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THE SERPENT'S FANG
By S. L. Flowers

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Having had some twenty-five years' experience in the Gospel ministry, we feel that we are not far from the truth, when we say that ninety-nine per cent of church quarrels and splits are

caused directly or indirectly by the wrong use of the tongue. The same is true of all trouble between individuals. Somewhere along the line and usually at the very head of the Amazon of ill-will, hard feelings and cutting words, there may be traced the slimy tracks of backbiting or evil speaking.

We have become so thoroughly convinced of the widespread evil of this universal sin, that we have determined to deal with it, with ungloved hands, and to use our influence, whatever weight it may have, against its constantly increasing ravages.

We have not written for the eye of the critic, nor yet for the casual reader. Our hope, in sending this little message out, is that we may reach and help the thousands in Israel, who are being led into sin by the wiles of the devil through this subtle enemy of all that is good and true and noble -- backbiting or evil speaking.

We feel that if we can help a few to find their way out of the quagmires and quicksands of "evil speaking," and help them to a nobler, holier aim in life than that of "slandering their brethren," we shall have accomplished that for which we have written the following pages.

Yours and His for the lost of earth,
S. L. Flowers

* * * * *

01 -- THE EDENIC TRAGEDY

"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

"And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

"But the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

"And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:1-4).

This is the first hint we have of the existence of, "That old serpent, which is the devil and Satan." (Rev. 20: 2.) That he had existed prior to this account of his satanic trickery is evident from the fact that his name is connected with the "War in Heaven," and Jude tells us of a dispute he had with Michael the archangel over the body of Moses. Jesus speaks of having seen him fall as lightning from heaven. We see then, by these accounts of his meddling in the things of God, that he is no new hand at the business.

Beginning with the insurrection in heaven, when he tried to usurp the throne of God, in which he dragged down with him, the third part of the angels, the devil has been a meddler, false accuser and general trouble maker. The first account we have of him he is accusing God of

misrepresenting to Eve. His next appearance is when God found him among His people and when asked about Job, he began immediately to accuse that righteous man of serving God for gain.

All down along the centuries, since the tragedy that barred the entrance to Eden and made man a slave instead of a king, the slimy trail of the old serpent can be traced as he has followed both individual and nation from the cradle to the grave.

Just why God has allowed this meddler with His affairs to carry on his warfare and cause the havoc he has, is a matter beyond our finite comprehension and which we will not likely understand until we have crossed the line of mysteries.

It is an evident fact that the devil and his angels lost their first estate in heaven by talking, meddling, fault-finding and misrepresentation. In other words, they talked themselves out of heaven and will no doubt continue their merciless attacks on the integrity of God and man until they are, "Shut up in the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:3).

Eve, evidently did not know that, hidden underneath the smooth enticing words of the serpent, there was the deadly fang with its poison bag brim full of distilled misery and woe; made ready, not only for her but for her companion, and through him, all succeeding generations. Had she known what was incorporated in that little sugar coated morsel, she would no doubt have spurned the enemy and not have fallen from the high estate she occupied.

As the millenniums have come and gone, burying themselves in the dark, mysterious past, the old serpent has continued his relentless warfare against God Almighty, adding to his forces all who would enlist and allow themselves to be used as a cat's paw, to carry on his nefarious work. His trump card was from the beginning, and is to the present day, the spirit of fault-finding and backbiting.

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02 -- AN UNRULY MEMBER

"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: but the tongue can no man tame: it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3: 7-10).

The story is told of a king who calling his chief butler one day requested of him that he would prepare his best dinner for some noted visitors he expected on the morrow.

When the time arrived for the great feast and the king and his guests were gathered about the royal table, the servants began to line the board with all kinds of deliciously prepared soups, meats, and other dishes whose tempting aroma invited the hungry company to eat to their fill.

As one by one the different dishes were sampled it was discovered that the entire menu was made up of tongue. There were tongue soups, tongue salad, tongues fried, boiled, baked, minced, breaded, pickled and spiced.

"This is your best dinner, is it?" asked the king of his butler.

"Yes sir," replied the butler, "this is my very best dinner. There is nothing in the world better than the tongue."

"Very well," replied the king, "I appoint another feast for tomorrow and I wish you to serve us your meanest dinner." The feast was prepared and when it was served, it was found to be exactly the same as the one given the day before. Tongues of every animal or bird obtainable and good for food.

"How is this?" asked the king of his butler, "when I called for your best dinner you served us tongue. When I asked for your meanest, you serve us nothing else. Is the tongue the worst thing as well as the best in the world?"

"Yes sir," answered the butler, "there is nothing in all the world so good or so bad as the tongue. It can bless or curse; bring joy or wring the heart with sorrow; it can bring peace or war; it can lead to virtue or seduce to vice; it can speak the truth or utter lies; it can be harsh or mild, rough or smooth, refined or vulgar, pure or impure. It is with the tongue we bless God or curse man."

The moral taught by this story is good. There is no member of our body more efficient, more healing and uplifting than the tongue, when the heart is sad and heavy. When the heart is overflowing with love divine and the soul burdened for one in trouble, there is no medicine so cooling and refreshing, or which can do quicker work than can this little, "Unruly Member."

On the other hand, there is nothing that can cut and bleed the soul, especially of the timid or discouraged, like this same little weapon, when controlled by the wrong heart condition. Many honest, hungry souls have no doubt been furthered on their road to a suicide's grave by the hasty word of a friend or loved one. It is also no doubt true, that many have been encouraged to press the battle to the very gates of the enemy because of an encouraging word from a loving heart. The following poem brings out these thoughts beautifully:

* * *

The Power Of The Tongue

Keep a watch on your words, my brother,
For words are wonderful things;
They are sweet, like the bees' fresh honey,
Like the bees, they have terrible stings.

They can bless like the glad, warm sunshine,

And brighten a lonely life.
They can cut in the strife of anger,
Yes, like a two-edged knife.

Let them pass through your lips unchallenged,
If their errand be true and kind,
If they come to support the weary,
To comfort and help the blind:

If a bitter, revengeful spirit,
Prompts the words, let them be unsaid.
They may pass through the brain like lightning,
Or fall on the heart like lead.

Keep them back, if they are cold or cruel,
Under bar, and lock and seal;
The wounds they make, my brother,
Are always slow to heal.

May Christ guard your lips, and ever
From the time of your early youth,
May the words that you daily utter
Be the words of the beautiful truth."

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03 -- TALKATIVENESS

"Talkativeness is utterly ruinous to deep spirituality. The very life of our spirits passes out through our speech, and hence all superfluous talk is a waste of the vital forces of the heart. In fruit-growing it often happens that excessive blossoming prevents a good crop, and often prevents fruit altogether; and by so much loquacity the soul runs wild in word-bloom, and bears no fruit. I am not speaking of sinners nor of legitimate testimony for Jesus, but of that incessant loquacity of nominally Christian persons, and of professors of purifying grace. It is one of the greatest hindrances to deep, solid communion with God.

