

## Speak Part 1, EPC Spring Training 2007, 05/06/07

### Class Context:

I'm assuming that you have initiated a gathering with someone & entered into at least a slightly more than casual relationship with that person or couple. You've asked them over for dinner because you want to get to know them & be a part of what God is doing in their lives.

You catch up on life, you ask good questions, you are get to know one another. You are engaging in personal ministry. And now you are getting your hands dirty. Your questions are bringing to light little glimpses of things that are going on beneath the surface. Things you very well might struggle with yourself. Things you appreciate about that person. And there they are. You can begin to see how the sinful nature is working itself out there and there.

The situation I'm envisioning could be as simple as husband & wife, could be a parent with a teenager, could be a Starbucks coffee table with two friends. Now that you have a clearer sense of where they could grow in Christ, you are in a position to speak truth to them in love, pointing them to Christ.

I'm aware that we're entering trickier territory when we move from listening into speaking. It's tricky for 3 main reasons

1. If we haven't been lovingly asking questions, and then actively listening our words may miss the mark at best, or be a hindrance at worst.
  - a. Denise Richardson said, "Jobs friends were fine until they opened their mouths."
2. The tongue is intimately connected to the heart, so if we're going to change one we must ask Jesus to help change the other.
  - a. **Luke 6:45** <sup>45</sup> The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.
3. The tongue has amazing power to either build up or to destroy
  - a. **Proverbs 15:4** <sup>4</sup> A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.
  - b. **Proverbs 18:21** <sup>21</sup> Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

Both truths are summarized in James 3

**James 3:4-11** <sup>4</sup> Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. <sup>5</sup> So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! <sup>6</sup> And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The

tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup> For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, <sup>8</sup> but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. <sup>10</sup> From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup> Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?

Opening your mouth is risky because sin is deceptive & subtle, our motives often tainted. And yet, for all the dangers, we are called to partake in a greater blessing, of being an instrument in the redeemer's hands to speak truth and communicate the fullness of the gospel in order to make disciples of all nations.

We are called & have the privilege of speaking truth in love,...of incarnating the one who spoke truth in love to us,...that Christ might be glorified.

**Let's begin by looking at what "speaking truth in love" looks like, what it is & what it isn't.**

**Let's look at some of the dangers, objections, & impediments to loving-truth-speaking & then next week lay down some specific guidelines for truth-speaking.**

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Turn with me to Ephesians 4:11, a passage I read quickly last week, which is one of the guiding passages for Jay & myself in this whole course.

**Big Context:**

circular letter,  
neatly divides into two parts, Ch 1-3 Union with Christ, Ch 4-6 Walking with Christ.

**Immediate Context:**

v.1-6 Unity in the Body through Union with Christ  
v.7-11 Distinctions within the Body through Christ's Gifts to his Church  
v.12-16 The Work & Results of Ministry

**Ephesians 4:11-12** <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip *the saints* for the work of ministry [διακονίας], for building up the body of Christ,

**→To Equip**

EQUIP – used of the disciples mending their nets, preparing them for use [Mt. 4:21], of training [Lk 6:40] of restoration [2 Cor. 13:11, Gal 6:1]

**v. 12 is why we've called this "Spring Training."** It is an exercise ground, an overt declaration of Ephesians 4:12 that the spiritual leadership of the church exists to serve the church by equipping the saints so that everyone of us is both a disciple of Jesus Christ and discipler pointing others to Jesus.

### →The Saints

Christ designed his church to look & work a certain way.  
**It is not** God's design that the work of service, the work of personal ministry, the work of relational ministry, the work of discipleship be limited to a handful of men or women.

The Great Commission is really "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength & mind, and love your neighbor as yourself"

Jesus **applies it** by telling his whole church to "Go [as you are going] make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit & teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

This is the design of Jesus Christ, to use his saints [that's you, it's not Boniface or Patrick, etc.] to further His work in His world.

