
The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XCI : UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS (4: 1-16)

Ephesians 4:15a —

But let vs folowe the trueth in loue (Tyndale's New Testament, 1524)

But let vs folowe the truth in loue, (Geneva Bible, 1599)

But speaking the truth in love, (King James Version, 1769)

and, being true in love, (Young's Literal Translation, 1898)

but speaking truth in love, (Revised Version, 1885)

but speaking truth in love, (American Standard Version, 1901)

Rather, speaking the truth in love, (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

but, speaking the truth in love, (New King James Version, 1982)

but speaking the truth in love, (New American Standard Version, 1995)

Instead, speaking the truth in love, Christ. (New International Version, 2011)

Rather, speaking the truth in love, (English Standard Version, 2011)

ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ (Stephanus Greek NT, 1550)

ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ (NA28 Greek New Testament)

THE PURPOSE OF MATURITY STATED POSITIVELY — but, and, rather — δὲ [de] — *“As Paul now focusses positively on the ultimate goal towards which he and his readers are moving, he desires that together they may grow up into Christ, who is the head. This growth will occur as they speak the truth in love rather than being misled by the malicious scheming of the false teachers.”* [O'Brien, 310] “[Paul] returns to the positive side of his portrayal of the Church's movement toward its goals. He describes growth instead of immaturity, a growth which takes place as believers speak the truth in love instead of being taken in by those who propagate error through their unscrupulous craftiness.” [Lincoln, 259; see also Best, 406; Hoehner, 564; Thielman, 285] “This verse contrasts with δὲ [de, 'but, rather'] and is parallel to v. 14; its main verb is subjunctive being controlled by the ἵνα [hina, 'in order that'] of v. 14; that verse was negative in tone; this is positive. It makes explicit the idea of growth which was already implicit in passages like 2.20-2 and present in the καταντήσωμεν [katantēsōmen, 'arrive, attain, reach, come to'] of v. 13 with its implication of movement towards maturity.” [Best, 406] Paul uses a chiasmic structure to better form the contrast:

'we might be no longer children' (v. 14) – static

'we might grow' (v. 15) – dynamic, motion

'with craftiness, deceitful schemes' (v. 14)

'in love' (v. 15)

'after the wiles of error' (v. 14)

'speaking the truth' (v. 15)

false teachers presenting false doctrine in a deceptive manner

God's people proclaiming the truth in love

COULD PAUL HAVE MEANT 'TRUTHFUL IN CONDUCT AND SPEECH? — speaking the truth in love, let us follow the truth in love, being true in love, — ἀληθεύοντες ... ἐν ἀγάπῃ [alētheuontes ... en agapē] — The commentators are divided (as well as those who translate the Scriptures) as to the exact emphasis Paul was trying to make in his statement. Henry Alford observes, *“It is almost impossible to express it satisfactorily in English.”* [Alford, 119] There are those who believe Paul was not limiting this to speech alone:

In classical Greek it means *'to be true, to arrive at truth, to speak the truth'* (Vincent, *Word Studies in the NT*)

the sense of *'being open, upright, truthful, adhering to the truth'* (Hodge, 172)

'live out the truth, truthing in love, living out the truth in the spirit of love' (O'Brien, 310)

'but cherishing the truth in love' (Abbott, 123)

'but being followers of the truth, walking in truth' (Alford, 119)

'but truthing it' (Salmond, 335); *'truthing in love'* (Barnes Notes on the NT)

'holding fast the truth' (Ellicott)

'doing the truth, living according to the truth' (Lincoln, 259)

'holding the truth, following the truth' (JFB)

'but let us follow the truth in love' (Tyndale NT, Geneva Bible)

'being true in love' (YLT)

"The Gr. (one word) is wider and deeper, including the thought of living and loving truth. Alford renders 'being followers of truth.' And the context is in favour of this. Not speaking truth, but avoiding false teaching, is in question. The Christian is to cultivate an instinct for Divine Truth, as against its counterfeits, in thought and in life." [Moule, 112f] ***"In contrast to the preceding verse, where there are three prepositional phrases to denote falsehood and deceit, the present word speaks of being real or truthful in both conduct and speech. Their deceit was not only in their words but also in their conduct (cf. John 3:21). In other words, the believers' conduct should be transparent, revealing the real state of affairs, as opposed to hiding or suppressing the truth (Rom 1:18) through cunning and deceit."*** [Hoehner, 565] While I would lean towards this being a reference to speech (for the reasons given below), I do not see the harm in taking these comments into consideration of Paul's meaning here.

