

Speaking the Truth in Love Ephesians 4:7-16

Introduction

Good morning! My name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. Also, Happy New Year! It's 2019! It's the time for all things new, for resolutions and goals and vision. So we're kicking off this year with a new rhythm too.

From day one, Antioch has placed great value on covenant membership—after all, our mission statement is built on what we call “intentional gospel relationships”. In fact, let's look at that mission together, which says, “We pursue intentional gospel relationships to display Christ's glory among the nations.” Now, we pursue those relationships in a couple of different ways. One is with people who do not know Jesus, and we are communicating the gospel to them through a genuine relationship. The other is with people who *do* know Jesus, fellow members of the body of Christ.

Because these relationships are literally what makes up a church, we want to do everything we can to help cultivate them. That is why we practice covenant membership. Each year at Antioch we not only guide new people through our membership process, we also ask existing members to renew their membership covenant. This reminds us of what we've committed to one another based on Jesus' commands. In the past we've emphasized membership renewal toward the end of a year, which often landed in the craziness of December. But here's our new rhythm as a church family: January is actually going to be our annual time for membership renewal. And hopefully it will help us start the year in the right direction as a church.

Our sermon series during this time of renewal is titled, “Speaking the Truth in Love,” which is a phrase that's taken directly from Ephesians 4. It's also a phrase that appears on the front page of our membership covenant. Why focus on this one aspect of church membership when there are so many others? Because it's something that we really want to grow in as a church.

For example, over the past year there were multiple times that we as pastors were speaking the truth in love and the person responded, “No one has ever said this to me before.” That would be no problem, except that the Bible doesn't teach that only pastors are to be speaking the truth in love. No, all members of the church are commanded to

be constantly speaking the truth to one another in love. Without doing this, according to Ephesians 4, the church literally cannot grow!

So today we'll be taking our text from Ephesians 4:7-16 in a message simply titled, "Speaking the Truth in Love". You can find that passage on page 977 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs. Today's main idea goes like this: We cannot have intentional gospel relationships without speaking the truth to one another in love. Thankfully, as you'll see in the outline of today's message, (1) We can speak the truth to one another in love, first, because Christ fills his church with grace - vv. 7-12, and second, because (2) Christ fills his church with truth - vv. 13-16.

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Ephesians 4:7-16. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says,

*"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men."*

⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ 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. Ephesians 4:7-16

May the Word preached here today echo in our hearts and among the nations. And all God's people said, *Amen*. You may be seated.

Exposition

How many of you, by a show of hands, have ever had a Hot Brown? How many of you don't even know what that is? Ok people, it's time for some local culture. This isn't just a Kentucky thing, this is Louisville thing!

The Hot Brown was created in the 1920's at The Brown Hotel here in downtown Louisville. Here's how the hotel's website tells the story: "In the 1920's, The Brown Hotel drew over 1,200 guests each evening for its dinner dance. By the wee hours of the morning, guests would grow weary of dancing and make their way to the restaurant for a bite to eat. Sensing their desire for something more glamorous than traditional ham and eggs, Chef Fred Schmidt set out to create something new to tempt his guests' palates. His unique dish? An open-faced turkey sandwich with bacon and a delicate Mornay sauce."¹

And so [here](#) it is in all its glory. Do you see the layers that make up the masterpiece? Open-faced turkey sandwich, bacon, and then it's all smothered in Mornay sauce, which is this creamy, cheesy sauce made of magic. Now you may be wondering why I'm making you hungry before this long sermon, perhaps even tempting you to break your new year's diet resolution. The answer is obvious: when I read Ephesians 4:7-16, I see a Hot Brown. Don't you? Let me explain.

In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, he spends the first three chapters unpacking doctrine about the church's high calling² to relationship with Christ and one another. Then we arrive at chapter four, where Paul begins,

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, Ephesians 4:1*³

From here throughout the remaining three chapters of Ephesians, Paul explains how the church can live up to their high calling. He goes on to say that because God is one, always in perfect unity, then his church must be eager to walk in unity. And really, how can a *disunified* church represent a God who is the very *definition of unity*: Father, Son, and Spirit?