"Notice how people will tell the same things over and over; how insignificant trifles are magnified by a world of words; how things that should be buried are dragged out into gossip; how a non-essential is argued and disputed over; how the solemn deep things of the Holy Spirit are rattled over in a light manner, until one who has the real baptism of divine silence in his heart feels he must unceremoniously tear himself away, and retire alone where he can gather up the fragments of his mind and rest in God, or his usefulness will be impaired. Not only do we need cleansing from sin, but our natural human spirit needs a radical death to its own voice, activity and, wordiness.

"See the evil effects of so much talk. First, it dissipates the spiritual power. The thought and feeling of the soul are like powder and steam -- the more they are condensed, the greater their power. The steam, if properly compressed, would drive a train forty miles an hour; if allowed too much expanse would not move it an inch; and so true action of the heart, if expressed in a few Holy Ghost selected words will sink into the mind to remain forever, but if dissipated in any rambling conversation is likely to be of no profit.

"Second, talkativeness is a waste of valuable time. If the hours spent in useless conversation were spent in secret prayer or good reading, we would soon reach a region of soul life and divine peace, far beyond our present dreams.

"Third, loquacity inevitably leads to saying unwise, unpleasant or harmful things. In religious conversation we soon churn up all the cream our souls have in them, and the rest of our talk is all pale skim milk, until we get alone with God and feed in His green pastures and the cream rises again. The Holy Spirit warns us that in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin. It is impossible for the best of saints to talk beyond a certain point without saying something unwise, or severe, or foolish, or erroneous.

"We must settle this personally. If others are noisy and gabby, I must determine to live in constant quietness and humility of heart. I must guard my speech as a sentinel does a fortress, and with all respect for others, I must many a time cease from conversation, or withdraw from company to enter into deep communion with my precious Lord.

"The cure for loquacity must be from within; sometimes by an interior furnace of affliction and suffering that burns out the excessive effervescence of the mind, or by an overmastering revelation to the soul of the awful majesty of God and eternity, which puts an everlasting hush upon the natural faculties.

"To walk in the spirit, we must avoid talking for talk's sake, or merely to entertain. To speak effectively, we must speak in God's appointed time, and in harmony with His indwelling Holy Spirit."

How full of life and meaning are these words. They were penned by an unknown author but whoever the writer was, surely he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. How much suffering, sorrow and misery might be forestalled if our words were more carefully chosen and fewer in number. King Solomon said, "He that hath knowledge spareth his words; and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit" (Prov. 17:27).

Talkativeness is a disease of the heart and must be dealt with as such. It would be just as profitable to undertake to kill an oak tree by plucking off its leaves, as to undertake a cure of this soul-killing disease by merrily watching the flow of words. We read in Matthew 12:34, these words of Jesus, "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh."

By this we are to understand that any permanent cure for this malady must begin within, in the heart, which is the citadel of all motives and impulses. John Wesley is reported as having said,

"It is impossible for the most spiritually minded to converse even on the deep things of God, more than a half hour at a time, without feeling lean in their souls." Not only was this true of Wesley's immediate followers, but it is still true. The man or woman of many words, is as a rule, not very deeply spiritual. Excessive quietness is by no means a mark of piety, but a light, talkative spirit is nearly always indicative of shallow spirituality.

We live in a talkative age. It seems that men think they will be heard by their much speaking. If it were not so serious, it would be really amusing to sit quietly and listen to the average conversation of the day. There is no end of words but in most cases the amount of real solid common sense entering into the sum total is almost nil.

Not only has this spirit of lightness and wordiness fastened itself on the men and women of the world, but it has entered into the very life of the Church of Jesus Christ. Spiritual people will spend hours in idle talk and when it is over they are powerless to help the needy souls about them. It is the spirit of the age and few there are who have not been caught in its deadly coils.

When we read the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 12:36, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment," we begin to realize something of the importance of the subject before us and are made to cry with David, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Psa. 141:3).

King Solomon must have had a few light, talkative people to deal with in his time. Here are a few of the pointed verses from the pen of this wise man. "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding" (Prov. 17:28). And, "A fool's voice is known by the multitude of words" (Eccl. 5:3).

The early church was no doubt burdened with them also for James deals with loquacity with ungloved hands. "If any man seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26). While Solomon seems to boil the whole trouble down when he said, "In the multitude of words, there wanteth not sin" (Prov. 10:19).

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04 -- IDLE WORDS

"Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36). There is no clearer index to one's heart condition, than his words. The Bible statement in Proverbs 23:7 "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." This refers to the source, as it is in the heart these idle words have their rise. Words are simply conveyances by which our thoughts are carried to others. Back of all our thoughts is the heart, the fountain, from which they spring.

"Out of the heart," Jesus said, "proceed evil thoughts," and the only way we have of passing them on to others, is by word of mouth, if they are to be fully understood. We see the necessity, therefore, of having the fountain pure so that the thoughts proceeding from it, and reaching those about us, by means of our speech may also be pure and clean.

James asks the question, "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? ... so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh" (James 3:11-12). Our words are so certainly indicative of the soul's condition that Jesus tells us, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37).

One of the qualifications of a bishop in the days of Paul was that he be "Not double tongued" (1 Timothy 3:8). Their wives also must be "not slanderers." It seems that a great deal of stress was placed on a right use of the tongue in those early days of the Christian church. They evidently understood that an idler was a dangerous person to have among the brethren so they forestalled it at least in their leaders and their wives.

Idle words are not necessarily evil words though they are apt to lead to evil. There is a danger of going to either extreme and while the one leading to a free use of idle words is the greater evil because of the possible result, it is also possible to do harm by assuming a melancholy attitude. The religion of Jesus Christ is a joyful and cheerful religion and a long face does not fit it very well.

By idle words we mean all light, frivolous or foolish conversation from which no good can be expected -- talk that we would not like to be engaged in when Jesus comes, talk that we would be ashamed to face at the bar of God. Any word or words that might lead to an unholy thought or desire or result in evil of any kind might properly be denominated idle words.

In 1 Peter 1:15 we read, "Be ye holy in all manner of conversation." If we will follow this admonition, we will not go very far astray. It was said of Him who was the example in all things: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:21-22).

It is not a difficult task to ascertain the spiritual condition of the average professor of religion. The same is true today as when the maid told Peter, as he stood by the fire warming himself, "Thy speech betrayeth thee." The heart that is filled with the love of God and overflowing with concern for lost humanity will not spend very much time in idle conversation. We read in Psalm 34:12-13, "What man is he that desireth life and loveth many days that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile." Then in 1 Peter 3:10, we have a like passage, "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile."

