

# IV

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## *FUELING A FLAME*

Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out . . . (Prov. 26:20).

This principle is quite obvious. Where no wood is, the fire goes out.

The application of this principle in the proverb before us however, deals with the use of the tongue, and in particular, the negative use of the tongue. It is a Scripture against "talebearing" or "gossip."

The last half of the proverb concludes, ". . . so where there is no talebearer the strife ceaseth."

This is certainly true. Any minor problem contains a major potential for trouble if enough people talk about it in the wrong way.

James wrote about the use of the tongue and said, "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (James 3:5).

I was told of a congregation in southern Illinois that was building an educational unit. In the course of construction,

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two Sunday School teachers had a heated dispute over the size of their respective classrooms. If no one had talked about that dispute, the fire would undoubtedly have gone out.

The dispute, however, became a major source of conversation in the community. The more they talked about it, the bigger was the fire. Ultimately, the congregation split and the building project was abandoned.

“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: and where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.”

I am convinced, however, that this Scripture has a positive application as well as a negative. What we talk about has a definite effect on our lives. The more we talk about generosity and generous people, the more apt we are to become generous. The more we talk about prayer and answers to prayer, the more likely we are to pray. The more we talk about evangelism and souls that are saved, the more likely we are to become evangelistic. Where no wood is the fire goeth out!

Since I desire to meet with the Lord within the veil, I am determined to talk about it. This will involve answers to prayer and the discussion of subjective experiences which I previously would have been embarrassed to discuss in public. Now I am convinced that the more I talk about these experiences, the more likely I am to have them.

The Psalmist wrote that God “inhabitest the praises of Israel” (Ps. 22:3). The more we praise Him, the more room we make for Him in our lives.

### “POOF, I WAS WELL”

Some time ago I was invited by a group of missionaries to speak at a conference in central Brazil. In the course of the conference, a little boy got sick. His parents, Jim and Vanita Davis, are missionaries with many years of faithful service. They had given their sick child what medicine they had available, but several days had passed and he still had a fever and

was nauseous. Finally, they came to the preachers and asked for prayer and the anointing of oil. Their request was based upon their understanding of James 5:14,

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord . . .

Not everybody shared the same understanding of this Scripture. Some preachers felt that this verse was only for those in the First Century. Others may have had some reservation or another about the manner in which the request was made or carried out.

Be that as it may, within a very short time after their request for prayer was honored, the little Davis boy was playing with his friends without any nausea or fever. He told Ruth Sanders (at that time a veteran of 35 years on the mission field in Brazil), "The men prayed for me, and poof, I was well!"

This is not intended to be a technical book of exegetical studies, it is a book on personal experiences. You could not go to court and "prove" that God healed this little boy. Perhaps the illness had run its course and he would have gotten well anyhow.

The little boy, however, felt that God had healed him, and I felt the same way. Even if I had not felt that way, I can see no real purpose in trying to convince the boy otherwise.

Furthermore, I want to fuel those fires that help my faith. So that evening in our meeting, I went out of my way to call attention to this little boy and to focus everyone's attention on what I believe was an answer to our prayer, and an experience which we might say was "beyond the veil." Where no wood is, the fire goeth out!

## OXEN AND WATCHES

Deuteronomy 25:4 teaches, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn." Paul quotes this passage in

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I Corinthians 9:9 and insists that the real reason why God inspired those words involved people and not oxen. God was merely using oxen to teach a spiritual principle: that the laborer was worthy of his reward.

God can take little things of no real value and use them to teach us truths of eternal significance.

This principle came alive to me several years ago when I took my Sunday School class on a hike. There were nine young men there that day from ten to twelve years of age. They were overflowing with energy, and for the first half mile I had to run to keep up with them.

By the time we came to the creek, they were strung out over 50-75 feet.

We went up the creek for a quarter mile or so and paused at a little beach to throw stones into the water.

Next we struck out across a little meadow. Then we came to a draw that led through the woods up to a railroad track.

It was at this point that Scotty Helms announced that he had lost his watch.

I judge that we had already traveled a mile and a half, and maybe more. We had covered a variety of terrain ranging from overgrown trails to tall grass and deep leaves. During much of the hike, we had not gone in single file. It would be difficult to even retrace our steps exactly as we had taken them, let alone to find the lost watch.

“What do you think our chances are of finding the watch?” I asked. One young man responded “a hundred to one.” Perhaps he was a bit optimistic.

Our dilemma was compounded by the fact that some of the boys had to be back at the church building in 35 minutes for Bible Bowl practice.

Does God care about watches? I really don't know, but I do know that He cares about little boys. Here was an opportunity to teach them something of eternal consequence.

First of all, I had the opportunity to teach them to care about someone who had a problem. Only one in our group had lost anything, but everybody in the group ought to share something of that loss with him.