¹ The Brown Hotel, "Louisville's Culinary Legend, The Hot Brown," <https://www.brownhotel.com/dining/hot-brown>

² Ephesians 1:18

³ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament

But it's not just a communist unity where everyone loses their individual identity. That would be like taking the parts of a Hot Brown and putting them all in a blender. Mmm, look how we've all become one (yuck!). No, it's a unity that is made glorious because there is still diversity. Every individual part plays a role so unique that if you were to take that part out, it would be like taking out a part of the Hot Brown—it's no longer a special thing, and the glory fades.

Paul wanted the glory of God's unity to fill the church at Ephesus, and so do we here at Antioch. That's because it's what God wants; he wants to fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory as the waters cover the sea.⁴ Really, this is what we just spent all of Advent learning, that God wanted it so bad he left heaven and *incarnated* himself as a man on earth. Let's not be too quick to move on from this wonder:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Jesus was filled full with God's glory.⁵ And when he laid down his life and rose again and returned to heaven and sent his Spirit all for the church, he was putting a ring on her finger. And as she became his bride, what do you think became her's? Everything that belongs to him, right. All the glory he is filled with, he wants to pour into her.

There's the doctrine, but how does he do this? What does this look like? Check out this amazing connection between John 1:14 and Ephesians 4, between our last sermon series and this one. John says the glory that filled Jesus could also be described as—what—grace and truth. Guess how Paul describes the glory that Jesus pours upon his church? As *grace and truth*.

I. We Can Speak the Truth to One Another in Love Because Christ Fills His Church with Grace - vv. 7-12

So, let's take a look at the first together, that we can speak the truth to one another in love because Christ fills his church with *grace*. We begin reading in verse 7,

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says,

"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,

⁴ Habakkuk 2:14

⁵ Colossian 1:19; Hebrews 1:3

and he gave gifts to men.” Ephesians 4:7-8

Let me say, first of all, that when it comes to a challenging command like speaking the truth in love, we all need a ton of grace to obey it. For some of you, as I’ve heard an old friend describe himself, your love language is words of condemnation. You’re prophetic, you love a good argument—however you wanna say it—you’re happy to speak your mind to others. I’m not saying that’s all bad, I’m just saying you need the grace of Jesus to speak the truth *in love*.

For others among you, and probably a greater number of you, speaking the truth in love, the idea of willingly confronting someone, sounds like torture; maybe even feels un-Christian. Conflict makes you clammy, so it’s better to put on the face of unity and keep your frustrations to yourself. You’ve got the love part, but you need the grace of Jesus to *speak the truth*.

Wherever you find yourself on this spectrum, hear this word again: “grace was given to each one of us”. Paul reminds us that Jesus is full of grace and eager to give it. He helps us understand this by quoting from Psalm 68, which says,

*You ascended on high,
leading a host of captives in your train
and receiving gifts among men,
even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there. Psalm 68:18*

This psalm is what has been called a victory ode. It gives you this picture of warrior-king who has led his army to victory in conquering the enemy. And he therefore has prisoners of war and is receiving the spoils of war, being submitted to among the enemy and celebrated among his people. It’s a beautiful image of Jesus as the warrior-king who “always leads us in triumphal procession”.⁶

But notice that Paul applies the psalm a little differently to Jesus here in Ephesians 4. Rather than “receiving gifts, Paul says that Jesus “gave gifts”. What’s up, Paul, why you messin’ with the Bible? What Paul is saying here is that Jesus isn’t just the warrior-king who disarmed the enemy and put them to open shame⁷; he also takes the spoils of war and he gives them to his church.⁸ This is what he *descended*, he came down, to do by

⁶ 2 Corinthians 2:14

⁷ Colossians 2:15

⁸ Bruce; Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 121-122

dying on the cross and rising again; and this is what he *ascended*, returned to heaven, to do by sending his Spirit to come live in every member of his church. This is what Paul is talking about when he continues in verse nine,