"Death and life are in the tongue" (Prov. 18:21). "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands" (Eccl. 5: 6).

God takes account of all our words. He tells us that, "Our conversation is in heaven," and we will surely meet it all again. We have often wondered if a book were written, containing all our words, would we be willing to meet it at the judgment -- be willing to have it opened up before the assembled millions when the world is on fire and the elements melting with fervent heat.

Unkind words, foolish words, malicious words, complaining words, insinuating words, all words that are not profitable to the speaker and to the hearer are idle words and will meet us at the bar of God to condemn and destroy. How careful, then, we should be of our conversation and see to it that we say nothing that will condemn us on that last, great day.

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05 -- BACKBITING AND EVIL SPEAKING

"An hypocrite with his mouth, destroyeth his neighbour" (Prov. 11:9). "Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another" (Prov. 25:9). "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone" (Matt. 18:15).

Backbiting. Evil-Speaking. What a world of tragedy and death and hell is incorporated in these two words. The two are so close akin that we will deal with them as one. However there may be a faint line of distinction as one may possibly backbite and not speak evil of the one talked about, but the line is so very dim that we will not use the time or space necessary to define the difference. In most cases, to backbite is to indulge in evil speaking.

The Bible is honeycombed from lid to lid with warnings to both the backbiter and the evil speaker. The backbiter is a specialist in his field of operation. The devil has no weapon in all his domain that can take the place or do the deadly work for which he is so well fitted.

Unless there is sufficient power in evidence to check them, one man or woman possessed with the spirit of backbiting, can and often does, stir up discontent and suspicion and in a short time wreck a whole church and damn a community. There is nothing that can work the havoc accomplished by this evil.

James says expressly that anyone who practices this evil of backbiting is not right in the sight of God. "If any man seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26). There were no ifs or ands about it with these men of God, if a man would not control his tongue he was branded as a sinner. Why, or on what grounds, may we excuse backbiting in these days? If it proved a lack of spiritual life in the days of the apostles, why does it not do the same now?

"He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips" (Prov. 20:19). Many are the wrecks along life's way which have been started down the hill to ruin and destruction by the talebearer. The closest of friends may be separated by the work of the backbiter. A few words from some meddler and the seed is sown that finally results in the heartbreaking separation. "A froward man soweth strife, and a whisperer, separateth, chief friends" (Prov. 16:28). "An ungodly, man diggeth up evil; and in his lips there is a burning fire" (Prov. 16:27). "Where no wood is the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer the strife ceaseth" (Prov. 26:20).

It is stated that the great Chicago fire was started by a lantern which was kicked over by a cow while being milked. Think of the millions of dollars worth of property and the multitude of lives which were lost as a result of so small a thing as the upsetting of a lantern. James in speaking of the tongue says, "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth" (James 3:5).

Just as a mere spark, however small and harmless it may seem at first, will kindle a fire on the great western prairies, which fanned by the furious winds, will reach miles in length and width, sending devastation, ruin and death in its wake; so the seemingly harmless word, or useless remark may send forth a spark, which fanned by the winds of hell, will become the means, in the hands of the devil, of destroying and damning precious souls. Truly, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21).

The spark of "suppose" sent forth by a thoughtless or careless man or woman, being fanned into the flame of so-called truth and stirred by the black-winged demons of the pit, may send a conscientious brother or sister reeling in discouragement down the slippery road to eternal despair to be lost forever. Is it in the power of the one, who started the destructive flame, though he may desire it with all his heart, to stop its work of devastation and ruin, when once the soul of the discouraged one is lost?

The fact that the thing told is true does not justify backbiting. There is no mention in the Bible of any difference in truth or falsehood when it is backbiting. Evil speaking takes no account of the truth or untruth of a statement. It is all one in the sight of God.

Notice the catalogue in which God places backbiting, "Being filled with all unrighteousness: fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful; proud, boasters, inventors of evil-things, disobedient to parents, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful, who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Romans 1:29-32).

"They that do such things are worthy of death." Do what things? Why murder, and all the rest of the black list, including backbiting and whispering. What right have we to condemn the murderer and not ourselves when we are guilty of a thing that God places alongside of murder?

I may kill a man and he may go straight to heaven. I may steal his pocketbook and I am stealing trash, but if I steal his good name and turn his friends against him, I have robbed him of his most valuable asset. For, "a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches" (Prov. 22:1). And, "a good name is better than precious ointment" (Eccl. 7:1).

"Not only they that do such things, but have pleasure in them that do them." How easy it is to rejoice while the reputation of one who has hurt us is being dragged down by a backbiter. God says this is as bad as the other. It is not only wrong for me to listen to the words of an evil speaker, but it is my duty to rebuke them and if necessary to keep my own soul from the muck and mire of this child of hell, to part company with them.

There is so much evil speaking today, even among holiness people, and some of it among holiness preachers, that we need to cry with David, "Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity: who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words; that they may shoot in secret at the perfect; suddenly do they shoot at him; and fear not ... But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded. So shall they make their own tongue to fall upon themselves; all that see them shall flee away" (Psa. 64:2-8).

"Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" The answer comes back, "He that backbiteth not with his tongue ..." (Psa. 15:1-3). "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against, the blood of thy neighbour; I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:16). "Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off" (Psa. 101:5). "To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men" (Titus 3:2). "Let all bitterness, and all clamour and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind, one to another; tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's, sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:31-32).

If the above verses of Scripture are the Word of God, and we believe they are, we can but be convinced, after reading them, that to backbite or to speak evil of anyone, even though it is truth that we uttered, we are under ban of death. God has turned His back to us and we are miserable backsliders and on our way to hell as fast as the unlocked wheels of time can carry us. No, matter what the profession, no matter how loud we may testify, if we are doing a thing that God plainly declares in His Word is a sin, we are a sinner. It will take more than a mere profession to take us through at the bar of God.

The same almighty God who says, "Thou shalt not steal," also says, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people." And, "He that slandereth his neighbour him will I cut off." God will not lie. He says He will cut us off if we slander our neighbor and He will do it, our loud professing notwithstanding.

During twenty-five years of ministerial work in the M. E. and Nazarene churches, we have had to deal with a number of church quarrels and in every single case the ones who started the trouble were the most unwilling to try to straighten matters out. These will usually tell the pastor if he can get the other side to come across, they will do their part. How far is this from the spirit of the Master. He said, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remembereth that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled, to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23). The entire spirit of His teachings all the way through was very plain along this very line. He came, "the just for the unjust" -- He died for our sins and became "sin for us, who knew no sin."

So the thirteenth of first Corinthians pictures love, as defending not itself, but, "bearing all things" in the spirit of the Master.

