

Cannibalism within the Church of God Today

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Recorded on November 10, 2018

If I say the word “cannibal”, what comes to mind? I think most of us would think this is something that’s just unspeakable. We cringe at the thought of it. The definition of cannibalism is one who eats human flesh or it can mean animals that eat their own. On Discovery Channel, several years ago now, I watched a documentary about lions and they were showing the male lion with its full mane, and the mama lion, and there were three or four lion cubs that were probably the size of small dogs. They were lying on the plain in Africa, and then in an instant a ferocity came over this male lion, and he grabbed one of the cubs, crushed it in his teeth and ate it—right on television. It was so shocking I got queasy just thinking of the viciousness and suddenness of it. This poor, defenseless lion cub was gone in an instant. That’s a form of cannibalism.

The word cannibal, I did a little research on it, comes from Spanish explorers at the time of Columbus. They found a native tribe of the West Indies called the Carib and this tribe practiced cannibalism—they ate other humans. The word cannibal is a corruption or a mispronunciation of the word *carib*, and that’s how we get the word cannibal today. The account at the time of Columbus was not the first mention of cannibalism. The Greek historian Herodotus, who wrote in the 400s B.C., mentioned cannibals who lived in a part of what is now Russia. Then Marco Polo, the Italian adventurer of the 1200s A.D., mentioned cannibalism; he found it in his travels. Then of course there are the tales from the sea—many tales—where the ship broke apart or the mast was broken in the storm, and they were stranded and they ran out of food, and there were tales, true stories, of the sailors who drew lots to decide who was to be killed and eaten so the rest could stay alive.

Cannibalism has been found among the North American Indians, the Aztecs in Mexico, in Eastern South America, in Western and Central Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and is still practiced to this very day in the remote jungles of New Guinea. Lest we think white Anglo Saxons are impervious to cannibalism, if you recall from history, most of us remember the Donner party. They were traveling to California in the winter of 1846 and 1847; they left late, didn’t make the progress that they needed to, and got stranded in the Sierra Nevada mountains under an enormous series of winter snows, and forty-seven of the eighty-two survived by cannibalism. Cannibalism also happened in Ancient Israel. We’re not going to turn there because it is fairly graphic, and for the ears of our younger kids I think we’ll skip that, but you can look it up in 2 Kings 6:24-29; we know Jerusalem was besieged many, many times and history reveals that cannibalism occurred in Ancient Israel.

All of us here, when we hear these stories, we would rightly say, I would never do that; I would starve before I’d do that. You know what? There is a different kind of

cannibalism occurring in the greater Church of God today, and it is not physical cannibalism, it's spiritual cannibalism. So the subject we're going to talk about today is:

Cannibalism within the Church of God Today

We have to ask the question, how is there cannibalism in God's Church? Remember cannibalism is eating one's own. It doesn't take a great stretch to apply that to the Church today—eating one's own. In the Church today we eat our own, not by consuming flesh (bringing into the mouth) but we eat our own by what comes out of our mouth. What comes out of our mouth in the Church is gossip, slander, false accusation, character assassination, and all the destruction that comes by the mouth of human beings. Cannibalism—eating our own. It was a problem in the early New Testament Church. Let's go to Galatians 5:13. This is not something new; it has happened in God's Church before, and it started during the time of the apostles. I'm going to read this from the New Living Translation. It's more graphic and more clear. Paul was writing to the church in Galatia so there was something going on at that church but it's obviously for us today, too.

Galatians 5:13 *For you have been called to live in freedom. Not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature but freedom to serve one another in love. [That's the goal, that's what we should be doing through God's Holy Spirit.]*

14) *For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

15) *But if instead of showing love among yourselves, you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another. (NLT)*

Obviously Paul is not talking about somebody grabbing somebody's forearm and starting to chew on it—that's not what he's talking about. He's talking about biting and devouring one another by a form of cannibalism—the kind that comes out of our mouths. Biting on people, devouring people, trying to destroy people by what comes out of our mouths. Christ explained how this happens. Let's go to Matthew 15:10; I'll read this out of the New King James. We're breaking into the account—you remember how the Pharisees were berating Christ's disciples because they didn't wash their hands before they ate and they were self-righteously getting all over Christ about this. So we break into that story.

Matthew 15:10 *When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear and understand:*

11) *Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."*

12) *Then His disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" (NLT)*

The disciples were worried for Christ that somehow He was going to get in trouble with the Pharisees.

