

Behind Your Back

Recently I came across a brief essay by a man who accidentally received an email written by a "friend" but not intended for him. But it had some things to say about him. And they were not particularly complimentary. Naturally, it bothered him. "Hearing other people's uncensored opinions of you is an unpleasant reminder that...everyone else does not always view you in the forgiving light that you hope they do, making all allowances, always on your side."

Of course we can be hurt and angry, regarding our betrayers as "vicious two-faced hypocrites." But the fact is that all of us have talked behind the backs of others, even those we love. And everything we say is not positive. The fact is that everyone says something frustrating, disappointing and ridiculous...including ourselves. We sometimes do things we shouldn't have done, say things we shouldn't have said or otherwise fail to be what others want us to be. And they occasionally talk about all that stuff.

And we all do the same thing. Sometimes, as the author of the above mentioned article notes, snide remarks and criticism are made to bond with others who share the feelings. Sometimes the comments are expressions of sheer nastiness. Sometimes the negative remarks we made of others have a positive intent. But, honestly, not very often.

But people do talk about our shortcomings. We don't mind so much people knowing our faults. But we want them to find the faults endearing or pleasantly amusing. It's fine for a person to say to someone else about us, "Oh, you know, that's just Dick!" Or Jane. *Not*, however, "Well, that absolute idiot is at it again!"

We want people to love us because they see the good in us, they recognize our strengths and appreciate our talents. But often those who love us don't think all the wonderful things about us that we would prefer they think. Instead they love us *in spite of* some of the flaws and unflattering qualities we possess. Many of us don't like the idea of being loved *in spite of*.

But the truth of the matter is that's the way we are always loved by people who know us well. While I hope some people also love me primarily "because of," most probably won't. And as for the opinions of those who really don't love me, it's best not to worry much about what they think and say. Indeed, only a person lacking wisdom wants to know everything said about him or her... even by friends.

I'm perfectly happy to be loved *in spite of*. I'm realistic enough to know that not many people are going to be pleased with every aspect of my personality or ideas or behavior. In fact I'm not always pleased with everything about me. I'm often reminded of the fact that the very scriptures that call us to love one another also say we need to "bear one another" and "be patient with each other" and remain "longsuffering toward one another" (Ephesians 4:2). The reason is simple: in the real world people are most often loved *in spite of*. And that's okay.