We have been asked if it is not proper to go to the pastor with any misdemeanors of the members of the church and tell him of them so that they may be taken care of before the work is injured. Yes, if it can be done in the spirit of the Master, and after the offending person has been

faithfully dealt with by the one reporting the misdeed. There may be occasional exceptions to this rule but they are so few that it is unsafe to risk it. In ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, when a report is made to either pastor or layman, there are other motives than the good of the offender back of the act. We are told to love one another even as Christ loves us, and if we do, we will not do very much to hurt each other. If my boy sins or my daughter makes a misstep, I am not likely, to publish it and make it known to all the church and the neighbors. "Love covereth a multitude of sins."

A little girl was carrying a big overgrown brother across a creek when met by a man who said, "Little girl, isn't that boy too heavy for you to carry?" "Oh, no," was the prompt reply, "he isn't heavy, he's my brother." Ah, that is the right spirit. If we love each other we will endure a great many things and will do more for each other than we will if love is missing.

"Love thy neighbour as thyself," was the Old Testament standard. "In honour preferring, one another," is the New Testament standard. Not many of us can remember very many cases of people telling all the mean things they know on themselves. Then if we love our neighbors as ourselves, we will be just as careful as to their reputation.

"Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?... He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour" (Psa. 15:1-3).

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06 -- FORGET AND LIVE

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13, 14).

Paul had a good forgetter. He was able to lose sight of the past and press forward to greater things for the future.

He realized that it was his only hope of definite and abiding victory. No one living in the past can forget. As they dwell in the past, they will recall unpleasant passages in their life's history and in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred, will become pessimistic, seeing only the dark pages in the book of their past. This will invariably lead to rebellion, and from rebellion to revenge, or at least a revengeful spirit.

It is impossible to think over old scores and not be more or less affected by it. As we think on it, the insinuation grows to be an insult, the hint to a reality and ere long, the soul is overshadowed by the dark clouds of rebellion and a desire for revenge. We seem for the time, at least to forget that God has said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."

Our only hope, if we have been wronged or wounded in the past is to forget. If we can accomplish this, we are safe and God can trust us with the refining process our souls so much

need. But there are few who really forget. We say we do but, when brought face to face with the issue we find to our horror that we have held a little place in our hearts for the hiding of our grievance all the time.

We have heard professing Christians say, "I can forgive but I cannot forget." This is impossible: we must forget, if we are ever able to forgive. The one is inseparable from the other. God not only promises to forgive, but to forget. He also tells us that, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15).

How then may we hope to retain God's favor and hold a grudge, refusing to forget a wrong? Unreasonable and uncalled for, though the affair may be, yet we were unreasonable and unfair and even blasphemous in our dealings with Him, for He forgave and forgot all the past. Shall we do less and expect His blessing? Our own attitude toward our fellowman indexes our standing with God. He forgives and forgets as we do, no more, no less.

Heaven would not be a place of joy and gladness if we were forever reminded of the past by the look and action of the angels and saints about us. If we felt that they were thinking of our past every time they looked at us, we would not be happy in heaven. The very fact that our sins were remembered would rob that celestial city of its joy and gladness for us.

The very fact that we dwell in the past and repeat things that should be buried is proof positive that we have not forgiven it. Not only does the fact of forgiveness depend entirely on the act of forgetfulness, but the very essence of all our Christian experience depends on it. It is impossible to retain the joy of the Lord and remember the past as it bears on an injury done us. We absolutely must forget if we are to see the pearly gates open for us at the close of life's pilgrimage.

If the first cause could be unearthed, we would no doubt find that every case of backsliding or at least the majority of them was a result of an unwillingness to forgive or forget a wrong. It is a fact that cannot be disputed, that every church feud or fuss has its rise just here. When the books are opened and the people are judged for the deeds done in the body, some individuals are going to face a record that will send them to the lowest depths of hell because of the wreck and ruin they have brought on churches and communities as well as individuals as a result of an unforgiving or unforgetting spirit.

After a quarter of a century in revival work, in which thousands of men and women have been led to Christ, we have learned by sad experience that it is impossible to promote a revival where the church is divided. A divided church is a backslidden church -- positively and absolutely. There is no half way ground. If there is a division and two sides are lined up against each other, both sides are wrong. There is no doubt a greater blame to be laid at the door of the side who started the division but it has reached a place, when the two sides line up against each other, that, "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek," they are both backslidden and on their road to a devil's hell.

The true child of God is like the old man in the South who used to say every time he testified, "Thank God, I ain't got nothin' agin' no body 'bout nothin', I love everybody with all my

heart and 'spect to meet you all in heaven." How refreshing to find that kind of attitude in the church today. What a revival we would have if all of God's people would live as this old man lived. What a time of refreshing we would receive from the presence of the Lord. How men and women would get to God in the old-fashioned way.

The reason it was so easy to promote a revival in the early days of the holiness movement was because God's saints loved each other and refused to believe anything against one of their number. They stood together and loved and prayed for each other till heaven opened and the glory of God came on the people. Now it is different. The church will compass heaven and earth to gain one soul and then the first time he or she does a thing they should not do, they are kicked and cuffed and as Bud says, "cussed and discussed," till they are finally ousted and the hunt continued for others to put through the same mill.

Of course this is not true of all holiness people or churches and we are glad to better it still by saying that there are few of them, but there are sufficient number of them to cause alarm and a note of warning. And the trouble is, their tribe is increasing as the days go by.

To us, one of the meanest things in the catalogue is to repeat what we hear and thereby stir up strife and break into the spiritual condition of a church or a community. There is no excuse for it and until God's people learn to hold their peace and thus show their wisdom we will have backsliding and church quarrels.

It is hard enough to make the city, over the protest of the devil, anyway without the added burden the backbiter brings on us. Oh, if we could see Jesus and hear His voice as He pleads for us to "Love one another even as I have loved you," how God's work would go forward and souls would be saved and the church come into its own.

If someone could promote a revival among professing Christians that would be far-reaching enough and go deep enough to unearth the devil of backbiting and evil speaking and everyone would really fix up all the old scores and confess to the bottom, what a revival this poor old, sin-cursed world would witness. How men and women would run to our altars and seek the old-time fire, and glory. We are in need of just such a prophet at this time. Would to God he were forthcoming.

"Lord, who, shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour" (Psa. 15:1-3).

"Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off" (Psalm 101:5). "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:31). "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there remembereth that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way, and be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither, will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15).

As long as there is a devil there will be backbiting and evil speaking. As long as there is a church left on earth there will be talebearers and church troubles. The enemy of all souls is too wise to allow such a successful means of income for his kingdom to be abandoned. But it is possible, thank the Lord, to shut, our ears and close our eyes to the whole scheme and refuse to be a party to it.

There is but one way the devil can work us into his plan and that is through the medium of selfishness. If we have been actually crucified with Jesus we will be free from selfishness or self-pity, and when these are gone there will be no more reason for our either backbiting or listening to the evil speaking of others.

