

Growing up, I can remember watching a number of movies that contained courtroom scenes. Inevitably, a witness would take the stand, place their hand on a Bible and were charged with the following oath: *Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?*

The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth...that is, as long as telling the truth doesn't implicate yourself. In the United States there's a little thing called the 5th Amendment. It states that in a court of law, you are not required to tell the truth if in the telling of it you will incriminate yourself. Interesting isn't it?

We live at an interesting time when it comes to our relationship with "truth;" it seems everyone has a different definition. Large segments of Western Culture have rejected the notion of truth with a capital "T". Instead, truth has been redrawn along less offensive lines: now there's your truth, my truth, his truth, her truth. In essence, "truth" is in the eye of the beholder.

And yet, when you clear away the philosophical rhetoric, at a base level, most people still believe that truth can be known, truth should be pursued, and truth should be spoken. Just talk to anyone who has been deceived, fooled, or lied to...you will encounter in them a kind of moral outrage...try telling them that truth is relative. The human heart, relationships, cry out for truth.

I came across something in my reading last week that was both simple yet profound. The author writes, "We cannot be mature Christians by ourselves, for we cannot give ourselves everything we

need for a life of faith. Christ could supply our needs directly, but instead he has chosen to grace other people so that they contribute to us and we to them. Grace comes from God, but it is also conveyed along horizontal channels."¹

Think about it...Jesus could supply all our needs directly if He wanted to. On a weekly basis, my Mac computer is set up to automatically download whatever patches or updates are required. Jesus could give us a weekly, cosmic download if He wanted; maybe He could do it while we sleep so we wouldn't have any down time. He could keep us encouraged, learning, and on track all by Himself.

But instead, He has chosen to provide much of what we need through others. Jesus graces other people (pouring out strength, wisdom, encouragement, or love) and they contribute to us. Jesus graces us (pouring out mercy, peace, hope, or forgiveness), and we contribute to others. "Grace comes from God, but it is also conveyed along horizontal channels."

This is especially true when it comes to hearing the "truth"...that is, the truth about ourselves. This morning, as we wrap up our series on *Loving Relationships*, I want to talk about the role of truth-telling in loving relationships. And before I go any further I'd like to invite you to turn with me to Ephesians chapter 4; that's page _____ in our Blue Bibles situated in the seat rack in front of you.

"lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. **2** Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. **3** Make every

¹ Klyne Snodgrass, *NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, 221.

effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. **4** For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. **5** There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all.

11 Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. **12** Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. **13** This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. **15** Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. **16** He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

21 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, **22** throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. **23** Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. **24** Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. **25** So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.

29 Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. **31** Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. **32** Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."

The first thing to note is that Paul's instructions on biblical truth-telling are clearly set within the context of relationship. Paul isn't instructing us to beat people with the truth, he's explaining the importance of truth in building God-honoring relationships. Woven throughout this incredible piece of Scripture are two specific words that we need to take to heart and put into practice: **truth** and **love**. And it's not surprising that God draws these two words together because both truth and love are found in God Himself.

1 John 4:16 tells us that God **is** love. Friends, we've been invited into an experience of God's love that has been going on since before the creation of the universe.

From eternity past, God the Father has delighted in God the Son and entrusted all things to His care. From eternity past, the Son has loved the Father and joyfully embraced and engaged in all of the Father's brilliant plans (like creation and redemption). From eternity past, the Holy Spirit has also been involved, loved by the Father and the Son, joining in the delight of the Father for the Son and in the Son's delight for the Father, and coming to dwell among us and within us as God's personal, empowering Presence. God **is** love.

God **is** also truth. Titus 1:2 reminds us that God the Father doesn't lie; nor does he change like shifting shadows (James 1:18). And it

was said of Jesus, God the Son, that “*He came from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14)”. Jesus said of Himself, “*I am...the truth* (John 14:6)”. And Jesus told His disciples that when the Holy Spirit comes “*He will guide you into all truth* (John 16:13)”. 1 John 5:6 says, “*it is the Spirit who testifies because the Spirit is truth.*”

When it comes to God, both character qualities are in play: love and truth, truth and love.

Illus: Let me attempt to draw upon an analogy. Did any of you grow up with a clothesline in your backyard? I did. When the weather would get warm in the Spring and Summer, the clothes would go straight from the washing machine to the clothesline...there’s nothing quite like the smell of putting on a shirt that’s been hanging on a clothesline.

I want you to picture your relationships as being like a clothesline full of clothes. In keeping with the analogy, what keeps our clothes (or relationships) from dragging on the ground? If you want to keep your clothes off the ground, every good clothesline needs two solid posts (or pillars) to attach to. In healthy, vibrant relationships, there are two posts that are always in play: one is love, the other is truth.

Now when it comes to truth-telling, wisdom and discernment **must** be exercised. It’s possible in our zeal to speak the truth, we may forget about love. Truth without love rarely builds up: it devastates, it maims, it destroys...and not just the other person, but the relationship.

But it’s equally possible, under the guise of “love”, to leave no room for speaking the the truth. Love without truth isn’t really love: it’s more like fiction, or fairy tale. And while it’s effects aren’t

immediately noticeable, “love” without truth ends up ruining people and relationships too. Truth without love misses the mark, and so too does love without truth.

