

EPHESIANS #61 4:15 3-10-13

TRUTHING IN LOVE

(Ephesians 4) We continue to progress through Paul's magnificent letter. Today we continue our look at his discussion of the church, how it is to function, how it is to grow. **11-16** *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,* ¹² *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;* ¹³ *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.* ¹⁴ *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;* ¹⁵ *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,* ¹⁶ *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.* We spoke last time of the call to maturity that is contained in verses 13-15. The great apostle says we are no longer to be children. We are to grow up to spiritual maturity. We are to be maturing believers. And if you were here I hope you recall the emphasis in the latter part of our study on the key to maturity. What was that key? What is that key? It is the truth. From several texts we saw the connection made between feeding on God's truth and growing as a believer. That message hit home with some of you, but as is typically the case - the sermons that appeal most to some of you rub others the wrong way. Some complained about the things missing in the message last week. *Pastor, what about the love part? It says "speaking the truth in love" and all you talked about was the truth part. And Pastor, what about the Holy Spirit? You can't talk about maturity without including the Holy Spirit.* And then there was the objection raised by those who get troubled whenever we talk about Christian responsibility, Christian duty. There is a school of thought that says you should never do that. "Christianity," they say, "is not a duty thing, it is a grace thing. You have to keep human effort completely out of it." Well, to respond in reverse order: Christianity is a grace thing, a faith thing. I think we made that exceedingly plain in our study of Ephesians 1 and 2, but the same book that teaches us about grace also says we have some responsibilities, some duties, some expectations placed upon us by the God of all grace. Those things don't form the basis of our acceptance with the Father, but they are as clearly taught in the New Testament as is the gospel. As for omitting the Holy Spirit and the element of love I will simply appeal to my limitations of time. I

can't present a comprehensive doctrine of sanctification in 35 minutes. One of the luxuries of preaching week to week is that I can be a little imbalanced one week because I know I have opportunity coming to complete the picture. That is sort of where I am today.

Last Sunday we focused on one word. What was that? "Maturity." Today we focus on five words. Those words contained in verse 15 which tell us what we should do in order to grow up. Here they are: "speaking the truth in love." ® Let's get rolling with our first consideration which I call the tendency of temperament ®. It has been my experience, and I expect yours as well, that most everyone I meet has a certain propensity to either care more about truth or more about love. These two values often strike us as being somewhat in conflict. If you have ever taken a personality profile you know how exasperating they can be. They ask questions like, "If your child came home crying over a bad report card would you comfort him in his disappointment or challenge him to do better." I mean, everybody wants to say "both" but that isn't an option. You sort of have to figure which one of those two is your greatest tendency. Are you more of a challenger or a consoler? Most of you know the answer to that question don't you? Well, this whole business of speaking the truth in love confronts us with two principles of Christian living that sometimes seem in conflict. They seem to be dueling principles. The fact is that some of you are more truth oriented, and others more love oriented. You know what I mean? Which camp do you think I'm in? You don't seem to be struggling enough with that question. You see, if you are like me you have a natural tendency to tell it like it is, call it straight, sometimes without regard for people's feelings. The truth is what counts! Listen, if I have been guilty of this with you either corporately or personally, please let me know. Coach me up a bit. Some of us less-sensitive types need to learn how to mix love in with our message. Temperaments differ. Upbringing differs. The two big influences in my life prior to marriage were my mother and my spiritual father, Jimmy Young - extraordinary people, but sensitivity to the feelings of others was not their strong suit. I married into that. The Spirit of God, speaking through my wife, has been working on me for 33 years so that I stand before you today, not where I want to be, not where I ought to be, but grateful that I am not where I was.

