

Job 11 • Using Truth to Hide Opinion

Introduction

There are a couple of times in the Bible when people are told to withhold the whole truth.

When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them.”

Revelation 10:4

God’s revelation of knowledge and wisdom does not come with a license to employ whenever it suits us. Job is replete with examples of people that apply biblical truth out of context. In the case of Zophar’s first response to Job, he establishes a framework of individual truths to hold up his own opinion. It gives his opinion the air of legitimacy and appearance of being a truth from God. But in the end it is nothing more than a misapplied opinion that is characteristic of someone more concerned about “preaching” a message than “ministering” to a need.

¹Then Zophar the Naamathite answered,

²“Shall a multitude of words go unanswered,

And a talkative man be acquitted?

³Shall your boasts silence men?

And shall you scoff and none rebuke?

⁴For you have said, ‘My teaching is pure,

And I am innocent in your eyes.’

⁵But would that God might speak,

And open His lips against you,

⁶And show you the secrets of wisdom!

For sound wisdom has two sides.

Know then that God forgets a part of your iniquity.

[Read v.1-6]

Q: What gives away Zophar’s position from the outset?

A: He presents what he believes to be a rhetorical question, “*Shall a multitude of words go unanswered*”, which in reality is **not** rhetorical at all.

Q: Why shouldn’t this be a rhetorical question?

A: Because the answer might actually be “Yes”. Zophar betrays that he **personally** cannot allow Job to go unanswered. It’s only rhetorical in that Zophar is not seeking God’s counsel as to what might be the appropriate response, but assumes that he himself must answer. It’s only rhetorical where Zophar is concerned.

Application: Are there ever times when it’s more appropriate **NOT** to respond to someone? What does it say about us when we allow our desire to express our opinion to overtake our love for another or even submission to God?

Q: What does Zophar think of Job to this point? What are the keywords by which Zophar describes Job in v.2-3?

A: “Talkative”, “boasts”, and “scoff”. Zophar basically believes that Job is using words to justify or excuse or disguise sin and unrighteousness. Zophar does not give credence to anything Job has spoken, attributing it to the ravings of someone that is in denial of their unrighteous condition.

Q: What is the nature of Zophar’s desire for God’s intervention in Job’s life?

A: “*But would that God might speak and open His lips **against** you*”. (v.5) Zophar is more desirous of God’s judgment than mercy, which would justify Zophar’s view of what is going on in Job’s life and utterly destroy Job’s view.

Q: What is Zophar’s point in v.6, “Know then that God forgets a part of your iniquity”?

A: Zophar’s taking a truth—that no one is righteous before God—and using it to discount Job’s claims of innocence by stating, in effect, “So what—you’re guilty no matter what, so stop avoiding the issue of sin.” He is using a truth to give his words the air and legitimacy of God’s truth, even though it’s really just an opinion.

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⁷“Can you discover the depths of God?
Can you discover the limits of the
Almighty?
⁸They are high as the heavens, what
can you do?
Deeper than Sheol, what can you
know?
⁹Its measure is longer than the earth
And broader than the sea.
¹⁰If He passes by or shuts up,
Or calls an assembly, who can restrain
Him?
¹¹For He knows false men,
And He sees iniquity without
investigating.
¹²An idiot will become intelligent
When the foal of a wild donkey is born
a man.

Q: What is the message that Job is getting concerning Zophar?

A: Zophar is neither listening to Job nor really concerned for Job; Zophar is showing that he is first and foremost concerned about Zophar, caring more about being right than being a friend.

Application: Does a fellow Believer's life have to be perfect before we can listen to them? How should we treat the words of someone undergoing great stress and trials—could they be ministering to **US** as much as we to **THEM**? How well do we suppress the urge to speak for ourselves? How well do we acknowledge that in the absence of God's direct revelation through us, that it's **demanding** of us to remain silent where our own words and opinions are concerned?

