

"IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAID BUT HOW YOU SAID IT"

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When people in religious error are confronted with the truth, they usually begin to make excuses in an attempt to ignore plain Bible teaching (Luke 14:18). One such excuse is found in the popular phrase "it's not what you said, but how you said it." While one might expect this from denominational people, sadly this is becoming quite common in the Lord's church. In recent years the body of Christ has allowed the world instead of the Word to define biblical phrases and terms (Isaiah 55:8-9; Proverbs 16:25; Jeremiah 10:23; Isaiah 5:20). Among these is "love," "patience," "kindness," "gentleness," "humility," etc. In an effort to understand what it really means to "speak the truth in love" we must put preconceived ideas behind us and examine the Scriptures with a good and honest heart (Luke 8:15; Acts 17:11; 1 Peter 4:11).

The Scriptures command Christians to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Many people have misused this verse. For example, you may have heard someone reference Ephesians 4:15 and said about a certain preacher: "He spoke the truth, but he didn't do it in love." What does it really mean to speak the truth in love? Does it mean you always have to have a smile on your face? Absolutely not! When Paul rebuked Elymas and identified him as a "son of the devil," there is no record of Paul smiling, but rather an intent look; yet he was speaking the truth in love (Acts 13:9). Does it mean you must speak with a soft tone in your voice? Most assuredly not! John, Jesus and Paul all "cried out" at certain times when they taught the truth in love (John 1:15; 7:28, 37; Acts 23:6). What then does "speaking the truth in love" mean? Speaking the truth in love means we boldly proclaim the truth because we love the souls we are teaching (1 Corinthians 16:14; Colossians 3:14; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 Corinthians 13:6). Not only must we speak the truth, but we must have a scriptural motive for speaking the truth, namely, love (1 Corinthians 13:2-3). Speaking the truth "in love" is not teaching us "the tone" to speak the truth, rather it is teaching us "why" we speak the truth. For example, did Jesus speak the truth in love when He turned the tables twice (1st time: John 2:13-22; 2nd time: Matthew 21:12-17), "name-called" (Matthew 23; etc.) and when He constantly preached the truth that offended and "ran people away" (John 6:60-66; Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:3; Matthew 15:12; Matthew 11:6; Mark 10:17-22)? Sure He did; otherwise, Jesus would have been in violation of the Scriptures and ceased to be the sinless Son of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). John also spoke the truth in love when he sharply rebuked the Jews for being a "brood of

vipers” and commanded them to repent (Luke 3:7-18). With these examples in mind, it is clear that “speaking the truth in love” is not about “the tone of your voice” you speak the truth in, but “why” you speak the truth.

For many people who have a wrong view of “love,” this is a hard truth to accept (compare John 6:60-64; Galatians 4:16). Thus, some have tried to come up with excuses like “that was Jesus, and He could do that.” Do we understand that this excuse is not a reason to get out of “speaking the truth” but rather a positive example commanding us to do the same?! Yes, Jesus is our ultimate example to follow. In fact, we are to follow the example of all of God’s faithful (1 Peter 2:21; 1 Corinthians 11:1). Another excuse that is often made is based on a false view of what it means to have our “speech seasoned with salt” (Colossians 4:6). Concerning this passage some interpret its meaning as, “Every time we speak, it must leave a good taste in the hearer’s mouth.” This could not be further from the truth! Truth is going to “taste” and “smell” differently to people depending on their heart and motivation for listening (2 Corinthians 2:15-16). Having our speech seasoned with salt and knowing how we must answer each person is all about the content of what is said - not the flavor of our tone or facial expressions. Even in cooking, salt is never a part of the PRESENTATION in food, but rather the CONTENT of the food. When we speak, we need to make sure our content is scriptural (1 Peter 3:15; Titus 2:1; Ephesians 4:29). Salt can be implied as a “negative” just as much as a “positive.” For example, it has been rightly observed that salt does not feel good when poured on wounds (compare this with Hebrews 12:11: “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”). To say that “speaking the truth in love” and having our “speech seasoned with salt” means that one must “have a smile on his face and a soft tone in his voice” is to teach false doctrine and go beyond that which is written (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Passages such as Proverbs 15:1, Galatians 6:1-2, Ephesians 4:32 and 2 Timothy 2:24-26 address the virtues of patience, kindness, gentleness and humility. Often times when a Christian rebukes another Christian, brethren consider the one rebuking as unkind, harsh, arrogant and impatient. First, we must understand that the Bible authorizes and commands rebuking (2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:13; 2:15). In fact, Proverbs 27:5 states “Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed.” We rebuke/discipline because we love (Revelation 3:19). The word “patience” in the Bible is often times better

