

The 9th Command: Truth Speaking in Love

Ephesians 4:25

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A few weeks ago I told you the story of my friends who were robbed at gunpoint. During the robbery my friend asked one of the gunmen, "Do you know Jesus as your Savior?" The man answered, "Yes, but I don't want to talk about that right now." Several other burglaries matched theirs and with similar-looking gunmen. This week, three men were arrested in connection with these crimes. It turns out, one of them claims to be a pastor who has actually written a book—get this—on moving on from a life of crime. Apparently, instead of my friend asking if he knew Jesus, he should have asked the masked gunman, "Are you a pastor?"

Obviously armed burglary is a violation of the eighth command against stealing but also relates to the ninth command's prohibition against a life of deceit: "*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*" (Exodus 20:16 ESV) We took this apart last week and I'll not repeat much here other than to note that while the immediate context is being a false witness in a court of law, it applies broadly to truth-speaking in all communication. None of it is to be false; therefore all of it is to be true. The reason this is a moral issue is that God is true and all falsehood is contradictory to him. In fact, it is God's truthfulness that means we don't have to lie. God gives us promises which, if we rely on them, eliminate our need to manipulate people or circumstances with false communication.

We ended last week's message by seeing how God changes liars into truth-speakers. He does this by placing truth in our hearts. How? Jesus said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*" (John 14:6) When a liar trusts in Jesus, the transforming power of gospel truth enters his soul. When truth is in me, now truth will flow through me—through my words and through my whole life.

This weekend I want us to see what that looks like practically. How does a Christ-follower talk? Our main passage is Ephesians 4:25. Paul gets practical with his put off/put on paradigm. We are to put off the old sinful self by not living according to its desires. Rather, like a new shirt, we are to put on the new self by striving to live in accordance with this new life that is ours in Jesus. That is verses 20-24. Verse 25 says, "*Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*"

It is noteworthy that Paul begins with deception as the first example. Why? I think it is because it's the easiest to do and the easiest to rationalize. It's like when you are weeding your garden, it's best to pull the biggest and fastest growing weeds first. Deceptive speech is the biggest weed in the sinner's garden because all of the other sins require a little bit of it. I got thinking about this as it relates to all the commands. The theme of falsehood runs through all of the Ten Commandments:

- First command—false glory
- Second command—false gods
- Third command—false identity
- Fourth command—false priorities
- Fifth command—false authority
- Sixth command—false love
- Seventh command—false purity
- Eighth command—false gain
- Ninth command—false words
- Tenth command—false satisfaction

We must see deceit as a systemic part of a much larger way of living. This realm is the realm set against God. It has its own leader. Jesus said so.

"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44)



From this perspective, we can ask, who's your daddy? Are you living on the left side or the right side?

- *"[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."* (1 Timothy 2:4)
- *"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* (Colossians 1:13-14)

So Paul's admonition in Ephesians 4 is to put away in our communication that which was the DNA of Satan and the old way of living. Rather, we are to put on a new kind of speaking; truth-speaking. *"Let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor."* (Ephesians 4:25) Look also at Ephesians 4:14-15 (emphasis added)—

*"...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. Rather, **speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."*

Here we see the same contrast. Our old selves are dominated by false teaching and living, but our new life in Christ is grounded in the truth about him and lived in a lifestyle of truth-speaking in love to one another. To speak the truth is to communicate what is true as best as we know it. To speak the truth in love is to speak what will build the other person up. Are you someone who speaks the truth in love or hate? In love or selfishness? In love or in deceit?

Non-truths, Half-truths, and Other Distortions of Loving Truth-speaking

Proverbs 18:21 says, *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue."* This one organ of our body has more power and ability to destroy or do good than any other. It also indicates whether gospel truth is actually in our hearts, *"If anyone thinks he is religious and does not*

bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless." (James 1:26)

Failure to speak the truth about myself—Brag, gloat, swagger

These deceive others by misrepresenting who we really are or by simply focusing on a strength without reference to our failures or weaknesses. This includes embellishing the story or dropping little details that inflate ourselves to others. "The other day I was talking to my good friend the governor..." Name dropping. Another example: "Yeah, I was headed to the big leagues but then I threw out my arm in the 8th grade..." Or how about when you have to one up the other person's story: "You hiked the Indiana Dunes? I love to hike too and I learned so much retracing Lewis and Clark's expedition."

