

Where There Is No Wood

By Chris Herd

Growing up in Australia, I remember we were faced with many dangers. We had so many poisonous snakes and deadly spiders, my mother's voice echoes in my mind as she would call out to us children, "watch out for snakes"! Us children would be phobic of long grass, and we learnt that this was a good concern to have. The other hazards were more environmental, floods, cyclones, and bushfires.

For many of these hazards, the Australian people learnt to prepare for the worst. As for flooding, they would build up and prevent building in lower lying lands. However, for the bushfires, the approach was back burning and clearing away of shrubs and bush that would act as feed for a fire. The wildfires in Australia would be one of the largest killers of people and destroying of property. This was also seen in the USA this year throughout the Gatlinburg district in Tennessee.

What was the approach taken by the Australians to prevent fire damage? To burn back and clear away any grasses and woods that would feed to fires! If this could be achieved, the firemen know that a fire can be contained and reduced its destructiveness. Why say all this? The reason is to say that we have many dangers facing the church today, within and without of the church. One of the greatest destroyers in the body of Christ is the tongue.

"Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (James 3:5-6)

The tongue is likened to a fire, a world of iniquity "set on fire of hell". That is such powerful language and indicates the destructive nature of the tongue that is not controlled. The idea here is, that that which causes the tongue to do so much evil derives its origin from hell. Nothing could better characterize much of that which the tongues does, than to say that it has its origin in hell, and has the spirit which reigns there. The very spirit of that world of fire and wickedness - a spirit of falsehood, and slander, and blasphemy, and pollution seems to inspire the tongue.

The image which seems to have been before the mind of James was that of a torch which enkindles and burns everything as it goes along as a torch itself lighted at the fires of hell. One of the most striking descriptions of the woes and curses which there may be in hell, would be to portray the sorrows caused on the earth by the tongue.

So just what do we do? There is a powerful lesson from my example, but more so from Scripture, consider these verses: "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the

belly. Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him; When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation” (Proverbs 26:20-26).

Remove the wood and the fire goes out! The application is that a talebearer will cause strife, he will wound deep down in the body of Christ. If you silence the talebearer or do not entertain his gossip, slander and tale bearing, the problem will cease. A gossip needs something to cause damage and that is a willing audience. Let us not listen to ill words about our brothers and sisters, let us rebuke those who will destroy with the tongue. The church that Jesus died for is far too important to allow the fire of gossip, slander and tale bearing to wound and hurt brethren’s good names.

If someone brings a tale to you ask, have you spoken to him about that? Why are you telling me this? Would you be prepared to say this to his or her face? Let us not provide wood for the fire but burn back, clear the shrubs and bushes that might let the fire of gossip spread. Let us be preventative in our actions and remember, if he/she gossips to you, he/she probably gossips about you too! Don't let gossip spread and as the Bible says, "...the strife ceaseth" (Proverbs 26:20).

Let us love the church of Jesus Christ our Lord, so much that we will never willingly cause her to be hurt by anything we are able to prevent. God bless you in His service!