→**For the work of ministry** – diakonia / service,...you hear the word Deacon in there. But it's service in the biggest sense of the word. It's the same word used to describe what Jesus did & came to do:

Mk. 10:45 "For even the Son of Man came not to be served [diakonia] but to serve [diakonia], and to give his life as a ransom for many." In other words, equipping the saints for the work of ministry means preparing one another to be, walk, talk, as Jesus did.

**NOTE also in v.12**, that the work of ministry is synonymous with the building of the body of Christ

<sup>12</sup> to equip *the saints* for the work of ministry [διακονίας], for building up the body of Christ,

Paul is not saying "focus inward & hoard the gospel." That what we are called to do is serve ourselves & no one else.

Building up the body **is** the Great Commission. It is the work Christ came to do & the work he has commissioned us to continue!

The work of ministry which you and I are called to do, has this as it's goal,... "building up the body of Christ" is not opposed to evangelism & outreach. It IS evangelism, it is outreach, it is shepherding, it is discipleship & vica versa.

When we focus on one term or another we lose sight of the fullness of Christ Jesus,...narrowing the scope of his ministry to "just" discipleship or "just" outreach or "just" shepherding.

When we focus on one term of another we lose sight of the full-orbed whole-person kind of ministry Jesus calls us to. The work of ministry, the "building up the body" is huge.

And what's the goal of the ministry by God's people to God's people?  
Of God's people to those yet to be brought in to God's people? How long do the saints need to persist in ministry, in service to Christ & in ministry to those around them?

**Ephesians 4:13** <sup>13</sup> **until** we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Until we all attain **unity of faith** in Jesus Christ,  
**unity of knowledge** of Jesus Christ,  
**unity of maturity** in Jesus on par with the maturity of Christ in all his fullness

Brothers and sisters if this is your hearts desire when you prepare to speak truth to someone,...desiring to come alongside the Spirit's work in their life & push them a step towards faith, knowledge, maturity in Christ Jesus,...we would be **bolder** in speaking truth & yet we would be **humble & loving** in our approach.

Paul says to the Philippians:

**"Philippians 1:6** <sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." & the amazing thing was that Jesus used a man like Paul to help bring that good work one step closer to completion.

The work of ministry, the work of discipleship, the work Christ has called us to [whether or not we "feel" as equipped as we'd like] is the privilege of being part of someone's life enough to be used by God in bringing about unity of faith, of knowledge, of maturity,...growing others into Christ and in Christ.

And what does successful body-building discipleship ministry look like? What's its outcome? What's the side-effect?

<sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

[Interesting that Paul drops the “d”-word here: doctrine]

Well what’s the principle means of accomplishing all this? What’s the primary means of making kingdom disciples? Paul springboards from this imagery of being tossed to and fro by doctrine, deceit, cunning, by man’s clever ideas & opinions...and he says here’s the opposite of that:

**Ephesians 4:15-16** <sup>15</sup> **Rather**, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

**First & foremost NOTE the goal.** This is another one of those important personal checks to make before opening your mouth,...does my truth spoken in love point people to Jesus Christ,...is my hearts desire for them to grow into Christ,...?

I fear our reasons are not so noble often times. The Lord blesses as he blesses, and I praise him that he uses my feeble attempts to further his work in others.

Sometimes I fear we speak truth to get people to become like us. We feel we have the solution to someone’s problem, but we don’t point people to Christ, we ultimately point them to ourselves. So we go around tossing “human wisdom” and opinions at people,...and what you win people **with** you win them **to** & you & I & the world need to see Jesus & hear from Jesus.

Sometimes I fear we speak the truth so people will leave us alone. [“Well, that’s an obvious example & that’s not out of love”...true, but we are brilliant rationalizers]

### **OK, so what is “speaking the truth in love” in its context?**

1. As you look at the context it becomes clearer it is not ANY truth.

Ex. Someone asks you if you like their haircut & you remember “speak the truth in love” & it’s a bad haircut so you say “I liked it better before” or you spin it nicely “it brings out your eyes.”

