

NO GOSSIP ZONE (JAMES 3:5-10) 11/11/12
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, ATCHISON, PASTOR LEE HENDON

IF WE WERE TO TAKE A SURVEY OF THE BIBLE TO DETER-MINE THE SIN MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED - ACCORDING TO FREQUENCY & VOLUME - WHAT SIN MIGHT THAT BE? LABEL IT THE **SIN OF ALL SINS**. ONE MIGHT SUPPOSE IT WOULD BE HOMOSEXU-ALITY, ADULTERY, MURDER OR SOMETHING MORE HORRENDOUS - **HOW WRONG WE WOULD BE!** THE #1 SIN WOULD BE, ALL LUMPED TOGETHER - GOSSIP, SLANDER, SPEAKING EVIL, THE USE OF ONE'S TONGUE. SURPRISED? SURPRISE, SURPRISE! GOSSIP IS THE **MAJOR SIN** NOT ONLY IN VOLUME BUT ALSO IN CONSEQUENCE. WE ARE TO STRIVE, TO DESIRE FOR OUR CHURCH TO BE A "**NO GOSSIP ZONE!**" WHAT A RELIEF & BLESSING THAT WOULD BE WHEN WE BECOME AT LONG LAST, A **NO GOSSIP ZONE!**

MILDRED, THE CHURCH GOSSIP & SELF-APPOINTED MONITOR OF CHURCH MORALS KEPT STICKING HER NOSE INTO OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS. SEVERAL MEMBERS DID NOT APPROVE OF HER EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES BUT FEARED HER ENOUGH TO MAINTAIN THEIR SILENCE. SHE MADE A MISTAKE, HOWEVER, WHEN SHE ACCUSED SAM, A NEW MEMBER, OF BEING AN ALCOHOLIC AFTER SHE SAW HIS OLD PICKUP PARKED IN FRONT OF THE TOWN BAR ONE AFTERNOON. SHE EMPHATICALLY TOLD SAM & SEVERAL OTHERS THAT EVERYONE SEEING HIS TRUCK THERE WOULD KNOW WHAT HE WAS DOING. SAM, A MAN OF FEW WORDS, STARED AT HER FOR A MOMENT & JUST TURNED & WALKED AWAY. HE DID NOT EXPLAIN, DEFEND OR DENY. HE SAID NOTHING. LATER THAT EVENING, SAM QUIETLY PARKED HIS PICKUP IN FRONT OF MILDRED'S HOUSE...WALKED HOME...LEFT IT THERE ALL NIGHT! YOU GOTTA LOVE SAM. EVERY CHURCH HAS A SLEW OF MILDREDS - CHURCH GOSSIPS & BUSY BODIES ABOUND - WOE ARE WE!

OH, **THE TONGUE** - JAMES' DISCOURSE ON THE USE OF THE TONGUE IS SO DIRECT & FORCEFUL THAT LITTLE EFFORT IS NEEDED TO APPLY IT TO THE SPECIFIC DEATH-DEALING ACTS OF SPEECH WITHIN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY. THE PROPER RESPONSE TO HIS SCORCHING INDICTMENT SEEMS LESS REFLECTIVE THAN CONFES-SIONAL - AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE MANY WAYS IN WHICH THE SIN, SO BRILLIANTLY DIAGNOSED, HAS INDEED

INFECTED OUR VERY OWN LIVES. THE POWER OF OUR WORDS IS AWESOME - OUR WORDS HAVE THE POWER TO CREATE OR DESTROY - HENCE WE HAVE AN OBVIOUS OBLIGATION TO PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT WE SAY - TO AVOID THE SINS OF THE TONGUE.

JAMES WROTE, "THE TONGUE IS A FIRE." OF COURSE, FIRE CAN BE FRIEND OR FOE - INDEED, WHERE WOULD THE ADVANCE-MENT OF SOCIETY BE WITHOUT THE FRIENDLY USE OF FIRE? HOW-EVER THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY WAS REELING & DEEPLY CONFLICTED & DIVIDED BY THE HOSTILE & CARELESS USE OF THE FIERY TONGUE. DAMAGE THE TONGUE CAN DO IS LIKE A RAGING, RAMPAGING FIRE:

1. **THE TONGUE CAN BURN, HURT & DESTROY.**

HOW ALLURING FIRE (I.E. GOSSIP) CAN BE, ONLY WHEN DRAWN TOO CLOSE - **OUCH!** - IT BURNS & HURTS. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN THE FOCUS OF GOSSIP IN THE CHURCH OR COMMUNITY - THEN YOU KNOW WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT! **OUCH** - IT BURNS & HURTS! CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY SPECIFICALLY & COMMUNITY IN GENERAL CANNOT, WILL NOT THRIVE & GROW WHERE GOSSIP & GOSSIPERS ARE ALLOWED & TOLERATED - **PERIOD!** CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY MUST BE FOUNDED UPON TRUTH, OPENNESS, TRUST, HONESTY & MOST IMPORTANTLY LOVE & GRACE. ALL THESE ARE CONSUMED BY A FIERY TONGUE - WE END UP SO INSULATED & ISOLATED WHEN GOSSIP ABOUNDS THAT WE DARE NOT TOUCH OR BE TOUCHED WITHIN A GOSSIPING COMMUNITY. NO ONE WOULD DARE RISK IT!