13) *But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.*

14) *Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."* (NLT)

Obviously Christ is trying to tell us that the leaders better not be blind and those following the leaders better not be blind, because either way you're going to go into the ditch if you're blind, so obviously the lesson for us is not to be blind—not to be deceived.

15) *Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain this parable to us."*

16) *So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? [How would you like to be Peter and have that said to you—you would cringe and sit in your chair a little lower, if you were seated.]*

17) *Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated?*

18) *But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.*

19) *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders [you don't even have to do a murder but you can have murder in your heart], adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*

20) *These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."* (NLT)

The Pharisees missed the whole point, they missed the big picture, and they were getting all wrapped up in these rituals, missing what comes into the mind, out of the mind, and out of the mouth. Christ was trying to set them straight. Spiritual cannibalism can happen with individuals or it can happen with groups. This also happened to Christ. Let's go to Mark 9:38, just one verse. My jaw dropped a few years ago when I read this out of the New Living Translation because it's so appropriate for today.

Mark 9:38 *John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw a man using your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he isn't one of our group."* (NLT)

Think about that—they said because he's not of our group he can't do any good; or what he's doing is wrong; or he's serving some other god or whatever, but because he wasn't part of the group walking around with Christ, that made him a bad person, an infidel. Does that sound familiar today? Not part of our group, nothing good is going to happen. Notice Christ's reaction in verse 39.

39) *"Don't stop him!" Jesus said. "No one who performs a miracle in my name will soon be able to speak evil of me.*

40) *Anyone who is not against us is for us.* (NLT)

This "not of our group" syndrome happens all too often in the greater Church of God. It's just amazing how we used to talk about cliques in a congregation but now we have cliques in groups. If you're not part of this group, you're on the outside. If you're part of

the group then you're on the inside and favored. This "not of this group" is where one group judges, condemns, looks down upon another group because they are not with them, they are not sitting with them every Sabbath. That happens by one group saying, don't you know, we're the only true Church of God that sits in this hall or has this name; we're the only group that God is working through today—not working through anybody else but us. Or, our leader is the only true minister alive today or the only true Apostle or the only true Prophet so therefore to have any validation you must be with us. In doing so, they spiritually devour, bite, eat, and chew up those who are not in their group. They do so through gossip, innuendo, rumor and character assassination. This is illustrated by the following parable of Jesus Christ. Let's go to Luke 18. Very famous parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Let's start with verse 9 and then we'll put it in context.

Luke 18:9 *And he spake this parable unto certain which [notice this] trusted in themselves that they were righteous, [not only that] and despised others: (KJV)*

He's talking about people, individuals, groups that trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. This can be applied individually, but as we read through this, apply it to different groups. Not just the Pharisee, not just the publican but to different groups.

10) *Two men [or two groups] went up into the temple to pray [today obviously there is no temple but we go before God to pray, many times a day, hopefully]; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.*

11) *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, [in that other group, with] extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican [the guy standing over here or this group over here].*

12) *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

13) *And the publican [of this other group] standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me [to our group] a sinner.*

14) *I tell you, this man [this publican or this group] went down to his house justified rather than the other [the other group that was self-righteous and looked down their nose at everybody]: for every one [or every group] that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (KJV)*

It's really interesting. I even know of certain ministers who've had their retirements revoked because they dare to attend with another group. If we are all God's people and we have God's Holy Spirit, what's the problem with that? Even the world doesn't revoke retirements because of what somebody does after they retire, but it happens in the Church of God.

If you are Internet savvy and are on the Internet all the time, there are blogs that you can go to (I will not give them the time of day personally) that condemn every other group except the group that the writer belongs to. Everybody else is bad, everybody else is an infidel, or at best, Laodicean, except those who belong to the writer or the writer's group. They spread unverified rumors—they're basically just like a gossip

house. They eat their own in the process. That's sad. They eat up God's people spiritually like a spiritual cannibal.

Let's ask a fundamental question. Does God recognize human corporations? That's a question that needs to be answered. When Pacific started, people wanted to tithe to Pacific, so by law, if you're going to receive tithes (and contributors want a statement at the end of the year so they can deduct their tithes off their taxes), you have to be registered as a 501(c)(3) corporation with the government, and you have to go through all this folderol, and you have to be incorporated. You have to have a president and a secretary treasurer and you have to do a mountain of paperwork. We did that and it took us months and months to get it done, and that's just typical of the world today; we operate on paper and operate on rules and regulations. So we have to have human corporations in order to provide tax relief for God's people—that's not what I'm talking about. Does God recognize human corporations as far as His people are concerned?

