

A Series on Ephesians
Sub-Series: Gospel Driven Change
“Living Together in Truth”
(Ephesians 4:22-32)
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City!

We've been studying through Ephesians.

Introduce the sub-series. God calls us where ever we are. He calls us to come as we are. Then, he tells us how much he loves us, how he chose us, how us adopted us, and gave us a new life, a new position in Him. But, that's not the end of it. He calls us on a journey together to grow together. God wants to change our lives completely and utterly. He has made it possible to change. We are not stuck with our old self. He has given us the power to change. He has given us a community so that we can help one another change. We are going to look at various different areas where God wants to bring change in our lives. So, this series will be called Gospel Driven Change.

Let read Ephesians 4:22-32

²²You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶“In your anger do not sin”^a: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³²Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

^a Psalm 4:4

I want to make one key note before we go on to the first issue. All of these moral commands are made to believers in the context of the body of Christ. It is not a command to people outside of the church. Although many of them will apply to all people, I think we have to limit its application somewhat. Our call to non-Christians is to bring them to the knowledge of the gospel. That's the most important thing. These commands regarding moral behavior are to those who are Christians already. In fact, they are to be done in response to what God has done. While they are good things to do, I don't think our main agenda should be to teach morality to non-Christians. We must teach the gospel to non-Christians.

Let's go on to the first topic in verse 25: **Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.**

We will only cover this one verse today.

This passage tells us (1) what it means to be truthful; (2) why we should be truthful; and (3) how to be truthful.

II. What it means to put off falsehood and speak the truth.

It doesn't just mean we have to stop lying. There's more to it than that. The word for falsehood is this word "*pseudos*" where we get words like pseudonym. It means it's a fake identity. It means we are wearing masks and projecting something about ourselves that is not true. It means we are inauthentic. When a bunch of people who are not themselves interact with one another, we can never have a real community. It's a fake community. That's not what church is. Our community is real only to the extent that we are authentic to one another, only to the extent that we are true to one another.

III. Why should we be truthful?

I know most of us think that it's an obvious question. Of course, we should be truthful. Any preschooler knows that. Every religion tells us the same. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam. They say the same thing. One of my favorite "theologians," Mark Twain, said, "When in doubt, tell the truth. It will confound your enemies and astound your friends." Someone said, "Tell the truth—there is less to remember." Even Billy

Joel sings it: “Honesty such a lonely word. Everyone is so untrue. Honesty is hardly ever heard. And mostly what I need from you.”

But, the reason we should tell the truth is different for a Christian than for someone under any other system of ethics. Every other system of ethics says we should not lie because it is wrong, because it’s not practical, because you’ll pay for it in the long run, or because you are going to be punished for it.

But, the gospel says to be truthful because of *who you are*. Right before Paul commanded us to be truthful, he repeatedly told us who we are. In fact, chapters 1-3 are about who we are. We’ve been adopted as God’s child. We are his princes and princesses. We are redeemed, accepted, and clothed with the righteousness of Jesus. And right before verse 25, he told us to put on the new self, the righteousness of Jesus. The position that we have. The new identity we have. That’s why we are calling this sub-series Gospel Driven Change. God tells us what our identity is. Who we are! Therefore! (that’s why verse 25 starts with the word “therefore”). Why should we be truthful? We have to look behind the “therefore.” Because of who we are. We don’t just refrain from lying because it is wrong, we refrain because we are starting to behold the glory of who we are, our position that Jesus died to give us. Our consciousness and life are becoming infused with his love and glory, and lying is inconsistent with that. God is the God of the truth, and lying is inconsistent with that. We are members of the Body of Christ, and lying is inconsistent with the character of Christ. It is inconsistent with the reality that we are his children in a loving relationship with him. That’s why in the middle of the passage Paul says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.” Grieving is done by people who love. The Holy Spirit, who is in you, loves you, and when you lie, He is grieved. Our sins of dishonesty and inauthenticity grieve the Holy Spirit in us. God is light, and when we live in the darkness of lies, it grieves him.

There is a dramatic difference between why as a Christian and under all other moral systems. Our ethics are identity driven. We are by grace given a new identity and life. We didn’t earn it or deserve it. Now that God has given us this new position and identity, we should live out who we are. The more we apply our faith, the more we accept it, the more internalize this reality, the more our hearts are changed, and the more we respond in truth and authenticity.