When people come to us with their grievances we will kindly, but very firmly, tell them to please keep them to themselves and pray for the one they would backbite. We will be ridiculed and spoken evil of for such a stand but we will be able by God's help to forgive and forget. Only selfishness remembers and refuses to forgive.

There is just one hope for the church of Jesus Christ to make good and win a lost world back to God. That hope lies in the two words, constituting the burden of this chapter, "FORGIVE" and "FORGET." This is positively our only hope. It is forget and live, or refuse to forget and die. God help us to forget and live.

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07 -- THE CURE OF EVIL SPEAKING -- By John Wesley

"If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

"But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee, one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

"And if he shall, neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:15-17).

1. "Speak evil of no man," says the great apostle -- as plain a command -- as, "Thou shalt, do no murder." But who, even among Christians regards this command? Yea, how few there are that so much as understand it? What is evil speaking? It, is not, as some suppose, the same with lying or slandering. All a man says may be as true as the Bible; and yet the saying of it is evil speaking. For evil speaking is neither more nor less than speaking evil of an absent person; relating something evil which was really done or said by one who is not present when it is related. Suppose having seen a man drunk, or heard him curse or swear, I tell this when he is absent. It is evil speaking. In our language, this is known by a very proper name, termed backbiting. Nor is there any material difference between this and what we usually style talebearing? If the tale be delivered in a soft and quiet, manner (perhaps with expressions of good will to the person, and of hope that things may not be quite so bad), then we call it whispering. But in whatever manner it is done, the thing is the same; the same in substance, if not in circumstance. Still it is evil speaking;

still this command, "Speak evil of no man," is trampled under foot, if we relate to another the fault of a third, when he is not present to answer for himself.

2. And how extremely common is this sin among all orders and degrees of men! How do the high and low, rich and poor, wise and foolish, learned and unlearned, run into it continually! Persons who differ from each other in all things else nevertheless agree in this. How few are there who can testify before God, "I am clear in this matter; I have always set a watch before my mouth and kept the door of my lips"?

What conversation of any considerable length in which evil speaking is not one ingredient? And that even among persons who, in general, have the fear of God before their eyes, and do really desire to have a conscience void of offense toward God and man.

3. And the very commonness of this sin makes it difficult to be avoided. As we are encompassed with it on every side, so if we are not deeply sensible of its danger, and continually guarding against it, we are liable to be carried away by the torrent. In this instance, almost all the whole of mankind is, as it were in a conspiracy against us, and their example steals upon us, we know not how; so that we insensibly slide into the imitation of it. Besides, it is recommended from within, as well as from without. There is scarce any wrong temper in the mind of man which may not be occasionally gratified by it, and consequently incline us to it. It gratifies our pride to relate those faults of others, of which we think ourselves not guilty. Anger, resentment, and all unkind tempers are indulged by speaking against those with whom we are displeased; and in many cases by reciting the sins of our neighbors, we indulge our own foolish desires.

4. Evil speaking is the more difficult to be avoided, because it frequently attacks us in disguise. We speak thus, out of a noble, generous (it is well we do not say), holy indignation against those evil creatures! We commit sin from the hatred of sin! We serve the devil out of pure zeal for God! It is merely in order to punish the wicked that we run into this wickedness. "So do the passions (as one speaks) all justify themselves," and palm sin upon us under the evil of holiness!

5. But is there no way to avoid this snare? Unquestionably there is. Our blessed God has marked out the plain way for His followers. In the words above recited, none who warily, and steadily walk in this path will ever fall into evil speaking. This rule is either an infallible preventive, or certain cure. In the preceding verses, our Lord had said, "Woe, to the world because of offences," -- unspeakable misery will rise in the world from this baleful fountain, (offences are all things whereby anyone is turned, out of or hindered in the ways of God). "For it must be that offences will come" -- such is the nature of things; such the wickedness, folly and weakness of mankind. "But woe to that man," -- miserable is that man -- "by whom the offence cometh." "Wherefore if thy hand, thy foot, thine eye cause thee to offend" -- if the most dear enjoyment, the most beloved and useful person turn thee out of or hinder thee in the way, "pluck it out" -- cut them off and cast them from thee. But can we avoid giving offence to some, and being offended at others? Especially suppose they are quite in the wrong, and we see it with our own eyes? Our God here teaches us how: He lays down a sure method of avoiding offences and evil speaking together. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him of his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he shall not hear thee, then take with thee one

or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established; and if he shall neglect to hear them tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

I. 1. "If thy brother shall sin against thee, go and tell him of his fault between thee and him alone." The most literal way of following the first rule when it is practicable, is the best: Therefore, if thou seest with thine own eye a brother, a fellow Christian, commit undeniable sin, or heareth with thine own ears, so that it is impossible for thee to doubt the fact, then thy part is plain: Take the very first opportunity of going to him, and if thou canst have access, "tell him of his fault between thee and him alone." Indeed great care is to be taken that this is done in the right spirit, and in the right manner. The success of a reproof greatly depends on the spirit wherein it is given. Be not, therefore, wanting in prayer to God, that it may be given in a holy spirit; with deep piercing, that it is God alone that maketh thee to differ, and that if any good be done by what is now spoken, God doeth it Himself. Pray that He would guard thy heart, enlighten thy mind and direct thy tongue to such words as He may please to bless. See that thou speak in a meek as well as lowly spirit; for the "wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." If he be "overtaken in a fault," he cannot otherwise be restored than "in the spirit of meekness." If he oppose the truth, yet he cannot be brought to the knowledge thereof, but by gentleness, still speak in the spirit of tender love, "which many cannot quench." If love is not conquered it conquers all things. Who can tell the force of love?

"Love can bow down the stubborn neck,
The stone to flesh convert;
Soften and melt, and pierce and break
An adamant heart."

Confirm then, your love toward him and you will thereby "heap coals of fire upon his head."

2. But see that the manner also wherein you speak be according to the gospel of Christ. Avoid everything in look, gesture, word and tone of voice that savors of pride or self-sufficiency. Studiously avoid everything magisterial or dogmatic; everything that looks like arrogance or assuming. Beware of the most distant approach to disdain," overbearing or contempt. With equal care avoid all appearance of anger; and though using great plainness of speech, yet let there be no reproach, no railing accusation, no token of any warmth but that of love. Above all, let there be no shadow of hate or ill-will; no bitterness or sourness of expression, but use the air and language of sweetness as well as gentleness, that all may appear to flow from love in the heart, and yet this sweetness not hinder you speaking in the most serious and solemn manner; as far as it may be in the very words of the oracles of God (for there is none like them), and as under the eye of Him who is coming to judge the quick and dead.