Let me pose a hypothetical. Does God say to Himself, I can't deal with this person that I called because they ended up in this other corporation and they got messed up with this other group. Does God say that—is that logical? Can a humanly devised corporation limit God? Can human beings say, if you're not part of this corporation, with this name, then God can't deal with you; God can't come into you; God and Christ can't make their abodes with you because you don't live in this corporation. It reminds me—it's as ridiculous as it sounds—of the Protestant doctrine, "once saved, always saved". I can remember coming into the Church in the early '60s and that doctrine was roundly criticized and rebuffed—once saved, always saved. The belief is that once you give your heart to the Lord and you dedicate your life to Christ, then after that it doesn't make any difference what you do. You can sin but because you gave your heart to the Lord back when, then it will all work out okay. That's that doctrine. Yet the Church of God, in many cases today, does exactly the same thing by saying, only those in this group will be saved, only those in this group will go to the place of safety. Regardless of the individual conduct of people in that group, everybody in this group is going to be saved. I have heard that so many times.

We have to ask the question, does God wink at somebody's sins because they sit in a certain seat? Is that the criterion for God to ignore somebody's sins? Obviously not. Does warming a seat in a certain group guarantee salvation? It reminds me of the old saying, going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in your garage makes you a car. When you think about it from God's perspective it is so ridiculous for human beings to say, God, you can't do what you want to do if they're not part of our group. That is the height of arrogance and the height of vanity. It's ridiculous to believe God recognizes man-made, human-made, government-made corporations.

When God looks down on the earth, I imagine in my mind's eye He sees little lights where His Spirit is with individuals. There are no corporate boundaries. God doesn't think in those terms; they are totally irrelevant to God. He deals with individuals. He deals with those whom He has called. Whether somebody is sitting in a seat here or sitting in a seat there, and is defined by a man-made corporation, that is totally

irrelevant to God. It's amazing that those who cannibalize God's people, their brothers and sisters, do it because they don't attend with them or don't sign the card that says you are a bonafide member of their group. Some even believe, because we've experienced this, some will lie about God's people, believing they are serving God. In other words, because this person left us or is not part of us, they will manufacture something in their head—a total lie—and they will spread it under the guise that I am obeying God, I am serving God because I'm getting after this bad person over here. I've seen that too many times in God's Church. A rumor will be started that is totally untrue. People will believe it and this person is then cannibalized as a result of a rumor that was knowingly started as an absolute lie by people who think they're doing God a service. It's just amazing.

I think if we are honest with ourselves, I've said it before, most of us have been treated far worse by people in the Church than outside the Church. That is true for my wife and myself, I can guarantee you that. I've heard people say that many times over the years. Over the years I've known people in God's Church who frankly love to hate. You would think the crux of the Bible is love but you see they love to hate. There are certain people who must always have an enemy. They must always be in a fight against an enemy because it gives their life purpose, it gives their life meaning—if they're on a conquest, if they're fighting something in their mind that's evil. They're always on a crusade of attacking their enemy of the moment whatever it happens to be. All too often that enemy is inside the Church of God. If they can't find an enemy, they're going to manufacture an enemy—I've seen that; can't find one, let's manufacture one. They make it a profession to condemn and judge those who are not like them. If you're not like them, you don't agree with them, even if you don't play up to them then all of a sudden now you're the enemy. These are people with God's Holy Spirit allegedly. You're the enemy and they will come after you.

These condemnations, they are the result of and they come by way of the tongue, the mouth. Nobody is taking a sword after anybody—figuratively, yes—not literally. The fact is the attacks come by way of the mouth. Other people hear this rumor, and very few of them stop and say, this person is saying something in an attack on another individual or another group and when hearing it, all too often, people don't stop and say, is this true?—were you there?—did you hear it with your own ears or observe it with your own eyes? All too often people just hear it and then repeat it.

We've all been in a situation or heard of a situation where you get individuals in chairs and put them in a circle, and have one person whisper in the ear of the other person a certain fact or event or account. Then they tell the other person, and you go around and when you get back to the original person, what comes back bears no resemblance to what was originally said. Everybody adds their interpretation or people hear selectively, and it gets completely out of hand. The point I'm making is these rumors start and people never stop and ask the question, is this true?—maybe I should check it out or maybe I should just not listen.