Others of you lean toward the love side. As a result you are prone to tiptoe around the truth and poke at it rather than jumping in with both feet. When faced with doing what seems loving or speaking the truth you may find yourself embracing error. Some people, lots of people, twist the truth because they care so much. One popular Christian teacher I know, is so eager to see people straighten out their lives that he sometimes distorts the word of God to make points that he honestly

believes will help people. Some will invent stories that wonderfully communicate truth but the stories themselves are false. Some of you are willing to cheat a little in order to be a blessing. You are more of a love person than a truth person. Where does righteousness lie? Which group would Jesus be in? You know the answer to that. God is called the God of Truth. And He is called Love. Jesus said, "I am the truth." But his atoning death was the greatest display of love you could imagine. Is Jesus a truth man or a love man? John 1:14 has the answer. **14** *the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.* But which one was dominant? I've wondered how Jesus would score on those personality profiles. The fact is that in Jesus grace and truth, love and veracity are equally dominant. He is perfect. The only reason you or I have a bent in this matter is that we are still sinners. Perfection, Christlikeness, is what we are to pursue, and that involves increasing commitment to the truth and increasing commitment to love. For most of us, one or the other needs greater work.

Let's look then at the call of God to display both qualities, to speak the truth in love. We begin with the truth dimension. I won't be long on this because we spoke of it last time. Interestingly, in the Greek, what is translated "speaking the truth" is actually only one word. It is a participial form of the noun "truth." Literally, it says, *truthing in love*. Not to prejudice your assessment, but truthing or speaking truth is the primary concept of verse 15 - grammatically and exegetically speaking. Whatever this speaking the truth is, it is contrasted with verse 14 about being tossed around by winds and waves, about being brought under the power of falsehood. In that context we may see that Paul is telling us not to change our creed to fit our crowd. We speak truth that doesn't shift depending on our audience. I thought of politicians when I read this. So often they are guilty of dramatically altering their tune depending on their audience. By the way, did you know, that George Washington's first inaugural address lasted only five minutes? That's what you get when you have a politician who won't tell any lies. Just kidding there. I hope your view of politicians isn't really that low. But you know what I mean about how the message shifts with the audience. The creed conforms to the crowd. That can't be for us. Truth doesn't change or waver. We can't shape it to fit our hearers, and we can't shape it to fit ourselves. The lack of care, among Christians, to be truth tellers is really distressing. In our home-school endeavors in years past, our family came across some materials put out by a fine Christian organization in which we read that Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were all homosexuals and even had such relations with each other. Now, I was

astonished by that. I was a Philosophy major in college and have continued my studies since. Nowhere in my readings had I ever encountered this. So, I went back and read thru everything I had on these guys. I called a PhD in philosophy and asked about this. It seems that in one of Plato's dialogues there is an approving reference about homosex but no hint of them being homosexuals. Aristotle was even married and was a strong advocate of family-type values. I wrote the organization in question and they gave me some references which I ordered thru the library and studied. They said nothing of the sort about these men. Finally, all I got from this group was this: the man who wrote that has moved away and we trust him. End subject. This was highly disturbing to me. This was historical slander and it was shrugged off as nothing. Why? Their motivation in this article was to make a moral point. The article argued that the leading shapers of secular thought were morally corrupt and their philosophy was shaped by their corruption. I agree with their point. Paul Johnson wrote an excellent book that argues the same way for 380 pages, but without resorting to falsehood to do it. If this were an isolated case among Christians I'd be thrilled; but it is far from that. In theological arguments, in sermon-making, in political battles we often resort to the enemy's weapon and feel justified for it because we are arguing for the right position; we are helping people with our truth-twisting. It is an ends-justifies-the-means way of thinking and it is not God's way. Dear friends, in your love and zeal, don't get careless with the truth. We grow as we speak the truth. We will say more about this when we get to Ephesians 4:25.

For now, we roll on to point #3 of the day, as we consider the call to be truthing in love. Let's focus on the love dimension. There are two gates that should govern what is allowed to come out of our mouths. There is the gate of truth. Everything must qualify on that score before it is allowed out. But then there is a second gate - the gate of love. Our speaking the truth has to be in love. We can't just say things because they are true. Some people think that is all you need to justify any statement. Not so.

