

Commentary — From the Margins “*Lashon Hara*”

Lashon hara, evil speech, is permitted if it is for constructive purposes, such as encouraging a person to restore that which the person has stolen from another. The Hebrew expression places approval upon what should never have occasion to occur between Christian brethren. The ministry of death was for want of the Holy Spirit. Under the second covenant mediated by Moses (Deut chptrs 29-31), circumcision of the heart and soul/mind [*naphesh*] was offered to Israel only after long-demonstrated obedience to God, obedience that began in a far land. But when its mediator became Christ Jesus, the second covenant received a better promise: spiritual circumcision came prior to demonstrated obedience. Spiritual circumcision is the reason why the convert, yet in a distant mental landscape, will leave the world and mentally journey to Judea where he or she will live as Jesus did. Thus, under the ministry of Spirit or glory, disciples “have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways” (2 Cor 4:2 ESV). This renunciation should eliminate every justifiable occasion for evil speech to be practiced. A thief would restore that which he or she has stolen. Actually, a thief would no longer steal, but would seek gainful employment. Among disciples, there should not be the occasion to call another a thief. The disciple who carelessly or mistakenly took the property of another would immediately restore the property when his or her fault is brought to the disciple’s attention.

But the ideal doesn’t always occur. Disciples err. They come short of perfection. And at times, it is not possible for a disciple to rectify, say, a business deal that went south. Inadvertent theft results. In May 1979, a disciple came to me and said that I hadn’t well handled a deal in which he wasn’t involved but a deal about which he had knowledge. I agreed with him, and asked him what he thought I should do. He said he didn’t know. Neither did I. Alaska had recently entered the *Bust* portion of its *Boom or Bust* economy. Money that had been available was no longer there. People who owed me money—the disciple who came to me owed me for an outboard motor for which he has never paid—were unable to pay me, and I was unable to rectify a business deal that truly wasn’t well handled. And in the twenty-five years since, the opportunity to undo what should have been a straightforward deal hasn’t presented itself.

By the end of the summer 1979, I believe the entirety of the Anchorage and Kenai WCG congregations could have been pointing fingers at one another. I missed most of this finger pointing by fishing a small vessel out of Dutch Harbor, and I missed a lot of possessions as some church members divvied up what I had left in storage on the mainland (there was a rumor that I had been lost at sea). UCG pastor Earl Roemer was then at Anchorage and knows more about what happened than I do. Regardless, there was no evil speech even though there were hard feelings, most of which were about a boat Don Gates was building and into which some brethren had sunk their life savings.

Lashon hara occurs when hierarchical government doesn’t exist. Evil speech becomes the only recourse available to rectify wrongs that would otherwise be litigated in the court system, for the wrong-doer does not recognize the authority of the Holy Spirit, because, usually, the wrong-doer lacks having received birth-from-above. Thus, the procedure outlined in Matthew 18 produces no results, for the Church itself is a house divided and has

been almost from its beginning. In His Olivet discourse, Jesus warns His disciples against deceiving many (verse 4 is poorly rendered in most English translations — who could deceive His disciples; it was His disciples who could do the deceiving). The Apostle Paul writes to the saints at Corinth that there would be divisions among them to determine who is genuine (1 Cor 11:19).

The procedure outlined in Matthew 18 works only when the party who has committed the alleged offense voluntarily submits to the hierarchical authority of a fellowship, or of a denomination. The Apostle Paul seems to say that if the offender does not submit to the hierarchical authority of a fellowship/denomination then the wronged person should suffer the wrong rather than go to court. This suffering of a wrong needs to be examined within the context of the events here at Port Austin.

When I arrived in late July 2004, the situation here at the tip of Michigan geographical thumb seemed as financially messy as was the funding for Don Gates' boat during the spring months of 1979. Students were attending a music camp for which no tuition was charged, and for which no room & board was charged. These students were fed and housed on moneys provided by Terry Williams when he didn't know in advance that he would be paying for them. But then, Williams was still paying for everything.

The financial house of the Port Austin Sabbatarian Church Community (PASCC) had not been set in order, for trustees Frankford, Drieman, and Williams were still waiting to see a draft of the trustee indenture that Peter Kershaw was to have delivered in April. Most financially responsible actions were being delayed because trustee Edwards told them that the trust's creator—a contract laborer—was having marital problems and was unable to deliver the indenture. Thus, Williams was covering expenses until actual operation of the campus could begin. Then, expected donations to PASCC would cover expenses if God were blessing the project.

The four trustees had committed themselves to make a \$5,000 per month property payment until the year 2013, with the only apparent source of income to cover this payment being anticipated donations. As with every unbelievable concept to which men of usually sound minds subscribe, there were reasons why this level of anticipated donations were expected. And Edwards was responsible for supplying these reasons to, especially, Williams and Frankford, the two men that Edwards had brought to Art Hawkins' and Warwick Potts' attention.

