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Dogs and Bones

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My grandmother had many tidbits of wisdom, like, “A dog that will bring a bone, will take one back.” It was a caution about how to handle those who bring you a bone of gossip, slander, or backbiting, and her way of saying they are not to be trusted. You see, the one who brings a bone doesn’t stop to ask if it is true. And even if it is true, the one who brings a bone doesn’t think twice about the damage that can be done with the telling and how quickly a good name can be marred or destroyed. The one who brings a bone makes you feel like you’re receiving privileged information. The one who brings a bone also has the notion they’re doing the church or the world a favor by disclosing the knowledge or rumor. And before long, the rumor, many times exaggerated or false, has been told so much, it appears to be true. One simply cannot go back and retrieve the words or repair the damage.

James wrote about the importance of our words (3:6-8). He used some rather dramatic word pictures to describe the tongue: a fire, a world of iniquity, it defiles the whole body, it sets on fire the course of nature, it is set on fire by hell (literally, it comes from hell), it is untamable, and it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. David said one who will dwell with the Lord is “*he who does not backbite with his tongue*” and “*whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy*” (Psalm 15:3, 101:5). Solomon must have learned well from his father. He said, “*Whoever spreads slander is a fool*” (10:18b). And one must wonder if Paul was thinking of dogs when he warned, “*if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another*” (Galatians 5:15).

Our tongues can utter kind words, sweetened by the living water we freely drink, or our words can be full of rotteness. We can *choose* to speak promoting goodness, or we can listen and retell things that help Satan do his evil work. The next time a dog brings you a bone of gossip, slander or backbiting, recall what God’s word says about such. And remember, a dog that will bring a bone, will take one back, and that kind of dog can just as easily take back a bone that involves you!

Today’s Verse: “*A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.*” Proverbs 11:13

Today’s Challenge: The next time a dog brings you a bone ask these questions:

1. Is it true?
2. Is the listening or retelling going to harm another?
3. Would I say this in the presence of the one I’m talking about?
4. Would I listen to or say this if Jesus was in my presence?
(hint: He is always with us)

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