



# SESSION 5

## SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE

**BIBLE STORY:** Paul Encouraged the Ephesians (Acts 9:1-6; 19:1-10,21-31; 20:1; Ephesians 3:14–4:16)

**SOME PEOPLE SAY:** If you don't agree with me, you don't love me.

**GOD SAYS:** Speak the truth in love.

**TODAY'S POINT:** Speak the truth in love.

**THEME VERSE:** Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. *Romans 12:2*

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. *Romans 12:2 (KJV)*

**BONUS VERSE:** But speaking the truth in love; let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. *Ephesians 4:15*

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. *Ephesians 4:15 (KJV)*

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

### INTRODUCTION

If you have kids, in your life, or even know someone with kids, you've probably observed the importance of the statement "speak the truth in love."

If a parent or another authority figure speaks the truth without love, she will be dictatorial or legalistic. If he loves but does not speak the truth, then he will be overly permissive and will not provide healthy boundaries. Therefore, real love looks like consistently speaking the truth in a loving manner.

Today's study provides specific examples of those who spoke the truth in love. We will see that speaking the truth in love is not always the easiest habit to embrace. Not everyone responds well to the truth, even when it is spoken in love. Others' responses, however, should not change our desire to be faithful to the teachings found in Scripture. Our goal is to learn from these examples so that we can embrace their practices in our own lives.

## **JESUS SPOKE THE TRUTH IN LOVE (ACTS 9:1-6)**

Jesus is always our best example, and this case is no different. Saul, also known as Paul, who would later write a large portion of the New Testament, was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. Paul was a Jewish religious leader, educated in “the strictness of our ancestral law” (Acts 22:3). He took up the mission to stop the spread of this new faith in Jesus, believing it was contrary to God’s law. He was on his way to Damascus to do just that when he found himself in a conversation with the living Savior. He learned that Jesus is alive and is God’s Son and that by persecuting Jesus’ followers, he was persecuting Jesus Himself. The Scripture does not reveal what Saul felt or thought in this moment, but it had to be more than shocking. Here was Saul thinking that he was on God’s side by actively persecuting those who were following Jesus. Instead, he was going against God’s plan.

How many times have we been guilty of not telling someone they were heading in the wrong direction because we feared we would hurt their feelings or were afraid of conflict? If we are being honest, most of us, if not all of us, have made this mistake. This type of response is anything but loving. Jesus knew that Saul was in the wrong and confronted him with the truth. Jesus did not belittle Saul, but He did not hold back on His words either. And Jesus’ words changed the trajectory of Saul’s life in the best way possible.

Yes, it may be difficult to confront loved ones with the truth. But if we truly love them, then we will speak the truth to them in a loving manner. God can use this to bring about important change!

## **PAUL SPOKE THE TRUTH IN LOVE (ACTS 19:1-10)**

Many of us have coached our children, grandchildren, and even ourselves not to bring up certain subjects at the extended family dinner table. We fear the reactions that may result. All too often one of the topics we say not to address is religion. Paul (his Roman name), known as Saul (his Hebrew name) in the previous passage, apparently didn’t have any reservations about talking to anyone about Jesus no matter who that person was. He spoke about Jesus in many environments, some very hostile.

First, we see Paul learn that a small group had been baptized but had not received, or even heard of, the Holy Spirit. Paul asked questions about their baptism and learned that they had been baptized in response to the teachings of John the Baptist. John had said that his baptism was incomplete and to watch for another: Jesus (Matthew 3:11). So Paul began to share the gospel of Jesus with them and they were baptized “into the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Next, we see Paul teaching in the local Jewish synagogue over a period of three months. When some became hardened and would not believe, Paul did not let their actions deter his obedience to the calling of sharing the good news of Jesus.

He went to the lecture hall of Tyrannus and continued teaching for two years “so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10).

The three groups’ responses represent different extremes we may encounter even today. The first are those who may be familiar with religion but not familiar with Jesus. We need to be like Paul in speaking the truth in love so that they can come to understand that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. The second are those who are far from God and hostile toward Him. The third group is made up of those who are far from God but open to hearing more. Our lives need to be lived in such a way that we can gently dialogue with any type of person over an extended period and consistently speak the truth in love.

If we badger people, or try to move too quickly, we may find ourselves having a limited time to share with them because we are speaking the truth without love. If we will take time to develop relationships and dialogue with people, we will have a better opportunity to share the gospel.

## FRIENDS SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE (ACTS 19:21-31; 20:1)

We may be able to talk ourselves into speaking the truth in love to our children and grandchildren, but speaking the truth in love to a stranger, a person in authority, or a person who is hostile to the gospel is an entirely different matter. This is exactly what we see happening in this passage. Paul, who was a prominent force for the gospel, wanted to personally address a group that was rioting against Christianity. This group was upset because Paul had been teaching that Jesus is truly God and all handmade gods are insufficient. The group was upset because Paul's words were causing them to sell fewer idols. They also convinced the crowd that this would cause their goddess, Artemis, to be despised. Paul wanted to speak to the crowd. The Bible indicates, however, that a group of disciples did not let Paul go to this hostile group. Even government officials Paul had befriended pled with him not to venture into the amphitheater where the rioters had gathered.

It had to take a great deal of courage for Paul's friends to advise him not to go. Paul was a strong leader in the church and had a great deal of authority. But, even those in leadership need to have friends who speak the truth in love. Paul needed to hear the wisdom that it would be a mistake to try to reason with such an angry crowd. And Paul listened to their advice, which is a good lesson for leaders everywhere.

## WE ARE CALLED TO SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE (EPHESIANS 3:14–4:16)

Our final study of speaking the truth in love is a reminder that we are all called to be obedient to this command as well. We once again see Paul living this out for us and he does so in two ways.

First, Paul is speaking the truth in love by praying for his brothers and sisters in Christ. The first passage (Ephesians 3:14-21) is a prayer for the church at Ephesus in which Paul shares his heart with God as well as the church family. To have someone pray over you is a powerful thing. You hear their words, and you know that they are talking to the Father on your behalf. It is not about the eloquence of the words, but rather the loving heart of the one uttering the words. Paul did this for the church at Ephesus and he is calling us to do the same thing for those we love as well.

Secondly, in Ephesians 4:1-16, Paul urges the church at Ephesus to live worthy of God's calling, to seek unity, and to avoid false teaching. Paul teaches them truth lovingly through his writing.

Toward the end of this passage, Paul urges the Ephesian Christians to speak the truth in love so that the church may grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ. Paul knew he was speaking to people who had experienced riots and persecution because of their faith. He knew the difficulty of what he was asking them to do because of his many times in prison. But he still urged them to keep speaking the truth and to keep doing it lovingly because it would bring them closer to Jesus and would bring others closer to Him as well.

## QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION

- Living out the command to speak the truth in love calls for us to equally share both truth and love. How does Jesus want you to apply the truths learned today? Is He asking you to make any personal changes in how you share His truth with those you love?
- Jesus spoke the truth in love to Paul and Paul later spoke the truth in love to others. Who is someone who has spoken the truth in love to you? Who can you speak the truth in love to this week in the hope that they will in turn speak the truth in love to others?
- Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus, and he shared his prayer with them. Is there someone in the church family who you know needs prayer right now? Can you write them a letter letting them know of your prayer or give them a call to pray with them?