

Ephesians 4:1-16

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Preacher: Alex J MacDonald

[0 : 00] Could you turn with me to that passage we read in Ephesians chapter 4, and particularly some words that we'll find in verse 15.

Ephesians 4 verse 15, instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the head that is Christ, especially the words, speaking the truth in love.

How are we to bring up children in the present age? How are parents to bring up their children? How is the church to care for children in this age of confused and conflicting messages of moral values, human rights, and personal identities?

Still comparatively recent times, the right of parents to bring up their children in keeping with their own family values was paramount, always within the general scope of the law that applied to everyone.

But now the state is taking to itself more and more responsibility in this area, mainly through the state education system, but also in other ways.

[1 : 21] Of course, free education for all is a great idea. It was really started back in the time of the Scottish Reformation with John Knox wanting a school in every parish.

And of course, child protection legislation is sadly necessary in a fallen world. And we can understand the motivation behind something like the named person legislation and the good intentions of that.

However, gradually the rights and responsibilities of parents are being undermined and weakened. And this is at the time when there's less and less consensus about the values we ought to be passing on to our children.

And what consensus there is seems to be contrary to many Christian values. Where does the Word of God say the responsibility lies?

Well, later in this very letter in chapter 6 verse 4, Paul says that parents are to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord.

[2 : 32] But how are we to do that in the circumstances that we face today? We seem to be in the situation described here in verse 14 in this passage.

We all, and not just our children, are like infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

I think we can understand something of what that means. We're just pushed around by various ideas that keep coming at us from all directions, whether it's from television or other influences, the internet or whatever.

All sorts of ideas and opinions. And we tend to get pushed one way and then pushed the other. And that's why we all, and not just parents, need to pay attention to what the Lord through Paul is saying to us here in this passage.

He says first that we must speak the truth. Speaking the truth in love. We must speak the truth.

[3 : 42] Now our present age has been described as post-truth. And that is a very difficult idea to get your head round, but the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

Well once you break all that down, it just seems to be a fancy way of saying lies. In other words, you don't want to know what the facts are, it's just your opinion about it, the way you feel about it.

It may not be true, but who cares about the truth? I don't know about you, but I find news outlets, especially TV news, so often infuriating because they focus far too much on the opinions and emotions and beliefs of people rather than on the facts of the case.

It's as if they have become pessimistic about actually discovering what the facts and what the truth is. And of course, the internet is fertile ground for this post-truth.

As the old saying goes, the lie is halfway around the world before the truth has its boots on. And that is extremely true of the internet. But of course, it should be no surprise to us that first we had post-Christian and now we have post-truth because the basis has been abandoned in the truths of Christianity.

[5 : 24] The whole concept of truth is now up for grabs. We have returned really to the pre-Christian attitude summed up so succinctly by Pontius Pilate when he retorted to Jesus, what is truth?

And he was expressing there the general cynicism of so many Romans of that time that you couldn't actually get to know what the truth was.

It was typical of the Romans and it's a very typical attitude today. People are either saying, well, there's no such thing as truth, the absolute truth. There's only relative truths.

What's true for now may not be true next year. What's true for you may not be true for me. Or what's true for me may not be true for the rest of society.

What truth may be is decided by what society decides or the opinion makers of society. Or it could be a more extreme view even, and that is that no one can know the truth at all.

[6 : 32] So, no one can know the existence of God or of moral absolutes or any of these things that are so important to the way that we live. Now in the modern world, this skepticism perhaps began in earnest with a man called Rene Descartes way back hundreds of years ago.

And he said, if you would be a real seeker after truth, you must at least once in your life doubt as far as possible all things. So he started his whole philosophy on the basis that, well, you doubt everything.

You're skeptical about everything. So then how did he build a philosophy on that? Well he built it by saying, well, there's one thing I can't doubt and that is the very fact that I am doubting.

I am actually thinking. And then he built from that, he says, I think therefore I am. I'm doubting therefore I exist. And he sought to build the whole of his philosophy on that basis.

While others who followed him critiqued that position and were not at all so sure that he had argued it out. David Hume, the great Scottish philosopher, he doubted the very law of cause and effect, that you could actually say that there was such a law that something would always lead to the same effect.