A couple months ago the staff read an article about the "humblebrag"—bragging that sounds like humility. Christians, we are really good at this because we know that Jesus' humility means we have to sound humble even as we brag. You see this on Facebook a lot. People post, "I was humbled to be asked to speak at such and such." "I was encouraged by reading the entire book Romans this morning." "I've been praying all day over Leviticus 19." "I'm so thankful to God that my son got all A's on his report card." One staff person suggested we should just call it the "Facebrag."

Why is bragging and arrogant talk not telling the truth? It's a half-truth. It highlights a strength or blessing or opportunity without the counterbalance of gospel truth. It lacks gospel gratitude. It's all about me. It denies what the gospel says—that on my own I am a wretched sinner. Furthermore, when I understand grace, I realize that all I have has been given to me. Does that mean you can't share good news with a friend or rejoice in a blessing of God? No. But the heart check is who looks good and glorious when I am done? Me or God?

Failure to speak the truth in love about others—Gossip, slander, and other non-loving speech

- *"Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends."* (Proverbs 17:9)
- *"The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body."* (Proverbs 26:22)
- *"A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends."* (Proverbs 16:28)
- *"Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered."* (Proverbs 11:13)

Gossip and slander are the most destructive human uses of the tongue. What is gossip? *The sharing of damaging news or opinion about someone else that diminishes their reputation or standing in the eyes of others.* "Gossip is really very simple: Person A says something to person B which is negative about person C. Person C has no knowledge of the conversation. Person B thinks less of person C as a result of what person A has said." (Scott Parkison, "Flames of Destruction—Part Two—Gossip/Slander." *Pastor Scott's Blog*, www.scottparkison.blogspot.com, October 25, 2007)

Gossip can be hidden in a prayer request or just a concern about a brother, but the real question is, *is this motivated by love for the other person?*

The difference between gossip and slander is that slander is more public; gossip is secretive. Slander tells the world and doesn't care. Gossip whispers. Both lack love while gossip lacks courage. A great way to know if it's gossip or not is if Person A is telling you about Person C, and you say, "Person C is right there, let's go talk to them about what you are sharing." Or, "I have their number, let's call him about this." The gossip will not do so because the gossip has no spine and no love. They don't want to speak *to* people; they want to speak *about* people. The best way to expose this is to stop them mid-sentence and ask, "Have you spoken to this person about this? If not, I don't want to hear about it." Do that once or twice and the gossip will look for a more receptive ear to spew their venomous talk.

I also find in Christian circles that there are people who don't speak gossip, but they sure love to hear it. These are the garbage collectors. They somehow know dirt on everyone or the latest salacious detail. They have a network of whisperers and they love to know the latest. *Listening to gossip is as wrong as speaking gossip.* We have to hear the truth in love too. How do you handle it when someone is sharing gossip with you? Seriously, what do you do?

A final category is what I call caricatures. You know what a caricature is at the fair. It's a picture that resembles the person, but the artist picks a few flaws and exaggerates them to define the person. This is when we refuse to see the person holistically and focus in on our perception of their failure or weakness. We make those qualities bigger than they are and their genuine strengths smaller than they are.

There are other relevant categories of speech: grumbling, nagging, and complaining. This is when we fail to trust God in life's circumstances and look for a scapegoat. A boss. A spouse. Someone who we perceive did us wrong. We even grumble against God himself, as Israel did in the desert. These are all common and they are all a failure to speak the truth in love.

Speaking What is True Motivated by What is Best for Others—Love

When the gospel puts truth in our hearts, it also places the love of God for others there too. Now there is a powerful combination of the truth of God and the love of God. This is what Ephesians 4 says we are to put on: *words that edify and build others up.* Let's look at that in the same categories:

Speaking the truth about myself to others (for their good)—Confession, Testimony, Gospel, Humility

All this doesn't mean we can't talk about ourselves; it just means that we must do so truthfully. Don't bear false witness about yourself. This requires a certain self-awareness which has to be informed by what God says is true about you.