translated “perseverance” or “longsuffering.” In Scripture, patience is not an excuse to allow people to continue in their sin (Romans 6:1-2; Galatians 2:17). When there is a new convert with whom we need to be extremely longsuffering, that does not mean we can ignore or justify his sin. It means there are a great number of things he does not know that he needs to learn (Hebrews 5:12-14). To be scripturally patient may require the faithful Christian to correct the new convert several times. The faithful must never allow or encourage the new convert to continue in his sin. Biblical patience, then, is being longsuffering with Christians as they continue to have the right heart, do the right thing and repent when corrected. Whenever a Christian sins, the spiritual must follow the biblical pattern of restoring the sinner by correction and rebuke (which is not prolonged) in order to fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1-2). Simon serves as a perfect example of biblical patience combined with bold rebuke, which resulted in Peter “speaking the truth in love.” In the context, Simon has just obeyed the gospel and is a babe in Christ (Acts 8:12-14). Immediately after obedience to the gospel, Simon falls into sin (Acts 8:14-15). Peter immediately rebukes and corrects Simon saying, “Your money perish with you... You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent” (verse 20-23). According to the way some of our brethren view speaking the truth in love, they would have told Peter he did not handle the situation correctly. For instance, they might say “Peter should have let the Christians of Samaria handle the situation;” or “Who made Peter the brotherhood watchdog?” or “It was not the right place or the right time to correct Simon... Peter should have exercised some patience and not been so harsh in his statements; after all, Peter does not have the right to be judge and jury of Simon’s soul.” They would have accused Peter of being arrogant, unloving and judgmental. However, Peter was showing a true love for Simon by rebuking him. Peter was demonstrating biblical humility (that is, submission to God in James 4:7-10), biblical gentleness and meekness (a subdued power under control), and biblical kindness. He was looking out not only for his own interest but the spiritual interest of another soul (Philippians 2:4). The same can also be seen in Galatians 2:11-15 when Paul rebuked Peter (notice: not only did Peter rebuke but he was rebuked). The first century brotherhood held one another accountable. Christians who hold each other accountable today are labeled by some as trouble-makers, those who have nothing else better to do than go around “causing trouble” - when in reality the so-called “trouble-makers” are the ones who have enough love for your soul to do the hard/right/unpopular thing and tell you the truth.

What is the real problem with many in the church today? Too many people are looking for an opportunity to get offended! These people are looking for an opportunity to let their emotions run wild and claim their feelings were hurt INSTEAD OF taking heed HOW they hear and WHAT they hear (Luke 8:18; Hebrews 2:1; Mark 4:24). Even leaders in the church, rather than back the truth, will go and “pity” those in sin. Sometimes, even without realizing it, the leaders or members of the congregation justify the “offended” member’s sin (Proverbs 17:15). Instead of “coddling” the sinner who heard the truth and got mad (Galatians 4:16), faithful Christians should “speak the truth in love” by rebuking them with a view toward the repentance and restoration of those who have forsaken the way (Proverbs 15:10; 27:5).

How contradictory it is when brethren get in an emotional frenzy about the “feelings” of those who need to be shamed for their sin; yet they never consider God’s feelings. Christians should be much more concerned about God’s feelings rather than those who do not love the truth. The first century church was not persecuted, killed, and given the reputation of “turning the world upside down” by imitating a “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood” approach (Acts 17:6). They turned the world upside down by being bold, zealous and showing a true love for lost souls (Acts 4:13, 29; Galatians 4:18; 2 Corinthians 5:9-11, 14). If we will stop worrying about offending others and return to genuine care for lost souls, we will begin to make a difference again for Christ in the world. For example, a gospel preacher recently preached at a congregation one Sunday on “The One True Church” and how all man-made denominations were going to hell. After the lesson a couple of members mentioned that they had a concern with not “what he said, but how he said it.” He specifically mentioned the Baptist denomination in the sermon because he knew there was a Baptist in the assembly who was lost and he wanted him to go to heaven. After the sermon he was accused of showing a lack of “kindness” by some of the members of the church where he presented the lesson. However, he was approached by the Baptist who actually thanked this gospel preacher for having the courage to speak the truth in love. The preacher ended up having a forty-five minute Bible study with him (which is still going on, only now there are three Baptist with whom he is studying). Do you see why the church is not growing as she should? It is not because people don’t want to hear the truth. It is because we are so afraid of offending someone that we will not say what God says. We must be more concerned about lost souls and the feelings of God. God says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your

thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9). Brethren, we must start getting back to the Bible and stop letting the political correctness of the world dictate our approach!

Christianity is not a religion of hate where we threaten and physically beat one into submission (1 Corinthians 4:21; Luke 9:54-55). Rather, Christianity is a religion of love for God and love for one another (Matthew 22:37-39; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 2:17; Galatians 5:15). Do you love others enough to rebuke them, hold them accountable and correct them? Are you humble enough to repent when corrected and rebuked by others (2 Chronicles 7:14)? The Bible states that we are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matthew 7:12). If you were lost in sin and on the road to hell, would you want someone to look the other way because they were afraid of offending you? If you were on the road to hell, it would not matter if they smiled or frowned, yelled or whispered, looked happy or sad—all you would care about is hearing the truth about salvation. No two situations are going to be exactly the same in rebuking (Jude 22-23). However, we must get away from this false doctrine of “it’s not what you said, but how you said it.” Are there those who have the wrong intent in preaching the truth and in rebuking? Yes, Paul addressed such persons in Philippians 1:18 when he said, “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.” A person honestly seeking the truth would rather have someone with the wrong intent correct them than someone who “claims to have the right intent” to ignore their sin. Not once in the Scriptures is there a single time when one of God’s faithful apologized for preaching the truth or apologized for “how he said it.” If one’s actions are correct and scriptural, let us abstain from making unrighteous judgments about their intent when only God can know the secret things of the heart (Psalm 44:21).