

<b>Topic</b>	Speaking the Truth in Love
<b>Reference</b>	Ephesians 4:15
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We live in a culture where we don't know how to speak the truth in love. Husbands find it difficult to talk to their wives and the wives tell the same thing. We have the same issue with our children, you talk to the children, they put on the headphones and then go on the iPad. So this is an issue and it happens very much in church.

Today we are going to do an overview and we are going to talk about two things.

1. How to talk about sensitive difficult topics like suicide, depression, violence, postpartum depression.
2. How to talk about things where, I just don't get on with you. You get on my nerves. How do I get that across.

**SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE IN RELATION TO SENSITIVE ISSUES:**

- Not taught in school, work or church ON how to discuss sensitive issues lovingly.
- Consequently we pretend like these issues don't exist to maintain some semblance that everything is ok.
- Love rejoices in the truth - 1 Cor 13.6. as we are not practicing this therefore our love for each other is crippled.

So if am church and I had an issue in the past, something bad happened to me in the past. I am not going to bring it up to you, if I am struggling with postpartum depression, I am not going to talk to you. If I have a kid who is suicidal, I am not going to talk to you. If one of my children is gay, I am not going to talk to you. I am going to come to church and say, hi brother Arnold praise the Lord.

**SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE IN RELATION TO CONFRONTATION:**

- Not taught in school, work or church ON how to confront others lovingly.
- Consequently we repress how we feel about others to maintain some semblance of peace.
- Let's be very honest, we all don't get on with one another in church and some characters like me how are a bit more irritating, even worse. So that's the truth, but love rejoices in the truth - 1 Cor 13.6. as we are not practicing this therefore our love for each other is crippled.

Our text today is fantastic.

*You are facing some issues in your marriage. According to the text you should approach your spouse and speak the truth in love. This should be done gently in a none confrontational manner.*

It is false, that is not what the text is teaching. In fact, the Bible has places where the confrontation is very brutal. You will find it in Galatians, Paul rebukes Peter publicly. You look at the Letter to the Corinthian church, it is so brutal. In 2-Corinthians, Paul had to explain why he wrote such a brutal letter. In the letter to the Galatians, he calls them you foolish Galatians, very brutal. So the text isn't saying it. Now I am not saying that it is wrong to do it, in fact it is great if all of us had this practice where we got a issue and we are going to go to the other party and says, dear I got a problem and I want to talk to you. How many of us actually do that? 99.9% of us just don't do that, we just keep quiet.

There is another problem with this. You can be very nice about it, but your intention could be wrong. So just because I talk to you nicely, gently and all of that, it is just technique, but my heart will be very far away.

The gospel truth is the foundation of all truths. So when the text talks about speaking the truth in love, you got to look at the bookends of the book.

Ephesians 1:13a

**<sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.**

So the context here is false teaching. How we are going to lead that to speaking to truth on a personal level. At the end of the Book of Ephesians, he says the same thing.

Ephesians 6:14

**<sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place**

In between there are two main themes happening in the Book of Ephesians; how God in the cosmic manner brings all creation under the cross and from chapters 2 onwards, the whole thing deals with the unity of the church. We are going to merge the two together. Now look at what he says here, instead speaking of speaking the truth in love,

we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

So truth is not just a process, it is a corporate process. So you want to know whether you feel what you feel about Arnold Lim is right, it is not just you and me, it is a process which involves the whole church. That's the key here. That's what really is one of the main drivers of Ephesians. Now let see how we break this down.

The text links with that very famous prayer in the earlier chapter, because he begins out with the word, 'then' and we had that fantastic prayer about how wide, long and deep is the love of God. So that ties to this. It not only ties to the chapter before, it ties to the chapter after this because he says, so I tell you this and after that we have this whole section of putting off the old selves and putting on the new self and that it goes onto marriage, it goes onto work. So how you behave at work, how you behave in your marriage, how you behave in church, is tied to this chapter, is tied to that famous prayer. That's that big picture of the whole thing. I give you three points:

- Before you speak, how sure are you it's the truth?
- Speak the truth in love by living the truth in love.
- Speaking the truth in love is a community endeavor, not a solo effort.

So lets look at the way, unity is just all over the text and there are actually three main sections in it. We are going to break it down. The first one verses 3 to 5, Paul really talks about we are all one. Remember in the chapter beforehand, he talks about how gentiles and Jews, no longer wall of hostility, now you are one. This text is very similar to 1-Cor 12, one body, one spirit, one Lord, one Baptism. So here in these verses, he stresses unity. It go down to verses 9 onwards to verses 11, he talks about the various offices of the church. Again, you should cross-reference to 1-Cor 12 and Romans 12, these three all have offices, all have gifts. From unity he is going to diversity. Verse 14 onwards 15,

<sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

He is now going on maturity. So you get unity, diversity and maturity and the glue that holds it together is the gospel, because the gospel manifests the love. Let me just break it down together. So this is what you call the breeding ground for speaking the truth in love. You don't have this breeding ground; it is just you versus me. Your opinion, my opinion. You need a church which is united. United

is not the same as uniformity, united simply means that all of us have one common goal and the goal is the cross. The gospel broke down all barriers. That's the chapter beforehand and then there is diversity which is the key theme in Ephesians. Diversity between Jews and gentiles. In Galatians, men, women, slave, free, all of this various offices, various gifts, diversity, different ages, it is like what we see here today and that is difficult because diversity often brings conflict and so you move to maturity.