3. If you have not the opportunity of speaking to him in person, or cannot have access, you may do it by a messenger; by a common friend, in whose prudence, as well as uprightness, you can thoroughly confide. Such a person speaking in your name, and in the spirit and manner above described, may answer the same end, and in good degree, supply your lack of service. And beware you do not feign the want of opportunity, in order to shun the cross; neither take it for granted that

you cannot have access without ever making a trial. Whenever you can speak in your own person it is far better. But it is preferable to do it by someone else than not to do it at all.

4. But what if you can neither speak yourself nor find such a messenger as you can confide in? If this be really the case, it then only remains to write. And there may be some circumstances which make this the most advisable way of speaking. One of these circumstances is, when the person with whom we have to do is of so warm, and impetuous a temper, as does not easily bear reproof, especially from an equal or inferior. But it may be so introduced and softened in writing as to make it far more tolerable. Besides, many will read the very same words which they could not bear to hear. It does not give so violent a shock to their pride, nor so sensibly touch their honor. And suppose it makes little impression at first, they will, perhaps, give it a second reading, and, upon further consideration, lay to heart what before they disregarded. If you add your name this is nearly the same thing as going to him and speaking in person. And this should always be done unless it be rendered improper by some very particular reason.

5. It should be well observed, not only that this is a step which our Lord absolutely commands us to take, but that He commands us to take this step first before we attempt any other. No alternative is allowed, no choice of anything else: this is the way; walk thou in it. It is true, He enjoins us, if need require, to take two other steps; but they are to be taken successively after this step, and neither of them before it: much less are we to take any other step either before, or beside this. To do anything else, or not to do this, is, therefore, equally inexcusable.

5. Do not think to excuse yourself for taking an entirely different step by saying, "Why, I did not speak to anyone till I was so burdened that I could not refrain." You were burdened! It was no wonder you should, unless your conscience was seared; for you were under the guilt of sin, of disobeying a plain commandment of God! You ought immediately to have gone and told "your brother of his fault between you and him alone." If you did not, how should you be other than burdened (unless your heart was utterly hardened), while you were trampling the command of God underfoot, and "hating your brother in your heart"?

And what a way you have found to unburden your heart! God reproves you for a sin of omission, for not telling your brother of his fault; and you comfort yourself, under His reproof, by a sin of commission, by telling to your brethren your brother's fault! Ease bought by sin is a dear purchase! I trust in God, you will have no ease, but will be burdened so much the more, till you "go to your brother and tell him," and no one else!

7. I know of but one exception to this rule: there may be a peculiar case, where it is necessary to accuse the guilty, though absent, in order to preserve the innocent. For instance; you are acquainted with the design which a man has against the property or life of his neighbor. Now the case may be so circumstanced that there is no other way of hindering that design from taking effect but the making it known without delay, to him against whom it is laid. In this case, therefore, this rule is set aside, as is that of the apostle, "Speak evil of no man," and it is lawful, yea, it is our bounden duty, to speak evil of an absent person, in order to prevent his doing evil to others and himself at the same time. But remember, meanwhile, that all evil speaking is, in its own nature, deadly poison. Therefore, if you are sometimes constrained to use it, as medicine, yet use it with "fear and trembling"; seeing it is so dangerous a medicine that nothing but absolute necessity can

excuse your using it at all. Accordingly, use it as seldom as possible; never but when there is such a necessity: and even then use as little of it as is possible; only so much as is necessary for the exposed. At all other times "go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone."

II. 1. But what if he will not hear? If he will repay evil for good? If he be enraged rather than convinced? What if he hear to no purpose, and go on still in the evil of his way? We must expect this will frequently be the case; the mildest and tenderest reproof will have no effect; but the blessing we wished for another will return into our own bosom. And what are we to do then? Our Lord has given us a clear and full direction. Then "take with thee one or two more:" this is the second step. Take one or two whom you know to be of a loving spirit, lovers of God, and of their neighbor. See likewise, that they be of a lowly spirit, and "clothed with humility." Let them be also such as are meek and gentle, patient and longsuffering; not apt to "return evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing." Let them be men of understanding, such as are endued with wisdom from above; and men unbiased, free from partiality, free from prejudice of any kind. Care should likewise be taken that both the persons and their characters be well known to him. And let those that are acceptable to him be chosen preferable to any others.

2. "Love will dictate the manner wherein they should proceed, according to the nature of the case. Nor can any one particular manner be prescribed for all cases. But perhaps, in general, one might advise before they enter upon the thing itself, let them mildly and affectionately declare that they have no anger or prejudice toward him, and that it is merely from a principle of good will, that they now come, or at all concern themselves with his affairs. To make this the more apparent they might then calmly listen to the repetition of your former conversation with him, and to what he said in his own defence before they attempted to determine anything. After this they would be better able to judge in what manner to proceed "that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word might be established"; that whatever you said might have its full force, by the additional weight of their authority.

3. In order to do this, may they not: 1. Briefly repeat what you spoke, and what he answered? 2. Enlarge upon, open and confirm the reasons which you had given? 3. Give weight to your reproof, showing how just, how kind, and how seasonable it was? And, lastly, enforce the advices and persuasions which you had annexed to it? And these may likewise hereafter, if need should require, bear witness of what was spoken.

4. With regard to this, as well as the preceding rule, we may observe, that our Lord gives us no choice, leaves us no alternative, but expressly commands us to do this; neither sooner nor later; namely, after we have taken the first, and before we have taken the third step. It is then only, that we are authorized to relate the evil another has done, to those whom we desire to bear a part with us in this great instance of brotherly love. But let us have a care how we relate it to any other person, till both these steps have been taken. If we neglect to take these, or if we take any others, what wonder if we are burdened still? For we are sinners against God, and against our neighbor; and how fairly soever we may color it, yet, if we have any conscience, our sin will find us out and bring a burden upon our soul.

III. 1. That we may be thoroughly instructed in this weighty affair our Lord has given us a still further direction. "If he will not hear them," then, and not till then, "tell it to the church." This

is the third step. All the question is, how this word, "the church," is here to be understood? But the very nature of the thing will determine this, beyond all reasonable doubt. You cannot tell it to the national church, the whole body of men termed, "the Church of England." Neither would it answer any Christian end if you could; this, therefore, is not the meaning of the word. Neither can you tell it to that whole body of people in England, with whom you have a more immediate connection. Nor, indeed, would this answer any good end: the word, therefore, is not to be understood thus. It would not answer any valuable, end to tell the faults of every particular member to the church (if you would so term it), the congregation or society united together in London. It remains that you tell it to the elder, or elders of the church, to those who are, overseers of that flock of Christ to which you belong, who watch over your and his soul, "as they must give account." And this should be done, if it conveniently can in the presence of the person concerned, and, though plainly, yet with all the tenderness and love which the nature of the thing will admit. It properly belongs to their office to determine concerning the behavior of those under their care, and to rebuke, according to the demerit of the offence, "with all authority." When, therefore, you have done this you have done all which the Word of God, or the law of love, requireth of you: You are not now partakers of his sin; but, if he perish; his blood is on his own head.