This is spiritual cannibalism that I'm talking about and while all of this is going on, the perpetrators ignore God's word. 1 John 3:14, let's go there. If people are biting and devouring one another, then how can you obey this verse? The point is, you can't.

1 John 3:14 [John says] *We know* [not we might, not we think we could—no, he says, we know] *that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.* (KJV)

That is a scary thought. You don't love your brother, you don't show love to your brother, you don't have concern, consideration, don't pray for your brother—we abide in death. Somebody could say, who's our brother? Let's go to Romans 12:5 and see—the Bible defines the Bible. There are many other scriptures we could go to but we'll just go to this one. Who are our brethren? We're brethren within the body of Christ.

Romans 12:5 *So we, being many, are one body in Christ* [the head of the Church], *and every one* [each individual] *members one of another.* (KJV)

Brothers, sisters, in the body of Christ. And yet people will gossip, assassinate characters, lie and say evil things about their brothers and sisters, totally ignoring 1 John 3:14, totally ignoring Romans 12:5, and it's a scary thing to realize that we abide in death if we cannibalize our brothers and sisters through gossip, rumors, innuendo and slander. It is a scary thing and people should take a deep breath, stop, and evaluate themselves to see whether or not that is going on in their lives. We've all done it—we all have in times past but at some point in our lives, in each individual's life, it has to stop if we are going to be in God's Kingdom. What can we individually do to stop this cannibalism? Now we get into the points.

1. We need to realize the nature of our tongue—my tongue and your tongue.

We need to know what we're dealing with. Let's look and see what the Apostle James says about the nature of the tongue; let's go to James 3:1. I'm going to read this out of the New Living Translation. James is rather direct here; he's not mincing his words and he's not playing games.

James 3:1 *Dear brothers and sisters,* [the King James says *brethren*—he's talking to the Church, he's talking to spiritual brothers and sisters] *not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged by God with greater strictness.* (NLT)

That in itself is a scary thought.

2) *We all make many mistakes. But those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way.* (NLT)

He's saying if you can control your tongue, you can master your body, your mind, in every other way.

- 3) *We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth.*
- 4) *And a tiny rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong.*
- 5) *So also, the tongue is a small thing but what enormous damage it can do.*
(NLT)

We've all seen it, we've all experienced it, we've all had it come our way. The words of other people can do enormous damage and enormous hurt. Going on:

- 5 continued) *But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire.*
- 6) *And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is full of wickedness that can ruin your whole life. [That's a powerful statement.] It can turn the entire course of your life into a blazing flame of destruction for it is set on fire by hell itself.* (NLT)

He is not holding back—he's saying this is what the mouth can do and he's telling us we'd better learn to control it.

- 7) *People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish,*
- 8) *but no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil, full of deadly poison.* (NLT)

What a condemnation.

- 9) *Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it breaks out into curses against those who have been made in the image of God.* (NLT)

The same tongue can praise God in prayer in the morning and then later on that day curse one of those whom God is calling and who has God's Spirit in him. He's asking how can that be, how can that happen?

- 10) *And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!* (NLT)

He gets to the core of the matter, that the nature of the tongue is uncontrolled and is something we have to be aware of. We know the Ten Commandments are the basis of God's law and every one of them can be broken by the tongue. You don't have to act, you don't have to go rob a bank or something. By our words we can break every one of the Ten Commandments. Proverbs 6, let's be turning there, lists seven things that God hates, and if we want to please God we would do well to look at these and remember them. As we read through these please note how many involve the tongue.

Proverbs 6:16 *These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him:* (KJV)

Verse 16 is a literary device that is used for emphasis: Six; no, seven—we find that occasionally in the Bible. What are they?

- 17) *A proud look*, [remember, let's think about how many involve the tongue] *a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood* [gossip, slander, innuendo],
18) *A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations* [we would say speculation], (KJV)

One minister said publicly, the next thing Pacific is going to do is teach Jesus Christ is a created being. Well, that's speculation—we haven't done it thus far and we're not going to do it because none of the elders believe it—never going to teach that. You see, that is wicked imaginations, meaning speculation.

