

Becoming a Church of Conviction and Compassion, 10/2/22, Ephesians 4:14-15

Ephesians 4:11-16

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

The Dead Sea is an utterly unique place on earth. Not only is it the lowest place on earth at 1300ft below sea level, but because of the incredibly high salt content, you float, almost as soon as you step in it sweeps your feet out from under you. Here I am floating[Picture]. All throughout the Dead Sea floor are salt deposits that form salt crystals [Picture]. Here's a salt one I grabbed. Now salt is an amazing mineral. One website I found had over 60 uses for salt. [Blank slide] But what is fascinating to me is what makes up the chemical compound salt- OK, middle schoolers- NaCl. Sodium and Chlorine. Two elements that by themselves are very harmful for human consumption and even contact. They can be caustic and even explosive in the wrong environments. And yet when these two potentially dangerous chemicals come together something close to magic happens. Sodium Chloride is one of most powerful bonds that can form.

Today in our passage, Paul tells us about a spiritual compound that is one of the most powerful bonds that can form. Did you catch it? [Verse 15 Slide] The compound known as truth in love. And like salt, when truth combines with love something close to magic can happen. However, both of these spiritual elements by themselves, Truth and Love, can be harmful in human relationships. Think back to the last conflict you engaged in or avoided. My hunch is that for some of us what was missing was truth in love. I believe that one of the greatest reforms that the evangelical church today needs is for the element of truth and the element love to bond together in the lives of Christians, marriages, churches relationships and communities. So let's unpack this idea.

Love without Truth. Love is a powerful element. The greatest of all commands is to love God and love others. Jesus said that it was love that compelled him to sacrifice himself on behalf of humanity. Not only true spiritually and relationally, but biologically. Love is so powerful that

when we experience love it releases the hormone Oxytocin in our brains, which is important for developing emotional, psychological and relational health.¹ I don't think I need to convince you further that love is a powerful element.

However, the Beatles weren't correct. All you need is love? No. Love when separated from truth can be harmful to relationships, I would even argue it renders love void without truth. Paul compares relationships that lack truth to a child who wanders into the ocean waves.

14 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. Have you seen this at the beach? While the parents are chatting, meanwhile an unsuspecting 2-year-old wanders into the ocean with a big smile on their face, until a wave hits them and they are tossed like a football. What Paul says is that people who lack truth telling relationships in their lives are like infants susceptible to self-deceit. Because love without truth is a lie.

[Love without Truth Slide] Sure, love can make us feel good, we may have a high self-esteem and low anxiety. But love alone can make us blind, make us shallow, lack discernment and unable to cope with the harsh realities of life. Like the father who, out of what he is calling love, never tells his teenage daughter just how grievous and destructive her self-centered behavior is. Out of what he calls love is actually more like selfishness. He didn't want to experience the pain of confronting his little princess. He didn't want to disappoint her or make her feel bad, hurt her. Which means her 20 and 30s were all taken up by blowing up one relationship after another, never hearing the truth from her father about the impact of her behavior.²

Today, there are all kinds of seemingly loving messages in our culture that lack truth. "You are who you feel yourself to be." "If it doesn't hurt anyone it can't be wrong." "You do you." "My truth is my truth." "A man can be a woman." These sound like loving messages are they true? Do they correspond to the reality of the natural and moral laws, established by God, who made us and is the only one who has the right to define what is truth and what is false, what is good and what is evil? Love without truth is like sleeping gas, it can make us comfortable but unconscious to reality.

Truth without Love. Truth is also a powerful element. Truth grounds us and secures us in reality. We believe that the Bible is the absolute standard for truth and moral order because it reveals God himself. Founder of the #TruthCampaign, **[Picture] Justin Giboney** writes, "We can't defer to popular opinion or lean on our own understanding when it comes to moral issues. The world tells us that our values should evolve with the times and suggests that every individual has their own truth. This might sound pleasant, but it simply isn't a biblical understanding of truth. Whether a pilot flies in the year 1950 or in 2020, southeast still isn't north and never will

¹ <https://www.gottman.com/blog/how-a-parents-affection-shapes-a-childs-happiness-for-life/>

² Tim Keller's illustration from a message on Ephesians 4:15

be regardless of his opinion. **Our own personal truth can't liberate us, only God's truth sets us free.**"³

