

Speaking the truth in love

Ephesians 4:11-16; Colossians 4:2-6; 1 Peter 3:13-17

I. Bible Study/Exposition

A. Ephesians 4:11-16

1. Describe the context of Ephesians 4:15? *Building up the church to the point of maturity is the general theme. The function of church leaders/officials is to “equip the saints” (each member of the congregation) for “the work of ministry/ service,” which results in “the edifying of the body of Christ.” A mature, built up, congregation will preserve doctrinal purity. But edification requires loving attitudes and behaviors. Mutual edification is stressed within the church.*
2. Does Ephesians 4:15 apply to personal evangelism? If so, the how? *The principle of “speaking the truth in love” generally applies in all relationships, within and without the church. Relationship “building” is a big part of personal evangelism (See John 4:39-42). To edify includes the idea of encourage or strengthen. Thus, our goals in personal evangelism are similar to our goals in congregational maturity.*
3. How does a mature Christian or church balance truth speaking, or doctrinal purity, and love for others? *Edification is the guiding principle for striking the right balance. On the one hand, truth can be spoken in cold, insensitive ways that reflect a lack of love and consideration for the hearer. On the other hand, love and consideration for others may lead to idolatry—which places the desires of men above the will of God! Actually, Paul does not say “speak the truth and love,” but “speak the truth IN love.” There is not dichotomy between truth speaking and love (See Galatians 4:16). A true friend, who loves you, will always speak the truth, even when it hurts (See Proverbs 27:6). The emphasis is on the motivation of the truth speaker.*

B. Colossians 4:2

1. Describe the context of Colossians 4:5-6? *Paul is wrapping up the letter—he has finished his discussion of doctrinal and ethical teaching by 4:1. In 4:2, Paul begins his parting words by asking the Colossians to remember him and his work in their prayers—specifically, he asks them to pray “that God would open to us a door for the word”(opportunities to share the gospel), and “that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (the ability to clearly explain the gospel in an appropriate manner).*
2. What is commanded in verse 5? *We are commanded to use wisdom in our interactions with the lost.*
3. What is commanded in verse 6? *We are commanded to always speak with favor toward others, in a way that does not leave a bad taste in their mouths.*
4. What is the result of favorable speech, “seasoned with salt”? *When we care about someone, and make an effort to speak considerately, we will “know how [we] ought to answer each one.” In other words, one does not have to be a wordsmith, a poet or a scholar to know what to say to someone he cares about!*
 - a. Illustration: President George W. Bush is not good with words, but he gets his message across and appeals to a significant number of majority of voters—enough to get re-elected, anyway. He has been called the candidate running on conviction not proper diction). Bush has forever removed the excuse we often hear from Christians who are hesitant to share their faith, or who are hesitant to teach publicly

or conduct a Bible study. You may not be “good with words,” but, if you are serious about your faith and you sincerely care for the souls of the lost, then you will find the words, any words to get the message across.

C. 1 Peter 3:13-17

1. Describe the context of 1 Peter 3:15? *The proper response to persecution is the general theme. Christians are being persecuted under Nero/Rome, suffering torture and death for Christ's sake. Having faith in God during such times requires a knowledge that “the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers” (3:12). Specifically, Christians may be asked why they endure persecution instead of simply renouncing Christ to save their skin.*
2. What kind of attitude/mindset ought Christians to have toward persecution? *Resolve as opposed to fear. Resolve to defend by reason your hope.*
3. What is the hope Christians have that enables them to face persecution without fear? *A hope of heaven, eternal life, a better country!*
4. What is the significance of the words “always be ready” in verses 15? *Christians are to have solid reasons for their beliefs. A Christian who is not truly convicted by truth (perhaps, one who has a borrowed faith) will not be able to endure persecution. So, he must not wait for times of persecution to figure out what he really believes—by then it's too late.*
 - a. Illustration: A young couple begins dating and is soon engaged to be married. During the engagement, the young man tells his fiancé that he does not want children. This greatly upsets the young woman. She had just assumed that she would have children someday, but now she has to decide if she really wants children or not. The problem is that she is “in love” and cannot imagine her life without her fiancé—hence, the cause for engagement. She agrees to marriage without children. Five years later, she is depressed and bitter toward her husband. Her desire for children has only increased, while her romantic feeling of love toward her husband has only decreased. The union ends in divorce.
 - b. Illustration: Why is it a bad idea to shop for groceries when you are hungry? You end paying too much for things you don't really need.