This is an example of speaking truth, perhaps out of love, but it’s not Eph. 4:15. Why not?

Context, Context, Context – Paul is talking about God’s truth here,...Biblical truth,...truth that’s not MAN’s idea of truth, not changing truth, truth tied to culture, not

truth that produces immature Christians floating about from one new idea to another of what to believe & think & how to live. But its truth that brings the focus on Jesus & has the goal of building someone up in Jesus.

Whether or not I like your haircut might make me seem nice or an insensitive jerk, but it is not the truth-speaking Paul is talking about here.

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What is the truth Paul is talking about here? What do we actually do when it comes time to speak? What do we say? **What is “the” truth?**

I’m going to argue that “speaking **the** truth in love” refers to BOTH the comfort & the call of the gospel in all its fullness. And I’m assuming here that Paul practices what he preaches, and so I want to look at some examples of “speaking the truth in love” both the comfort and the call and draw some conclusions about what it looks like & what it doesn’t.

Let’s look big picture at a book like Ephesians before we zoom in on some specifics. The comfort of the gospel is primarily emphasized in Chapters 1-3. These are the indicatives. This is who Christ is, this is what he has done, here is who you are. You have been buried with Christ.

For the non-Christian, here’s who you are not, here is the one you desperately need but do not know. You are buried & stuck in your sins. That is who you are.

Let’s look at the comfort of the gospel in Ch 1 –

**Ephesians 1:3-14** <sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

**Ephesians 2:1** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...**Ephesians 2:4-9** <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have

been saved- <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

**Ephesians 3:14-21** <sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith- that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

**This is truth, spoken in love. This is the comfort of the gospel.** Here is Jesus, here is what he has done,...you are united to Him. You are loved in Him. You have His Spirit in you. You need to hear it. The church is built up by the good news of Jesus Christ. The work of ministry, speaking truth in love, is sharing, communicating the comfort of the gospel.

**But he doesn't end there.** This is the foundation, and it's a foundation of faith in Christ that Paul never assumes (otherwise he wouldn't be speaking so much about Jesus).

**Where does Paul go from there? The call of the gospel in Ephesians 4-6.**  
Ch 4 - Because Christ is one and you are united to Him, you need to be united with one another. Because you are united to Christ,...v.17

**Ephesians 4:17** <sup>7</sup> Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.

**Ephesians 4:20-24** <sup>20</sup> But that is not the way you learned Christ!- <sup>21</sup> assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, <sup>22</sup> to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, <sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

It's the argument of Romans 6: why not sin that grace might increase,...because you died to it through Christ,...how can you live in it any longer? The indicative,...the comfort of the gospel,... includes the imperative,...the call of the gospel.

Here's Christ, here's you in Christ,...here's how you ought to think, live, speak.

You have a robe of righteousness through Christ, so live like it. "Put on" the new creation, the "new self" & "put off" the "old self",...why? Because through faith in

Christ, through union with him his death paid for sin & freed you from it & his righteousness is yours and it frees you to serve him.

**Ephesians 4:32** <sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

See the connection, even contained in one verse: comfort & call.

Eph. 5 – Because your identity is in Christ you are freed to serve others as Christ has served you,... husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church, wives submit to your husbands as unto the Lord.

Eph. 6 - children to obey their parents, slaves their masters,

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This is a pattern we see throughout Paul's letters, both the comfort & the call of the gospel. We see it letter wide,...Romans 1-11, 12-16 for example. Galatians 1-4, 5-6. Colossians 1-2, & 3-4.

But my point is that while this is a pattern and distinction we see, the two are never separate from one another. "Speaking the truth in love" is both comfort & call.

Turn with me to Romans 8

Romans 8:1-11 COMFORT

**Romans 8:1-2** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

**Romans 8:7-11** <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

You have died with Christ, you have been raised with Christ. He will be your strength in weakness, his fullness is what you need, you are united to Him.

