

Tale Bearer or Faithful Spirit?

Proverbs 11:13

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*“A tale-bearer reveals secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit
conceals the matter.” - Proverbs 11:13.*

A Talebearer is one of the single most negative “characters” we see in the Bible; whether called by name or simply seen in practice. The word used here is especially illustrative for us. It is the Hebrew word “rākīl” (ray-kewl) and basically refers to one who slanders another, damaging his perception by those around them both. The tales he bears, then, are ones that affect the way his standing is seen in the public’s eye or in the long term.

We should note, also, that the clear statement here is that it is a very definite action on the one who “bears the tale”. It is a chosen thing for the one in view. This very clearly sets up the contrast that we have here:

- Our “Tale-bearer” is seen to be a negative and even sinful one.
- The one with the “faithful spirit”, discussed in a minute, is portrayed positively.
- The implication of the one, the talebearer, is that we are NOT to be thus.
- The implication of the other, the one of faithful spirit - discussed in a moment, is to be emulated by believers.

“Faithful” is often joined with “spirit” and, together, speaks of the trustworthy person, the one who can be relied upon to do what is right and needful in a given situation. He does what is needful and required. “Spirit” actually refers to the inner part of man (ruah - the spirit) and so is speaking of the very essence of man, what “makes him go” so to speak. It contains the mental and also the spiritual side in quite a number of places in which it is used. It is THIS aspect of the being of man that is in view here. IT stands in contrast with one who slanders those nearby. So we can see that Isaiah’s intent is to underscore both the importance and the sacredness of one who holds up the truth about us (not to mention the truth that we know from God).

It is set directly against the danger and sinfulness of revealing what he calls “secrets” just after the term for “talebearer” which we have already thought through. A “secret”, we can think of as a confidential discussion between people. Because of the context, we can think of it as an important matter which is revealed against the will of the one holding it. It comes to the knowledge of other persons, and he/she lets it be known in a more public sense. This is NOT just speaking of something that you do not WANT known, but of something that, perhaps OUGHT not to be known. There are many possibilities here which we do not have time to go into in any more depth than a simple mention.

However, we will mention that the one who comes into knowledge of such a matter sees its need for confidence and he/she “conceals” it so that it does not become any spread about thing, being “revealed” when it ought be so. BTW a “matter”, mentioned here, is just a general reference to general situation and does not, at this point, have an SPECIFIC thing in mind as Solomon writes.

We should mention, however, that Solomon was, after all, a King! As such, there were many of both matters that affected him. He was slandered and run down on all sides. Likewise, he had those round him who know of things best kept in confidence who did just that and so demonstrated their “faithful spirit” to Solomon and to the kingdom.

By way of rehashing our interpretation here a tale-bearer” or “a slanderer,” for how closely slander and tittle-tattling are allied (comp. Prov. 25:9, 10)! With the slanderer is contrasted the faithful and reliable man; with the tattler in compared the man who conceals the matter. The caution is actually against entrusting our secrets to any one of whose thorough reliability we are not assured!

We also have a number of Biblical Illustrations to ponder:

- The conduct of Doeg the Edomite is an example of the mischief that may be done by a tongue that devises mischief (1 Sam. 21; 22; Ps. 52). It may indeed have been his duty to report to the king his master what he saw and heard, but he should not have kept back the important fact that
- Ahimelech had been imposed upon by David, and had acted as he did under the impression that David was about Saul’s business. Partial truth is a dangerous form of slander, as those tell-tales well knew who quoted against our blessed Lord His own words imperfectly (comp. Matt. 26:61; John 2:19).
- David himself afterwards suffered from the treachery of a bosom friend, though not blamelessly if (as is supposed)
- Ahitophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba.
- Nehemiah seems to have had traitors in his court, nobles of Judah who uttered his words to Tobiah (Neh. 6:19).
- Jeremiah observed a prudent reserve, when entrusted with the king’s secret (38:24–27); but we may not blame Joseph who divulged his brother’s evil doings.

Thinking by way of application -

- The devil, as his name teaches, is a slanderer, and goes to and fro in the earth collecting matter that he may accuse men before God.
- Doubtless from him also proceeds that disposition to make mischief with the tongue which has always betrayed itself in human nature.
- The motives for tale-bearing are various, and include vanity, love of mischief, spite.
- The ways of tale-bearing are numerous, and comprise open blabbing, confidential communications, sly insinuation.

- A compound of weakness and wickedness is the social tell-tale usually, and, like a traveler who brings the plague in his garments, cannot be too carefully fought shy of.
- I may, as a rule, effectually discourage such a one by refusing to hear his tales, and this, remembering that he who blabs my neighbor's secrets to me will surely blab mine to another.
- Let me beware that I fall not into this habit myself. The grace of God will preserve me: but he who has no bridle on his tongue has never much grace in his heart.
- Let me choose friends and servants on whose discretion and honor I can rely, and not trust them beyond their power. To hear no evil of a friend; to speak none of an enemy; to believe not all I hear, nor speak all I know;—these are good rules both to be observed and taught.