II. Illustration of Biblical Principles for Personal Evangelism

A. The sermons in the Book of Acts

1. Obvious consideration for the needs of the hearers.
 - a. Acts 2 – Peter addresses Jews with several appeals to OT Prophecy as well as their experience with Jesus' ministry. Peter sees their conviction of faith and commands repentance and baptism. Later, in Acts 16, Peter would command the Philippian Jailer to “Believe on the Lord Jesus.”
 - b. Acts 17 – Paul speaks to a Greek audience, appealing to nature, and reason or logical deduction, and even “some of [their] own poets” to present a case for the existence of God, the creation, the spiritual nature of God—his Divine Nature (v. 29)—and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

2. Acts 23:6 – A unique example of Paul’s use of wisdom in his interactions with others—in this case, a hostile audience.
 - B. John 4:39-42 – The Samaritan Woman used her influence, such as it was, to bring others to Jesus.
- III. Application of Biblical Principles for Personal Evangelism
- A. What should motivate us to share the truth with others?
 1. Love (Ephesians 4:15) and a Biblical understanding of the spiritual condition and eternal destiny of those lost in sin.
 - a. 2 Corinthians 5:14-20
 2. There is a saying, “No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”
 3. Consider the following satirical description of prevalent attitudes toward personal evangelism:

Even though they are still babes in Christ, new converts are often more likely to share the gospel with others than long-time members of the church. Often, the results are frustrating for these new disciples. We, who have been in the church long enough to know better, look on with pity for these enthusiastic new Christians who just haven’t learned that the risks associated with personal evangelism—disappointment, frustration and broken relationships—are too high. Such risks require that we take a more cautious approach. We figure that after they have got it out of their system they’ll settle down like the rest of us. They’ll learn to pick and choose carefully those to whom they speak about Jesus and Bible truths. After all, Jesus says, “Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces” (Matthew 7:6). Personal evangelism is important, but we should not have to bear any needless pain or discomfort when it’s obvious that most people are not really interested in the truth; thus, they fall into the swine category. The Lord does not want us to waste our time with swine. Instead, we need to focus our energies on “holding our own,” “keeping the fort,” and making sure that those who are already in the church don’t “go off” into digression.

- a. Identify 3 or more attitudes/beliefs toward personal evangelism described in this satire:
 - 1) _____
 - 2) _____
 - 3) _____
- b. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 represents “strong agreement” and 1 represents “strong disagreement,” how well do you think this satire represents prevailing attitudes in your congregation? _____
- c. On the same scale of 1 to 5, how well does this satire reflect your own attitudes toward personal evangelism? _____

- B. Since we are motivated by love and consideration for the lost, we then are willing to make the effort to learn what and how to speak the truth in love.
1. Equippers are placed in the church to equip each member for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12).
 - a. Take advantage of “equippers” in the church. Seek out brothers and sisters who can teach you about the truths of God’s word, who can help you learn to effectively communicate the message and encourage you and help you grow spiritually—and in turn, you may be able to encourage someone else.
 - b. The truth encompasses the whole body of knowledge taught in the Bible. Like any body of knowledge, facts must be learned, principles must be understood, and conclusions must be drawn. We must be educated in the Bible. It takes four years of college courses to become educated in most areas of knowledge—think about the number of books read, the hours of listening to lectures, conducting research and writing a typical college student completes to be educated in some secular field. Secular education is important. But, do we evidence the higher importance we place on Bible education in our lives?
 2. Building relationships is essential to personal evangelism. Most friendships are built upon shared interests, common goals and similar experiences. “A man who has friends must himself be friendly” (Proverbs 24:18). Building a relationship provides the trust and influence a Christian needs to effectively share the gospel. Building a relationship will also give the Christian valuable insight into the life of his friend that will enable him to know “how” to best to communicate the truth.
 - a. Illustration:

When they first met as co-workers at the same company, Jim and Stan got into a discussion about religion. Jim, a faithful member of the Lord’s church explained the plan of salvation with book, chapter and verse. He also showed how important it is to have Bible authority for all we do in faith and practice, including the work and worship of the church. Jim illustrated how religious people may fail to obey the truth because they follow traditions of men instead of simply following the Bible. Jim showed how Paul corrected the Corinthians’ incorrect observance of the Lord’s Supper by going back to the original instructions given by Jesus and passed down by Paul. Jim concluded by asking Stan if he wanted to follow the Bible and be saved or keep practicing his false religion and be judged to a devil’s hell. Stan didn’t say much, but Jim could tell that he wasn’t getting anywhere. So, he changed the subject and never brought up religion again in his talks with Stan.

A year later, Jim and Stan had become good friends. The both enjoyed playing tennis and had begun meeting twice a week to play at the local tennis club. Over time, they learned a lot about each other. Jim learned about Stan’s upbringing—how Stan’s father was a staunch conservative preacher of a fundamentalist denomination. Jim realized that Stan had heard about commandment keeping and a devil’s hell since he was a child. But Stan’s distant relationship with his father and the apparent lack of joy in his father’s church had turned Stan off to religion in general.

Jim realized that Stan had only asked Jim about his faith out of curiosity. Stan had no intentions of getting religion or making a commitment to any kind of faith. To Stan, religion was a downer, a joy-killer. Nevertheless, Stan had lately noticed that Jim seems to really enjoy life and has a

warm and loving family. Stan is continually amazed at how much Jim enjoys going to church. Stan realizes that it isn't just a hollow duty or obligation for Jim to worship God—it's a joy to him. Stan is still not looking to make any changes in his life, but he has a much more open mind toward Jim's church than he ever had toward his father's church.