Having something true to say is insufficient grounds to open your mouth. You have to have a reason to say it that is rooted in love. You know, for years, I didn't understand this. Finally, thru Ephesians 4:29, a lot of good teaching and some relational pain I figured this out. Now, I'm striving to make it a consistent practice. Ephesians 4:**29** *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.* You see that? We have a whole sermon on this coming soon to a church near you. But this establishes for us that second gate or guard on our lips. We have to

concern ourselves not only with the truth factor, but with the love factor, and that will greatly influence what we choose to say and how we choose to say it. It will also get us thinking about our heart motivations.

If you have worshipped here long you realize how important we believe truth is. We don't want to compromise what God has handed down to us in His word. We have seen far too much of that. In the early part of this century a group of church leaders saw the gradual eroding away of certain classic and critical Christian truths. They saw the need to take a stand and so they developed a list of what came to be called the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Ten things there were that they said you had to believe to call yourself a Christian. Those who adhered to these ten points were called *Fundamentalists*. In that sense of the word, every true Christian is a fundamentalist. But that word has undergone a certain evolution. *Fundamentalist* is now a bad word, not only in the secular media, but also among most Christians. It is used to refer to jihadist Muslims as well as conservative Christians. Few would willingly wear that title. Why not? Several reasons, but one is because it has come to be associated with a certain, ungracious, strident method of defending one's views. *Fundamentalist* we are called. We love to go after those *liberals*. And the problem is that many have been downright nasty for Jesus' sake. It's true. We sometimes use the Bible like a soldier uses grenades. We haven't been very good listeners, and sometimes we haven't demonstrated much respect and compassion in our disputes. Can I give you another quote out of my book, "From I Do to I'll Sue?" An 84 year old woman shot her husband in the leg with a .38 caliber revolver during an argument over her having kissed a pastor after church. "I tried to tell him it was in the Bible," she told police. Hey, you know, she's right. It is in the Bible. I'll be in the foyer after the service. But may I suggest we have here an example of speaking the truth in something other than love? We often argue for the right position in the wrong way. God calls us to do better than that. There is more to being righteous than being right. Given my disposition I have to watch myself when I write letters defending something I have taught or decided. I can be viciously logical and brutally honest. One thing I've done is this and I wish I could do it in every communication: I write my letter just like I feel it, just like I want to say it. Then I go back and do a second draft, passing it now through that other gate of love. Sometimes when I do that - there is no letter left. I can't send it at all.

Now please, don't think this means that Jesus doesn't want us ever saying things that hurt, doesn't want us ever offending anyone. Not so. Jesus said things that got him killed they were so

offensive. But he said them out of love. In Matthew 15 Jesus calls the pharisees hypocrites, he says **15:8-9** *This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me.* ⁹ *But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men,* That was hard stuff. I could give you harder from the lips of Jesus. I read this one because of verse **12** *Then the disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?”* Duh? This truthing in love may be practiced with soft truths or hard truths. The man who called us to this actually wrote some very sharp rebukes. Read the book of Galatians. Paul jumps all over those people. “Who has bewitched you?” he asked them. He called some *the enemies of Christ*. Apparently, he offended some folks in that church too. In Galatians 4:**16** *So, have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?* Listen, when you speak to someone, you can’t evaluate the character of your message by their reaction to you. Some will respond sweetly to a harsh, spiteful word. Others will get violent in response to the most gentle rebuke. What’s a person to do? You must to guard your heart and check your motives. Examine your words to see if they express adequately both your love and the truth. You can speak or write out of anger - sometimes. Anger is sometimes a good emotion, but only when it is a byproduct of love and not of personal hurt or competitive spirit. What is love? What is it? It goes beyond mere kindness. It is the disposition to seek the best interest of another. ® Lloyd-Jones says, “Love is so powerful that it is prepared to hurt its object in order to win it and to save it and to safeguard it from a dreadful fate.” That great word in Proverbs says, **27:6** *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.* Don’t assume that every hurtful statement flows from an unloving spirit. Not so. ® You young people here. So often the devil tempts you to believe that your parents discipline you, or your parents scold you because they hate you. The very opposite is true. They love you, imperfectly, but truly. Those hard words often come in love with the intention that any pain they inflict would be redemptive pain.