2. "Here, also, let it be observed, that this, and no other, is the third step which we are to take; and that we are to take it in its order, after the other two; not before the second, much less before the first, unless in some very particular circumstance. Indeed, in one case, the second step may coincide with this: they may be, in a manner, one and the same. The elder or elders of the church may be so connected with the offending brother that they may set aside the necessity, and supply the place, of the one or two witnesses; so that it may suffice to tell it to them, after you have told it to your brother, "between you and him alone."

3. When you have done this you have delivered your own soul. "If he will not hear the church," if he persist in his sin, "let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican." You are under no, obligation to think of him any more; only when you commend him to God in prayer. You need not speak of him any more, but leave him to his own Master. Indeed, you still owe to him, as to all other heathen, earnest, tender, good will. You owe him courtesy, and as occasion offers, all the offices of humanity. But have no friendship, no familiarity with him; no other intercourse than with an open heathen.

4. But if this be the rule by which Christians walk, where is the land where Christians live? A few you may possibly find scattered up and down who make a conscience of observing it. But how very few! How thinly scattered upon the face of the earth! And, where is there any body of men that universally walk thereby? Can we find them in Europe? Or to go no farther, in Great Britain or Ireland? I fear not. I fear we may search these kingdoms throughout and yet search in vain. Alas for the Christian world! Alas for Protestants, for reformed Christians! Oh, "who will rise up with me against the wicked?" "Who will take God's part against the evil speakers?" Art thou the man? By the grace of God wilt thou be one who will not be carried away by the torrent? Art thou fully determined, God being thy helper, from this very hour, to set a watch, a continual watch, before thy mouth; and keep the door of thy lips"? From this hour, wilt thou walk by this rule, "speaking evil of no man"? If thou seest thy brother do evil, wilt thou "tell him of his fault between thee and him, alone"? Afterward "take one or two" witnesses, and then only "tell it to the church"? If this be the full purpose of thy heart, then learn one lesson well, "Hear evil of no man."

If there were no hearers, there would be no speakers of evil. And is not (according to the vulgar proverb) the receiver as bad as the thief? If then any begin to speak evil in thy hearing, check him immediately. Refuse to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so sweetly; let him use ever so soft a manner, so mild an accent, ever so many professions of good will for him whom he is stabbing in the dark, whom he smiteth under the fifth, rib! Resolutely refuse to hear, though the whisperer complain of being, "burdened till he speak." Burdened! Thou fool! Doest thou travail with thy cursed secret as a woman travaileth with child? Go then and be delivered of thy burden in the way the Lord hath ordained! First, "Go and tell thy brother his fault between thee and him alone." Next, take with thee one or two common friends, and tell him in their presence; if neither of these steps take effect, then "tell it to the church." But at the peril of thy soul, tell it to no one else, either before or after, unless in that one exempt case, when it is absolutely needful to preserve the innocent! Why shouldst thou burden another as well as thyself, by making him partaker of thy sin?

5. Oh, that you who bear the reproach of Christ, who are in derision called Methodists, would set an example to the Christian world, so-called; at least in this one instance! Put ye away evil speaking, talebearing, whispering: let none of them proceed out of your mouth! See that you "speak evil of no man"; of the absent, nothing but good. If ye must be distinguished, whether ye will or not, let this be the distinguishing mark of a Methodist: "He censures no man behind his back: by this fruit ye may know him." What a blessed effect of this self-denial should we quickly feel in our hearts! How our peace would flow as a river, when we thus followed peace with all men! How the love of God would abound in our own souls, while we thus confirm our love to our brethren! And what an effect would it have on all that were united together in the name of the Lord Jesus? How brotherly love would continually increase when this grand hindrance of it was removed! All the members of Christ's mystical body would then naturally care for each other. "If one member suffered, all would suffer with it"; "if one was honored, all would-rejoice with it"; and everyone would "love his brother with a pure, heart fervently." Nor is this all: but what an effect, might this have, even on the wild, unthinking world! How soon would they descry in us, what they could not find among all the thousands of their brethren, and cry (as Julian the apostate to his brethren courtiers), "See how these Christians, love, one another!" By this chiefly; would God convince the world, and prepare them also for His kingdom; as we may easily learn from those remarkable words in our Lord's last solemn prayer: "I pray for them who shall believe in me, that they may be one, as Thou Father art in me and I in Thee ... that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me." The Lord hasten the time! The Lord enable us to thus love one another, not only in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth," even as Christ hath loved us! -- From Wesley's Sermons, used by permission of the publishers, Eaton and Mains, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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08 -- SOME POINTERS -- THE BACKBITER'S HOPE

"He that covereth a transgression seeketh, love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends. A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.

"The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with" (Prov. 17:9-10, 14).

You have just finished one of the strongest, most pungent messages on the subject of "Evil, Speaking," that you have ever had the privilege of reading, and no doubt a stronger than you will ever again have the pleasure of perusing. We refer to the preceding chapter, "The Cure of Evil Speaking," by John Wesley, the founder of the great Methodist Episcopal Church. It is indeed a masterpiece and seems to so fully cover the ground included in the scope of this little book, that there is really but little more to say. Yet there are a few pointers we have in mind, with a note of warning and final offer of help to the backbiter, that we wish to give in closing.

If you are given to much talk, your only hope, if you would avoid "evil speaking," is to practice silence, till you have at least in a measure, conquered yourself. Your friends will not understand you, and you may at times seem even melancholy but you have yourself in training, and your soul is at stake; so you must "stick to your job" till you are able to come forth "made anew." You can then be as pleasant as you ever were and at the same time be in far less danger of saying hurtful and even ruinous things by your much speaking.

"Pray without ceasing," "Be filled with the Spirit." Keep your mind occupied with something pertaining to heaven and heavenly things. Be careful of the conversations you listen to. When you feel like jesting and joking, lift your heart to God in prayer and ask Him to give your words, when you do speak, power to give "grace to the hearers."

When in company, make it a rule to listen rather than talk, for silence is preferable to speech. "It is wiser to talk too little than too much, and to speak well than to say many things." "Aim at speaking rather to the point, than often." Reflect; think twice before speaking. In this way many things better unsaid will remain buried in your own bosom where they belong: "Refrain" the tongue when the heart is agitated." "Keep quiet when others are noisy." "Say least, when you feel like saying most." "Keep quiet, when you feel too great a desire to talk." "Speak after others; never, against others; always well of others." Never seek information through curiosity. This too often leads to evil speaking.