⁹ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) Ephesians 4:9-10

And there it is again, that idea of Jesus filling something up. Track with me back to the beginning of the Bible. There, God creates a world, puts a man and woman in the middle of it, and basically says to them, ‘Go, fill it up with my glory.’⁹ But if you know the story, then you know it’s a fail, right? Look at human history—we don’t fill the earth with the pure glory of God, we fill it with things that come from filthy hearts, hearts where every intention and thought is only evil continually.¹⁰

So Jesus comes to fix what we broke, to carry out the glory command that we couldn’t. He comes to fill God’s world with God’s glory by filling *you* with his glory—along with every believer in Africa and South America and Asia and the Middle East and Australia—a church to cover all the world! He has already defeated Satan; he has destroyed the authority of sin over your life; he has told death that it doesn’t have the last laugh anymore. The warrior-king has conquered.

But how has he given the spoils of war to his people? Paul tells us in verse 11:

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, Ephesians 4:11-12

The spoil that Jesus freely gave to his church were people, people made to reflect Jesus in a unique and crucial way. Apostles to give eyewitness testimony to Jesus, prophets to proclaim the words of God, evangelists to carry forward the good news, and shepherds and teachers to tend and feed the church.¹¹ Brothers and sisters, we would not be here today if Jesus did not give these gifts of grace to his church. It would be like having all the ingredients of a Hot Brown, but no chef to put them all together.

⁹ Genesis 1:28

¹⁰ Genesis 6:5

¹¹ Foulkes, 124-126

But it's also not just the chef that's important. If you don't have any ingredients, you just have an empty plate. So, we have to see that every member of Jesus' church is uniquely made to reflect him and contribute. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers are given to help each member live into his or her identity, and to bring out the key ingredient (so to speak) they contribute to the life of the church.

You are a gift of grace, and you matter. And without a doubt, part of what you have been made to contribute, by the grace Jesus is pouring into your life, is to speak the truth to others in love.

II. We Can Speak the Truth to One Another in Love Because Christ Fills His Church with Truth - vv. 13-16

This brings us to our second hope in being able to do so: we can speak the truth to one another in love because Christ fills his church with truth. Paul tells us that Jesus graciously gave leaders to his church to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

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, Ephesians 4:13

There is so much packed into this one verse, and I would love to just settle here for a while. But for the sake of time I'll just use the simple image that Paul so often does: the head and the body.

When I lived in East Africa, my friends had a phrase that described how babies are born with large heads and small bodies (this isn't abnormal, it's just the way we all start out). They called this having a "duba ras," literally a "pumpkin head". It takes a lot of time and effort for any of us to grow into the measure of the stature of the fullness of our head, right?

It's not just a matter of your body being proportionate to the size of your head. Growing into mature manhood or womanhood means knowing yourself really well, to the point of being comfortable in your own skin. It means all the parts of your body working together—like the difference between a newborn foal who tries to walk on gangly legs and a full-grown thoroughbred that can run in the Derby. In some ways, you could say all that takes a good part of a lifetime.

In the same way, Paul uses this image to describe the growth and maturity of the church. Jesus himself is

the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. Colossians 2:19

That means we are Jesus' body, the church—and not just this local church, but the universal church, all followers of Jesus from all time. Now, think with me for a moment how disproportionate this head and body are. Jesus as the head is fully developed; he's full of God's glory.¹² And even though in him we stand perfect before God and full of his glory because we're full of his presence,¹³ we still have to "grow into ourselves"; to borrow a phrase from verse 15, we need to "grow up in every way into him who is the head". We have not, individually or together, measured up to the stature of the fullness of Christ himself.¹⁴

And so, not to be insensitive, but we're kind of a pumpkin head, with this fully formed head and an underdeveloped body. Ironically, however, this is actually an encouraging thought—we're still growing, we haven't arrived. Growing into the fullness of Christ means knowing him really well, and knowing him together. Not just knowledge *about him*, but intimacy *with him*. And you see, the way Jesus has set up his body means none of this can happen without all the parts of the body.¹⁵ We are to grow until we match the Head,