2. **THE DAMAGE OF THE TONGUE IS WIDE-RANGING.** IT

DAMAGES AT A DISTANCE & OVER THE WHOLE COUNTRYSIDE. WHAT BEGAN AS A CAMP-FIRE QUICKLY BECOMES A FOREST FIRE. A CHANCE WORD DROPPED IN ONE END OF TOWN CAN FINISH UP BY BRINGING DAMAGE, GRIEF, HURT & HEARTBREAK AT THE OTHER. A JEWISH RABBIS TAUGHT, "LIFE & DEATH ARE IN THE HAND OF THE TONGUE. HAS THE TONGUE A HAND? NO, BUT AS THE HAND KILLS, SO THE TONGUE. THE HAND KILLS ONLY AT CLOSE QUARTER; THE TONGUE IS CALLED AN ARROW BECAUSE IT KILLS AT A DISTANCE. AN ARROW KILLS AT FORTY OR FIFTY PACES BUT THE TONGUE RANGES OVER THE WHOLE EARTH & REACHES HEAVEN." A PERSON CAN WARD OFF A BLOW FROM THE HAND FOR THE ATTACKER MUST BE IN THEIR PRESENCE TO STRIKE THEM. BUT A PERSON CAN DROP A MALICIOUS WORD OR REPEAT A

SCANDALOUS STORY ABOUT SOMEONE WHOM THEY MAY OR MAY NOT EVEN KNOW - ABOUT SOMEONE HUNDREDS OF MILES AWAY - TO CAUSE INFINITE DAMAGE & HARM. THE RANGE THE TONGUE CAN REACH IS ONE OF ITS GREATEST PERILS.

HOW TO MAKE THIS CHURCH A NO GOSSIP ZONE:

1. **TALK FREELY ABT YOURSELF** & YOUR OWN LIFE EXPERIENCES OR THE LIFE EXPERIENCES OF THE PERSON WITH WHOM YOU ARE TALKING. MUCH ABOUT WHICH WE TALK IS NONE OF OUR BUSI-NESS. IF IT DOES NOT DIRECTLY CONCERN US DO NOT TALK ABOUT IT - PERIOD. OR IF IT CONCERNS SOMEONE ELSE GO TALK WITH THAT PERSON FIRST & LEAVE IT FOR THEM TO TALK ABOUT IT FUR-THER OR NOT. ***WE ARE CLOSE TO THE QUICK SAND OF GOSSIP WHEN OUR CONVERSATIONS ARE ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE.*** IF NONE OF OUR BUSINESS, IT IS NONE OF OUR BUSINESS. JUST WALK AWAY.

2. **USE SOCRATES' THREE FILTERS TEST:**

A. THE FIRST FILTER IS **TRUTH**. MAKE ABSOLUTELY SURE THAT WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO SAY IS TRUE. TRUE AS IN DIRECTLY VERIFIED BY THE PERSON(S) INVOLVED.

B. THE SECOND FILTER IS **GOODNESS**. IS WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO SAY SOMETHING GOOD? MY MOTHER USE TO SAY, "IF YOU DON'T HAVE SOMETHING GOOD TO SAY THEN DON'T SAY IT!"

C. THE THIRD FILTER IS **USEFULNESS**. THAT WHICH YOU ARE TO SAY MUST BE USEFUL EITHER TO THE PERSON(S) INVOLVED OR THE ONE RECEIVING THE INFORMATION.

SOCRATES SAID, "IF WHAT YOU WANT TO TELL IS NEITHER TRUE NOR GOOD NOR EVEN USEFUL, WHY TELL IT TO ME AT ALL?" TRUTH BE TOLD, IN OUR SINFUL WEAKNESS WE OFTEN WANT TO BE THE FIRST TO TELL OR SHARE JUICY, SENSATION STUFF TO BUILD UP OUR OWN FRAIL EGOS OR TO SPICE UP OUR BOREDOM. WHEN WE BECOME A NO GOSSIP ZONE 'ROUND HERE WE JUST MIGHT END UP WITH MORE TIME & ENERGY TO DO THE WORK OF THE LORD OR SPEND IT IN QUIET PRAYER & MEDITATION - WHICH AINT' SO BAD!

IN A NUTSHELL - IF YOU GIVE OR RECEIVE GOSSIP OR RUMORS, STOP IT - STOP IT - BECAUSE THAT IS THE WAY OF THE LORD! JESUS SAID IN MT.12:36, "*ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT YOU WILL HAVE TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT FOR EVERY CARELESS WORD YOU UTTER.*" GULP, IT IS ON THE TEST....