Illus: Let me tell you a story that took place during my freshman year of Bible School. At the end of the year, I was shocked when my mortal enemy confronted me...the shock was that I didn’t know I had a mortal enemy until Bill began to speak “truth” to me.

That morning in church, the pastor had been preaching about building healthy relationships, about speaking the truth, about humbling oneself and asking for forgiveness. After the service was over, Bill made a bee-line towards me. I knew who Bill was, but nothing more...I suspect our most meaningful conversation to that point was something like: *Hey Bill, can you pass the salt.*

But that morning, Bill had something to say. *Hey Mark, can I talk with you? Sure, what’s up? Mark I wanted to let you know that ever since the beginning of the year, I’ve judged you and carried bitterness in my heart towards you. The first week you were here, I saw how comfortable you were interacting with the other students, I saw how good you were at the sports we were playing, and in my heart, I labelled you as an arrogant jerk.*

I know we don’t really know one another, but I felt convicted this morning by what the pastor said, and I felt I needed to confess that I’ve carried hate in my heart towards you all year. And then Bill asked for my forgiveness.

Moments later, Bill walked away with a spring in his step, feeling like a massive burden had been lifted from his soul. I, on the other hand, remained behind, staggered by the heavy burden he had just

dumped all over me; Bill did not have my best in mind when he spoke the truth...he was thinking of himself. Truth **and** love. Love **and** truth. Both posts are necessary to keep our relationships from dragging on the ground.

In the time remaining I want to address two questions: (1) *why speak the truth, when it might cause pain?*; and, (2) *how do we speak the truth (in love)?*

(1) why speak the truth? Ephesians 4:4-6, 16, 25

a) The first reason is grounded in who God is; take a look at vs. 4-6. Paul writes, “**4** *For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.* **5** *There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* **6** *and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all.*”

Did you notice the trinitarian language? Paul describes God’s essential nature: one Spirit, one Lord (this is how Paul refers to Jesus), and one God and Father. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...this is the only case in the universe that I’m aware of where 1+1+1=1. God is both three and yet one. And there is no pretending in the life of God, nothing hidden, nothing secret, nothing false.

b) If the first reason for speaking the truth (in love) is grounded in who God is, then the second reason for speaking the truth (in love) is grounded in who we are. God is both three and yet one, and we who are many, are described in vs. 4 as also being one: one body. Jesus doesn’t see us as a random collection of individuals. We are one body, one family. We speak the truth to one another because we are members of one body, and we want the best for one another.

c) The third reason we speak the truth is because Jesus has chosen to grace other people so that they contribute to us and we to them; He has chosen to provide much of what we need through others. Much of the time, Jesus reveals the truth about ourselves through others.

Let me ask a simple question: what’s the goal of a disciple? Isn’t it to become like the Master? In vs. 15, Paul says the goal is to grow, in every way, more and more like Jesus.

But here’s the problem: We are utterly blind when it comes to our own blind spots. I consider myself quite self-aware, but like all of you, there are things about myself that I simply cannot see. My wife sees things in me that I cannot, both the positive and the negative; as a disciple of Jesus, I need her to speak the truth to me, in love. Around the church, I work pretty closely with Pastor Dave and Pastor Shane, I also work pretty closely with our Elders Board...they see things in me that I cannot; as a growing disciple of Jesus, I need them to speak the truth to me, in love or my growth will be stunted.

Illus: Quite a few years ago now, in the early years of my marriage, I went to a Christian conference in Winnipeg with one of my closest friends. We lived in different cities and hadn’t seen each other for a few months but we picked up right where we left off. We were talking one evening, a few days into the conference, about life, about marriage, about pastoral ministry, and there came a moment where the conversation became very pointed, and deeply personal.

In a very kind, and humble way, he told me that he had noticed something in my speech in these last days, and from the last time Naomi and I had visited with he and his wife. *Mark, when you speak about Naomi, you are often quite critical. My wife and I both noticed*

the last time we were all together that you tell stories that make fun of her; or you will say things that highlight her weaknesses. Talking about your wife that way doesn't honour her; I can only imagine it make her feel small. You probably don't realize what you're doing or the effect it's having.

He stopped speaking and then there was silence, a deafening silence. I was struck to the heart. Proverbs 27:5-6 says, “**5** Better is open rebuke than hidden love. **6** Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” Proverbs 24:26 takes a slightly different angle on speaking the truth, it reads: “*An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.*”

Paul says that we are one body, one family. There can be no oneness apart from love, and there can be no love apart from truth. Love doesn't pretend; it doesn't look the other way. And real love isn't fragile; it doesn't run at the first hint of mess or trouble. 1 Corinthians 13:6-7 says, “*Love...rejoices with the truth. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.*”

The reason we speak the truth is **because** we love one another, because we want God's best for one another. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is to tell someone what we see in them, both that which is praiseworthy, and that which needs transforming.