- 18 continued) *...feet that be swift in running to mischief ...* [that can happen with the tongue]
19) *A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.* (KJV)

When you look at all seven, the first one is the only one that doesn't involve the tongue—a proud look. All the rest involve what comes out of the mouth. Six of the seven that God hates involve the tongue. Now let's go to chapter 18:21. Again, a verse showing the power of the tongue that can result in spiritual cannibalism. It says it very plainly.

Proverbs 18:21 *Death and life are in the power of the tongue* [I'm reading out of the King James] *and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.* (KJV)

The New Living Translation says those who love to talk will experience the consequences, for the tongue can kill or nourish life. It can do either one and we reap the consequences of what comes out of our mouth. So we see, closing out the first point, the nature of the tongue, as James says, is carnal, it is evil, it must be controlled by the Holy Spirit. It must be inspired by the Holy Spirit to do good. The only way the tongue will do good is if God inspires us and motivates us to speak what is in accordance with His word. Otherwise, left to itself, as James points out, it's an abominable evil.

Let's go to the second point.

2. If we are going to stop spiritual cannibalism we have to realize we are all members of the body of Christ.

Remember, Christ died for each one of us. We have been baptized and God and Christ reside in us through the Holy Spirit, and we are all walking down the path to be in the Kingdom of God, irrespective of corporations. We're not all at the same place, we're not walking in lockstep; people have been in the Church longer, people have been in the Church less time. Some people study more than others, some people are more dedicated than others, some people exercise God's Spirit more often than others. So we're not all in the same place but because someone is not a member of our group

does that mean they're enemies when we're all walking to the same place? Just because they're not part of the pack that we're with, somehow they're an enemy and because we differ in certain areas, does that mean we should hate them or condemn them or judge them?

Let's take an example of people who keep a different calendar. I've known people who keep a different calendar out of pride, because they say, I have special knowledge that you don't have, or I'm smarter than you are, or I have this ability to analyze scripture in a way that the rest of you do not have. If that's their motivation in keeping a different calendar, that's not a good motivation, that is pride and arrogance and vanity. But what if someone keeps a different calendar out of sincere heart and if they didn't keep this particular calendar they feel they would violate their own conscience? For those people, how can we condemn them when they honestly feel that they're obeying God—it's not out of pride, it's not out of vanity, they just feel like this is something that God wants them to do. So who are we to condemn them, who are we to judge them? That's between them and God.

We have invited people to attend with us when Holy Days sync up, or on the Sabbath, with no reservations as long as they don't try to cause disruption, because we are brothers and we are sisters. We're all seeking the same thing—the Kingdom of God and we're doing so as kin—brothers and sisters. Let's go to Ephesians 4:23. Another reminder of who we are. Who on earth we are. Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 talk about the fact that we must have a new mind. We must get rid of the old self and put on the new self.

Ephesians 4:23 *And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;* (KJV)

In other words have a new spirit in your mind that motivates you.

24) *And that ye put on the new man, [what is this new man?—we're told] which after God [in the likeness of God, in the image of God] is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

25) *Wherefore [because if we have the mind of God, then] putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.* (KJV)

How can we lie about our brothers and sisters? How can we slander our brothers and sisters, assassinate the character of our brothers and sisters? Yet people in God's Church make a living doing this, sad as it is. In this case, the neighbor might not be converted—think about that. How much more should we behave in a godly way toward those in the Church? We should behave the same way towards all, but with those in the Church, they understand and we can behave in a more deep, spiritual way. So closing out the second point let's ask the question: Will God have somebody in His Kingdom who devours and cannibalizes his brothers or sisters? Think about that—would God allow somebody to have eternal life who makes a job out of cannibalizing

brothers and sisters in God's Church? Don't think so—that's not going to happen. We as God's people, if we want to be in God's Kingdom, cannot eat our own.

That leads us to the third point.

3. To stop to cannibalism in God's Church, we have to realize that gossip is the murder, the cannibalization of someone in another person's eyes.

It's the murder of someone's reputation. It's the murder of someone's image in the eyes of others. Let's go to Proverbs 18:8—we've all experienced the hurt of what somebody says about us.

Proverbs 18:8 *The words of a talebearer are as wounds ... (KJV)*

Just as if you cut yourself; somebody stabbed you and if you've been on the receiving end of character assassination and false accusations, it is like somebody just stabbed you in the gut with a knife. We've all experienced that, we've all had that happen to us.