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. Ephesians 4:16

One of my favorite things that we do at each of our Fall pastor retreats is we take time to speak the truth to one another by answering the question, "How over the past year have we experienced Christ in one another?" This usually takes a few hours, and the result is almost always the same. Not only do we walk away built up by one another, but we're deeply reminded just how much we need each other, that none of us are omni-competent. As John Calvin put it,

¹² Colossians 1:19

¹³ Colossians 2:9-10

¹⁴ Bruce

¹⁵ Foulkes, 127-128

*No member of the body of Christ is [given] such perfection as to be able, without the assistance of others, to supply his own [needs].*¹⁶

This is why we're all about intentional gospel relationships and Family Groups. It's not just a modern way to do Sunday School. This is how you grow, how the body of Christ grows. The world around us is only going to become more convinced that spiritual life is something that—if you practice it at all—you do on your own. It's only going to become more common for people to say, "I love Jesus but not the church." One of the biggest problems with that, however, is it's hard enough to survive as a Christian with a loving community around you, let alone on your own. That's why Paul is telling us to move toward maturity *together*,

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.
Ephesians 4:14

Here are the images Paul uses for the danger all Christians face: can an infant protect itself from harm? Can a boat with no sail or rudder make its way through a storm? Of course not! Until we reach full maturity in Christ as a church and as individuals, we are in harm's way, like a lion after an infant, or a hurricane around a paddle boat.

The danger Paul's talking about here is lies and schemes. There is one truth that nourishes and protects the church, and it's not just a doctrinal statement—ultimately, it's a Person, Jesus Christ, and all that the Bible teaches about him. Anything that is contrary to that truth is a lie; and any form of trying to convince others of that lie is a scheme. They're nothing less than the lies and schemes used by the serpent to deceive Eve in the very beginning.¹⁷

Thankfully, Jesus, who is not only full of grace but also full of truth, fills his church with truth. How does he do that? *Through you*. Look at verse 15 with me:

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, Ephesians 4:15

Not just through me, the preacher. Not just through us, the pastors. But through all the members of Christ's body, speaking the truth to one another in love. Yes, correcting one another when we're believing lies. But also, confronting one another when we're walking

¹⁶ John Calvin via Foulkes, 121

¹⁷ Genesis 3:1-6; 2 Corinthians 11:3; Foulkes, 129

in sin, counseling one another when we're doing things that aren't wise, affirming one another with our identity in Christ, and warning one another when we're starting to wander. And not just doing this occasionally, when things get really bad, but constantly. In fact, the word Paul uses here literally means "truthing" one another.¹⁸ It's not just about our words, but being the presence of Christ to one another.

If we don't love each other enough to do these things, to take the risk of making things awkward, then we won't grow. Worse than that, in the long run, we won't survive. In a way, we'd already be living a lie, because when we see things that need to be spoken into a brother or sister's life and we don't approach them honestly with deep affection, then we're being false. And Paul says just a few verses later,

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Ephesians 4:25

To sum this up, we cannot have intentional gospel relationships without speaking the truth to one another in love.

Conclusion

What a challenging word, right? But remember, we can do it because Jesus is full of grace *and* truth, and he fills his church with the same. And yet, there's an even better parting word to send us into our time of communion. We can also speak the truth to one another in love because *Christ builds his church with love*.

Remember the Hot Brown? Think of it this way. The open-faced turkey sandwich, that's grace. The bacon, that's truth. And the creamy, cheesy mornay sauce that makes the magic happen, that's the love that Jesus smothers over his church. He isn't inviting us to life alone or to be immature forever, but to a love feast together.

And here is that feast. On the night Jesus was betrayed he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to them and said, "This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me." He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, "This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you

¹⁸ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word, Loc 2243-2247; John R.W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today, 171-172

announce the Lord's death until he returns." In other words, **we are announcing that Jesus Christ is the truth spoken in love today and forever.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you're a baptized believer, come and remember what Jesus has done for you. If you're a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you're not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. In past we have also had a number of volunteers who pray with people at this time. We would like to start this again, so please let us know if you'd be interested. Also, if God has brought someone to mind that you need to speak the truth in love to, it would be a great first step to come and let us pray for you. Let's pray.

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