



Practical Peacemaking #2: SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

I. INTRO

A. Happy Father's Day

B. Imagine picking your car up from the shop after a routine servicing and the technician says, "This car is in great shape, there is not a thing wrong with it."

1. Later that day, the engine light goes on and you find that you've been driving with very little oil – and now your engine is ruined.
2. You go back to the shop, and you say, "Why didn't you tell me?" The technician replies, "Well, I didn't want you to feel bad. Plus, to be honest, I was afraid you might get upset with me. I want this to be a safe place where you feel loved and accepted." You'd be furious! You'd say, "I didn't come here for an ego massage! When it comes to my car, I want the truth."

C. Or imagine going to the doctor's office for your yearly physical. The doctor says to you, "You are in the best health of anyone I have ever seen – you have the heart and lungs of an Olympic athlete. You are to be congratulated."

1. Later that day you're on the Stairmaster at the gym and your heart gives out and the paramedics come and rush you to the hospital.
2. You're in ICU and your doctor comes by and you say, "Why didn't you tell me the truth?" The doctor says, "Well, I knew your heart was in pretty bad shape, but if I tell people stuff like that, they get kind of offended – and it's bad for business. I want my office to be a safe place where people feel loved and accepted." You'd be furious! You'd say to the doctor, "When it comes to my body, I want the truth!"

D. We are in the second part of a 2-part series we're calling *Practical Peacemaking*.

II. BODY

1. Today we looking at Ephesians 4:15 – "*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*" -- Ephesians 4:15

2. The first thing we need to do is to clear up a misconception about Eph 4:15:
 - a. This verse is often taken out of context.
 - 1) Many believe the phrase, "*speak the truth in love*," means, "Tell it like it is, but gently." Like: if a student bombed a test or if a person loses his or her job, you may have to do the tough work of telling them the truth, but you need to soften the blow.
 - 2) Many have thought that when we need to share difficult things that a person needs to hear about it in a gentle way.
 - b. While gentleness is certainly an important part of loving someone, this verse is not talking about that.
 - c. The context of Eph 4:15 is primarily about doctrinal truth—truth about God and about His Son.
 - 1) The first three chapters of Eph deal with our position and calling in Christ.
 - 2) Paul is saying in Eph that a true understanding of Christianity does not begin by DOING but begins with what has been DONE. We are invited to relax and enjoy all that God has done for us in Christ. We are to rest in Him.
 - 3) And notice, even in 4:11 – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are all agents of truth. Each office centers on the truth of God the gospel.
 - d. So, when we speak the truth in love it means we are speaking truth ABOUT God and ABOUT Jesus and ABOUT the gospel. It means speaking biblical truth, spiritual truth, truth about life as God sees it.
 - e. So, *speaking the truth in love* is how we are to minister and equip one another. We speak truth about what Christ has DONE – and we are to speak it in God's sacrificial love (*agape*). Both are crucial. Truth (or, knowledge) and love.
 - f. "*Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*" --1 Corinthians 8:1b
Knowledge without love puffs up, but love without knowledge is confused and aimless, and disintegrates into sentimentality. That's why Paul prays in Philippians 1:9 "*That your love might abound more and more in all knowledge and discernment.*" --Philippians 1:9

- g. Love abounding in knowledge and discernment is what builds the body of Christ.
3. The second thing we are to see in this verse is that we cannot call ourselves mature until we are able to *“speak the truth in love.”* Notice again the plain words of the text: *“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up...”*
- a. When was the last time you were frustrated or fearful, or angry and spoke harshly to someone else? When was the last time you lost your temper? [Reacting vs. Responding]
 - b. Here’s a second question: Was the last time you spoke harshly or angrily just a flash of immaturity or does it happen on a fairly regular basis? Are you willing to ask your spouse? Or your friends? Or your kids? Or your co-workers how often you tend to speak in anger or with harshness?
4. It is good for us to acknowledge that none of us have mastered this measure of maturity, AND it is good to acknowledge that we want to be mastered by this measure of maturity.
- a. It comes through the gospel. Again, what Paul is seeking to say to the church in Ephesus is that a true understanding of Christianity does not begin by DOING but begins with what Jesus Christ has DONE.
 - b. As we acknowledge the ongoing work of the gospel IN and THROUGH our lives – and our ongoing dependency on the Holy Spirit to both convict and empower us, we can move into maturity.
- B. I would like to spend just a few more minutes to provide you with four practical ways regarding **How to speak the truth in love:** ¹
1. Speak the truth completely
 - a. *“Someone who holds back the truth causes trouble.”* --Proverbs 10:10
 - b. The author is talking about concealing the truth. This verse in Proverbs is actually saying the same thing as Eph 4:15 -- The Greek word for truth in Ephesians 4:15 literally means “non-concealment.”