8 continued) *The words of a talebearer are as wounds and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. (KJV)*

Over the years, so many have been hurt by this spiritual cannibalism. Eating our own, slaying our own, destroying our own. Gossip also is condemning somebody's heart when you think about it. The heart in biblical terms is their innermost being—their basic character, what they are internally. Gossip is really condemning somebody's heart. People say, I know what they're thinking, I know what their agenda is. Do we really know what the agenda is of another person? Can we really look into their mind and their heart and know what they're really thinking and what their real agenda is?

Only God knows the heart. As a reference, there are many scriptures, but Psalm 44:21 tells us that. God knows every thought, every motive, every action we have. God reads our heart and knows exactly what we're made of. It's true that out of the heart the mouth speaks, yes, but only God knows what's deep inside the heart. Thankfully people don't speak everything that's in their heart at all times so as humans we have no way of knowing. Only God knows what's deep inside the heart of another human being—what their motives are, what their intent is and what they believe deep down—only God knows that.

Cannibalism by gossip consists of two events: the hearing of negative information about somebody and then the repeating of that negative information. To hear, to bring it in, then the second part is to pass it along, to spread it to others. Let's take the first one. The Bible says that we have to refuse to hear gossip—must refuse it. Let's go to Proverbs 20:19. I'll read this out of the New International Version. Notice the characteristic of somebody who gossips.

Proverbs 20:19 *A gossip betrays a confidence; (NIV)*

In other words somebody can come and say, this is just between you and me, and then the gossip completely forgets that and spreads it all over.

19 continued) ... *so avoid anyone who talks too much.* (NIV)

Because ultimately it will be passed around. Let's go to chapter 26, verse 20. This is a principle that I've seen in action, that I've experienced in various congregations.

Proverbs 26:20 *Without wood a fire goes out [there's nothing to promote combustion]; so where there is no talebearer the strife ceases.* (KJV)

It's amazing in God's Church that sometimes you can have a church in turmoil and uproar, and one person leaves and peace breaks out. It just takes one—a talebearer, a gossip. The question we have to ask ourselves and I have to remind myself, am I lifting up or am I tearing down by what I say? Am I lifting people up or am I tearing people down? Let me give you a personal example that I'm ashamed of. About thirty-five years ago, I went to a minister, the pastor, and I passed along some gossip to him that I had heard about another minister. I never should have done it but it was common in those days and I did it. I gossiped to him about another individual. His response taught me a very valuable lesson. He looked me right in the eye and said, I know this man well, and he would never do what you're saying he did. That stopped me in my tracks; I was so embarrassed and I felt so low.

I learned a great deal from this embarrassment because who am I to pass on something negative about another person, and who am I to pass on something that I don't even know is true or not?—I never took the time to verify it. We can stop gossip in its tracks by saying, excuse me, I just don't want to hear this. I confronted a man in the Church not long ago and said, why don't you say that? He replied, but they need somebody to talk to, they need a sensitive ear so they can vent. I said no, they're just gossiping to you and why don't you just tell them to go to the person that they're concerned about and talk to that person directly, and you tell him, I don't want to hear it anymore. But the man refused. We must refuse not only to hear gossip, we have to refuse to repeat gossip. Let's go to Proverb's 17:9; there is much wisdom here.

Proverbs 17:9 *He that covereth a transgression seeketh love;* (KJV)

So somebody sins—it's a transgression and you cover it. In other words, you don't repeat it, you make it stop there.

9 continued) ... *but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.* (KJV)

A friendship can be broken almost irrevocably if a friend betrays another friend. Let's go to verse 27.

27) *He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. (KJV)*

In other words, not a cannibal.

28) *Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding. (KJV)*

Abraham Lincoln famously paraphrased this when he said, it is better to remain quiet and be thought a fool than to speak up and remove all doubt. That's a wise man. Sometimes it's better just to keep our mouth shut because in a multitude of words, we are going to trip ourselves up sooner or later. Abraham Lincoln knew that. He that shuts his lips is esteemed a man of understanding but if we repeat a matter we can destroy a friendship in a heartbeat. Friendships that take years, decades to build up can be destroyed in a matter of minutes. Even as this Proverb points out, even the truth is sometimes better left unsaid because, as we said, he that covers a transgression seeks love. Somebody saw his brother commit a sin, let's say. You can spread it all around or you can keep your mouth shut, and sometimes it's better to keep one's mouth shut. Let's go to Proverbs 29:11; it follows the same principle that Abraham Lincoln paraphrased.

