

Speaking the Truth in Love
Ephesians 4:15

Introduction – The Relationship Between Truth and Love

In Scripture, truth and love are complementary, never contradictory. Truth and love are interwoven, and they should not be separated. However, sometimes believers struggle to keep truth and love in the right balance. Truth and love are both crucial aspects to the growth of the body of Christ. Therefore, it is important for the church to understand the relationship between truth and love.

Truth and love both find their origin in God's character. A proper understanding of the relationship between truth and love starts with a proper understanding of God's character. All of Scripture helps us better understand the character of God. The Old Testament reveals much about the character of God, and God's character does not change. Therefore, we can begin to learn about truth and love from the revelation of God's character in the Old Testament. When God commanded Moses to take a second set of stone tablets up to Mount Sinai, the LORD makes a declaration about His own character. Exodus 34:6-7 says, "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*." Both goodness and mercy in these verses come from the same Hebrew word, *רָחֵל*. This refers to God's loyal love for His people. This word is often translated "lovingkindness." The LORD wants His people to know that He is abundant in love. However, this loyal love clearly does not tolerate evil. The LORD also wants His people to know that He is abundant in truth. He will righteously judge those that break His law. It is important to understand that all of God's characteristics exist in perfect unity. Therefore, He is always abundant in love and truth. Psalm 85:10a says, "Mercy and truth are met together." God does not have to suspend his love in order to display truth and justice. God does not have to suspend His truth in order to display His love. Truth and love are not in opposition in the character of God. Therefore, it would be a mistake to think that these two concepts cannot exist in unity. God's character actually reveals that real love upholds the truth, and real truth does not act unlovingly.

The unity of truth and love is further revealed in Jesus Christ. John 1:17 says, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The incarnation reveals the embodiment of truth and love. Jesus displayed both grace and truth in the flesh. Jesus is the Truth. John 14:6 says, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." This statement points to the reality that truth is exclusive by nature. Jesus is the only Truth through which we can come to the Father. Therefore, this means that there is no other way to the Father. Jesus only ever spoke the truth, and His witness regarding Himself was true. Jesus also displayed the greatest form of love. John 15:13 says,

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus demonstrated sacrificial love in His death for the sins of mankind. Jesus lovingly spoke the truth throughout His entire life. Jesus put the unity of truth and love on perfect display in the flesh. Believers are supposed to put on the character of Christ, and this includes the characteristics of both truth and love.

The unity of truth and love is further revealed through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is described as the Spirit of Truth. John 16:13 says, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.” The Holy Spirit is characterized by truth. The Holy Spirit is also the Teacher of truth. I John 2:27 says, “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.” The Holy Spirit teaches believers the truth. The Holy Spirit is also the Producer of love. The first fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22 is the fruit of love. The Holy Spirit produces Christ-like love in the believer. The Holy Spirit teaches believers the truth, and produces Christ-like love in the believer. Therefore, truth and love are supposed to be characteristics of the believer because of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The goal of this study is to look at the importance of reflecting the character of Christ in these areas of truth and love. Specifically, Ephesians 4:15 reveals the relationship between truth and love. God wants believers to speak the truth in love. Ephesians 4:14 reveals the need for speaking the truth in love. Ephesians 4:15b-16 reveals the result of speaking the truth in love. This need and result will point to the truth that God wants believers to speak the truth in love.

The Need for Speaking the Truth in Love:

The need for speaking the truth in love is related to the unity and stability of the church. Ephesians 4:14 says, “That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” The presence of false doctrine highlights the great need for believers to speak the truth in love. The church is supposed to be unified based on the truth. Ephesians 4:13 says, “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Speaking the truth in love is necessary for the unity and doctrinal stability of the church.

Because false teaching is present, there is a need for believers to be able to identify false doctrine. How do believers identify false doctrine? Believers identify false doctrine by being intimately familiar with the truth. Believers become intimately familiar with the truth by spending time in God’s Word. II Timothy 3:14-17 says, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned *them*; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” Scripture is profitable for teaching believers what is true and what is false. Therefore, believers must study Scripture in

order to know the truth. In II Timothy 2:15-16, Paul tells Timothy, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.” Paul instructs Timothy to use the word of truth correctly. Believers must handle the word of truth with respect and accuracy. They must also avoid foolish and empty discussions that are not based on the truth of Scripture. Jesus also said, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). The Word of God must be where believers learn about the truth. The Holy Spirit is actively involved in using the Word of God to guide believers into the truth. The importance of believers studying their bibles and becoming intimately familiar with God’s truth cannot be overstated.