Let me try to go this down a little bit deeper. 9/11,

Narrative 1: Demonstrates the dangers of religious extremism. If you do a poll amongst Southern Baptist in America or what you call the rustbelt of America. 99.9% will say, see this is what you get when we are too tolerant on immigration issues. Tighten up the airports. Some religions are just extremist.

Now take this picture and bring it to Palestine, take it to Iraq, take it to the Middle East, take it to Jordan and this narrative will come out

Narrative 2: Demonstrates the deadly consequences of a foreign policy that destroys nations.

This is not unity, it is uniformity. You are white, conservative, churchgoing, narrative 1. You are Arab, Middle Eastern, Christian or Muslim, narrative 2. What is the similarity? Different racial group. So that's uniformity. That's what Paul is trying to drive at. Let me give you something simpler, belt and road initiative.

Same group of people will tell you, it is a predatory debt trap. You go into all of this; the Chinese will put you in debt trap. I find it quite hypocritical because the same people didn't say any of this thing when the IMF brought a lot of people into debt in the 80s. Take this narrative to China, they say it is win-win.

The issue here is again same thinking to a particular racial group. What I am trying to tell you is this, our thinking is very much conditioned by the group and if the group is all the same in race, same in social standing, same in certain things, you will take the beliefs of the group. They call this group thing, or they call this the illusionary truth effect. So if you are in a church that tells you speaking in tongues is bad, is bad, is bad, you will go on and say it is bad. You go to a church where they say, everyone should speak in tongues, you will say that yes everyone should speak in tongues. The group has a lot of impact on you. So the evangelical church needs diversity.

Rustbelt Americans, so long you are pro-life, antigay, pro-Israel, everything else goes out of the window. Because you measure truth only by these three things, it is a moral proposition. Now I tell you why is this so deadly for us. Let me give you a statement,

*"The time is fulfilled for the German people of Hitler. It is because of Hitler that Christ, God the helper and redeemer, has become effective among us. ... Hitler is the way of the Spirit and the will of God for the German people to enter the Church of Christ."*

German pastor Hermann Gruner.

When Germany was reeling from national disaster from the first World War, group things happens, we are ashamed, we all need to think forward, you will blind yourself to horrors that come except for one man called Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the confessing church. Why I am telling you all of this? Because you are a product not of the Bible, we are a product of the group you hang around with.

Paul recognizes that issue, he don't want to have a breeding of a group, you have no idea what it does to your brain. That is what he is saying. Ephesians is an interesting book because it is very generic. It doesn't give you a much of the social context like 1-Cor or Galatians but in Ephesus there was a famous temple called the Temple of Artemis. We just talked about uniformity. Here is another thing which Paul talks about which is very dangerous. So we have one of the dangers which is uniformity. Here is another one, those time the gods were on the hill and the gods create confusion. Because one god says this and the other says that. All the gods have various views. Today the biggest religion which everyone practices, even in the church, the gods are not on the hill, the gods are in the valley, to be more accurate they are the gods of Silicon Valley. This is your god today, social media.

They have data and they are not doing it because they really want to help you, they are mining data to milk you for stuff. They have deceitful intention. Data is king, not cash. Because data profits people. You can see the studies. People are killing themselves by a vote on social media and the church has to respond. So this part of what we are doing today. So Paul says this,

**4<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.**

On one hand, uniformity, you become dumb. The other dumb, diversity, without an anchor you just pick what you want. Your itchy ears gather what you want to hear and there are cunning people who sell you stuff, they sell you whatever you want and that frames your thinking and whether it frames your thinking, you cannot speak the truth in love, because your mind has been downloaded a lot of crap.

So the world flips and flops but we anchor ourselves in a few things. Paul is telling you to anchor yourself in the gospel truth and scripture. Then you anchor yourself in the community which is united by that by diverse. With that you are able to speak the truth in love. How does this then flow on? Paul tells you he flows this on into few areas. In your family life, in your work life and in fact in your place in the world. That's chapter 1. Let me give you a simple example.

You have an argument with me, and you don't like me. In your view, what I did to you was wrong. That's a proposition which is very common. How do you discern truth from this? Let me give you four points:

1. Is it built on a careful diverse study of scripture?
2. Does it build the other party up?

Paul is saying that get into a culture of talking to people who are different, get into the culture of reading scripture from various points, get into the culture of building yourself out, suddenly speaking the truth is easier and when all else fails because we are such sinful people and we will hurt each other with word we say, he gives you the final glue, thus the love of Christ hold the way you are processing the issue, because chapter 3 tells us, he says church I pray that you can find, how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and once I have the love of Christ and is so much in me, I look at you and suddenly you don't look so ugly after all. That's how he is trying to do it. This is such a simple truth and all of us fail in this.