In our September meeting, Edwards admitted that donations to PASCC were being received, and were being deposited in Edwards' CBTM account with Regions Bank. Knowledge of these contributions was kept from the other three trustees. And depositing these donations in Edwards' Florida bank account was contrary to the publicly expressed wishes of the other three trustees. In fact, the three had expressly prohibited Edwards from doing the very thing he had been doing all along.

By the end of the first week of September 2004, I was privy to information that PASCC trustees Frankford, Williams, and Drieman did not have. Much of this information was conveyed directly to me by Edwards. He came for a Matthew 18 meeting about what I had written in an e-mail correspondence: I had written that he was unable to operate a school. He left hours later realizing that we possessed contrary spirits. I could not, and would not operate using his underhanded means. So Edwards conferred with Warwick Potts of Eternal Life Bible Institute (ELBI), and Potts threatened Paul Drieman if Drieman did not remove

me from a personal residence then still owned by Art Hawkins.

Drieman had no authority to remove me from the residence he believed I had purchased from Norman Edwards, so he came to me and informed me of Potts' wishes, and of his threats. I probably would have then quietly gone away if money had not suddenly dried up as if supernaturally shut off. In 1979, I had left a confused situation on the Kenai Peninsula behind me as I went fishing, first out of Kodiak, then out of Dutch Harbor. But there was one differing element this time: there was no Earl Roemer in place to try and untangle obvious wrong-doing. Here, there was no respect for any authority by the person committing the wrong-doing. And I didn't have a boat in which I could sail away.

When trustees Frankford, Williams and Drieman voted to end the SEE program, which they had concluded was a fraud, I wrote an open letter to Dixon Cartwright of *The Journal* saying that the SEE program for which I had come to teach was an educational hoax. I did not name names. There was no reason for any names to be included in the warning about SEE. Those individuals who knew of SEE would know who was involved. No one else needed to know. But Royce Mitchell inserted himself into the matter, introduced Norman Scott Edwards' name, and took out a half-page advertisement in the October 30, 2004 issue of *The Journal* for purposes that seem only an enhancement of himself.

Again, *lashon hara* occurs when hierarchical government doesn't exist (and hierarchical governments cannot permit evil speech to be used against those in control).

In early November 2004, Drieman came to me and said that Edwards had worked as hard as he could and as fast as he could to prove me right on every accusation and implied accusation I had made against Edwards. When Potts had threatened Drieman, a major mistake by Potts for Drieman will be one of the last people standing in a fight, Drieman had promised Potts that he, Drieman, would investigate the whole affair. In his investigation, Edwards' long-standing relationship with ELBI, Potts, and Art Hawkins had begun to emerge. This relationship had been concealed from the other three trustees. If it had been revealed, none of the three would have allowed Edwards to enter into any discussion with ELBI on their behalf.

The evil speech really didn't begin here until Art Hawkins' attorney sent me an eviction notice. I then had cause to make a direct accusation of deceit against Edwards, who by now had three months to repent of his wrong-doing. During these three months, though, Edwards had shown no intention of mending his ways; he was not subject to any authority but his own. Plus, my course of action was additionally simplified by the absence of financial resources. I had no choice but to stay and fight to overturn not just one wrong, but a series of wrongs going back five years, wrongs committed against the resort community of Port Austin by people using underhanded means in the name of God.

The evil speech has only begun.

In the cold rainforests of the Pacific Northwest, idling saw in hand,. I have walked up to timber four, five, six feet in diameter, glanced at the lean, then looked to see where I would bed the log. I would start in a patch of pristine forest in the morning, cut one stick after another, stop for lunch and see the carnage behind me, feel a twinge of regret, then get back to work. The owner of the Fishing Vessel *Amatuli* was once asked what was wrong with the king crab fishery. His answer was simply, *We have killed a lot of crabs*. We also killed a lot of trees. And it took contempt for the danger involved to kill so many crabs, and so many trees. Thus, beginning and staying a course of *lashon hara* will produce occasional

twinges of regret when someone points out the carnage being produced, but that is the price of no hierarchical church, which leaves the condition where a person can, in the name of God, gather to him or herself donations using underhanded means. No one will know if nothing is publicly said, if those who know remain silent. They then allow others to be harmed as they attempt to practice what Paul seemed to say about silently suffering being defrauded. In practice, they love themselves and their righteousness more than they love their neighbors, meaning that there is more to what Paul writes than is immediately apparent.

For reasons that will be discussed in other pieces, it seems that Edwards has been instructed to stay out of court. I thought for a while that he would initiate a small-claims action that could be bumped up to circuit court. It now seems that the best chance to get him into court will be to have him added as a co-plaintiff to a Federal District Court action. Either way, the record of the civil court action would then be the basis for a criminal action—unless of course, Edwards repents, and brings forth fruit worthy of repentance. Then the evil speech has to stop. It will have accomplished its sole justification for existence.