But notice the Call in Romans 8:12-13

**Romans 8:12-13** <sup>12</sup> **So then**, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

**Speaking the truth in love is communicating the gospel in all it's fullness** modeled for us in Scripture. Modeled for us in Christ. Jesus comes into people's lives as he has come into yours and mine with his comfort. With justification. With our identity being sealed up & secured in Him. With His Spirit to help us. And he comes to us with a call : take up your cross and follow me.

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The church is always erring in terms of balance, as we all are. And I can think of two epitaphs for a Christian, two epitaphs for a church.

**The first is call without the comfort, which falls infinitely short of speaking truth in love even when it's spoken lovingly.**

**Non-lovingly spoken truth is easy to smoke out.** It looks like people who speak harsh truths to one another harshly.

A husband tells his wife, I hate it when you do that and so does the Lord.

A wife is ticked at her husband so she spits out "don't let the sun go down on your anger" while she's seething with it.

We recognize when someone is beating someone else up with the "call" of the gospel in a way that you begin to wonder if this person has experienced the love of Christ. "You just need to stop sinning & honor the Lord."

**But even lovingly spoken truth, if it's all call & no comfort falls infinitely short of "speaking the truth in love"**

Why?

Because if you truly love someone you will not be content with correcting their behavior.

If that's the case Christian discipleship doesn't look any different than Islamic discipleship, Jehovah's witness discipleship, it's call without comfort. It's attempting to produce people who act like Christians without focusing on Jesus Christ.

We can do this with one another by assuming we've moved beyond the need to talk about Jesus. We can do this with one another by feeling a call to be the "holiness" police.

We can do this with those outside the church as well. Call without comfort means your entry point with your neighbor who does not know the Lord is the fact that they are living with someone they aren't married to, they smoke, they're a jerk. You rebuke them. Why? Sometimes I fear its because if they acted more like a Christian we would be more comfortable.

**So we would reverse Jesus' approach with the woman of the well.**

"Hey, looks like you've been around the block a few times & you're living with someone out of wedlock,...you're living in sin. You're not supposed to be. God is holy." And the tragedy is, if we examine our hearts many of us would be content to stop

there. The neighbor hood tramp won't embarrass you anymore. Your kids are safer. Because the call went out, they heard it. All is well.

**But Jesus begins with living water.** He begins with the promise to be the one who truly fills & fulfills. He begins with the promise of comfort, eternal security. Yes, there is a call. But there is also the comfort.

### **Why does this fall short?**

Because if you truly love someone your hearts desire will be that they grow in faith in Jesus Christ, knowledge of Jesus Christ & the maturity of Jesus Christ.

If your hearts desire is to ask "how can I come alongside what God is doing in this person's heart and push them one step closer to Christ?" then there will hope in the midst of brokenness. There will be comfort in the midst of the call. There will be gospel in the midst of the call to bear the cross.

### **The second epitaph for a church is comfort without the call.**

This looks like a nice church with nice people. It looks like nice relationships that sound nice, and people who do & say nice things. But they do not speak the truth in love.

Comfort without call means we select nice truths & avoid the tough ones. When someone comes to us with a tough truth, ...niceness recoils and asks "where's the grace?" Niceness has no category for rebuke or correction, only fluffy nice sounding assuring truths.

A nice group of nice people may indeed only be winning people to their niceness when they could be winning them to Christ in all his fullness. Nice people don't go much further than the surface level because they are scared of confrontation even when in their own Christian walk they have grown most when Christ has confronted them.

Comfort without call, which I think looks like fluffy niceness, means we see points where we need to change & areas where someone else could grow in Christ & we are silent. Niceness means we suspect sin is poisoning someone's marriage and we are silent because we do not want to make waves. Niceness means keeping we value keeping the church family together & our own families together to the extent that we overlook the sin that is ruining hearts & homes & churches.

### **What does it look like to speak the truth in love?**

It means you extend the comfort of the gospel & the call of the gospel, and next week I want to look with you more closely at some of Paul's examples, and get into some more practical things to consider as we seek to incarnate Jesus to one another with our words.