Proverbs 29:11 *A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards [or until later].*

Now go back to chapter 12, verse 23; we're following a thought train here, talking about covering up, not saying everything on our mind.

Proverbs 12:23 *A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness. (KJV)*

What this tells us is words can always be said later but once you say them, you can't un-say them. Once you ring the bell, you can't unring the bell. So the point is, don't say them in the first place, and a good rule of thumb is, if you're not sure, don't. If you're not absolutely sure, if you haven't looked into the scriptures to see what God wants and you're not sure about it, don't say it. You can always go back and revisit it later. It is not a sin to not say all that's in your mind. In fact, it is a good thing to not say everything that's in our mind because that's what gets us in trouble. There is no law that says you have to blabber out everything that comes into the head. What's the old saying—don't believe everything you think comes from God because Satan is around too.

We need to put our mind in gear before we speak, and I guarantee all of us have spoken before we put our mind in gear. I can remember words coming out of my mouth and as they are coming out of my mouth, I'm trying to grab them and pull them in because I know I'm saying things I have no right to say, I shouldn't be saying them. We need to put the mind in gear, ask the question, is what I'm hearing true? Has it been verified? And even if it has, we don't have to repeat it. If we're thinking about repeating

something, ask the question: Am I doing any good by repeating this? Is it godly to repeat this? Look at James 1:26. James is talking about the tongue again. He's talking about somebody who wants to be religious. We do want to be.

James 1:26 *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, [then what] but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. (KJV)*

Deceiving one's own heart means he is deceiving his heart into thinking he is not a cannibal when he really is. He's deceiving himself in that I'm not really eating my own, I'm standing up for God and I'm condemning this evil person over here, even though this "evil" person has God's Holy Spirit and is walking down the same path that he is.

19) *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: (KJV)*

The point is, we have a part to play. We need to do our part to stop the cannibalism that is rampant in God's Church.

Now the fourth point.

4. How should we respond to gossip about us?

When someone comes to us and says, did you hear about what so-and-so said about you? What should be the proper response? Should we gossip about them in return? That's the carnal response. We want to get back, we want to get even so we'll gossip back—we've all done it. Let's go to Ecclesiastes 7:21-22. This is great advice, wonderful advice. It's amazing how just one little example can put everything into perspective.

Ecclesiastes 7:21 *Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; [why?] lest thou hear thy servant curse thee:*

22) *For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others. (KJV)*

We've cursed others, so when somebody curses us, why get upset about it? We've done it to others; what goes around comes around, as the saying goes, so take it. Remember what Christ said on the cross: Father forgive them because they don't know what they're doing. Satan has got a hold of them, Satan is provoking them and motivating them, they don't know what they're doing, so just let it go. Now let's go to Matthew 5:38; this is coming out of Christ's mouth, this very subject. How do we respond to those who want to cannibalize us, who want to eat us alive and destroy us? Some do so angrily, bitterly, hatefully, but what did Christ say to do about it?

Matthew 5:38 *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:*

39) *But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: [don't fight back] but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. (KJV)*

It's better to be hit twice than to fight back. It's taken me decades to learn this, especially having a military background, and my dad, he was tough and he said, if somebody hits you, you hit them back harder and hit them back more than once. That's not what Christ tells us. So you hit them back once or twice and then what? What's after that, where does that go? Christ is saying just don't resist it, don't fight back.

44) *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you [that's hard to do], do good to those who hate you [that's hard to do], and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you ... (KJV)*

This is a commandment—we have to pray for our enemies and that's probably the hardest commandment to follow—when somebody hates you, they're yelling and screaming at you, they're lying about you, and Christ says do good to them, pray for them, bless them.

45) *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (KJV)*

The point is, God watches to see whether we will obey this command or not. I have a hard time believing that somebody who does not obey this command is going to be in God's Kingdom. Somebody who's ready to fight, ready to get back, ready to get even—how would God give somebody eternal life in His Kingdom who is like that? That's why Christ says what He says. Now let's go to 1 Thessalonians 5:15. The apostles picked up on that and believed, internalized it, and repeated it. Paul says the very same thing.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 *See that none render evil for evil unto any man [the word "man" is in italics, so it's been added]; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves [he's referring to those in Thessalonica, in God's Church], and to all men. (KJV)*

Don't render evil for evil to anybody. Let's go further to James 4:11. James says the same thing. This is repeated and repeated and repeated in the New Testament, and yet it amazes me that those among us who behave like spiritual cannibals just read right over these scriptures; they don't take them personally.