¹ Adapted from a sermon by Rick Warren.

- c. When we conceal the truth what kind of trouble does it cause?
Resentment, mistrust, and superficiality.
- d. We get into trouble by not saying what we mean and not meaning what we say. The bump in the rug keeps getting bigger and bigger...
- e. If you don't face issues honestly eventually relationships it will explode.
- f. *"In the end people appreciate frankness more than flattery."* -- Proverbs 28:23 (emphasis added) It may be unpleasant at first...
- g. God says, in the end people appreciate honesty. So let's tell the truth completely.

2. Speak the truth consistently

- a. Being honest most of the time is not integrity.
- b. *"Let our lives lovingly express the truth in all things—speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly."* --Ephesians 4:15 (Amp)
- c. Honesty is to be a life style. We need, by God's strength and power to be consistent.
- d. *"People who can't be trusted are destroyed by their own dishonesty."* --Proverbs 11:3
- e. Lying sabotages success and destroys relationships. Every relationship is built on one word -- trust. Truth telling produces trust building. Deception destroys trust.
- f. *"Reliable communication permits progress."* --Proverbs 13:7 If we're not making progress somebody's not telling the truth.

3. Speak the truth lovingly

- a. But being honest does not mean being brutal. *"Speak the truth in a spirit of love."* --Ephesians 4:15 Don't use the truth as a club. Don't beat people over the head with the truth.
- b. Think of somebody you would like to see change. If we want to help somebody change we need to remember two things:
 - 1) People will make better progress when they know they are loved.

- 2) People will perceive truth without love as an attack. It doesn't matter if it is the truth. If we don't feel the love we will resist it and very often become defensive.
 - c. An old Arab proverb: When you shoot an arrow dip it in honey first.
 - d. So, how do we know if I'm speaking the truth in love? We need to ask ourselves, "Who am I trying to benefit from this?" Am I trying to change them so things will be easier on me? Or am I really sharing this with the friend or loved one because I really care about them and want them to be the best they can be. If I'm doing it for their benefit then it's probably speaking the truth in love.
 - e. *"Speak only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen"* --Ephesians 4:29
4. Speak the truth tactfully
- a. *"Thoughtless words can wound as deeply as any sword. But wisely spoken words can heal."* --Proverbs 12:18
 - b. We always have options with our words: we can either hurt people or we can facilitate healing.
 - c. We can develop people or we can destroy people.
 - d. We can build people up or you can tear people down.
 - e. We can delight or we can devastate.
 - f. Words have tremendous power. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is not a true statement. We are called to share with tact.
 - g. Whenever we need to share a tough truth the solution is to use tact, not deception. It is true that the truth sets us free (Jn 8:32), and when we speak the truth we must speak it completely, consistently, lovingly, and tactfully.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. In *Making Peace* the author reminds us that Community, communion, and communicate all come from the root word: *koinonia*, (which he defines as) "to hold things in common." --*Making Peace*, pg. 203

- B. Truth and love work together – truth sanctifies, love sacrifices. ²
- C. We cannot know the truth about ourselves by ourselves. (Mat 7:3-5 logs and specks create blind spots)
- D. The best way for a church to implement speaking the truth in love is by invitation.
 - 1. Do you have some people in your life where you've said, "If you see anything in me at anytime, call me on it."
 - 2. Of course that level of speaking the truth requires trust, and trust takes time, but a church that is not speaking the truth in love is not really practicing Christian community.
 - 3. And there's only one place to find perfect truth and love: it's at the cross of Jesus. Only Jesus can empower us to speak the truth in love. It's only at the cross where we see a full picture of God's grace for us -- and the ugly truth about our sin.
- E. "God never withholds from His child that which His love and wisdom call good. God's refusals are always merciful -- "severe mercies" at times but mercies all the same. God never denies us our hearts desire except to give us something better." --Elizabeth Elliot: Missionary Statesperson, Author, and Widow of Jim Elliot

² *Making Peace*: 205.