



FOR in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.³ Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.⁴ Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.⁵ Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.⁷ For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:⁸ But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. (James 3:2-8)

It is true that the tongue can be a deadly weapon – even a murderer. Many lives have been ruined by false rumor and gossip; and many men have died on the battlefield due to lack of guarded speech. A poster that was common during the Second World War read, *Loose Lips Might Sink Ships*. The phrase originated on propaganda posters during World War II. The phrase was created by the War Advertising Council and used on posters by the United States Office of War Information.

Quite often much damage is done unintentionally by indiscreet talk. Movement of battleships in war need not be revealed on the street before disembarkation lest the enemy learn of it and prepare an ocean ambush on the high seas. Neither do troop movements need to become common knowledge for the same reason. General Stonewall Jackson was so cautious as not to reveal his final battle plans even to his own staff officers until it was essential for them to know.

The above precautions of national security are based on the dissemination of factual information to the enemy; but today, we will be addressing the careless gossip and rumor common to every day society and, especially, the Church.

Nothing is more vile than the tongue that spreads false rumor and gossip. Even secrets of a person's past life is not to be published among the church when that person has been converted and made one with Christ. Let me tell you a little story that will make my point a little more clearly:

A respectable deacon, in his 70's, of a Baptist church in the South was well known for his character and Christian morality. He was a long-standing beacon in the Church and an example to all.

There was, in the same Church a busy-body who sought dirt even on a freshly-mopped marble floor. If she could not discover some weakness in others, her fertile and malicious mind would invent such.

One day the deacon came to Sunday morning worship and was coldly received by his old friends and acquaintances. Upon inquiring as to this reception of the minister, he was informed of some deleterious information about his character that had come to light over the past few days. But what could that be? asked the bewildered deacon. Mrs. Abigail Jones (the local gossip) has spread the word that you are an alcoholic. Replied the minister. But alcohol has never graced my lips! replied the deacon (Baptist consider a drop of alcohol more sinful than adultery). He then learned the details of the accusation against his honor and character.

Mrs. Jones had witnessed the automobile parked at a local bar at which strip-tease performances were regularly made. She made sure that it was no short space of time of his being at the bar since she cross-checked on the car for more than four hours as it sat at the bar. Thusly, she reported this act of shameless behavior to the whole Church – such people always have a full telephone directory.

There has been a very great misunderstanding, avowed the deacon. My car was parked at the bar, which was closed for the day, since there was not parking space available across the street at my tax accountant's office. The minister knew the deacon was telling the truth and promised to set the matter straight.

In the meantime, after the evening service at the Church, the deacon lingered long after each soul had left for home. He then drove to the home of Mrs. Jones, parked his car in her driveway, locked the doors, and walked home.. He recovered his car around noon the next day. Not a word was breathed by Mrs. Jones concerning the deacons car being parked at her house overnight, however, she obviously got the message.

Please consider the seriousness of the sin of idle gossip. Paul lumps the sin of the busy-body in with that of the murderer and thief. *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.* (1 Peter 4:15)

The tendency to outright and knowingly impugn the character of others, especially those in important positions, is well illustrated in the 'fake news' of our day. Print and digital media slander honest people every day with lies and innuendo that have no basis in fact - a twisted truth is still a lie. *But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun*

to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. (1 Timothy 5:11-13)

The moral principle is not limited to poor widows, but to everyone, especially wicked men, who practice this inglorious art. *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12)* This latter text provides good advice and counsel for the welfare state as well as busybodies.

Many ministers of today are fixed in the mire and profuse words of what they consider a higher theology that most of us unwashed commoners can never grasp. However, the truth is often more clearly understood among the less 'school trained' and more 'Bible trained' indigenous peoples of the island nations. I include below another example from the Rev. F. E. Marsh from his book, *Points, Pearls, and Parables*(1908):

A native of Aniwa, named Titonga, gave the following sound advice to his brethren: *I see many things among us that are not right. There is often bad talk. When you hear a whisper of a scandal, you bend forward your ear and exclaim, Say that again: say it again that I may hear it well! and then you take it and put it in your heart, and go about looking for someone to tell it to. You come to Church and take the Word of Jesus, and open it and read it, and then you shut it and leave it there. You go to school in the morning, and open the Word of Jesus and read it; then you shut it and leave it there. You go to your work and forget it. You do not lay it up in your hearts. My friends, this is not right! We must close our hearts and ears to bad talk, and open our ears and hearts to the Word of Jesus.*

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. (Matthew 17:5)

Remember: to be a busybody is to be busy about the business of other bodies, and to neglect the business which should occupy the body which is minding the business of other bodies.