

If You Can't Prove It, Don't Say It

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One of the great problems in the church today is the loose tongue from an undisciplined mind. Nearly every congregation has at least one. Friendships of many years are severed by a few brief statements filled with poison instead of truth. Charges and countercharges are hurled back and forth between brethren who are alienated because of false statements by someone.

"Let no corrupt" (rotten, i.e., worthless, bad, corrupt) "communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29). "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25).

One of the most sinister acts perpetrated against a human being is the accusation against him of some evil that is not so. When one wants to hurt another's reputation and destroy his influence for good, he makes a malicious charge of something completely foreign to that person's life style, and which cannot be proved. History is replete with evidence of kings, emperors, rulers, statesmen and presidents suffering from the blows of these verbal, venomous blasts by their enemies. In the same vein some of these rulers have made similar unfounded false charges against those who would oppose their ruling. Envy, jealousy, and bitterness are at the heart of these false charges that have been made to inflict injury.

To be more practical in this study, I want to refer to some incidents of which I have first hand knowledge. Twenty years ago word came to me that it was reported in California that my wife had left me for another man, and that I refused to forgive her and pray for her when she asked for forgiveness. Some people who heard this were well acquainted with my wife and me, and could not reconcile the report with facts they knew a very few years before when they were in my home often while in school. I assured those who asked that there was not one iota of truth in the charge. It was a false accusation that had no substance in reality. Only an evil heart would produce such an unbelievable story. It grew out of an effort to "get even with me" for opposing sin in the church, which eventually resulted in a few leaving the church rather than repent.

It is one thing to make a charge that is untrue, and it is quite another thing to prove it. Since when have false accusers been interested in trying to prove their lies? The Jews charged Jesus with having a devil, and speaking blasphemy. The unbelievable assault on Christ was believed by many in his day who did not ask for proof. The Pharisees charged Christ with *blasphemy*. "Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy" (Matt. 26:65). They wanted no proof. They just wanted him charged with a crime that would take his life. "Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death" (Mark 14:64). This charge was made without any vestige of proof.

Now why would anyone say such a thing without any evidence? The answer is that they wanted to reduce that man's reputation to nothing in the minds of other people. They had a bad motive in speaking the lie.

When the chief priests and elders condemned Jesus to death and delivered him to Pontius Pilate to be put to death, Pilate asked him of the accusation against him, "And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearst thou not how many things they witness against thee?" (Matt. 21:12-13). "For he knew that for envy they had delivered him" (Matt. 27:18). There is the story! Pilate asked Christ to verify the evil charges against him by the scribes and chief priest. They said many things against Christ that they could not prove, and indeed, they did not try to prove it. However, Pilate knew why they had delivered Christ and had told these lies. It was for envy!

The chief priests and elders of the people sought false witnesses against him. "And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together" (Mark 14:55-56). The Holy Spirit called these witnesses false. They could not agree among themselves.

Having condemned him to death in their own council for blasphemy, they brought him before Pilate. "And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing. And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee" (Mark 15:3-4). Pilate asked them what evil Christ had done (Mark 15:14), and they only cried, Crucify him!

The inspired account of the proceedings that followed the false accusations against Christ that resulted in his death is recorded in Luke 23:1-15. It tells the story of false charges against an innocent person. In this case it was Jesus the Christ.

"And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it. Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man. And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves. And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him" (Luke 23:1-15).

Not one of the charges made by the chief priests and elders could be proven, and Pilate and Herod found him innocent. The chief priests and scribes had charged Jesus with: 1) perverting the nation, 2) forbidding people to give tribute to Caesar, 3) claiming that he was a king instead of Caesar. To all this Pilate said, I find no fault in this man. When the multitude cried, Crucify him, Crucify him, Pilate asked them again: "And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go" (Luke 23:22).

Jesus Left Us an Example

Christ left us an example of dealing with false accusers who press lies against us: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:21-23).

His example is that he did not sin, and we should strive not to sin. "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid" (Rom. 6:6-15).

The third chapter of Colossians is devoted to the destruction of the practice of sin in the body and the seeking of the things above where Christ is at the right hand of God. Every verse in this chapter directs us toward abolishing sin in our lives and put on the things of the Spirit.

Jesus left the example of having no guile in his mouth. What does guile mean? It is from a term that indicates a trick (bait), i.e., deception, a wile: craft, deceit, guile, subtlety. Jesus did not use trick language to deceive people.

When Jesus was reviled, he did not revile again. Revile is to return evil speaking. From a word which means to make light of, to bring into contempt, accuse, despise, to defame, chide, taunt, suffer reproach, upbraid; to vilify, to speak impiously of, to speak evil.

The example is that when we are reviled, we do not revile back. Of course, efforts should be made to correct false accusations if possible, but if the false charges continue with no real effort to prove them, we should not retaliate against the accusers with lies. When we are falsely accused of wrong doing, we do not counter with a greater charge of evil. To do this secretly is even worse.

Jesus said, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of Judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:36-37).

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