This knowledge of the truth from God’s Word is foundational for being able to speak the truth in love. Believers cannot speak the truth if they do not know the truth. Speaking the truth involves speaking God’s Word and the truths of God’s Word. This word for “speaking the truth” in Ephesians 4:15 is one word. It is a present, active, participle. It is the idea of telling the truth. This form of the word is only found one other time in Scripture. It is found in Galatians 4:16 where Paul says, “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” Paul of course had to deal with false doctrine that was impacting the spiritual growth of the Galatian believers. Specifically, they were mixing in the law with the Gospel. They were justified by faith in the Gospel, but then they were trying to grow spiritually through the keeping of the law. Paul even calls them “foolish” in Galatians 3:1. He says, “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth.” Paul was bold in his declaration of the truth to the Galatians because he loved them. Paul is not attacking them out of hatred for them, but rather he is attacking the lies that they have believed because he cares so deeply for them. Thus, Paul asks the question, “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” No, Paul was not their enemy because he told them the truth. Paul was actually their friend because he told them the truth. It would have been unloving for Paul to let the Galatians continue in false doctrine relating to the Gospel. This reveals the real challenge of speaking the truth in love. Speaking the truth in love is not difficult when everyone is in agreement. However, speaking the truth in love becomes a real challenge when there is not agreement about fundamental doctrines. This is what believers are supposed to do in the context of the church.

Speaking the truth in love is necessary in order to protect against false doctrine in the church. However, it is important to understand that the prepositional phrase, “in love,” is key to doing this the right way. I Corinthians 13:6 says that love “Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.” Love does not rejoice in sin or that which is wrong. Love does not rejoice in lies or deception. Love rejoices in the truth. Therefore, it is loving to speak the truth. However, it is important to understand what else love does. I Corinthians 13:4-5 says, “Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.” Therefore, there should also be patience with people while believers speak the truth. There should be kindness in how believers speak the truth. There should not be a carnal zeal for attention or praise when believers speak the truth. There should not be any bragging or self-promotion in how believers speak the truth. There should not be a spirit of pride in how believers speak the truth. There should not be rudeness or unnecessary offence when believers speak the truth. There should not be any motivation for selfish gain through speaking the truth.

There should not be debating and provoking to anger when believers speak the truth. There should not be an assumption of evil motives when speaking the truth. This understanding of biblical love in light of speaking the truth reveals that much of what may be called “speaking the truth in love” is actually not in love at all. Speaking the truth without love actually pushes people away from the truth. Therefore, speaking the truth without love or trying to love without speaking the truth leads to the same result. Both of these unbalanced approaches result in the church not being edified with the truth.

There is another context in which speaking the truth in love can be challenging. That is the context of confrontation regarding sin. Galatians 6:1-2 says, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” Confronting another believer about a sin is always for the purpose of restoration. This is to be done in the spirit of meekness and humility. Working to restore a brother in Christ is actually one way that believers can fulfill the law of Christ. This refers to the new commandment that believers are supposed to love one another as Christ has loved them. Believers can speak the truth in love in the context of a fellow believer in sin and in the context of false doctrine. Speaking the truth in love is needed in the body of Christ because of these reasons.

The Result of Speaking the Truth in Love:

Speaking the truth in love is needed because of false doctrine and deception that is prevalent in churches. The result of speaking the truth in love is clear from Ephesians 4:15b-16. The primary result of speaking the truth in love is spiritual growth. Ephesians 4:15 says, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even Christ.*” The church is supposed to be a place of spiritual growth. The church can only fulfill this responsibility if they are speaking the truth in love.

This points to the reality that truth and spiritual growth are closely related. I Peter 2:2 says, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” The Word of God is necessary for spiritual growth. Jesus made it clear that sanctification happens through the truth of God’s Word. Therefore, the church is a place where the Word of God should be the focus. The Word of God should be preached and taught, and that is why God gave spiritual gifts to the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-12 says, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” The exercise of spiritual gifts in the context of the body of Christ results in spiritual growth. Specifically, the use of spiritual gifts in relation to speaking the truth results in spiritual growth. Believers grow through the truth of God’s Word, and that means that the Word of God should be the focus.

