

Maybe You Should Stick Your Nose in Someone Else's Business

OK, kids, gather 'round and let me tell you today's quaint Italian proverb:

Let every fox take care of his own tail.

If you prefer a more country version, how about Hank Williams Jr?

If you mind your business, then you won't be mindin' mine.

Most of us have been taught since childhood to keep our noses out of other people's business. Even the apostle Paul warned the church in Thessalonica:

"We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies" (2 Thess. 3:11).

Both the Italian proverb and Paul's warning are excellent advice for the church—up to a point.

Is there a time we *should* stick our nose in other people's business? Consider the following:

Buying and selling people as commodities have always been wrong, but the United States made slave importation illegal in 1807. But that didn't stop Timothy Meaher from trying fifty years later. Meaher was a ship builder in Mobile, Alabama, and as the story goes, Meaher made a bet with a Yankee gentleman that he could defy the law and bring slaves from Africa.

Meaher had a schooner call the *Coltilda* that he refitted to serve as a slave ship. It was fast, and it didn't look like a ship for hauling humans as cargo. What helped this venture was the knowledge that West African tribes were at war. One tribe was glad to sell off their enemies (from what is now the small country of Benin). And they did. They sold off 110 human beings. (The buyers only wanted 100, but it was assumed 10 would die on the journey.)



Before the *Coltilda* arrived in Mobile, the federal government got wind of this bet—and apparently Meaher and his cohorts got wind that that government got wind.

Offshore, they transferred the slaves to a riverboat and promptly burned and sunk the *Coltilda*.

Fast forward to now. We've had some nasty weather in recent weeks, and the weather folks even described a "bomb cyclone." This bomb cyclone brought unusually cold northern winds through Mobile, causing a very low tide and exposing the previously hidden remains of the *Coltilda*.

It looks like the last American slave ship has been found. What has not been found are adequate answers to some heartbreaking questions. As Jim Denison points out in his excellent blog on this, we can lay a lot of blame on Timothy Meaher, the ship's captain, and the yahoo who made the bet with Meaher, but they are not the only ones guilty.

- Where were the people who knew about the bet? Why didn't they speak up?
- Where were the people who knew about the retrofitting of the ship for human trafficking? Why didn't they speak up?
- Where were the people who knew about the distribution of the slaves? Why didn't they speak up?

Oh, Lynn, you're so naive. This was the antebellum south. No one spoke up against such matters.

Exactly my point. Wrong is wrong. We can't rationalize away our neglected responsibility simply because everybody was doing it. And if we have the opportunity to speak up, to act, to intervene in something that is harmful to others, well, James said it best:

"If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them" (Jas. 4:17).

God just may be calling you to stick your nose in other people's business.

Slavery still happens. Unborn children are killed daily. The elderly are forgotten and neglected. Each of these lives is important. They are important to God, and therefore, they should be important to us. So let me say it again:

God just may be calling you to stick your nose in other people's business.