Stan and Jim meet to play tennis every Thursday evening. But this Thursday things were different, and Jim could tell right away that Stan was not a happy camper. Jim casually asked him, "What's going on with you? You seem a little down." Stan replied, "Yah, I guess I am. My father passed away last night. I haven't spoken to him in ten years. Mom called this morning. I suppose I'll have to fly home for the funeral." Jim comforted his friend. He put his hand on Stan's shoulder. He asked Stan if there was anything he could do to help. "Do you need me to cover your shift at work?" Jim asked. "No, the company gives us time off for bereavement," Stan said, "and besides, I could use a vacation."

Jim asked Stan if he would like to pray together. There in the middle of the tennis court, Stan bowed his head and listened as Jim prayed that God would help Stan and comfort him during this time of need. After Jim said "Amen," the two finished their match and called it a day.

As they walked out to the parking lot, Stan stopped and asked Jim, "Do you think my father is in heaven?" With anyone other than Stan, Jim would have stammered and stuttered to answer such a loaded question. But with Stan, his close friend, Jim didn't hesitate or skip a beat. He said, "That's not my place to say, Stan. Christ is the judge, and we will all stand before Him. One thing I do know is that life does not end in death. That's why we need to prepare ourselves for what lies beyond this." Jim went on to explain the reasons that he believed in an afterlife. He focused on the resurrection of Jesus. "This one fact," Jim said, "is so compelling that I have given my life to serving Jesus, knowing that He gave His life for me."

In that moment, Stan began to believe. He went to his father's funeral. He mourned for his father, especially for the lost time they had spent resenting and blaming each other. Stan thought within himself, "If there is an afterlife, then I hope my father was prepared." His next thought came so suddenly that he laughed quietly to himself. He thought, "I hope I'll be prepared." Did he believe in an afterlife? Did he believe in the resurrection of the dead? The resurrection of Jesus? Yes. He did.

When Stan returned home, he immediately called Jim and asked if he could come by to ask him some questions about the Bible. "Is this Stanley Walters?" Jim asked just to make sure he knew who he was talking to. Stan laughed. "I know. I'm not the most religious guy in town. But, I ready to give faith a fair hearing, and I trust you to tell me the truth."

Jim and Stan began studying the Bible together, and in a few weeks, Stan obeyed the gospel.

3. How we say it is as important as what we say! (Process vs. content)
 - a. Process describes the way we interact with others. Content describes the particular issue(s) that our interactions focus on at a given time.
 - 1) A husband yells at his wife when he is angry. This is his process.
 - 2) He is angry because she failed to pick up his dry cleaning again. This is the content.
 - The content may change, but the husband's process will likely remain the same.

- b. Changing our process may have drastic effects on our interactions with others.
- 1) A husband who typically yells when he is angry may begin to count to ten instead of yelling and then find he is able to talk respectfully to his wife. The content or issue is more likely to be resolved and the relationship will likely become stronger.
- c. A typical, but ineffective process for personal evangelism:
- 1) As soon as the subject of religion is broached, we begin explaining why we are different from other religious groups. We get defensive and argumentative; quoting any verse we can remember to support our positions. Not surprisingly, we find ourselves trying to explain why we are right and everybody else is wrong. The hearer(s) are turned off by our defensiveness and considers our apparent need to distinguish ourselves from other believers as arrogant and insensitive. The discussion is brought to a screeching halt when someone asks, "What, do you think you're the only people going to heaven?" Our hesitancy to answer confirms our arrogance in the hearer's mind. The discussion is over and we either feel frustrated and discouraged or we rationalize our lack of effectiveness by judging the hearer's heart, insisting that he must not have a sincere interest in the truth.

d. A change of process can make all the difference.

- 1) Instead of trying to explain our differences, emphasize our similarities with other faith-groups.
- 2) Instead of getting on the defensive, take the offensive and ask about the hearer's beliefs.
- 3) Instead of personalizing who's right and wrong, depersonalize the discussion by asking questions of the Scriptures, only suggesting conclusions.
 - a. For example, you might say, "In Matthew 28:19-20, could it be that baptism has a special significance above other good works, since Jesus mentions baptism, separate and apart from all the other commandments we should observe?"
 - b. You might say, "I'm wondering if Paul indicates that baptism is the point at which God's work of regeneration takes place, since he says we are "buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him, through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12). It seems that God has chosen baptism as the moment of forgiveness, while Jesus' blood is the basis and our faith is the means of forgiveness.
- 4) Instead of beginning with a debate over doctrinal issues concerning salvation, or worship or church government, begin with a discussion of inspiration, or how to understand the Bible, or the old and new covenants.

Shared beliefs provide a common ground to build upon

Opportunity to make the hearer think, and perhaps, reconsider his ideas

Relieves tension and brings some objectivity to the discussion

Evaluates the hearer's level of Bible knowledge & sets the stage for more effective discussion of doctrine