

Speaking the Truth in Love

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In Ephesians chapter four, Paul explains how saints are to grow in the image of Jesus and become mature. He says that we are not to be like children who are easily persuaded one way and then the other (Eph. 4:14). Through deception and trickery, we can be led to believe almost anything. As Christians, we are not to be easily persuaded. We are to be grounded in the truth of what God accomplished through Jesus. Once grounded, we can begin to grow.

As we grow, we are to become equipped to teach the truth to others. One trait of maturity is the carefully honed skill of teaching. In this chapter, Paul tells saints how they were to teach. They were to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

Have we learned how to speak the truth in love? Today, we live in a culture in which we are encouraged to speak. As a matter of first importance, we have a right to speak according to our Bill of Rights. This has often caused us to speak, but without love. Social media has enabled us to speak instantaneously, but often with little thought.

For most of us, speaking is not a problem. We will voice what we think on a matter. Our struggle is often with how we speak. Too often, we will speak the truth in anger. We will speak the truth in frustration. We will speak the truth in arrogance. But, rarely will we speak the truth in love. Rarely, will we speak the truth with patience. Rarely, will we speak the truth with understanding and empathy.

Yes, we must speak the truth. However, just as important as what we say is how and why we say it. Consider some Biblical wisdom for speaking the truth in love.

1. Remember to listen. Listening has been described as an art. Like anything else done well, listening requires learning. Do we know how to listen to people with different viewpoints? It seems as a nation we are losing the ability to listen to each other.

The irony of our culture is that technology has undermined our ability to effectively communicate. Social media is often used to debate differing viewpoints; yet, people are rarely dissuaded from their viewpoint. Social media is a platform to rant and rave. We use it to enrage and embarrass. Not much listening is done.

Solomon said, *“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame”* (Prov. 18:13). Rather than just react and reload, listen when someone else is speaking. Sadly, some feel as if they do not have to listen because they have the truth. They are blinded by arrogance. Speaking the truth in love involves listening.

2. Examine yourself. The Bible urges us to examine ourselves: *“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”* (2 Cor. 13:5). Do we do this when

we are teaching someone the truth? This may seem strange; however, we can learn from those with whom we may disagree.

We all have blind spots. We may have beliefs that are nothing more than misrepresentations of the truth. We may have beliefs that are nothing more than traditions. Discussing the Scriptures with someone we disagree with will test our beliefs. We all need to have our beliefs challenged. This is part of the process by which we examine ourselves and grow. By nature, truth is subject to investigation. If what we believe fails the test of truth, we must change our belief.

3. Recognize differences. Speaking the truth in love requires making wise discernments in the kinds of people we teach. While the basic need for salvation is the same for everyone, everyone is different. People come from different walks of life. People have different religious backgrounds. People have different experiences that have influenced their beliefs. Being a mature teacher means being able to recognize these differences and adjust our approach accordingly.

For example, Jesus quietly taught the truth to a Samaritan woman in John chapter four. Jesus discussed some controversial subjects with her: marriage, worship, and His true identity. This woman was quite receptive to Jesus throughout their conversation. She had a willingness to learn and obey.

In John chapter five, Jesus dealt with a very different group of people. Jesus healed a lame man at the Pool of Bethesda. His miracle incurred the anger of the Jews. They wanted to kill Jesus. Yet, Jesus forcefully declared His true identity.

Now, these two chapters in John's gospel show the Master Teacher treating different people according to their differences. He spoke the same truth but did so based upon the character of the people involved.

4. Be honest. Speaking the truth in love involves a certain type of attitude. We must have an attitude of honesty in our teaching. Honesty begins with ourselves. If our beliefs are proven to be unscriptural, we must be honest enough to receive correction.

Luke writes about a dynamic public speaker in Corinth who knew the Scriptures: Apollos. As knowledgeable as he was, he did not know about the baptism commanded by Jesus (Acts 18:24-28). Two wise and loving disciples, Priscilla and Aquila, privately corrected Apollos. This must have been a humbling experience for Apollos. Thankfully, he was willing to receive correction and implement his new-found understanding of the truth into his teaching.

5. Avoid arguing. Speaking the truth in love means avoiding arguing. Paul told Timothy, *"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will"* (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

People might be entertained by arguing, but they are rarely persuaded by it. People are not persuaded by being shouted at, over, or down. The goal of teaching is not to be the loudest in the room or to win an argument. The goal of our teaching is to persuade someone to acknowledge their sin and repent. This requires sensitivity and kindness. This can only be done when we speak the truth in love.

Conclusion

The command to speak the truth in love applies to a variety of people. First, those in leadership positions must speak the truth. Elders, preachers and teachers will be held accountable for how they spoke to those they attempted to lead (Jas. 3:1).

Secondly, husbands and wives must speak the truth in love as they strive to reflect the glory of God by their marriage (1 Pet. 3:1-7). Speaking the truth in love will greatly help to solve conflicts in marriages.

Thirdly, this command applies to how parents rear their children. If they are not careful in how they teach, they can provoke their children to anger (Eph. 6:4).

God has persuaded us to obey Him through self-giving love. Therefore, if we are going to be like Him and His Son, we must use love to persuade other people to obey Him. All Christians must learn to speak the truth in love.