

Another Day

Biblical reflections for busy teachers



Staffroom gossip

"A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret."

Proverbs 11:13

'People watching' is a popular occupation. Even better is eavesdropping! There are some places where you can't avoid overhearing interesting snippets of conversation, like on a train or 'plane or in a restaurant or cafe. Occasionally a celebrity or politician's indiscretion in a public place makes big headlines in the tabloid press. No-one is likely to forget former Prime Minister Gordon Brown's recorded but private comments in his car during the last general election!

School staffrooms – like any workplace – are hopefully places where staff can unwind, even let off steam occasionally and find the support of colleagues. It may be about a situation at home or the class just dismissed and, more often than not, a pupil who is especially trying. Sometimes there is a thin line to be drawn between character assassination and a necessary understanding of the child or even of another member of staff and such conversations help to release pressure or find solutions to difficult situations.

Clearly this was an issue in the early Church as well. The Jerusalem Church leader and half brother of Jesus wrote, *"A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything – or destroy it! It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell."*

James 3:3-5 (The Message)

Today we might speak of the gears and brakes of a car or perhaps even more potently, a speed limiter, instead of a horse's bit. The latest versions of Sat Nav provide the opportunity to set warning sounds when reaching the speed limit on the road or a pre-set limit of your own. Many people could do with such warning systems to control what they say and when. Jesus himself warned, *"What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean', but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean'."* Matthew 15:11

But then there is the matter of what we hear! The proverb clearly distinguishes between a gossip, for whom what is heard becomes a morsel of information to pass on, and the trustworthy person who keeps the secret. Respecting the confidence of another has to be a key attribute to be found in a Christian, especially in the staff room.