

A Mouth that Speaks for Others' Good, Not My Gain
Psalm 5:8-10

In this Psalm, David makes a contrast between himself and the wicked who opposed him. The contrast between the wicked and the righteous revolves around what is said from the mouth. The wicked flatter. The wicked backbite. Both flattery and backbiting are the sign of an absence of grace in a person's life. Flatter is defined as *"excessive and insincere praise, given especially to further one's own self-interests."* Backbiting is defined as *"malicious talk about someone who is not present."* Graced people avoid both.

I. Flattery is composed of "words of praise" that are given with expectations of a "return of favors"

Encouraging words, sincere expressions of gratitude, and heartfelt admiration are not flattery.

"Flattery is from the teeth out. Appreciation is from the heart out" (Dale Carnegie). A few times, because it is outlandish, flattery is obvious to the speaker and the subject. Mostly, it's hard to notice. Politicians flatter voters, students flatter teachers, employees flatter bosses, members flatter clergy.

A. Flattery is harmful to both the speaker and the subject.

"A man that flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet" (Proverbs 29:5). Who is this "his"?

We value most what we delight in most. Pleasure is not God's competitor, idols are. Pleasure is the measure of our treasure. Jonathan Edwards said, "Praise is the consummation of pleasure."

Flattery of someone is different from pleasure in someone because flatterers want something.

B. Flattery is idolatry of the lips. It is the replacement of God with people. "A flattering mouth works ruin" (Proverbs 26:28). "The wicked flatter" (Psalm 5:9). The danger that comes to the subject of flattery is the loss of humility. The usefulness of a true servant of Christ depends on his humility; as soon as he thinks himself as a great man, and is puffed up, the Spirit is grieved and the real power of his ministry will be gone. To acknowledge blessing received through ministry, to thank the Lord for His grace and gifts, that is another matter.

C. Flattery will be absent from heaven and should be within the body of Christ.

The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things (Psalm 12:3).

Paul said, *"For neither at any time used we flattering words,"* (I Thessalonians 2:5). We are clearly told to *"meddle not with him that flatters with his lips"* (Prov. 20:19). "He that rebukes a man afterwards shall find more favor than he that flatters with the tongue" (Proverbs 28:23).

II. Backbiting is composed of "words of criticism" that are given in an environment of concealment.

Backbiting is speaking in a concealed manner to ruin someone's good name. The Hebrew word "backbiting" in our text means to "hide" or "conceal." It is hidden words intended to harm someone.

A. A reputation can be stolen openly.

A robber can take something from you by an act of violence, out in the open. When one openly utters words against another that rob him of reputation, the speaker steals reputation publicly.

B. A reputation can be stolen secretly.

The act of taking another's reputation in secret is what the Bible calls *backbiting*. Backbiting reveals disrespect for the person who is being discussed in secret. Rather than revile him, so that he is injured directly, the speaker's words intend to rob another of his good name secretly.

"Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour" (Psalm 15:13 KJV). A graced mouth refrains from both flattery and backbiting.