Secondly, I had the opportunity to direct these young men to God, who is the ultimate solution to all of life's problems. We joined hands in a circle of prayer and I said, "God, you know exactly where the lost watch is, and I am asking you to help us find it."

Some 25 minutes later, Ralph Wakely found that watch, and my son, Paul, even found the little spring loaded pin that came out of the watch band causing it to fall from Scotty's wrist.

I gathered the boys for another circle of prayer. The watch was not of great value. At today's market a brand new watch just like it could be purchased for under ten dollars. The lesson we learned, however, is profoundly significant. God, who numbers the hairs of our head and watches every sparrow, longs to make our heart and mind the receptacle of His new covenant.

This was the kind of fire that I wanted to keep burning. We talked about it in Sunday School class. I told the story from the pulpit on Sunday. I wrote about the story in our church paper. Fires without fuel go out!

## MEMOIRS OF ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

When I was in college many years ago, I studied a book called the *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell*, by Robert Richardson.

In that book, I read about some remarkable experiences which Mr. Campbell had that might be described as "beyond the veil." They were not experiences that grew directly out of a study of some passage of Scripture, but were personal experiences about which the Bible gave no direct instruction or advice. For many years, I glossed over these stories as inconsistent with the life of Mr. Campbell, whom I regarded as a careful student of the Scriptures. Now, I do not feel that his

premonitions and answers to prayer are inconsistent at all, and I am determined to fuel this flame with the hope and prayer that I can receive similar insight and guidance.

For example, beginning on page 99 of Volume I is this remarkable story. It was October 7, 1808. The Campbells were in a ship riding at anchor and ready to sail to America. After family worship, Alexander fell into a somewhat uneasy slumber and presently awoke with evident marks of alarm. He told his mother and his sisters that he was confident of great and impending danger. In a most vivid dream, he thought that their ship had struck a rock causing water to come rushing in and nearly fill the vessel. He thought he had been making the most strenuous exertions to save the family and secure their luggage. Consequently, he said to his family,

I will not undress to-night. I will lay my shoes within my reach, and be ready to rise at a moment's warning; and I would advise you all to be prepared for an emergency.

At about 10:00 that night, the winds veered toward the South and increased rapidly to a severe gale. In a few moments, the passengers were suddenly aroused by a violent shock, accompanied with the crashing sound of breaking timbers and the rushing of water into the main hold of the vessel.

Amidst the threat of capsizing the ship, the sailors and men with broad swords hewed down the masts which righted the vessel to some extent. The captain ordered the firing of minute-guns to signal their distress, but amidst the violence of the storm it seemed impossible that they could be heard on shore.

It was on this night that Alexander Campbell sat down upon the stump of a broken mast and dedicated himself to the Christian ministry. He thought of the many lessons he had learned from the Scriptures and his pious father, but more significant at that moment was the lesson that God communicates in the here and now. He was not just a God from history, but a God who was vitally involved in the present. In this conjunction Richardson says of Campbell,

He was a very firm believer in special providences, and was the more impressed on this occasion as, in his previous history, he had found his presentiments several times strangely verified. With him, these were simply facts which he did not pretend to explain upon natural principles, but regarded as indications of God's watchful care and interest in the affairs of his people (Vol. 1: p. 106).

It seems that Mr. Campbell also believed in experiences "Beyond the Veil" though he apparently did not use such terminology.

Another remarkable experience on Saturday, September 4, 1847, is recorded on page 556 of Volume II. The Campbells had lived in America since 1809, but in 1847 Alexander returned to the old world and in September of that year was lecturing in Glasgow, Scotland.

On the night of Saturday, September 4, Mr. Campbell was affected with a peculiar sadness for which he had no explanation. This was so entirely foreign to his nature that he could not avoid mentioning it the next morning at breakfast. Campbell's biography records his feelings with these words,

He felt as if some great calamity was impending, and he found it impossible to divert his mind from thoughts of home, which seemed to press upon him as never before . . . It is a singular circumstance that just about the time he experienced this unaccountable depression a sad affair was indeed occurring at his home across the Atlantic. On that very Saturday, his second and most beloved son Wickliffe, then in his eleventh year, was drowned. . . .

It needs to be observed that neither of these premonitions by Campbell is in conflict with any teaching of the Scriptures. The Devil certainly has power to perform supernatural signs and wonders and we must exercise great caution that we not be deceived by the wicked one.

In I Thessalonians 5:19-22 the Scriptures teach,

Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. . . .

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The Greek word used in "prove all things" is the word used for the assaying of metals. We are not to become gullible and irresponsible, but are commanded to scrutinize all things with the same diligence that an assayer has as he takes apart and analyzes samples of ore.

Campbell apparently examined these experiences and did not find them to be of the Devil. I'm not certain how much encouragement they gave to him . . . but I think they would have been of considerable encouragement to me. That's the reason I am so excited about talking about them.