But hey, don’t forget the soft words too. If you parents never say any thing pleasant in love, it’s doubtful that your scolding is in love either. I have learned that when someone comes to you and says, “I need to speak the truth in love with you today Brother. You had better fasten your seatbelt and get ready for a high hard one.” But we need to obey this for nice things too. How many of you remember *The One Minute Manager*? That book, popular in its day, was brilliant. The author, Ken Blanchard, who has since become a Christian, encourages managers to try to catch their employees doing something right. And then really tell them about it! In his book, *The One Minute Father*,

Blanchard says he caught his son one day doing something right, so he yelled at him across the house in a really stern voice, “Billy, you get over here right now!” Then he laid into him with all kinds of heavy praise. May I share a minor personal victory with you? Recently I played basketball with a really rough character. This guy was major-league obnoxious. He yelled at his teammates, he yelled at the other team. He told everybody how to play. He gave a running commentary on everything that happened. He mocked all the other players. He cheated. He was arrogance personified. And the worst part of it was that this kid was an awesome basketball player. He was tremendous! After losing to him for the third straight game and being abundantly fed up with his mouth I approached him with Ephesians 4:15 in mind and said the only nice thing I could say. I think he expected a lecture but I said, “Tony, you were awesome.” And I asked him where he played college ball. Responding that way is not the natural me. I could stand to write sermons on this verse every day.

Speaking the truth in love. When we do this a lot of great things are going to happen. For one, we are going to grow up as children of God. The truth has that effect, but especially so when it comes in love. Preachers are often reminded that people don’t care how much you know. They want to know how much you care. The fact is that a caring messenger has a lot more success delivering the goods. II Timothy 2:24-25 *The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,* ²⁵ *with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.* Man that speaks volumes doesn’t it? Among the many things the Lord’s bond-servant must be, “able to teach” is just one. And he suggests that greater persuasiveness comes with a proper attitude. We’ve all heard teachers who had good arguments but turned us off with their attitudes. They came off as angry and condescending, as unnecessarily and inappropriately harsh. And again, there is a place for anger, but you can sort of tell when it comes out of love for people and for truth and when it comes from a personal aggravation or jealousy. When I started seminary in Mississippi, the school had just released a well-known and controversial professor. This man held some views that were not widely held in our circles and those who opposed his firing complained that he was fired because the school’s leadership didn’t like his teachings. They said it was a truth issue. The president of the school essentially explained that it was not a truth issue, but a love issue. ® It was how he handled and presented those views that made the difference, and how he related to those who disagreed. That is often such a critical thing. Oh may God give us the grace of truthing in love!

Our denominational motto speaks to the reality of our disagreements and says, “In essentials unity. In non-essentials liberty. And in all things charity.” It means that in the fundamentals of our faith we must be agreed. These are non-negotiable. But in the non-essentials. In those things more on the periphery of Christian faith and life, we must expect and allow some disagreement among us. And finally, in all things, charity or love is to mark our discussions as followers of Christ. Are you familiar with what the Bible says about truth without love? I Corinthians 13:1-2 *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.* And you know what you accomplish for the building up of the body of Christ? At best you accomplish nothing. How tragic!

In my own struggle to keep truth and love connected, the Lord recently sent a bit of encouragement my way. On Monday I received this email from a young man who is studying to be a pastor. He wrote: *God put you on my heart this morning and I was praising Him for putting you in my life. I am so thankful for the love you have shown me as your brother in Christ. You might not remember this, but Mandy and I rented a house before we moved into your neighborhood. You came over and visited us and shared the good news of Christ. God has imprinted that conversation on my heart, and it's one of the greatest examples to me of what it means to be a discipler of Christ. You were bold in sharing the truth with me, but yet you did it in love. I doubted Gods word and pridefully/foolishly challenged you, yet you showed me kindness and patience. Christ used you in a major way to help me see what it means to truly love others, especially the lost...Thank you for that Dan and I will continue to pray for you and your family.*

Brothers and Sisters, whether it is in your family, your church, your witness to the world, it is by speaking the truth in love that lives are changed and the God of truth and love is honored. Pray with me, please.