"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." (Romans 12:3)

Would you agree that most of us think more highly of ourselves than we ought? I raise my hand to that. The gospel doesn't mean that we can't talk about ourselves, but it does mean that when we do, we try and make it gospel-centered conversation. The gospel says I am a sinner, so when I sin against you, I confess that to you and ask for forgiveness. Truth-speakers shouldn't struggle with admitting sin.

I am struck with how often Paul tells his story in Acts and refers to his story throughout his letters. He was a man who had a lot to brag about and he even talks about some of his accomplishments. But he tells them in a way that Jesus gets glory. He also is free to talk about his weaknesses and even glory in those! How many people do that on Facebook? "Another day struggling with lust." Do you see or hear much of that from people? Yet Paul writes, "*Wretched man that I am!*" (Romans 7:24) and declares himself the chief of sinners in 1 Timothy 1:15. That is completely strange in our day where even among Christians we laud our attainments and accomplishments. Paul's language has what I'll call deflection in it. To deflect something is to make it go a different direction. Paul is obviously one of the greatest Christians and missionaries ever. But his words have an underlying deflection. Even when he acknowledges how God has used him, he makes it clear that it is *God* who has used him.

This seems to me to be how we speak "gospelly" about ourselves. We can acknowledge and enjoy God's fruit born in us but we seek to deflect the glory of the accomplishment toward God. Not humblebrag but "humbletruth." I am free to talk about myself but with a gospel shaping that when I am done people think God is great. That's when I am talking truthfully about myself.

Truth-speaking to others motivated by love to build them up

- "*To speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.*" (Titus 3:2)
- "*Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*" (Ephesians 4:29)
- "*The lips of the righteous feed many.*" (Proverbs 10:21)

When we consider the powerful and wonderful opportunity we have to bless others with our words, really, why don't we do it more?

Encouragement, admonishment/confrontation, forgiveness, affirmation, praise, and thanksgiving

These are all graces that smooth out relationships and help us get through the inevitable tough spots. Some of our people are so good at this. You get around them and when you are done talking with them, you feel uplifted somehow. They may not talk about you but even their talk about themselves is so gospel-gracious that you sense both their humility and their genuine interest in you. This can be faked, but when it is genuine, somehow you know it.

Please also note that admonishment and confrontation is on here. *Speaking the truth in love* means sometimes we must talk about conflict or sin or failure. This means confronting lies and false doctrine in the church. Jesus describes in Matthew 18 this kind of loving confrontation. These are not as pleasant but they can be most helpful to others. So we aren't talking about superficial happy talk that sounds like a cocktail party but is devoid of truth. Truth has teeth to it and we shouldn't resent brothers and sisters who confront us in love to help us.

We would all be so blessed if we consciously and intentionally sought to bless others with our words. I have personally challenged myself in the area of *affirmation*. When I see gifting or spiritual growth, I need to say it; affirm it. I don't do it nearly enough. I want to improve. How about you? Do any of these stir your heart to action?



My old pastor would often use this as an illustration of what it should be like to be in a healthy church. Apparently they have done studies about the honking of geese. You know when geese are flying around because they make an awful racket. There is so much honking. Did you know studies suggest they are actually encouraging each other with their honking? *You are a good flyer! That's an amazing formation! You can make it! Honk! Honk!*

What kind of noise is heard around here? Have you honked at anyone lately? Affirmed them? Encouraged them? Admonished them with grace somehow?

The power of life and death is in the tongue. When that tongue flows from a heart of gospel truth, motivated by God's love, what a powerful blessing it can be. Gossip isn't honking. *Mr. Goose told me that Mrs. Goose once....*Lying isn't honking. Bragging isn't honking. Gospel truth in the heart means I speak the truth with my mouth for the good and joy of everyone in the community of believers.

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