Sometimes our thinking is so tangled. More often than not, we don't speak the truth because we don't want to hurt someone's feelings. “*I can't speak the truth to my husband/friend/child because I love them too much!*” But sometimes, in reality, the reason why we don't speak

the truth is because we love ourselves too much (or at the very least we don't want to deal with the potential conflict).

Analogy: Speaking the truth (remember, it's truth and love) in relationships is like tending a skinned knee: either deal with it now, or you will deal with it later. If you deal with it now, it's often little more than picking out the gravel, wiping away the dirt, and washing with a little water; before long it's as good as new. But putting it off doesn't make the problem go away. If you wait too long, infection can set in and then more drastic measures are required. The same thing happens when we withhold the truth in relationships.

Over the past four months I've talked with two sets of friends who are in the final stages of their marriage; one couple has been married for over 20 years, the other couple over 30 years. That's a long time to be married and what is so shocking to me is that there is nothing they can put their finger on that has pushed their marriage over the edge. But when you talk with them you can see the signs. Somewhere along the way, one or both of the spouses stopped speaking the truth.

Hurtful words were spoken and the offended spouse didn't say anything, they chose to just let it slide; “*I'll just forgive and forget,*” we tell ourselves. But we don't always forgive, and often can't forget. And then there's the next time, and the next, and before long we have lists a mile long: hurts, bitterness, and disappointments that have never been addressed. When we stuff those things instead of giving voice to them, to God and to our spouses, inevitably the feelings go underground until they explode one day. And some choose to walk away instead of dealing with years of unspoken hurt.

So the next time you hear someone say, “*But I don’t want to say anything because I love her/him too much,*” do them a favour; tell them to speak the truth in love...some temporary pain might save them long term pain.

The second question I want to address this morning is:

2) How do we speak the truth (in love)? Eph. 4:2-3, 23, 29, 31-32

Paul gives us some wise counsel. In vs. 2-3 he writes, “*2 Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love. 3 Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.*”

When speaking the truth to someone, speak from a place of humility and gentleness. Make sure you agonize in prayer before you speak the first word. As one author has said, wisdom is required to discern when it’s best to speak the truth right away and when it’s best to hold your tongue for a little while.² Remember, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit is with us to guide us into all truth, and to give us the wisdom we need in every circumstance.

If you intend to speak with someone about their pride, ask God to deal with your own pride first. Jesus once said, deal with the log in your own eye before you attempt to remove a speck of sawdust from your friend’s eye.³

Verse 29 reminds us not to use foul or abusive language. Paul writes, “*Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*” Paul’s not advocating an “if you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all” approach. What he’s saying is, make sure you speak for the good of those who listen...not to hurt, not to punish, not to set yourself above another. It is possible to say something that is very hard to hear, and those same words be spoken in gentleness, with respect, and spoken with the other’s best interests in mind.

And one final thought on the matter of speaking truth. When all is said and done, after we’ve spoken truth, the reality is that we cannot control what a person does with what they’ve heard; our responsibility is not to argue people into submission. But once we’ve spoken the truth, our responsibility has not come to an end.

In vs. 2 Paul reminds us that we are to make allowance for the faults we encounter in others. As you know, speaking the truth in love isn’t a silver bullet. Speaking the truth in love does not mean we no longer have to bear with one another’s quirks, faults, or brokenness. In every relationship there are two imperfect people living out their imperfections every day. We speak the truth and we choose to bear with one another in love, both are necessary to loving relationships.

Conclusion: Over the last eight weeks, we have turning to the Scriptures to discover what God has to say about building loving

² Snodgrass, 226.

³ Matthew 7:2-4.

relationships. After all, that's what we've been made for isn't it? For relationship with God and the people around us?

And all throughout this series we've acknowledged that building loving relationships is challenging because, in the words of the great Ron Maclean, "*In life, love, and hockey, you always play hurt.*" And, as we know all too well, *hurt people always hurt people.*

I want to conclude this series with the same basic invitation that we've been making every week: invite Jesus into the centre of your life, invite Him into every relationship you have, because you will find in Jesus a love, a strength, a wisdom, and a forgiveness you can draw upon in each and every relationship.

Bring your brokenness to Jesus, bring your broken experiences of relationship to Jesus...not only can He heal painful memories, He can redeem and restore the relationships you find yourself in.

I want you to know that when a church is working right, no one stands alone. And this morning, I don't want any of you to feel like you need to keep dealing with life on your own. Jesus never intended His church to be a loose collection of individuals, seeking to live their lives and their faith privately, or independently, of one another. He describes us as a body: one body, with many different parts. He describes us a family: brothers and sisters, fathers, mothers, and the occasional quirky uncle...we're family.

It could very well be that some of you here this morning are feeling very alone right now and in over your head when it comes to life...you know who you are, but unfortunately, I don't. And so I want to ask you to do something that will require a little courage.

Take a step this morning, reach out. After the service concludes, stick around a little while, come on forward and a number of us would love to pray with you and help you bring your concerns before God. Praying with one another is a regular part of our life together.

And can I ask you to do one more thing? Make a decision to join one of our small groups and get connected to the life of our church family. Coming on Sundays is fine, but getting shoulder to shoulder with others and doing life together...that's where the action is.

Worship

Benediction