And yet, truth alone isn't enough. Separated from love, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13 that we are a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal, he even goes as far as to say truth without love is nothing. **[Truth without Love Slide]** One pastor gives this illustration, "Truth without love is like being a bad Uber driver. It's like being a driver who knows exactly where to go but has no interest in his passenger's safety or comfort. You pick up your passenger in your beat-up 1973 Ranchero that is filled to the roof with fast-food garbage so they have to sit in the open back with no seats and no seat belts. Your passenger hops in, only to find a coyote carcass and a month's supply of beer cans, while you take off racing down the street and squealing your tires around every turn. When you arrive at their destination you discover that your passenger hopped out miles ago at a stoplight because it was all too much. You may have arrived at the destination, but you failed to bring your passenger along with you."⁴

This is what it's like when we throw our favorite Bible verses at people without considering whether they are actually what is most needed. Too many people have been convinced that biblical truth "doesn't work," not because there was a problem with the truth, but because the truth wasn't communicated with love. This happens when we tell people that we haven't taken the time to get to know what we think they are doing wrong. Or when we immediately judge based on appearance, or what political party they are in or what bumper sticker is on their car. It's when we see people not as people created in the image of God with dignity and value, but rather just a problem to be solved, an ideology to be defeated, annoyance to be ignored. That's not love. If love without truth is sleeping gas, truth without love is tear gas. All it will do is cause pain and drive people away running.

Truth in Love.¹⁵ *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.*

The result of truth in love spoken in the community of faith is maturity in every way, emotional stability, relational wholeness, restoration of dignity and strengthening of our walk with Jesus. In other words, we grow up! We start to look, talk, act like Christ. Isn't this what we are after? Think about the most emotionally healthy, spiritually grounded, least anxious, grace-filled, compassionate person you know...Isn't that what we want for ourselves and one another?

Let me give you just a little guidance on this. If love is what is driving us to speak truth to others we will be concerned with what, how and where and when we speak. **What we speak:** Just a few verses later, Paul gives us an immensely helpful principle. 4: ²⁹ *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* Does this word build and benefit someone? **How we speak:** ³¹ *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every*

³ Justin Giboney, *Compassion & Conviction*, chapter 3.

⁴ <https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/the-danger-of-love-without-truth-and-truth-without-love/>

form of malice. ³² *Be kind and compassionate to one another.* You can be right and still be wrong because of how you say it...attitudes, motives, and tones of voices with which we speak them. We will strive not to give offense by the way we speak the truth. **When we speak:** James 1:19 *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.* There are times when it is better for us to remain silent than to speak, either because the individual involved is not yet ready to hear the truth, or because we need to pause and meet someone on the emotional level, or because saying it would do more harm than good. **Where we speak:** One time a congregant came up to me immediately after a wedding and wanted to get into a conflict with me about something I had said many months before. I was like, "Brother, we are at a wedding! This is not the appropriate place!" What is an ideal environment for you to speak truth in love? It may not be social media. While truth in love can be magical...it can also be messy, and you can do this with the deepest love and affection like Jesus, and still have your Judas.

Pastor Tim Keller sums up this passage well: "Love without truth is sentimentality. It supports and affirms us but keeps us in denial about our flaws. Truth without love is harshness. It gives us information but in such a way that we cannot really hear it."

"God's saving love in Christ, however, is marked by both radical truthfulness about who we are and yet also radical, unconditional love toward us."

This is where the magic happens. And that powerful bond of truth in love can only happen if Christ is at the center holding that bond together. It's only if we've experienced the truth in love in Christ, that we will have the ability to show it to others.

This is why we want to be a church known for Compassion and Conviction. So speak the truth boldly, but speak it wrapped in love that seeks to build up not tear down. Angry prophets never change the world, they just alienate people. Malcolm X and Louis Farrakan could never change the world for the better...but Dr. King did. Only love working through truth has the chance to reconcile the lost to God, to reconcile families, to reconcile our communities. Only gospel truth wrapped in gospel love can have the power to bring the lost children home.

Interview with Walt Heyer. [\[Video\]](#) while Walt is coming up to the platform.

Welcome Walt. One of the reasons I wanted to sit down with you to talk about this is because your relationship with Pastor Jeff, and the church, wasn't all roses...this truth in love business is hard and we don't always get it right. What were some of your fears entering into the church and meeting with Pastor Jeff?

We were talking about how you likened your relationship with Pastor Jeff to iron sharpening iron, why?

What were some ways you experienced love from Jeff and from the church in those days that kept you coming back even when it was hard?

You told me that Jeff and the church leaders asked you to do something that helped you grow, what was it?

How do you see the power of truth in love lived out in your ministry?