



CRABS IN A
BARREL



Reformation Christian Ministries

Why a Story That Cannot Be Told

July 2004

**Let not then your good be evil spoken of
by crabs in the barrel**
(Romans 14:16)

The context of this statement from Scripture was that of the Apostle Paul giving instructions on how Christians should conduct themselves amongst weaker brothers who were still concerned about clean and unclean foods and how to avoid putting a stumbling block before others. It was good to eat any foods, but if it caused a brother to stumble, then it might be evil spoken of, and for this reason should be avoided in the midst of those who would do so.

I am using this passage to bring to you another application of the same principle in a different context. I had hoped to bring to your attention a great and encouraging work of God's grace in the life of a teacher in our school in Suriname. God has brought this person through some serious hardships in life by His grace and from that, produced a great testimony to His sustaining and comforting power in the midst of great trials and struggles. While gathering some information from the person about their story, they reflected upon the evil that would be spoken of them if God's good to them was reported to you in this newsletter. Why? Because the mail and the Internet have made information so easily transmittable and the information would get into the hands of other teachers at the school. As a result, this person's good would be evil spoken of.

Envy is such a part of the culture of Suriname and Guyana that to bring this story of God's grace to you would subject this growing young Christian to personal torment and gossip from others. If this person was in a higher position, it would not be the same problem, but because of being an ordinary teacher with no particular rank, my telling you this story of God's grace could cause others to think evil of this person to such an extent that they could become the subject of much tale-bearing, even amongst Christians. This is the sad state of affairs not only in Suriname, but in many other countries.

As we spoke with John Doe from Iraq about this problem, we found that the same thing existed in the culture of Iraq. Sadly, this is not something unique to Suriname but part of many cultures which have had substantial non-Christian populations.

"Like crabs in a barrel" is a little proverbial phrase that is used by Guyanese that illustrates this phenomenon. In the markets of Suriname and Guyana, it is common to find a bunch of crabs in a barrel waiting to be sold. If you watch them long enough, they will begin to climb up over each other until one of them reaches the top. As it is holding on to the top trying to get out, so many others hang onto it that they pull the one at the top back down. This, they say, is how many in our culture are

(speaking, of course, of what others do, not the person using the proverb). Rather than helping the one get out, they would rather pull it down than that any get out.

Many cultures of the world which have not been impacted significantly by Christianity have this "dog-eat-dog" or "crab-pull-down-crab" mentality. This kind of envy is endemic in these cultures and creates special challenges for Christians and pastors. But there is good news in the midst of this bad news. God's grace is used to distinguish between the true wheat and tares.

God's grace is evident in the case of this person by their willingness to discern that the good that God has worked in them will be evil spoken of and therefore is willing to forego the sharing of that good, lest it be evil spoken of. This takes the same kind of Christian grace and maturity that the Apostle Paul speaks about in the context of Romans 14:16. It underscores 1 Thessalonians 5:22 by avoiding the appearance of evil, even, as in this case when it is good. May God be praised and continue to work in the life of this unnamed teacher.

We ask your prayer for this unnamed teacher, that they may continue to grow in God's grace, and for all those who may see this article that find envy arising within them that they may be convicted of the sin, confess and repent of it rather than speaking evil of this person.

We ask your prayer for Pastors Poettcker and Hamid as they seek to make disciples of those who have confessed Christ so that their lives would become more like that of this person. Pray especially for Pastor Hamid and his wife and family, as this is the culture that they have come from, and their position and authority in the school make them targets of such evil speaking. Pray that they set a good example of God's grace, and one that displays humility in dealing with the many "crabs" who may try to pull them down. Pray especially for him as he pastors in this culture and must provide godly leadership often requiring him to speak out when necessity dictates even when he knows that evil will be thought and said of him. Don't forget the same prayers for John Doe in Iraq as well as all of the pastors elsewhere with which RCM works.

Our prayer is for more and more of the "old man" to be "put away" and more of the "new man" to become evident in the lives of those in Christ's church, especially those of like precious faith.

May those who might see this article who are guilty of this sin of envy (including the writer), be willing to confess it and forsake it whenever it surfaces. There is this great tendency in all of us to envy occasionally (or frequently) arising within us. May God convict us all of our sin, confess and repent of it rather than speaking evil of others when they do good. May then the grace of God be glorified as it is in this person whose story I cannot tell you.

 **Geoffrey Donnan**

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