Leave it to the world to talk of the world. "Let your conversation" be in heaven." "Complain of nothing; neither of persons nor of things." "Say little of your work, less of your troubles. Confide these to but few, persons." Always relate a thing as nearly as you know it as possible. Exaggeration is very common, even among God's people. A story is told of a certain minister, who being reprimanded for his careless way of relating common place experiences, which through his imaginative word paintings became such great events, answered, the committee waiting on him, "I realize my fault, brethren, and I ask you to bear with, me. I have shed barrels and barrels of tears over it."

Utter no useless words. Never enter into a conversation which in any way whatever is dishonoring to God or hurtful to those present or anyone absent. Rebuke backbiting instantly; and be sure that you do not enter into it, either by word or your sympathies.

If you remember that you have listened to someone as he talked about another and you did not rebuke him, go to him at once and ask his forgiveness for listening. This will warn him not to repeat the offence, at least with you, and at the same time will likely, if your attitude is as God would have it, start him to thinking, and might, result in his salvation.

If you find that it is hard for you to forget an injury, make it a very special subject of prayer and ask God's special help on that one thing, for it is your only hope to make the city. If you remember the sins of others against you, God will remember your sins against Him. It is impossible to forgive and not forget. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those that sin against us." That is the measure we are to be measured by.

Positively refuse to repeat a thing that you have seen or heard, till you have first had a private talk with the one concerned, and then only as outlined in the preceding chapter, "The Cure of Evil Speaking." This will put a stop to a lot of hurtful rumors constantly floating around in our churches.

Remember that to backbite is to backslide.* -- [*Truths set forth in this booklet are good, but IN MY VIEW, THE PRECEDING STATEMENT, AND SEVERAL SUCCEEDING STATEMENTS IN THIS PARAGRAPH ARE TOO STRONG! In reading such sweeping and adamant remarks it is possible that some tenderhearted Christian could be thrown into confusion, thinking mistakenly that he or she was backslidden, simply for having technically said something that this book rigidly defines as backbiting. It is one thing to dispense light on this subject, and quite another to pass judgment upon all who may technically have violated the strict interpretation of backbiting set for in this booklet. There seems to be almost a tone of accusation in this paragraph, and a stringency that is a bit foreign to the tenderness of the Holy Spirit. Only the Spirit of God has the right to inform a Christian that he or she has sinned and has backslidden. -- DVM] -- It is as impossible to separate them as it is to separate murder or theft or adultery and backsliding. To backbite is to sin and to sin is to become separated from God and to be lost, eternally lost; unless proper steps be immediately taken to rectify the wrong. No matter who the backbiter may be -- if it is yourself, face the truth and tell your own heart that you are a backslider and on your road to hell and that unless you repent and make right at once, that you are lost. If it is a brother or sister in the church, tell them plainly, but in love that they are backslidden, and away from God and must straighten up, or go to hell for their sin. If we will refuse to listen, the backbiter will soon run out of anyone to spill his venom into and will either get in or out.

Many churches have been utterly ruined by this sin of backbiting. Someone starts it and others listen and then take it up and soon there are two sides and it is not long till the whole church is working for the devil instead of for God. It is impossible to pray down much of a revival over this kind of a thing in the church, or among its members. If our ministry were perfectly free from backbiting, they would more often rebuke it in others, (some of them do it anyway), but it has little weight when they do.

If anyone comes to you with a request for forgiveness, their hearts broken over the discovery of their sin, and you in turn repeat the fact to another, you are of all backbiters, the worst. It seems to us that the meanest thing a person can do is to take advantage of a brother or sister who has come to them for forgiveness, and tell it to others. We have known of this being done and when it is done, the one confessing receives a double portion from the Lord and the one repeating the matter either backslides or drops farther down the incline he is already on.

No matter how loud the profession, no matter how much one may shout and testify, if he is guilty of backbiting or evil speaking and has not made it right, according to the formula given by Jesus in Matt. 28:15-17, the whole performance is as "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." It may be hard to convince the guilty, parties of the fact now, but at the bar of God when they hear His, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity," they will then understand the import of this green-eyed monster from the pit.

Selfishness is at the bottom of most of our church troubles. If we were all free from this child of carnality, we would see the greatest revival the world has ever seen. Someone speaks evil of us and we at once resent it and begin to say mean things about the other party. Why? Because our pride is hurt. We love ourselves more than the offender, when God has said, "Love one another, in honor preferring one another." We allow our self-love, our-selfishness, if you please, to get the upper hand of us and begin to meddle with the matter and simply add fuel to the flame and thereby damn, souls.

We are told to "Seek peace and pursue it." The Hebrew scholars tell us that this word "pursue" means to seek as a young lion seeks its food. If this be true, how few of us are seeking peace as God meant that we should. In a very great majority of the individual as well as the church mix-ups, if this plan were followed, the trouble would very soon come to an end.

"But," asks someone, "shall I say I am to blame when I am not?" Certainly not. That would be to lie. You can however, "Take the blame." In this way, the other party is made ashamed and in many cases you, will win your brother. Go to your enemy and tell him, "Brother, I'm sorry this matter has come up between us. I want to do all I can to correct it, and I freely take all the blame and ask that you forgive me for allowing myself to be influenced by it, and ask that we may be friends as of old." If a real spirit of earnestness and love is in evidence, not many will be proof against such an approach.

Someone may ask, "What is backbiting? It is anything said about an absent person, whether true or untrue, that in any way reflects on his moral or spiritual character. If the thing you have to say will in the least degree lower the one talked about in the estimation of the one to whom you are telling it, then you are about to commit the sin of backbiting, and for the sake of your own, precious, immortal soul as well as that of the other party and the cause of Christ in general, refrain from saying it. Because truly, "Death, and life are in the power of the tongue."

The very fact that an individual or the other side of a church quarrel refuses to take the initiative in fixing the trouble up and securing the blessing of God on the services and community thereby, is proof positive that they are as deep in the mud as the opposite side are in the mire. The very fact that the one side will take the blame and do it in a way that will prove to the other side, conclusively, that they are in dead earnest is proof positive that they are at least on their way back to God.

If your own experience is below par and you can recall a single individual that you do not love or about whom you have said unkind, though true, things, go immediately to that one and ask his forgiveness and though he were to blame for the whole trouble, take the blame and ask him to be friends and do it in the spirit of the Master and you will be surprised to see how soon your own

soul will begin to grow and flourish in the things of God, and your old time joy will soon be yours again. The same is true where the church of which you are a member is dead and no one getting to God -- the altar services, when you have any, are dead and juiceless and those that pray through at your services are still-born. There is a reason for such conditions, and usually it is in this one thing: backbiting, evil speaking.

Any church can have a revival if conditions, as laid down in the Bible, are met. All we need to do is to rout out the old scores and fix them up and in a very short time the revival fires are burning in their old-time, brightness and men and women are again weeping their way to the cross around our altars. Our young people will take on new life and we will have no further trouble trying to entertain them.

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THE END