[7 : 46] One cause would always lead to the same effect. And indeed he doubted the whole concept of reason. And so it began to seem that there was nothing that you could trust at all.

Now David Hume's thinking is brilliantly illustrated by his statue in the high street in Edinburgh. There we have David Hume pictured as almost a great Greek or Roman philosopher.

And he's sitting there and he's got his foot on, actually there are two tablets we might say in this statue and they're not handheld devices but they're like Moses tablets of the law.

And one is under his foot and the other he's holding out and there's nothing written on it. It's blank. In other words, he has put aside all idea of, you know, the commandments of God, the whole idea of God's existence.

That's under his foot. But you can choose what to write yourself. You can invent your own meaning basically.

[8 : 49] The chilling statement of Adolf Hitler really sums up the outcome of all of this. He said, the victor will never be asked if he told the truth.

In other words, it's not truth that ultimately matters. It's whether you have the power to win, to establish your will. In the light of all of that, we hardly need to ask the outcome of this way of thinking, this post-truth, this skepticism about everything.

Well, it led to his condemning the most innocent man who had ever lived. What is truth?

So, it didn't really matter if Jesus was not the rebel that the religious leaders said he was. It didn't really matter.

All that mattered was political expediency that Pilate would hold on to his job if he did stir up trouble with the emperor in Rome. So, it didn't matter. That's where it led.

[9 : 52] Attitude affects actions. Our thinking, our worldview, our philosophy, whatever you like to call it, affects the way that we live and the way that we treat people.

C.S. Lewis put it bluntly, we make geldings and bid them be fruitful. We emasculate the moral sense of people and then tell people they've got to be moral.

It's so ironic. We have taught generations of students to be skeptical about the very existence of truth, and then we're surprised when they end up in politics and in the media and act as if truth doesn't matter.

Why should we be surprised? Truth matters at an everyday level of life. We know that. You go into a garage with your car, the brakes are failing, you want the brakes repaired, you go in and they say it's repaired and you drive out and you crash.

They haven't repaired. They said they did, but it's not repaired. Truth matters. But, of course, truth matters at a higher level than that, of course.

[11 : 02] It matters in the great questions of the existence of God. Dostoevsky, the great Russian writer, as one of his characters say in the book Brothers Karamazov, he says, if there is no God, everything is permitted.

In other words, it makes a devastating difference to how we live and how we treat people, whether it isn't permitted.

It is what God says is permitted. But if God does not exist, everything is permitted, and that is the way so many people are living today.

So, how are we to respond to this situation? How are we to respond ourselves and how are we to encourage our children to respond? Paul says we are to speak the truth.

And to do that, first of all, we have to know the truth. We need to return to Jesus' view of truth, because the ultimate source of truth and the standard of this truth is not from this world.

[12 : 01] Jesus, in that passage, you know, where Pilate says, what is truth? Jesus said to him, my kingdom is not of this world. The kingdom of truth that he was talking about, it didn't originate from man.

It didn't originate from the emperor in Rome. It didn't originate from Pilate. It didn't even originate from the religious leaders in Judaism.

It came from God. My kingdom is not of this world. And in John chapter 17, verse 17, in Jesus' great high priestly prayer, as he's praying for his church and all those who would believe through the witness of the church, he says in it to God, your word is truth.

He says to God the Father, your word is truth. In other words, he's saying there, we can know the truth because God has spoken. God is not silent.

He's spoken to us in the Bible. You see, it's not just a matter of opinion. It's not just a matter of what Christians think is true and other people think is not true.

[13 : 02] This is what God has said. God has spoken. He's not silent. For many people today, they think God's silent. If there is a God at all, He's not said anything. He's not interested in us.

God has spoken. The word is truth. This is it. We have it here in our own hands. But truth is inextricably linked to Jesus Himself.

Again in that passage where He's interacting with Pilate, He says, for this I came into the world to testify to the truth. And He puts it even more strongly when He says in John chapter 14, verse 6, I am the way, the truth and the life.

