



17 He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears. 18 As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, 19 So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport? 20 Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. 21 As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. 22 The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. 23 Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. 24 He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him; 25 When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart. 26 Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation. 27 Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him. 28 A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin. (Proverbs 26:17-28)

The remaining verses of Proverbs 26 addresses the quarrelsome busybodies among us. They inhabit every neighborhood, every social gathering and every church. Their enthusiasm to find out personal secrets of others defies imagination, and they never rest. Though I have related the story before, I will do so again since it has direct relevance to the subject at hand:

A well respected and faithful deacon of a small Baptist church, who had worked tirelessly to fund, maintain, and grow the church, went downtown to get a prescription filled. It was the evening rush hour and there were no parking spaces left in front of his pharmacy. He looked across the street and saw many remaining spaces in front of a cocktail lounge, so, thinking he would only be a few minutes, parked in front of the cocktail lounge. It had been raining and the man inadvertently left his headlights on. When he came back to his car, the battery was dead. So he got a ride home and came back the next morning with cables to jump-start his car and drove home. The next Sunday morning, he discovered quite a different attitude toward him from his fellow worshippers. On diligent inquiry, he discovered the church gossip (a widow woman) had spread the word that he had spent all evening in the local cocktail lounge. He confronted the lady and asked where she got such an idea. She responded, "Because I saw your car parked at the cocktail lounge all night long - THAT is where I got the idea!" The deacon was reserved and made no response; however, that Sunday night, he

drove his car to the gossip's house, parked it in the driveway, and left the car parked there overnight. The question may have arisen in the minds of many as to why a widow woman had such an all-night visitor..... Be not deceived, our sins shall surely find us out!

17 "He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears." Such a one is more than a fool - he is a meddling fool - for two main reasons: 1) he has no idea what the nature of the strife is about; and 2) It is not a matter that concerns him regardless of its nature. In the Middle East, dogs are despised since the superstitious Muslims believe them to be a fallen race of wicked people - much the same as a pig. One must look long and hard to find a dog that has its ears. They torture every such creature they can get their hands on by cutting off its ears and tail. No wonder, the dogs have a deep-seated hatred of humankind. They are mostly wild and will attack humans at night if they are in a pack. If you try to take one of these dogs by what remains of its ears, you can count on a great number of well-earned stitches. Why would anyone, in the first place, grab a passing dog by its ears? You do not know the dog and its past. You are begging for trouble in the same way that a man who meddles in the arguments of others is begging for trouble. He makes himself liable to the anger and ire of both contending parties.

THE MEDDLER AND TALE-BEARER:

18 "As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, 19 So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?" A madman is thoughtless in his rampaging. He does not consider, in the least, the pain and suffering his careless slanders and pin-prick comments cause. He hurts men and women alike, and may destroy a family; yet, he takes pride in his foolish behavior and calls it only a joke. It is noteworthy that most such individuals cannot take the joke when it is turned on themselves. Such character of man is especially brought out in the face of war. Such a fellow feels exempt from the normal laws of society and therefore feels empowered to hurt and maim at will. I once had a fierce argument with an Army warrant officer who boasted of giving peanut butter filled crackers (from his C-rations) to a Vietnamese child - laced with the ingredients of a heat tablet. He was happy to say that the heat tablet ate out the child's vocal chords. Within five years of that encounter, the warrant officer died of cancer of the trachea.

20 "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. 21 As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife." This could be a statement of the modern day adage, "Where there is smoke, there is fire" only in reverse. The querulous man adds fuel to the fire rather than extinguishing the flame. Mobs are not rational because men provoke and incite their senseless emotions. Anger is the cause of a great percentage of violence and that anger is usually baseless to begin with.

22 "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." When men in society are honest, there is justice in conversation. But a talebearer is not honest. He embellishes his tale-bearing with drama and added lies. There is no defense against the damages he causes because he cloaks his remarks in behind-the-back whispers. The victim is sickened to the soul because he has no defense against the subterfuge of the talebearer. His nature is like unto the brown recluse spider whose bite is microscopic, but whose poison spreads throughout the body to cripple and destroy. The victim is unaware of the bite until the poison has taken its course.

23 "Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross." The illuminating effects of phosphorus in decomposing meat or animal waste is very much like the example of the cheap and primitive potsherd being coated with silver dross. It appears as something it is not. The wicked and rotting heart attempts to disguise itself as something it is not. It is sometimes the case that the most deceitful and envious lips utilize a wonderful vocabulary to poison. Envy is the mother of hatred. Hear the words of a great preacher of the past: **1. Of a wicked heart showing itself in burning lips, furious, passionate, outrageous words, burning in malice, and presenting those to whom, or of whom, they are spoken. Ill-words and ill-will agree together as well as a potsherd and the dross of silver, which, now that the pot is broken, and the dross separated from the silver, are fit to be thrown together to the dunghill, 2. Or of a wicked heart disguising itself, with burning lips, burning with the professions of love and friendship, and even persecuting a man with flatteries; this is like a potsherd covered with the scum or dross of silver, with which one that is weak may be imposed upon, as if it were of some value, but a wise man is soon aware of the cheat. This sense agrees with the following verses.** (Matthew Henry.)

24 **"He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him;"** The talebearer disguises a black heart with the whitewash of flatteries, lies, and gentle expression. He is like a silver-plated spoon whose base metal is lead. It appears precisely as the genuine silver spoon until time wears through its coating exposing the real character beneath. Since he practices deceit, and repeats lies so often, he comes to believe them himself. He is victim of the very same propaganda advocated by Paul Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda - a big lie, oft repeated, becomes believable. You may recognize this approach in current American politics.

REASONS NOT TO BELIEVE A MEDDLER:

25 "When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart." 26 "Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation." 27 "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him." Seven being the number of completeness, the heart of the envy-infested meddler is complete in its wickedness - so complete that there is no room left for righteousness. He labors at digging the pit for others, but falls victim himself to the same stratagems he employs. There is nothing more dangerous than a deceitful hater who covers his hatred with soft and appealing words. He will, at some point and after much damage, be publicly exposed. **"Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops."** (Luke 12:3) **"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."** (Gal 6:7)

28 "A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin." A lying and malicious tongue is never the advocate of goodness to its victim. Deceit is, by its nature, UNFRIENDLY! A flatterer offers false hope. It makes one feel better than he should and, at the last, slams the door in the face of its object. The great evil of flattery is that it appeals to our basest, sinful instinct - PRIDE. Flattery, even to its agent, will lead him into unintentional pits. Several years ago, a famous radio evangelist from New York was being introduced by a local pastor of a New Britain, Conn. church who tried to build the man up to his congregation. He said: *"Think of the radio ministry of Dr. Cadman and his incredible ministry across the airwaves of the nation every Sunday afternoon, the millions who listen in spellbound! I have introduced the king of the electrons, the ruler of the airways, in fact, the prince of the power of the air!"* He began by calling the man a great worker of righteousness and ended up calling him the Devil: *"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the*

prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience ." (Ephesians 2:2) Let us come away from this Proverb with a spirit of truth and sincerity in our dealings toward our fellow men and women.