IV. HOW do we be truthful?

In order to be truthful, we have to be true to God, to ourselves, and to one another. You have to remember that that the first symptom of sin was hiding. First, we hid from God. After Adam and Eve sinned, when God came around looking for Adam and Eve, the Bible said they hid. Then, we hid from ourselves. Instead of facing the reality of our sins, our falsehood, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the Serpent and the Serpent didn't have a leg to stand on. We blame others instead of ourselves. We lie to ourselves. Then, we began to lose our truthfulness with one another as demonstrated by them covering their nakedness, in essence hiding from one another. We have to undo this pattern of curse in order to be truthful.

(1) **We have to undo the curse of hiding from God.** When we are sinful, it is only natural to hide from God. We feel like God is so perfect and holy, we fear being in his presence. We fear his wrath and anger. Yes, God was angry at our sins, but because he loved us so much, he gave his only Son to die on the cross for our sins, that whoever believed in him shall not perish but have eternal life as his children, forgiven, reconciled. Our natural tendency is to hide from God, walk away from God, but God is looking for you. He loves you. He wants to find you. He wants to reconcile with you. He paid for your sins on the cross. He is not looking to get you! He is looking to give you freedom, purpose, and truth of his love for you.

(2) **We also have to become honest with ourselves.** One time, I was at Love LA preaching (it was the second sermon I ever preached), and I asked people "Can you handle the truth?" And a guy in the front just looked at me and said, "no." Well, it's not easy to do. The Bible says that the forces of evil are always trying to deceive us. Satan is called the father of lies or the father of darkness. He accomplishes his agenda through deceptions and lies. And his work is more sophisticated than you think.

We are constantly deceived to think for example: I am valued if I am more beautiful. That's a lie. My worth and value depends on my performance, if I am more successful, if I make more money, if I live in an expensive house, if I am good enough, if people like me, etc. We have to come to terms with the fact that our value, our worth is not depending on any of those things. It is purely depending on the identity that God has

already given us, the validation that God has already given us, the righteousness (which means approval) that God has already given us. Our value and worth comes by grace free of charge. The gospel is the truth. Everything else is deceiving us.

When we hold on to this reality, we are able to face our faults. When someone tells us the truth, we are able to handle it. Sometimes (often), I think the sermon went pretty well, and Grace gives me a reality treatment. “This and that part of the sermon was really bad. What were you thinking??” Sometimes, I ask Grace if maybe she can tell me something positive before she destroys my sermon. At first, this was really hard to take. In some ways, I was building my identity based on a lie that my worth as a person depends on how well I can preach. But, I have to constantly preaching the gospel to myself. My worth and validation comes from Jesus. My identity comes from Jesus. So, when Grace gives it to me, I am able to put it into the right perspective. I can actually handle the truth without destroying me. She is able to speak the truth to me and help me. It would be sad if my wife can’t speak the truth because my worth and validation was so tied up with my performance that no one dared to tell me the truth. What I am saying is that if you don’t get your identity from God, you will get it from somewhere else. You will not be able to face truth in your own life.

If you build your identity on your appearance, you won’t be able to face either the truth of your unique features or the inevitable effects of aging, or the truth that you are absolutely beautiful in God’s eyes, as His handiwork. You’ll try everything to cover up faults. You will get upset and angry if anyone treated you like you’re not beautiful or just not able to believe the fact that you are beautiful. You will not be able to face truth in your life.

If you build your identity on your career or school success, you will struggle more with integrity at work, cheating at school. You are more like to take shortcuts and tell them a lie instead of facing the consequences of the truth.

If you build your identity on your moral performance, you will not be able to face the darkness of your heart. Some people have such a strong desire to feel like they are a good person that when they find out that they can make mistakes or sin like anyone else, they can’t handle it. The moral goodness has fed their sense of value and acceptance all of their lives. Somewhere in there, they have a hard time accepting others who are less

than them in moral goodness. They don't see that their sins of pride and judgment are just as bad as the moral badness they are judging. It's like the elder brother in the prodigal son parable. Or the religious leaders at the time of Jesus. They couldn't face the reality that they were as messed up as the younger brother or other sinners. If you build your identity on moral performance, you will not be able to be honest with your own sins.