I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. He puts it in this most powerful way that He Himself is the truth because He is God in the flesh.

He is the standard by which we will know everything to be true or not true. He is God made known to us. Jesus is the truth and the only way to God.

[14 : 07] But not only is He truth in Himself in that sense, He also tells us the truth. In John chapter 8, in that passage from verse 31 onwards, He talks about the fact that we are slaves to sin.

And He says, but if we hold to His teaching, we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. That is if we listen to what Jesus has to say.

If we make Jesus our standard and if we listen to what He has to say, we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. See, truth is not just something abstract.

It's not just principles and standards and doctrines or even just Bible verses important, though all of these things are. Ultimately truth is personal. And that is, that means, in thinking about bringing up a new generation, we have to introduce our children to Jesus.

Not just to the Bible. Not just to the truth in abstract terms. But we have to introduce them to the person of Jesus.

[15 : 21] We have to introduce them to the character of Jesus. To encourage them to love this person that they read about in the Gospels. To introduce them to the death and rising again of Jesus.

Out of His great love for us, He gave Himself over to death so that we could be set free. To engender in them this love of Jesus as their great hero, their great good shepherd, the one who loves them and gave Himself for them.

In other words, we have to tell them the old, old story. This great story of God's Word. The story that focuses on Jesus.

That exalts Jesus. And, of course, we are to speak the truth. We need to be truthful in all our dealings with our children and with others.

It's a sad reflection on us and on the message that we stand for if we're not truthful. Our children ought to know that we are reliable and we can be relied on in what we say to them and what we teach them.

[16 : 32] We need to speak the truth about morality, about standards and values. We can't pretend that the values of the world around us are the same as the values of Jesus.

Because in many places they are not. Yes, there may be general truths that people recognize that generally they would recognize it's not good to lie or whatever. But the standards that are actually practiced may be very different.

And we've got to show that the standards of Jesus are the ones that are really good and the ones that He wants us to live by. Whether these standards relate to the value of human life or relating to sexuality or gender or marriage or whether relating to honesty in general or to racism or whatever it might be, it's the standards of Jesus.

We've been made in the image of God and there are tremendous standards that attach to that. We need to speak the truth also about what we believe, about the existence and character of God, about the sinfulness of the human heart, and about the only way of salvation through Christ alone.

And that final one is so important, isn't it? It always has been and it still is today. Because today people may have very confused ideas about there may be all kinds of ways in which you can come to God.

[17 : 57] There's only one way you can come to God and that's through Jesus Christ. He said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Can't be more categorical than that. And we must make that known because there is only one way for our children, for ourselves, and for our neighbors and our friends. For growth in Christian maturity, we need to speak the truth.

This passage is all about growing in Christian maturity. But see how it's put? It's put in a very personal term, isn't it? It's growing into Christ who is the head.

That's what real growth is. Growing in union with Jesus and in line with Jesus, in this personal relationship with Jesus. And we do it by speaking the truth.

But of course, that's only half of our phrase here. And it would be completely unbalanced if we left it at that. It is speaking the truth in love.

[19 : 03] Because you see, it's all too possible for us to believe the right things and say the right things, things, but to do so without love, to do so coldly or harshly, without sympathy or compassion.

If we are to be like Jesus, we must speak the truth in love. It's difficult to overemphasize the importance of love in the Christian life. You can overemphasize some things, I think, from the Christian faith, but you can never overemphasize love because it is such a foundational level in the Scriptures.

In 1 John 4, verse 8, we're told, God is love. Stupendous statement. It defines what love is.

And of course, we're told, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. That's the amazing quality of God's love towards us.

The Apostle Paul puts it very personally. He says, the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. Galatians chapter 2.

[20 : 21] And Jesus Himself said, as I have loved you, so you must love one another. So, at every level we can see there, from God the Father, from God being love, right down to God's great expression of love to us in Jesus, in a personal way, right down to how we express ourselves to others, it is all love.

But what is this love? It's easy to use the word love. It's a very simple, monosyllable love. But what is it? Well, it is not the contentless, connotation word, love, that's so used today.