The more you know the bible, the high you are up in church leadership, the worse it is because you and I lack humility which is the first thing Paul starts off in chapter 4.

### **SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE IN LIVING THE TRUTH IN LOVE:**

Leon Morris says, truthing the love. Meaning chapter 4 goes in the hills of chapter 5 because he ends verse 17, I tell you and insist in the Lord you must not live like this in the thinking and then he tells you putting on a new self. Meaning, speaking the truth in love flows with living the truth in love. They flow. In simple English, you can't speak the truth in love if the other person doesn't believe you

love them. It is simple as that and we fail to communicate that across. That famous prayer comes with a doxology and the doxology is telling you, God can do a lot of stuff in you. Whatever you want is not the answer, be able to live a life worthy of the calling. That's how the text tie. There are three qualities: To be humble, gentle, patient and bear with one another. In simple English we call this biblical empathy.

Say your wife has a nail in her head. The nail is the metaphor for the problem she is facing. What would the husband do? Men say, remove the nail and the problem is solved. But for the wife, it is feel my pain, you don't understand, you always try to solve things, you never listen to me, you always think about yourself. They call this being empathetic to the pain. To remove the nail, you must feel her pain first. She is not going to let you remove the nail unless you feel the pain. That is really the gospel story. God saw us in the pain of our sin and he came down to take our shape, our flesh and he took that pain on the cross. It is not about the nail, it is about the nails that were driven into the cross. That is biblical empathy.

#### **SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE ON SENSITIVE MATTERS:**

- Check your *agenda* before speaking (**truth**).
- Put yourself in their shoes (**humility**).
- Don't give your views first. Ask for clarification (**patience**).
- Don't subconsciously interrogate or accuse (**gentleness**).
- Be conscious to affirm – verbal and nonverbal (**gentleness**).
- Explore *together* solutions- empower the other part (**patience**).
- When all else fails learn to *de-escalate* the situation (**bearing with one another**).

Sometime the tone of voice goes up, you learn not to threaten and not to argue, challenge, argue, order and shame, we all do this subconsciously. We all struggle with this.

#### **SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE IS A COMMUNITY ENDEAVOR, NOT A SOLO EFFORT**

The text is about unity, diversity and maturity. There is this instillation artist who did what she call a confession booth in Vegas. Basically, you walk into the studio and you write a confession and then you put it up and so people write a lot of stuff. It became very famous and went viral. So I looked at some of the stuff people write, I began to realize one thing, people need to ventilate and sometimes the ventilation shows deadly symptoms. So let me ask you, when was

the last time you ventilated. Do we even give people here a platform to ventilate. So I come to church and I really-really struggling with loneliness, I put on a face, I say hi and I go back, I really want to scream out certain things. We criticize the charismatic church for their alter calls. That may be true but at least the charismatics have a platform but here what we do in this church we bottle everything up. That's why we cannot speak the truth in love because we build walls and people can't come in.

So what does Paul teach us:

1. He is teaching the church to be a confessing community. If confession comes before rebuking, is easier to do it. There was a young American missionary called Zack, who really taught me this. There was somebody who offended him so much, but he started off by confessing his own sins. You see, if all of us learn to confess and make it a habit to publicly confess. Paul confess publicly about his past. Augustine wrote a book about his confession of sins. If we all learn to confess and that becomes our diet, becomes our normality, it is easier to rebuke. Why? Because everyone sees our faults. But if you start to rebuke before confessing, people will put a wall. You will never speak the truth in love. So we need to create this culture of confessing.

So everything I taught you today, I am not a good example. I am probably the last guy to teach this. So I am teaching myself, I am impulsive, I say things without thinking, I shoot my trap off, but if all of us learn to confess simple things, the sinner in your midst who struggles with the deep sin won't feel so bad. The person who has some hurt in his past won't feel so bad. Suddenly, this church will become more vulnerable.

Here is another point about community endeavor.

**<sup>11</sup>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip his people for works of service,**

The same thing happens in 1-Cor 12 and in Romans 12, meaning there are certain people who can carry the truth better than you. You can just do a bit, the other person will do a bit. So here is how it works, the apostles tell something, the prophet solidify it, the evangelist preach it, the pastors teach it and then after it, it goes down to the common person. So here is how it works, maybe today in church you heard something. After that what happens, you go out and you talk to someone in Garden Café. Someone takes that and speaks to you. Then next week you go to a prayer meeting, someone speaks to you. You see

speaking the truth is something we all do, every single one of us. It is not something that I do alone, it is something we do together.

I want to challenge us to take a small step.

- Before you speak, how sure are you it's the truth?
- Speak the truth in love by living the truth in love.
- Speaking the truth in love is a community endeavor, not a solo effort.

The last verse says this,

**4<sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**

In our midst of today, there are some of us who are struggling with issues. They won't tell you or me, how do you and I get them to a point where they will speak it to someone else, so that they can be comforted. They only do it if we all do our part.