This spiritual growth that happens as a result of speaking the truth in love has a specific direction. This growth is into Christ. Christ is the Head of the church, and thus He should have the preeminence in the church. Spiritual growth involves becoming more comfortable in one’s position in Christ. Spiritual growth involves becoming more like Christ in one’s character. Spiritual growth involves fulfilling one’s role in the body of Christ. This type of growth is only

possible for those who are in Christ. This spiritual growth comes from growing in the knowledge of Christ. Getting to know Christ better, and getting to know the truths of God's Word better results in spiritual growth. Speaking the truth in love directs people towards growth in Christ.

The church must avoid things that turn away from the truth. Titus 1:14 says, "Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth." The church is supposed to avoid commandments of men. The concept of "speaking the truth in love" is often used as a reason for preaching personal preferences and standards. However, this is actually taking the focus away from the truth. God's Word must remain the focus when speaking the truth in love. Preaching or teaching the commandments of men can create division and strife where there does not need to be any contention. There are clear biblical truths that believers should contend for, and thus the church should focus on those fundamental truths. Contending for nonbiblical preferences, standards, and beliefs can actually be a hinderance to the spiritual growth of believers within the church. II Timothy 2:23 says, "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes." Believers should avoid questions and topics that create unnecessary strife. Titus 3:9 says, "But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain." There are certain things that worth contending for, and there are certain things that should not be contended for. The focus must be the truth, and the church should avoid unnecessary contentions that are unprofitable and vain.

Speaking the truth in love results in the church growing spiritually. Ephesians 4:16 says, "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." The church as a whole is able to grow spiritually when the truth of God's Word is the focus. The body of Christ is able to operate how Christ desires it to when the members of the church are speaking the truth in love. The members of the body should be building up one another through speaking the truth in love. To edify a fellow believer is to edify the whole body. This edification is done through love one for another. Speaking the truth in love results in the members of the body of Christ building up one another.

Believers should speak the truth in love even when the truth is not popular or desired. II Timothy 4:1-4 says, "I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." Paul charged Timothy to preach the word with authority because truth and doctrine are necessary for spiritual growth. Speaking the truth in love involves reproofing, rebuking, and exhorting. However, the key is that those things are supposed to be done with all longsuffering and doctrine. Longsuffering is patience directed towards fellow believers. Preaching and teaching the Word of God should be done with an attitude of patience with God's people. Every believer is at a different point in their walk with Christ, and love understand this and thus is patient. However, longsuffering does not mean comprising the truth. It is possible to be longsuffering with one another while also speaking the truth. The truth is not

always the most popular thing, and oftentimes people do not really want to hear the truth. However, believers should determine to speak the truth in love because that is ultimately what is needed in the church even if it is not always what is wanted. Jude 3-4 says, “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” Believers are to contend for the faith. Believers are to contend for the truth. However, believers should learn to contend for the faith without being carnally contentious. This is what it means to speak the truth in love. Speak the truth, refute false doctrine, rebuke sin; but do it all in love. The motivation and the method of delivery matters because believers are supposed to do everything in love toward one another.

Speaking the truth in love demonstrates faith in God. Fear and shame can sometimes keep the believer from speaking the truth. II Timothy 1:7-8 says, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.” Believers should not be ashamed of the truth. Sometimes there can be persecution or suffering as a result of speaking the truth. However, these are not things that the believer should fear. If believers truly believe that God’s truth is necessary for spiritual life and growth, then they will not be ashamed of God’s truth. However, believers need to be careful to discern whether the persecution that they are suffering is because they are speaking the truth in love or rather because they are engaging in carnal debates and fights. Believers should not be fearful of persecution or suffering, but they also should not have a carnal love for conflict. Speaking the truth in love does not seek out fights and conflict, but it also does not comprise the truth when the truth is under attack. Speaking the truth in love demonstrates faith in God and in the power of God’s truth to change hearts and lives. This is the opposite of trying to change hearts and lives through constant debates and arguments. Believers should walk in faith in this area of speaking the truth in love.

Conclusion:

God wants believers to speak the truth in love. Believers need to speak the truth in love because false teachers and false doctrine are prevalent in churches even today. Believers speaking the truth in love will result in the spiritual growth of the body of Christ. Therefore, believers must seek to know the truth of the God’s Word so that they can speak the truth in love. Believers do not need to be fearful of speaking the truth in love. Believers should determine to speak the truth in love to one another because that is what Christ wants for His church.