

The Truth in Love

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“The truth” and “love” are themes found in 1 Timothy (the book of focus in this issue of CW). “The truth” appears five times (1 Tim. 2:4, 7; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5). “Love” appears six times (1 Tim. 1:5, 14; 2:15; 4:12; 6:10, 11). Both are needed in ministry. Both are needed in the church. Our text of study is Ephesians 4:15. It reads, “but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ.” The context concerns the use of spiritual gifts, and roles in the church.

Let us notice that in order to build the church...

1. We must speak.

Those with the ability to teach and preach should use that ability. Timothy was told “stir up the gift” that was within him, and “not be ashamed” (2 Tim. 1:6-8). He was to “preach the word,” and to do so “in season and out of season” (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Paul said “woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16).

Members should use their tongues to edify (Eph. 4:29), exhort, and stir up love and good works (Heb. 3:13; 10:24). Paul instructed, “comfort each other and edify one another” (1 Thess. 5:11 cf. 4:18; 5:14). Our tongues can be used for good.

It has been said that sometimes silence is golden, but sometimes it is merely yellow. Do we care enough to speak? “Is there not a cause?” (1 Sam. 17:29).

2. We must speak the truth.

The original word translated “speaking the truth” is *aletheuo*. It appears twice in the New Testament (Gal. 4:16; Eph. 4:15). It means to proclaim the truth, or to deal with truthfully. It is the truth of God’s word, not human opinions or human wisdom that needs to be proclaimed. The truth has power. It is the truth, which begets (Jas. 1:18), sets free (John 8:32), purifies (1 Pet. 1:22), sanctifies (John 17:17), and arms one for spiritual war (Eph. 6:10-17).

Moreover, it is not enough to speak some truth, but hold back on teaching all that should be taught. Paul said, “I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). Again, he said, “I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Someone has written, “If you are my friend, if you are concerned about my soul, give me the truth... for the truth, and only the truth, can make me free from the shackles of sin, strengthen me in the pathway of righteousness, and lead me to heaven’s joy.”

3. We must speak the truth in love.

Our speech should be motivated by love, genuine love. Love motivated Paul to correct the brethren at Corinth (2 Cor. 2:4). One brother has written, “One of the most unloving acts that one could do – is nothing – when he knows that a brother is being overcome by sin... Brotherly love cares enough to correct” (Jimmy Jividen, *Koinonia*, pp. 147, 179).

Our speech should be tempered by love. We should be in the habit of seasoning our words with salt (Col. 4:6). Yes, there is a time for bold speech (e.g. Matt. 12:34; 23:13ff; 2 Cor. 4:21).

However, this should be the exception and not the norm. Jesus was very bold with His active, vocal opponents, who were trying to interfere with His work, or who were plotting against Him. This is not the way He treated most people (Nicodemus, John 3; the woman at the well, John 4; the woman caught in adultery, John 8; the rich young ruler, Mark 10). We should avoid being unnecessarily offensive, rude, or unkind.

We should try to be compassionate, and demonstrate our love. Imagine two preachers. One points out sin in a member's life with a gleam in his eye, and seems to enjoy it. The other points out sin in a member's life with a tear in his eye, and seems sincerely concerned. Which one would you want to hear? Paul shed tears (2 Cor. 2:4; Phil. 3:18). May we "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). Let us learn to sincerely care for people. Remember that without love, we are nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3). Preachers and members should remember that preaching is not just about rebuking (2 Tim. 4:2). It is also about convincing, exhorting, comforting, and edifying (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Thess. 4:18, 5:11, 14; 1 Cor. 14:26b; Acts 14:21-22, etc.).