You need gospel humility to be honest with yourself. That's confessing that we are more messed up than we know, yet more loved and adopted and validated and approved and valued than we can ever imagine in Christ Jesus. That new self roots out the lies in our lives. It creates gospel humility that allows us to face the truth.

(3) **We also have to be honest with one another.** This means we are not only open about ourselves, putting off falsehood and all pretensions, but it tell us to "speak truthfully to his neighbors for we are all members of one body."

On the one hand, this means we are called to be truthful to one another. When someone is engaged in sin, you have point that out. When someone is always being rude, we have to able to speak the truth. We have to be able to make corrections. We can't just always tell lies to each other as if everything is okay. If we all did that we would not be living in reality. We often limit the truth to the negatives. You are not as good as you think you are. You need to give it up. But, I think speaking the truth also means affirming gifts and goodness in people. Even when others don't see goodness, to be able to see through the eyes of God and affirm and encourage people with the truth. It means to affirm people's identity in Christ. See people as God sees us. Love as God loves us.

I really think we need people in our lives who are going to be honest to us. Someone who is going to say, what are you doing?? One scene in an old 80's movie called St. Elmo's Fire always stayed with me. A friend was married but going through a tough time. When they were at a bar, the married guy started to flirt with a girl. His friend drags him to the bathroom and takes him to the toilet and puts in face in the toilet and says, "Wake up. Are you crazy? You are married!" The world needs a friend, a brother, who's going to watch each other's back. I think we are too afraid of offending people. We are too individualistic. Well, I am not going to butt in to his life. That's his life. Paul says we are all members of one body. We belong together. When one member

rejoices, we all rejoice. When one member fails, we all fail. We need to encourage one another and speak truth to one another.

Now, on the other hand, we have to speak the truth in love. That's what Ephesians 4:15 was saying: "speaking the truth in love." That's similar to the idea here that we are all members of one another. The truth is spoken out of love. Now, some people say to me, speak the truth pastor. This usually means don't worry about what people think, just speak the truth. Some of us do that all the time. We go around speaking the truth. You're ugly. You're rude. You're stupid. You're bad. You're inconsiderate. You're in sin and I rebuke your lifestyle. That's not speaking the truth in love. That's not speaking as a member of one body. That's just inconsiderate.

There is nothing inherently good about speaking the truth in and of itself. Didn't 1 Corinthians 13 say, even if you spoke prophecies from God, if you have not love, it is nothing. Even if you speak of the greatest truth of the Scripture, but you have no love, it is nothing. Nothing! Our goal is not just to speak the truth but to gently get the truth communicated into the heart so that there will be transformation. It is in love for the edification of the member of the body. It is not speaking truth for truth's sake, it is speaking truth so that they will come to know God's love and truth in their lives. This is an area we all have to be very careful in. Christians are notorious about speaking the truth when speaking the truth will not accomplish anything.

Let me give you some examples.

If you are talking to someone and you realize that they person is not so nice, you don't just tell them the truth. In fact, it might be wise to not say anything. The Proverbs are full of saying like, be slow to speak. You might not be the right person to tell them the truth about their rudeness. It might not be the right time. You have to do it in love in the way that will edify that person. Otherwise, you are just being selfish.

Sometimes, there is so much prejudice that your speaking the truth will take them further away from accepting the truth. They may accept the truth from someone else but not from you. You have to be able to discern this via wisdom. Sometimes, you have to demonstrate love first. You have to earn their trust and relationship before you share the truth. I think oftentimes, truth spoken outside of a loving relationship will backfire.

The goal is for healing and reconciliation of the member of the body.

I think we tend to error on either side. We are too individualistic and lax. We don't get involved. Even if the train is coming, we just sit there and not say anything because we don't want to offend or judge. Or we are confronting everyone with the truth even when it is backfiring. That's not right either. The answer is to speak the truth in love.

How do we do that?

It's not just how you say it, but it is also why you say it. This is really a case by case thing. Sometimes it is obvious where there is addiction, racism, sexism or homophobia, but sometimes it is not so obvious. Maybe someone just rubs you the wrong way. Instead of confronting that person, you might want to just develop the relationship with that person. Maybe what you experienced what just you. But, maybe he rubs everyone the wrong way, and as you develop this relationship, you need to pray for an opportunity to share it.