

## Speaking the Truth in Love

God chose the act of preaching to save and edify man (I Cor. 1:18-21). Throughout the book of Acts, we read of the preachers "speaking" and the people "hearing" (Acts 2:7, 14; 37). The "seed of the kingdom" is the Word and the Word is Truth (Lk. 8:11; Jn. 17:17).

Consider Paul's statement to the Christians at Ephesus: *"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ"* (Eph. 4:15).

"Speaking the truth in love" is part of God's plan and provision for salvation and spiritual growth (It is the necessary agent that causes a beginning, continues on through time and is an eternal constant). "Truth" in its scriptural setting, is *objective* and "in love" is *subjective*. Truth, then, is tangible while the motive for speaking the truth, love, is not as perceptible.

To grasp what "speaking the truth in love" IS, it is necessary to know what "speaking the truth in love" IS NOT.

**Speaking the truth in love is not withholding parts of the truth.** Paul said, *"For I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God"* (Acts 20:27). Paul appreciated the truth to the point of allowing it, if necessary, to make those whom he loved his enemies (Gal. 4:16). Love, rather than causing one to withhold what is needed and applicable will actually cause a *"declaring the whole counsel of God"* (Prov. 13:24).

**Speaking the truth in love is not watering down the truth.** Some seek to dilute and weaken the truth (I Pet. 2:1, 2). "Preacher, tone down your preaching," we hear and, "Do not rock the boat." The same writer who penned, "...speaking the truth in love" also wrote, *"Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine"* (2 Tim. 4:2).

**Speaking the truth in love is not being so obscure that the hearers do not understand.** Some preachers are skilled in circumlocution. After patiently listening to them, you realize that what they have said cannot really be decisively understood. As one man said, "The only way he could have said less would have been for him to have said more."

Spirit led preachers who spoke the truth in love were clear and precise in their preaching (Acts 2:37, 38-41).

### *So, Then What is Speaking the Truth in Love?*

Biblical examples of speaking the truth in love clearly exemplify boldness. Jesus' teaching was "open" and "plain" (Mk. 8:32; Jn. 10:24, 11). One descriptive word used by the Bible to describe the preaching of the apostles is "boldness" (Acts 4:13, 29, 31). To the same people to whom Paul wrote "...speaking the truth in love," he later wrote in soliciting their prayers, *"And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel"* (Eph. 6:19).

**Speaking the truth in love necessitates the use of both the positive and negative.** So many diluted people have chosen to believe that preaching must be positive or its not preached "in love." The Bible is replete with what to do (positive) and what not to do (negative). The word encourages good (positive) and exposes and condemns evil (negative, 3 Jn. 5-12).

**Speaking the truth in love demands the "speaking" of all that God has said.** What some do not realize who hold views that circumvent and prevent speaking the truth in love is that it is the truth that sets people free and saves (Jn. 8:32, Jas. 1:18). Therefore, if one truly loves others, he will deliver the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Also, the word is designed too often be disciplinary so that correction and repentance will result (2 Tim. 4:2, Heb. 12:5).

### *What May We Expect When Truth is Spoken in Love?*

**Is preaching the truth in love always received?** One can expect some adverse reactions to the matter of speaking the truth in love—therefore the "reception" is NOT the judge of "preaching the truth in love." Jesus' speaking the truth in love caused some of his disciples to "...walk no more with him" and even resulted in division among his Jewish brethren (Jn. 6:66; 7:43). Speaking the truth in love resulted in Stephen being murdered by a mad mob (Acts 7).

**All preachers should speak the truth and speak it in love.** There should always be an earnest desire of the preacher in making sure what is taught is the truth and that the motivation for speaking it is love. Even though the preacher qualifies in both material

and motive there will be those who do not agree with the truth and seek to find fault with the preacher by charging that they are, "...not speaking the truth in love!" By thus charging, they think that they have avoided the consequences of opposing the truth and have shifted guilt to the presenter of the truth. Paul spoke the truth in love, yet, he was relevant, cogent, plain, and often rebuking (cp. 2 Cor. 12:20, 21).

**Love as taught in the Bible is not simply a sentiment, platitude, or indefinable emotion.** Love is not a warm spot in one's chest to which one can point and identify "salvation." Love is never passive and inactive. Love actually serves as the motivation for faith that prevails (Gal. 5:6). Those who attempt to separate or make antagonistic "love" and "commandments" grievously err. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments,"* John exclaimed, *"and his commandments are not grievous"* (I Jn. 5:3, see I Jn. 2:3-6). In view of biblical love, it is not surprising that God's essential nature is that of love (I Jn. 4:8).

What this generation needs are not just "speakers about love" but rather "truth spoken in love" speakers.

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