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MINISTRIES

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Parashah Points: Kedoshim – Harmful Speech

Welcome to another episode of Parashah Points—short thoughts from the weekly Torah Portion.

This week’s Parashah Point comes from Kedoshim, which is Hebrew for “holy ones,” and it goes from Leviticus 19:1 to Leviticus 20:27.

This Torah portion gives instructions for holiness and ethical behavior. It also lists the penalties for various transgressions of God’s laws governing sexual relationships that were listed in the previous parashah.

There’s a lot we can talk about in this Torah Portion. Today we’re going to talk about gossip and slander.

This week’s Torah Portion is part of what’s comes to be called the “holiness code,” which is a section of the Torah dealing primarily with laws governing moral and ethical behavior as well as ritual purity. These laws teach us what it means to “be holy” as YHWH is holy.

Among these commandments are several laws pertaining to our speech. We are not to lie to people or swear falsely by YHWH’s name (Leviticus 19:11-12). We are also not to slander:

Leviticus 19:16

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor. I am the Lord [YHWH].

All throughout the Bible are warnings concerning slander—that is, harmful speech intended to disparage others. There are also warnings against gossip—idle talk about others’ private matters and spreading potentially embarrassing information behind people’s backs. Both of these types of speech can be labeled as *lashon hara*, evil speech.

This is an extremely serious issue in the Bible. The Book of Proverbs goes so far as to declare that life and death themselves are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21).

The New Testament echoes these warnings and principles. Paul says, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up” (Ephesians 4:29). James says that our religion is “worthless” if we do not know how to bridle our tongue (James 1:26). James later compares the destructive nature of careless and harmful speech to deadly poison (James 3:8).

Interestingly, scientific studies have actually backed up the Bible’s warnings. One study from 2014 showed the immense psychological harm suffered by victims of harmful speech, and how negative emotions like humiliation are felt much more intensely than even anger and happiness. (Marte Otten & Kai J. Jonas. *Humiliation as an Intense Emotional Experience: Evidence from the Electro-Encephalogram*, Social neuroscience, Vol. 9:1, pp. 23-35)

As believers, we have a biblical mandate to control our speech. We are to build up our brothers and sisters with our words, not destroy them:

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

But how do we fight against this sin of harmful speech?

The first step is to acknowledge the fact that gossip and slander are indeed sins. We need to stop attempting to justify ourselves when we engage in such speech. We need to stop deluding ourselves into thinking it’s not that big of a deal. Yeshua said that we would one day be judged for every careless word we’ve spoken (Matthew 12:36).

We must see gossip and slander as what they really are: deadly and contagious viruses that harm others and potentially destroy entire communities.

The second step is to resist the temptation not only to engage in gossip and slander but also to listen to it. This might require that we confront those in our lives we see engaging in this sin and warn them that they need to stop. It might require that we disconnect from certain groups on social media. Proverbs tells us to not associate with simple babblers:

Proverbs 20:19

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babble.

The third step is to ask God to change our hearts. Yeshua said, “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart” (Matthew 15:18). Ultimately, harmful speech is not a tongue problem but a heart problem.

May God teach us to truly love our neighbor as ourselves and write his Torah on our hearts. Then we can resist the urge to engage in harmful speech. Perhaps not so coincidentally, the command to love your neighbor as yourself occurs just a couple of verses after God’s command not to slander.

Thank you for joining us for another Parashah Point!

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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