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“It is better to be thought a fool...”

As Terry Mikel was speeding toward Tucson, he passed a car — an unmarked Arizona Highway Patrol car. The officer pulled Terry over. When Terry explained that he was late for a class he was teaching at the University of Arizona, the officer took pity on him and let him off with a warning. Before he went back to his car he said, “Slow down and drive safe.”

Terry felt obligated to correct him. “Excuse me, Sir, but it should be, ‘Slow down and drive safely.’ You said, ‘Drive safe.’”

The officer walked back to his car and wrote Terry a \$72 speeding ticket.

We just can’t do it, can we? We just can’t seem to keep our mouths shut! When we stop and look back, we know we shouldn’t have said a word, but at the time we felt so compelled to speak. Maybe you didn’t get a ticket as a result, but you’ve said something just as foolish with negative consequences, haven’t you? So have we all.

James was certainly right when he wrote, “...If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body as well . . . For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no man can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.” (3.2, 7-8) The tongue lives in its own cage, but far too often we fail to keep the cage door shut!

This is so often what happens when we are faced with a question about God’s will in spiritual or religious matters. Instead of waiting to learn what His will truly is, we become presumptuous and speak when we are not yet sure what He has spoken on the matter. Consider the following:

Pharaoh had released the children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt after God had persuaded him to do so by a series of plagues upon the Egyptian land and people. No sooner had the Israelites left Egypt than Pharaoh changed his mind and began to pursue

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them. He found them encamped by the Red Sea and was rapidly approaching to overtake them.

“As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord. Then they said to Moses, ‘Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, brining us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.’ But Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.’” (Exodus 14.10-13)

The children of Israel presumed to understand the will of the Lord when, in truth, they had no clue. He did not intend for them to perish on the shores of the sea. He would tell them in the following verses to move forward, having parted the Red Sea that they could cross on dry land. They just needed to wait and listen for the will of the Lord!

Sometimes we make the same mistake. Instead of waiting to learn what God’s will truly is, we just jump to conclusions. And most often, our conclusions are wrong. May we learn to wait and learn what the Lord has to say before we speak.

“He who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.” (Proverbs 13.3)

Perhaps you have heard it said this way — **“It is better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.”** Wiser words have seldom been spoken by mortal man.

~jeremy paschall