MOST OF THE COMMENTATORS AND VERSIONS ACCEPT PAUL TO BE REFERRING TO 'SPEECH' — But while there are those who steadfastly believe Paul was referring to more than speech, many of the above recognize a valid argument for the translation *'speaking the truth in love'* and many more recognize that as the correct emphasis. Indeed, most of the major translations render it *'speaking the truth in love'* (KJV, RV, ASV, RSV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, ESV). ***"The form of the verb suggests a sense other than that of simple speech, yet there are good grounds for the rendering 'speaking truth'; it is usage and context rather than form which in the end must determine meaning, and v. 14 dealt with erroneous and deceitful opinions whose utterance might mislead believers."*** [Best, 407; see also Abbott, 123; Alford, 119; Thielman, 285; Bruce, 352; Snodgrass, 206; Calvin, 286; Hodge, 172]

PAUL IS SAYING MORE THAN SIMPLY NOT TO LIE, RATHER THE CONTEXT CARRIES THE SENSE OF 'SPEAK THE GOSPEL IN TRUTH AND LOVE, CONFESSING THE TRUTH IN LOVE' — ***"If ἀληθεύοντες [alētheuontes] refers to speech, the meaning is not simply that believers are never to tell lies but always speak the truth, though this is what is said in 4.25. In the context of v. 14, where believers are warned against those who would lead them astray in respect of doctrine or ethics or both, truth should be understood as the truth of the gospel. The truth is the gospel. The sense is then almost that they should speak or proclaim the gospel and stand firm against the corruptions tempting them to deviate from it (v. 14)."*** [Best, 407] "At Galatians 4:16, the only other instance of the word in the New Testament, Paul refers to 'speaking the truth' of the gospel (cf. Gal. 2:5, 14). The same meaning makes better sense within the immediate context of Ephesians 4, where the ascended Christ gives ministers of the word, and where speaking the truth provides a pointed contrast with the scheming of the false teachers and the dangerous winds of doctrine that were swirling around throughout proconsular Asia. ***Accordingly, the apostle is not exhorting his readers to truthfulness in general or speaking honestly with one another, however appropriate or important this may be. Rather, he wants all of them to be members of a 'confessing' church, with the content of their testimony to be 'the word of truth', the gospel of their salvation (1:13).*** This truth, which is guaranteed by God and is depicted as part of his own armour, is the belt which believers are to buckle around their waist as they resist the onslaughts of the evil one (6:14)." [O'Brien, 311] "But in classical Greek the verb seems to mean to speak truth as opposed to ψεύδεσθαι [pseudesthai, 'falsehood, lying'], and that is its sense also in Gal. iv. 16. It is best to take it here, too, as = 'speaking truth'; or more definitely ***'confessing the truth'***. The point of this brief, but significant clause, therefore, may be this — ***these Ephesians had learned the saving truth of Christ. They had been exposed to the treacheries and risks of false teaching. Christ had given them Apostles, prophets, and evangelists to secure them against all teachers of craft, and they are here charged to continue to confess the truth in which they had been instructed and so grow to the maturity of the Christian life.***" [Salmond, 335] "Just as in Galatians Paul's claim to be telling the truth to his readers (4:16) is inextricably bound up with his proclamation of the truth of the gospel (2:5, 14), so in Eph 4:15 the Church's speaking the truth is determined by that word of truth which is the gospel of salvation (1:13; cf. also 6:14). ***In line with this, believers cannot make use of the same means of manipulation and deceit as those who are ready to lead believers astray.*** Instead, they proclaim the truth by means of love." [Lincoln, 259f]

'IN LOVE' — **PAUL CONTRASTS BELIEVERS WITH THE FALSE TEACHERS** — ***"The word 'love' was discussed at 1:4 where it was defined as that which seeks the highest good in the one loved. Again, this is in contrast to the preceding verse, for deceit is used for selfish ends whereas truth with love considers the interest of others supremely important. Furthermore, with this in mind, believers are not to use truth in a retaliatory manner against the deceivers, but rather are to show and speak the truth with love. This manner of life is far more powerful than a life of deceit because it has no fear that hidden motives or facts will be revealed. It is a transparency that is wedded to love, love with truth that enables individual believers to grow harmoniously with other members of the body with the resulting growth of the whole body."*** [Hoehner, 565] "The manner in which believers are to speak the truth to others also contrasts with the methods by which the false teachings of verse 13 operate. Whereas their 'system of error' proceeds 'by trickery' and 'by cunning,' believers are to speak the truth 'in love.' ***Love involves seeking the benefit of the undeserving, even at one's own expense (2:4-5; 3:19; 5:2, 25; cf. Gal. 2:20b) and is bound up with humility, gentleness, and a willingness to work for unity and peace (Eph. 4:2-3). As those who have heard and believed the gospel themselves (1:13), Paul's readers are rooted and grounded in this kind of love (3:17), and so they bear witness to the gospel not only by their faithfulness in representing it accurately but also by their motives and manner as they***