[Read v. 7-12]

Q: Are v.7-12 the expression of Zophar's opinion or the substance of biblical truth?

A: They are biblical truth because they speak only of the characteristics of God and can be substantiated by other passages of Scripture.

Q: So what do you think Zophar is trying to do? Would you characterize his efforts as “ministering” to Job or “preaching” to Job? What's the difference?

A: Zophar is “preaching” to Job. That is, he's conveying truth that neither actually applies to Job's particular situation, nor gives Job comfort. It does not lead to any kind of reconciliation or healing. Zophar is more concerned about getting out his message than addressing Job's need.

Q: What in the world does v.12 mean? How is Zophar applying it to Job?

A: The Hebrew word used could be literally translated “a wild-donkey man”. It's a proverb describing the untamed wildness of man, wherein man wishes to give the appearance that he is wisely obedient to God, but in reality lives according to his own unsubdued spirit from birth. [See Jeremiah 2:24 and Genesis 16:12.] Zophar—in the vernacular of the day—is calling Job a hypocrite, that Job's faith was only from the mouth and not from the heart.

Point: Like Zophar, some people believe that if the listener isn't responding to one's message the way they think they should, the listener is branded as “the problem”, when many times the issue actually resides with the speaker.

¹³“If you would direct your heart right
 And spread out your hand to Him,
¹⁴If iniquity is in your hand, put it far
 away,
 And do not let wickedness dwell in
 your tents;
¹⁵Then, indeed, you could lift up your
 face without moral defect,
 And you would be steadfast and not
 fear.
¹⁶For you would forget your trouble,
 As waters that have passed by, you
 would remember it.
¹⁷Your life would be brighter than
 noonday;
 Darkness would be like the morning.
¹⁸Then you would trust, because there
 is hope;
 And you would look around and rest
 securely.
¹⁹You would lie down and none would
 disturb you,
 And many would entreat your favor.
²⁰But the eyes of the wicked will fail,
 And there will be no escape for them;
 And their hope is to breathe their last.”

[Read v.13-20]

Q: According to v.13-14, what are the specific steps that Zophar tells Job to take in order to remedy the situation?

1. “Direct your heart right” (v.13)
2. “Spread out your hand to Him” (v.13)
3. “Put it [iniquity] far away” (v.14)
4. “Do not let wickedness dwell in your tents” (v.14)

Q: According to v.15-19, what are the things Zophar states Job will gain if he follows Zophar’s 4-step program?

1. “You could lift up your face without moral defect” (v.15)
2. “You would be steadfast” (v.15)
3. “You would...not fear” (v.15)
4. “You would forget your trouble” (v.16)
5. “Your life would be brighter” (v.17)
6. “You would trust” (v.18)
7. “You would...hope” (v.18)
8. “You would...rest securely” (v.18)
9. “None would disturb you” (v.19)
10. “Many would entreat your favor” (v.19)

Q: Because we know the *WHOLE* story of Job—in particular what transpired between Satan and God—what can we say about Zophar’s discourse?

A: Although it cites things that are, in themselves, true, it is not applicable to Job. It is based entirely on the wrong assumptions for the causes of Job’s ills.

Point: Both a man that can’t swim who falls into a lake and a man being chased by a lion are in danger of losing their life—but the circumstances that got them there are entirely different, and the advice on how to swim is useless to the one running from the lion. In either case, how useful would they find a person that showed up in the middle of their predicament who said, “You know what your problem is? Let me tell you all about how I see it”. And although we weren’t there to witness it, assuming that the presence of the lake or lion are the fault of the dying man’s to begin with.

Overall Application

- Are we always bound to respond to every person, to everything that they say?
- Even when we think we know the truth, do we need to pause to seek God’s guidance in how to apply and convey it? Does knowledge—even biblical truth—give us license to speak it whenever we want?
- What are the lessons here concerning false teachers? Do we see why we need to evaluate their teaching in order to discern what is applicable biblical truth versus what may be their own opinion disguised by the truth?