James 4:11 *Speak not evil one of another, brethren. [It's clear; there are no exceptions, no qualifications.] He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother [the Greek word for judge means "to condemn or put on trial"], speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: [that's the same Greek word—if we do this we condemn God's law and none of us wants to be in that category] but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. (KJV)*

A judge is somebody who condemns, and none of us wants to stand before God and say, God, I just condemned Your law; I made it of none effect; I didn't obey it; I thought it didn't apply to me. What's God going to say to that?—It doesn't apply to you? Christ died because it applies to you.

God's word is very, very clear. Returning evil for evil is what Satan wants us to do and Satan provokes this cannibalism through the tongue, and the only solution is to follow Christ's example. Don't return evil for evil.

The fifth and last point:

5. How should we prevent gossip in the first place?

It's always good to stop it in the beginning rather than later on, and the key, as in so many other areas of our Christian life, is humility. That's where it all starts. 1 Peter 5:5. It takes humility to obey the following two scriptures. If we think we're better than other people, we're above other people, then these two scriptures can't be done. Peter says,

1 Peter 5:5 *Likewise, ye younger, [younger in age] submit yourselves unto the elder. [Someone older, but then he adds to it] Yea, all of you be subject one to another, [how do you do that?] and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. (KJV)*

The Greek word for “subject” here—*be subject one to another*—is Strong's #5293; it's the Greek word *hupotassó*, and it means “to subordinate or reflexively to obey”. He says, obey one another, put yourself below this other person, don't elevate the self. Then let's go back toward the front of the book, Philippians 2:3. This is one that should be burned on the inside of our eyelids as we go forward. I'll read this out of the New King James. Very familiar, we all know this—how do we prevent gossip?

Philippians 2:3 *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition [that's pride] or conceit, but [rather] in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (KJV)*

This works in a marriage, it works within the Church, if we will just humble ourselves and look out for others before we look out for ourselves. If we esteem others better than ourselves. Then of course we have to apply Matthew 18:15—that's a whole sermon in itself: Somebody offends you, you hear a rumor about yourself, go to them alone and say, I heard you said this about me, can we talk about it? If God's Spirit prevails there will be a reconciliation.

Humility says, how can I carry a grudge against my brother? How can I do that? If I'm esteeming my brother better than myself, how can I carry a grudge against my brother? How can I cannibalize my brother by talking behind his back? Think about that. How can I love my brother, and say I love my brother, and then cannibalize him by talking about him behind his back? Stop gossip in the first place. Never say it, never repeat it.

Okay, let's conclude. The point is cannibalism is indeed alive within the greater Church so remember what Satan's goal is for us—we've talked about it before. Satan's goal is to get us to sin because if Satan can get us to sin then that separates us from God and then we are more vulnerable. Satan wants us to be a murderer just like him. Remember that Satan walks around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Satan wants to devour God's people and he wants to provoke us so that we devour God's people. We do his bidding for him by cannibalism—spiritual cannibalism—gossip, rumor, slander, innuendo. The bottom line is, in the end we are going to be judged by what we say. Let's go to Matthew 12:34. Christ is addressing the Pharisees and He is railing against them because of what they do and what they think.

Matthew 12:34 *O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*

35) *A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*

36) *But I say unto you, [this is what we're going to give account of] that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. (KJV)*

Every idle word. If you have to give account of every idle word, what about slander, what about lies, what about innuendos, what about character assassination? We're going to have to give account of that.

37) *For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (KJV)*

We have to remember that life and death are in the power of the tongue—our life, our death, and the life and death of the reputation of others when we cannibalize them. I need to make sure that my words lead to life and the life of those around me. We cannot let our tongues be an instrument of Satan in his efforts to destroy the Church. Satan is coming after God's people who believe the truth—wherever God's truth is taught, Satan is coming after with a vengeance to cannibalize those people—to kill and destroy those people.

Let's close with one final scripture, 1 Peter 3:10; I'll read this out of the New King James. This tells us where we need to go.

1 Peter 3:10 *For "He who would love life and see good days [we all want to love life and see good days], Let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit.*

11) *Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. (KJV)*

We do so by having uplifting, clean, godly words in our mouth. So let's do our part, starting right now, to stop cannibalism within God's Church.