

It Is Written

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Help From Above May Come Through Those Below

By Philip C. Strong

Obviously, God is omnipotent (all-powerful), and can do anything He wants. But it's also true that sometimes He elects to act through agents — even human ones. As great and powerful as the gospel is, it is often carried and dispersed through “earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:6-7) — as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:20, “as though God were entreating through us...” (though I believe he was specifically referring to inspired apostles in this passage).

I know that when I or other brethren pray for God to act in ways “that only You can”, we recognize and are petitioning for Him to assist in ways that we can't. But on such occasions, I also wonder if I've done or will do what I could in the matter. Jesus refused to rebuke and in fact praised the woman who anointed Him with “an alabaster vial of costly perfume of pure nard” by saying, “She has done a good deed to Me ... She has done what she could...” (cp. Mark 14:6, 8). I, therefore, many times wonder, when asking God to perform “what only You can do”, if I have done what I could toward the same ends? Or, am I just wanting God to “take over” in a way that somehow excuses me from doing what I could but haven't ... or won't do?

The Bible is filled with accounts of God acting through people — ordinary people of faith doing extraordinary things. Consider a few examples:

- Barnabas led and encouraged (Acts 4:36-37). At a time when God's people were suffering physical hardships, Barnabas led by example when he sold property and “brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet” to help care for needy saints (v. 37). But Barnabas didn't just do good things, he also said good things — encouraging things; so much so that he was given the name Barnabas, which means “Son of Encouragement” (v. 36). When we ask God to encourage someone “in ways that only You can”, have we done what we could to encourage them? Typically, I haven't.
- Titus comforted the depressed (2 Corinthians 7:6). The verse specifically says, “But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus”. God provided the comfort, but He did so through Titus. What did Titus actually do? He traveled to Corinth to find out about the brethren, and then returned and reported to Paul and his companions. He simply provided needed and desired information. Sometimes, that's all it takes to “comfort the depressed” — information. If we don't have it, go get it and bring it to those who need it. God comforted, but He did so through Titus. Have we asked God to comfort “in ways that only You can” while not doing our part? I have.
- Tabitha/Dorcas continuously abounded with deeds of kindness and charity (Acts 9:36-39). The text doesn't specify how poor the city of Joppa may have been at the time, but when Tabitha died, “all the widows” came “weeping” and “showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them” (v. 39). Neither does the text provide information regarding how rich or poor Tabitha was. But what is obvious from what it does say is that she continuously abounded with “deeds of kindness and charity” — she did what she could to meet others' needs. When we pray for God to provide “in ways that only You can”, are we providing in ways that we can? I haven't always done so.

It's often said that “God works in mysterious ways”. This is undoubtedly true. But many of “the ways” in which God works aren't so mysterious at all. They're just people of faith like you and me doing what they can — and I need to be more like them. How about you?

"Ways To Avoid Gossip And Slander"

By Jarrod Jacobs

Gossip and slander are a two-way street! You have to have someone willing to talk and someone willing to listen for them to be successful. Gossip and slander are perpetuated because folks give those with "loose lips" their "listening ears." One who would please God should have nothing to do with such sins. If we are going to avoid gossip and slander ...

Have A Heart Of Humility.

The humble of heart, the one who thinks less of himself than others (Rom. 12:3), puts God first, others second, and himself last. Thus, he will not speak slanderously against God's creation (Jas. 3:9)! The Bible records the lives of many men and women who are great examples of humility. Therefore, let us follow the examples of such worthies as Christ, Moses, Daniel, Timothy, and others, who humbly served God and guarded their tongues against speaking gossip. When humility is absent, gossip and slander soon follow. The proud person often belittles or "digs up dirt" on others to make himself look better.

Avoid Hatred Of Others.

David said those who hated him were those who gossiped about him (Ps. 41:7). Yes, hatred is a strong motivator for gossip and slander. We need to remember the words of Christ, who told us to love our enemies and pray for them (Matt. 5:44). Have we been doing this? It is too easy to allow emotions to cloud sound judgment. Don't do that!

Keep The Words We Speak To A Minimum!

How often have people gotten into trouble for "engaging their mouth before their brain was in gear"? Let us not be hasty to speak. Instead, let us heed the words of Solomon, who said, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.... Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin..." (Ecc. 5:2, 6). How wise were the words of Solomon that remind us to keep our words to a minimum (Prov. 10:19)! May we live the words of David, who said, "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3).

Reserve Our Ears For Listening To The Truth.

Gossip and slander are useless when folks refuse to listen! Let us not give any ground for that. Our minds need to be filled with that which is lovely, pure, truthful, virtuous, praise-worthy, etc. (Phil. 4:8). The sins of gossip and slander are the opposite of that. Let us avoid them!

Remember, if we listen to those who gossip and slander, God will not find us guiltless! We must not waste time listening to this garbage! Just imagine how gossip and slander would be severely diminished if the "listeners" stopped listening!

Conclusion

Gossip and slander are insidious problems we face. Therefore, let us avoid these sins with all we have! As James says, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (Jas. 1:19). If we are going to please God in word as well as in deed (Col. 3:17), gossip, and slander must never cross our lips! Let us put into practice the rules we have learned so that we will be the kind of people God would have us to be – pure in thought, word, and deed! Be warned: "He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool" (Prov. 10:18).