convey its message.” [Thielman, 285] “As Christians witness to the truth of the gospel they cannot use the same methods as the false teachers or the tempter whose evil activity lies behind them. Instead, they are to set forth this truth in love, an expression that rules out all cunning and deception.” [O’Brien, 311] ***“There are other ways of speaking truth. It is sometimes spoken in a harsh, crabbed, sour manner, which does nothing but disgust and offend. When we state truth to others, it should be with love to their souls, and with a sincere desire to do them good. When we admonish a brother of his faults, it should not be in a harsh and unfeeling manner, but in love. Where a minister pronounces the awful truth of God about depravity, death, the judgment, and future woe, it should be in love. It should not be done in a harsh and repulsive manner; it should not be done as if he rejoiced that men were in danger of hell, or as if he would like to pass the final sentence; it should not be with indifference, or in a tone of superiority. And in like manner, if we go to convince one who is in error, we should approach him in love. We should not dogmatize, or denounce, or deal out anathemas. Such things only repel. He has done about half his work in convincing another of error, who has first convinced him that he LOVES him; and if he does not do that, he may argue to the hour of his death, and make no progress in convincing him.”*** [Barnes’ NT Notes]

THE IMPORTANCE OF BALANCING TRUTH AND LOVE — ***“Speaking the truth in love,’ should be understood as the means of the Church’s growth. The association of truth and love in this clause is a significant one. Any claim to loyalty to truth which results in lack of love to those perceived to be disloyal stands as much condemned as any claim to all-embracing love which is indifferent to truth. But it is not as if two competing claims or two quite different qualities have to be held in balance. Ultimately, at the heart of the proclamation of the truth is love, and a life of love is the embodiment of the truth. The Church reflects this relationship when its witness to the truth has love as its style and as its power.”*** [Lincoln, 260] ***“It has been well said that some men find love the easier precept, some truth; but that the Gospel enjoins the harmony of both.”*** [Moule, 113] “Whether spoken or expressed in action, the truth is never to be dissociated from love. The confession of the Christian faith can be cold and indeed unattractive if it is not accompanied by the spirit of Christian love. ***It may not be irrelevant to recall the testimony of the Fourth Evangelist, that ‘grace and truth’ came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).***” [Bruce, 352]

LOVE IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR WITHIN EPHESIANS — “Love has a prominent place in Ephesians: the first half of the letter (chaps. 1–3) climaxes with a prayer for the readers’ establishment in the love of Christ and for a greater awareness on their part of the magnitude of this divine love (3:17, 19). The second half (chaps. 4–6) contains a series of instructions to love, the fulfilment of which is the outworking of the apostle’s prayer. These are summarized by the exhortation to ‘walk *in love*, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us’ (5:2). Here the key phrase *in love*, which occurs six times in the epistle (***note: In no other New Testament writing does this formula occur as often as it does in Ephesians: 1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2***), begins and ends this paragraph on unity, diversity, and maturity in the body of Christ (4:2, 15, 16). It thus forms an *inclusio* or envelope to the passage (4:1-16). All those who have been urged to live a life worthy of their calling (v. 1) are to bear with one another in love (v. 2) and to testify to the truth of the gospel in love (v. 15; see also on v. 16). *In love* describes the sphere of the Christian life and spells out the manner in which the ministry of all is to occur. Its juxtaposition with truth is no accident. The claims of the two should not be held in tension. The truth as proclaimed should not be dissociated from love or promoted at the expense of love, while a life of love should embody the truth of the gospel.” [O’Brien, 311f] “Truth and love are emphasized in the rest of the letter, which should be no surprise, since they are two of the five words summarizing the Christian faith (along with grace, faith, and hope). Note the focus on truth and love in 4:16, 21, 24, 25; 5:2, 9, 25-33; 6:14, 23.” [Snodgrass, 206]