### JOE AND SANDY BARKER

Sandy Feathers Barker was a member of the youth group in Kingsport, Tennessee, when my good friend, Gordon Clymer, served there as associate minister. Her story, which was printed in the August 1980, issue of *Guideposts* was therefore of particular interest to us.

Joe and Sandy moved to Florida and went sailing for recreation. They ran aground on a sandbar and damaged the three foot stabilizer which served as a keel. Without this stabilizer, they were unable to steer and slipped sideways out into the open sea.

At this point, Joe threw out an anchor, but it tore loose from its cleat and disappeared. With no anchor, they hurriedly tried to lower the sail and in their haste knocked a fitting loose and lost the halyard which they would need to raise the sail again. The only way they could raise the sail again would be to lower the hinged mast to the deck and re-rig the line from its top. This would require a calm sea and no wind at all. The sea, however, was not calm.

Joe desperately fitted the oars into the oarlock and tried to row. It was hopeless. The high seas and the strong winds were tossing them like a toothpick in a torrent. Soon it was dark and the black waves pounded them so violently that they lashed themselves down with ropes to keep from being swept overboard.



The dawning of a new day did little to dispel their utter hopelessness and despair. At this juncture, Sandy looked down into the trusting eyes of their little dog and saw something profound and wonderful. The little dog had no fear because it trusted its master. She wondered why she did not trust God like her little dog had trusted her.

Somehow, she was emboldened to believe that God could calm the wind and the waves for them just as He had done for Jesus. So while the sun glowed low, they joined hands and prayed. Within five minutes, the six foot swells had melted into a sheet of still water. Sandy wrote that the experience was so awesome that she can still scarcely believe it.

The calm enabled them to accomplish a makeshift repair and again hoist the sail. Again they prayed, "Lord, we're ready, please give us wind to blow us back east to the shore." As if the Creator's hand was moving across the sea, a steady wind began to blow. It was blowing them in exactly the direction they needed to go so there was no need for steering. For twelve long hours they sailed until they fell asleep in utter exhaustion.

When they awoke, there was an erie calm. Their meager supply of water had long since been exhausted. Utterly helpless and vulnerable, they began to fear an impending storm. Sandy cried out again, "Oh, God, You've brought us this far, why have You left us here?"

The answer came soon. A 51 foot yacht loomed on the horizon. It was guided by very sophisticated electronic navigational equipment, yet "somehow" was 18 miles off course in just the right place to rescue Joe and Sandy Barker.

Within a few hours the storm hit with all its fury . . . but the Barkers were safe . . . and they had learned a lesson in trust which they would never forget. Not only did they not forget it . . . they were willing to share their praise in a public way. Praise the Lord! Where there is no wood the fire goes out!

## LACKING WISDOM

A wise old preacher once asked a group of college students what the first requisite was for receiving wisdom from God. Some suggested "faith" and others said "asking." He then replied that the first requisite was to "lack wisdom."

Every parent has had the experience of trying to tell his children something . . . and not being able to. "I know daddy" they sometimes say. As long as they think they know the answer, it is very difficult to communicate with them. It is only when they hit bottom, so to speak, that they can be easily taught.

Focus all of your spiritual and mental energies on this beautiful promise from God:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord . . . (James 1:5-7).

There are some Christians who can truthfully say, "I have never received special wisdom from God." The Scriptures promise that some people will not receive anything from the Lord. Their arrogance, or perhaps their lack of faith, prevents them from claiming the promise and receiving the blessing.

I am "persuaded better things of you." The very fact that you have been willing to read this far in a little book about answers to prayer and providence is a strong indication that you have a desire to be close to God and that you have an openness to be instructed.

Therefore . . . GO FOR IT! Confess your ignorance and lack of wisdom. Pray about which man to marry . . . or which car to buy . . . or which job to take . . . or whatever other burden weighs heavily upon your heart today. And pray BELIEVING! God is all knowing. He has all the answers. He can deliver the godly out of temptation and reserve the unjust unto punishment.

When God answers your prayer . . . go public. Let your lips speak forth His praise. God will richly fill your life in such a circumstance for the Lord "inhabitest the praises of Israel."  
And where there is no wood . . . the fire goes out!

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER IV

1. What did Jesus mean by, ". . . out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34)?
2. Think of a time when gossip magnified an insignificant matter out of proportion.
3. Observe how not talking about that circumstance might have helped.
4. Why are some people reluctant to talk about answers to prayer?
5. What can be done to help people who have no answers to prayer?
6. Can Christianity be "caught" as well as "taught"?
7. What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? Share a time when you received wisdom from God.
8. Who or what causes Christians to doubt God?
9. How is a double-minded person "unstable" in all his ways?
10. Think of special wisdom which you need right now and ask God in faith to receive it!

