



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Putting a Kink in the Grapevine

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Introduction

1. Reportedly, Winston Churchill was once attending an official ceremony in London where two men recognized him and began to whisper behind him. “They say Churchill’s quite senile now,” said the one. “Yes, they say he’s doing England more harm than good,” replied the other. “They say he should step aside and leave the running of this government to younger, more dynamic people,” continued the first man. At that point, Churchill turned and in a loud voice said, “They also say he’s quite deaf.”¹
2. I don’t know what the men said then, or how red their faces became. But that story shows the nature of the grapevine, the tendency to participate, and the danger involved. It also serves as a good starting point to continue talking about things suggested by James 4:11-12.
 - a. Two sermons ago, we focused on James’s emphasis on playing God and judging.
 - b. Last time, we noted James’s repetition of “speaking against” another, noticing:
 - 1) Key New Testament words that show who a gossip is.
 - 2) Reasons we continue to gossip despite knowing it’s wrong.
 - 3) And the lack of spiritual maturity that continuing in gossip demonstrates.
3. We’ll now turn our focus to two important tests to help put a kink in the grapevine.

Body

I. The Truth Test.

- A. We begin in Deuteronomy 13, in a section that warns Israel to take idolatry seriously.
 1. 12:29-32 – a general warning not to compromise with the peoples of Canaan, concluded with a warning not to add to or subtract from the word of God.
 2. 13:1-5 – a warning to not be fooled into pursuing idols by a miracle worker.
 3. 13:6-11 – told to execute even close family members if they turn to idols.
 4. 13:12-18 – instructed to eradicate a city, including all its people and livestock when it is found to be practicing idolatry.
- B. 13:12-15 teaches caution in carrying out the last command.
 1. Verse 14 elaborates the steps to be taken to ensure the truth of the charges.
 - a) “Inquire” – go to the trouble to be sure the report was correctly heard.

¹ Andrew Carr, in *Humor for Preaching and Teaching from Leadership Journal and Christian Reader*, ed. Edward K. Rowell and Bonne L. Steffen, 48.

- b) “Make search” – “probe” (NIV); check into where the person telling the tale got his information and how reliable it is.
 - c) “Ask diligently” – “investigate it thoroughly” (NIV); go to the trouble of doing everything possible to check out the facts of the report. (If the facts are hard to come by, we should be especially hesitant to pass on the tale.)
 - 2. Make sure the charge is “true and certain” – here is the crux of the issue.
 - a) We have no business passing on things that are not true.
 - b) We should make every effort to be sure they are true.
 - c) If we cannot confirm the truth, we should be hesitant to share a tale.
- C. Following the instructions in this passage will do serious harm to the grapevine.
 - 1. Righteous skepticism leaves us less likely to gullibly convey misinformation.
 - a) This is especially valuable for believers, for I do not believe sincere disciples ever intend to pass on something we know is untrue.
 - b) That it’s worth the trouble is clear when we remember that, whether or not a falsehood is told on purpose, the damage done is severe and irrevocable.
 - 2. It makes life less complicated: gossips are less inclined to share with one who is known to ask probing questions and put up roadblocks to telling tales.
- D. In a time where “news” is so prevalent, we need to be resolved to investigate.
 - 1. We tend to forget the adage to not believe everything we hear, especially if the “news” is negative about someone we’re not sure about or sympathetic to (the reputation of more than one church has been harmed by such laxness).
 - 2. Modern communication methods make resistance a particular challenge.
 - a) “Party lines” have been replaced with speed dialing and conference calls.
 - b) Media reports are often more “sensational” than thoughtfully accurate.
 - c) The internet, especially social media, is a forum for the wildest of tales.
 - d) Social media has perhaps reduced, but not eliminated the use of email forwards to pass on falsehoods.²
 - 3. It is among the greatest ironies that the same believers who so fervently quote texts like John 8:32 prove incapable of applying the point to rumors and gossip.
 - a) So, when presented with a tale, ask, “who told you this?” Reports beginning with “I heard” or “They say” should not be accepted as properly documented. If you cannot identify or validate a story’s source, it’s best not to repeat it.
 - b) Furthermore, guard the confidential. Ask, “may I quote you on that?”

II. The Love Test.

- A. Determined to make sure a thing is true before we spread it, are we therefore free to share anything we know that happens to be true? The love test answers, “No.”
 - 1. Others in our world understand this, as we see in cases where media organizations are held accountable for sharing victims’ identities courts have ordered suppressed.
 - 2. Texts like Galatians 6:1-2 can be abused, leading us to cross the line between spiritual concern and encouragement and satisfying our nosiness.
 - a) The goal is the other person’s spiritual upbuilding, “mending” (καταρτίζω, *katartizō* - cf. Matt. 4:21 = Mark 1:19) the person to be more Christlike.

² It really doesn’t take that long to check various sites that aim to debunk the myths.

- b) The action contemplated in the text is not primarily learning another's transgressions, but actively working with them to restore them.
 - c) It is noteworthy that gossips who justify themselves by saying, "I was only telling the truth" seem to tell a disproportionate amount of negative news.
 - d) A good test: "Gossip only talks. But real love gets involved – sensitively and discreetly in the lives of others."³
- B. This illustration might help us understand the point of the love test.
1. Suppose I know a man who tells me he intends to harm you. I know he's purchased a gun and is headed to your home. I would be wrong not to warn you.
 2. But, what if I know a man you recently met has a criminal record for a crime committed thirty or forty years ago when he was a young man. He has reformed, converted to Christ even. His past has no bearing on your relationship with him. What is to be gained by telling about his crime?
- C. The principles of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 give us a workable method of evaluation.
1. Will it be kind?
 2. Am I telling because I am envious?
 3. Does telling it fuel my pride?
 4. Am I rude with the truth?
 5. Do I tell because I am self-seeking?
 6. Am I keeping a record of wrongs?
 7. Do I delight in knowing about others' "dirt"?
 8. Do I rejoice in their good?

Conclusion

1. The 2100-year-old wisdom of ben Sirach remains relevant: "7 Never repeat a conversation, and you will lose nothing at all. 8 With friend or foe do not report it, and unless it would be a sin for you, do not disclose it; . . . 13 Question a friend, perhaps he did not do it; but if he did anything, so that he may do it no more. 14 Question a neighbor, perhaps he did not say it; but if he said it, so that he may not say it again. 15 Question a friend, for often it is slander; so do not believe everything you hear" (Sirach 19:7-8, 13-15, RSV).
2. Resolve to help strangle the grapevine. You, the people you spare from hurt, and the world generally will be better for it. More importantly, God will be pleased!

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³ Ken Durham, *Speaking from the Heart: Richer Relationships through Communication*, 55.