

## Sermon – 28/09/2008 am

### Truth in Love

Study Text: Ephesians 4:15-16

Spring is such a beautiful season. Have you noticed all the buds bursting open to produce flowers and new growth? Just a few months ago I was pruning the roses. It was difficult to tell if some branches were dead or alive. In fact I cut many branches out this year in a heavy pruning. Now the branches that remained are bursting forth with new growth. The ones that were cut off lie dead on the ground.

Jesus said ‘I am the true vine and you are the branches’. ‘Abide in me and I in you, since a branch cannot bear fruit of itself – it must remain in the vine’ (John 15). The message is clear – without Jesus we can do nothing, we can achieve nothing and we will perish. This picture presented by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4 conveys much the same message. He uses the picture of a body rather than a vine but the dominant theme is still that of remaining in the body if we are to live and grow in Christ.

### Truth

*Speaking the truth in love.* This phrase in many ways summarises how we are to live in Christ. Let truth and love never leave you. John the elder wrote to Gaius *whom I love in truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth* he wrote (III John 1, 4).

Most Bible versions have ‘speaking the truth in love’ but the literal translation is ‘truthing in love’. Whilst speaking is perhaps the principal reference of ‘truthing’, it includes more than just speaking. It means professing the truth in word and deed; it means dealing truly with one another. This truth is the opposite of deceit and error referred to in the previous verse as characteristics of the devil, and the ungodly.

What is truth? What sort of question is that you ask? We all know what the truth is, and what a lie is, even if we do not always speak the truth. But the question ‘what is truth’ is one that echoes from every page of history. The man who sent Jesus to the cross is renowned for putting this question to Jesus – and we are glad he did. Who better to ask than Jesus? But like so many people Pilate did not wait for the answer. Still the answer is given. Jesus had said to him *everyone who is of the truth hears my voice* (John 18:37). The truth is related to Jesus.

Jesus is the truth. He said ‘I am the way the truth and the life’. Jesus is the source and the supplier of truth. All who come to Jesus and believe in him come to the truth. They are of the truth. As believers we are of the truth and we walk in the truth. In we are not in Christ we are of the devil. There is no truth in the devil. He is the father of lies. He can do nothing but lie and deceive. You have met a con man have you not? The devil is the chief con man and he has many followers.

To return to the body metaphor – truth comes from Christ the head. The church is the body of truth whilever it holds to Christ as the head. If it loses connection with the head, if it becomes the church of men, or the church of the world, truth will be lost. Beware of being taken captive by the traditions of men and worldly principles (Colossians 2:8). Truth is found only in Jesus Christ.

While truth is one, error comes in many forms. Error can come in the form of legalism. Men who think the church belongs to them are ever ready to add laws and traditions to the truth of the gospel. They deceive people into believing salvation depends upon keeping these laws. This error threatened New Testament churches like the ones at Ephesus and at Colossae. Many rules were imposed by the church – *Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle* (Colossians 2:21).

Error comes in the opposite form of antinomianism also. There are those who say anything goes when Christ sets us free from the law. There are those who say the truth is relative. It all depends on the situation. ‘What is true for you may not be true for me’ they say. ‘I believe God wants me to leave my marriage’ they may say. ‘God allows us to tell lies in certain circumstances’ they say – circumstances that they determine of course. The truth of Jesus is not relative, it is absolute.

All churches and all members of the church face the challenge of standing firm in the truth of Jesus Christ. *Hold fast to the head from whom all the body nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments grows with the increase which is from God* (Colossians 2:19). New Testament churches were continually urged to hold fast what they had (Revelation 2:25, 3:11).

Winds of error blew upon the New Testament churches and they continue to blow upon the church today. False teaching blows upon the door of all churches; it seeks out cracks in the wall and in the floor. The foundation must be strong and must be maintained. Remember Jesus Christ is the only foundation. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets – that is the gospel. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone. Christ and Christ alone is the truth on which we stand.

Truth in doctrine shows itself in truth in life. Jesus is the truth and those who are filled with Christ are filled with truth. It is amazing how soon children start telling lies – almost from the time they can speak. Why is this? Because they are born in sin. Lying belongs to our old sinful nature. It is disturbing to see how quickly and easily we can revert to that old nature and start telling lies. We must strive to tell the truth at all times for we will have to give account to our maker and master one day for every word that has come out of our mouth (Matthew 12:36).

## **In Love**

The truth in love. We are called to speak the truth but the truth in a particular way – the truth in love. Some have no trouble speaking the truth but they do so in a boastful and bitter way. There is an old proverb that says ‘think before you speak, think if what you are about to say is true and not only true but is it kind and is it necessary’. This is good advice. Take a look at what Paul writes a little further on in this chapter (4:29). ‘Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth but only what is helpful to building others up in their faith and imparting grace to them’.

It is right to be honest but we do not have to be ‘brutally honest’. Some people pride themselves in being brutally honest. Rather we are to be lovingly honest. Any form of cursing is wrong. *My brethren these things ought not to be so* writes James of those who bless God in one breath and curse men in the next (James 3: 10).

I once heard of a church member who felt it was his duty to be brutally honest and point out every one faults. This went on for some time until one day someone gently pointed out some fault in his own behaviour. The man got angry and left the church.

The apostle Paul wrote a severe letter to the church at Corinth when they started following after false teachers and criticising him and the gospel he preached. But he wrote it with tears, *that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you* (II Corinthians 2:4). The word of God is living and active. It is powerful to touch our hearts. It will rebuke and correct us.

Love must not be a cover for the truth. In some sections of the church love is considered more important than truth. I refer to those driven by ecumenism or organisational unity. We may not hear much about ecumenism today but it is still high on the agenda of some churches. Some Protestant churches are pursuing unity with the Church of Rome. Such a unity would mean abandoning the truth of the gospel but some are prepared to do this in the name of love.

Whatever you say and whatever you do, let it be done in love. May love motivate all that you say! Speak with the hope of building one another up in the Lord Jesus Christ Speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord (5:19). If you are speaking the words of the Bible what you say will be true and if you know the love of Christ in your heart it will also be in love.

## **Growing Up In Christ**

*Grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ* (4:15). The church is the body of Christ. We are members of this body, each one unique and each one essential as we exercise our gifts in the building up of the body. Christ is the head of the body. He is the one who controls every part of the body. In him all things hold together and work together – joined and knit together are the words we find in verse 16 – as well as in Colossians 2:19. The head is vital to the whole functioning of the body.

A baby has a large head in proportion to the rest of its body. As the body grows, as the arms and fingers, the legs and the toes grow they become proportional to the head. We are to be growing up into Christ as members of his body.

Being joined to the head is vital to this growth. The head directs every part of the body. Our hands and feet only move when directed by the head. The brain works through the nervous system. Through connection to the head we are nourished. While it is the heart that pumps the blood through the body making it grow, the head plays an essential part in the blood flow also. This is only a metaphor but a very instructive metaphor and one which helps us tremendously to understand the church and our place in it relative to others and to Christ.

‘Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God made it grow’. The church will only grow, and you as a member of the church will only grow, as you remain steadfast in Jesus Christ. God gives the growth but remember you have a role to play, be it planting, or watering, or whatever the Lord gives you to do. Remember also that whatever you do you must do it in truth and in love.

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