

Peace and Unity

Every congregation of the Lord's church strives for peace and unity among its members. Surely, all of us understand that truth spoken in love is essential for peace and unity within the congregation (Eph. 4:1-15). Still, too often we hear of someone speaking disparagingly to another member, saying things that are unconfirmed or, even worse, untrue. Why does one speak disparagingly or evil of a brother and sister and what are the consequences?

Perhaps recalling some Bible verses can help us understand the one who speaks evil of a brother or sister. James says, *For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there* (James 3:16). Jesus was even more insightful to the human condition: *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks* (Matt. 12:34b). A person whose heart is right with God will want to carefully weigh each thought before speaking.

So, how should a Christian respond to a brother or sister who speaks unkindly about another member in your presence? First, all of us must remember not to let any corrupt communication proceed out of our mouth, but what is good for edification, always speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver* (Prov. 25:11).

We must also consider the person who speaks ill-spoken words. Is he or she a new Christian and one that has not been taught about the hurt false or evil speaking can cause? If this is the situation we must follow Galatians 6:1a, *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.*

Sadly, sometimes the person is an older Christian and one who surely knows that it is disruptive to speak ill of a brother or sister in Christ. We are warned not to be deceived through philosophy and empty deceit according to basic principles of the world. (Col. 2:8). But we can offer to go with the person to meet the one being spoken about. Also, we can simply refuse to listen to the person. Unfortunately, sometimes those listening to a brother or sister speaking evil are new and/or immature in the faith, become discouraged and leave the congregation. Again, Galatian 6:1 should be invoked.

For the elders,
Don Denton