses "information" that is "reported" about other brethren as the basis for his rebuke. Therefore, Paul recognizes a distinction between the two. Since there is a distinction between the two, we as God's children must refrain from gossip or slander because it is sin. Yet on the other hand, we must appreciate the necessity, at times, of necessary information being reported in order that sin can be dealt with as is required in the New Testament (Rom 16:17; 2Tim 2:17,18).

Just what is "slander" or "gossip"? In 2Cor 12:19 Paul says: "...we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying." and then in the next verse he says he is afraid that when he comes he is not going to find them in the condition in which he would like for them to be. He is afraid he is going to find: "...debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbiting, whisperings, swellings, tumults" (NASV "...strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances.") Each one of these expressions has to do with the idea of causing trouble in the congregation. It is obvious that "debate" here is not used in the same sense as the honorable discussions in which brethren often engage, as they air their differences, but as you can see, is translated "strife". However, the two words we are concerned with in this article are: slanders (KJV backbiting) and gossip (KJV whisperers). The word "slander" is defined as: to speak against or evil speaking and the word "gossip" is defined as: secret slander. The difference between the two words is simply that one (slander) is done openly and the other (gossip) is done in secret. However, both have to do with defamation of character. This sometimes simply takes the form of idle talk about others, giving no thought to the consequences of what is said or how it is received or perceived by others. At other times one may simply be prone to sensationalize or embellish an event or what has been said by another. It also involves the idea of speaking secretly behind ones back with malicious intent to hurt and destroy ones good name and reputation. All of this is condemned and the Christian must be very careful to avoid such. Remember, Jesus tried to find the good in people rather than the bad!

But on the other hand there are times when it becomes necessary to make an accurate and necessary report to others about the conduct of a brother or sister such as was done in 1Cor 1:11 "For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you." The word "declare" means to make plain, to inform or make clear. What is the difference in what took place here and what is involved in the idea previously discussed? What did Paul do to show them that what he said was not just something he made up? He told them **HIS SOURCE**. He told them it came from the house of Chloe. This is important, because when the source of some report is known it can be checked out to see if it is really true. In 1Cor 5:1 Paul said: "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you.....", in other words it was common knowledge, everyone knew about it because it was out in the open, therefore it was an accurate account. In both of these accounts the things are reported, that is, others are informed in an effort to correct the lives of individuals, to help them get rid of their sins and save their souls. The individuals about whom these reports are made are talked to about their actions and encouraged to make the necessary corrections in their lives and herein is the difference. In the actions of the former ideas discussed there is no consideration given to the spiritual welfare of the one being talked about, yet involved in the informing or reporting of 1Cor 1:11; 5:1 this is the primary purpose of the action involved.

Jesus makes it very clear that an offense needs to be dealt with on a personal level if at all possible. However, it sometimes reaches a point where it must be made public. But, this is after all other measures have been tried to keep it from being made public, if in fact the action was private Matt 18:15-17. When an offense is public then it must be dealt with publicly as did Paul in Gal 2:11-14 when he withstood Peter to the face "before them all" because he was to be blamed. This was not slander or gossip but a necessary reporting or

informing one of sin in an effort to correct.

We do have a responsibility to help one another; we are our brother's keeper. But remember, in our efforts to restore the erring it must be done: "...in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal 6:1). One cannot engage in gossip or slander and still have a humble, meek and contrite heart.

Yes there is a difference, a **BIG** difference and as Christians we must avoid the one while practicing the other. We must pray to God for wisdom to know which is which and to act properly in carrying out the actions involved in fulfilling God's will for us as His children. (jlh)