The classic statement, I suppose, of that was in the Beatles song, All You Need Is Love, Love Is All You Need. Back in the 25th of June, 1967, the first live global television link took place.

The program Our World was beamed by satellite all over the world. And on that program, the Beatles performed that song. That's half a century ago. All you need is love. It was watched by 400 million people in 26 countries, which was astonishing at the time. But that was the beginning of the huge revolution that we have today, where we have a global village, where communication goes so fast and so easily.

That song expressed the key thought, not only of the 1960s, but of our present postmodern world. But the problem is that love is undefined. It's become what Francis Schaeffer called a connotation word. It connotes something and perhaps different things to different people. It can mean anything.

[22 : 17] It can justify anything. It can justify selfishness, dishonesty, unfaithfulness, betrayal. Because I love someone. So, what is this love that the Bible speaks of if it's not just this contentless vehicle for expressing what you want yourself? Well, we have a virtual definition of love in 1 John 4, verse 10.

This is love. So, John is saying, you want a definition of love? This is love. Not that we loved God. So, love is not determined by us. It's not based on us. Not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. The meaning of love is bound up with what God has done for us in Christ. This love did not originate with us. It's not defined with us. It originates and is defined by God. As Paul puts it in Romans 5, verse 8, God demonstrates His own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

So, if we try to break down what that means, what is this love? First of all, this is active love. It's something that's seen in action. It's not just a matter of words and feelings. Words and feelings are important, of course, in all their... I mean, here we're dealing with words, aren't we, expressing what this love is? And of course, it's important that when we realize the depth of this love, that we feel that love. But primarily, it's about action. Jesus didn't just say He loved us. He didn't just feel a love for us. He came from the glories of heaven down to the depths of the depravity of this world to show His love. He went down eventually into that pit of Calvary where He bore the sins of the world and the wrath of God. That's love by what He did. But it wasn't only that. He also taught and He prayed for His people. He prayed for His disciples. He prayed over Jerusalem. He wept over Jerusalem.

It was how He lived and how He acted and how He treated people. That's what we see what love is. If we want to see a definition of love, again, we look at Jesus.

The greatest list, I suppose, of what's involved in love is given in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. I'll just read two or three verses of it from verse 4. Love is patient. Each one of these statements could be a sermon in itself, but I'll resist. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not boast.

[25 : 26] Love is not proud. Love is not rude. Love is not self-seeking. Love is not easily angered.

Love keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil. Love rejoices in the truth. Love always protects. Love always protects. Love always trusts. Love always hopes. Love always perseveres.

That's love. That's the love that Jesus shows to us. Love always protects us. But not only is it seen in action, this love doesn't count the cost.

It's willing to pay whatever price. It cost Jesus everything He had to save us. It meant self-sacrifice. It meant ultimately crucifixion. He gave His life for us.

Love always protects us. The greatest example I know of self-giving love in ordinary life is a young mother who gave her life to save her children from a burning car. It's amazing, self-sacrificial love, because she loved them.

[26 : 46] We may never be asked to make such a sacrifice, but day by day if we're parents, it is costly to live our lives for our children, to give our lives in that sense, to give time to them, to play with them, to read to them, to teach them about the Lord Jesus instead of just pleasing ourselves and doing other things. It costs. And of course, everything in the Christian life is costly in that sense.

Jesus has achieved our salvation and that gift of salvation is free to us, but we must count the cost in following Him. He said it Himself. We must take up our cross and follow Him. In that sense, the Christian life is not an easy one, and He didn't mean it to be so, but it's worth it.

The other thing we see about this love as we think of the great love of Jesus for us is that love is unearned. It was while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. A lot of people make horrendous mistakes in this area. They think, I've got to be good enough before God will accept me. I've got to turn over a new leaf. I've got to somehow change myself, and until I can do that, well, it's no use.

No. It's while we were yet sinners, Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. There was nothing good in us, nothing that deserved it. We couldn't earn it. We could never show that full righteousness of God that He demands. But Jesus did it all while we were still hostile to God.

That's the whole point of what Jesus did. It's not the healthy who need a doctor, He said. It's the sick. I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And although we perhaps know that, we so often don't remember it in the way that we deal with others.

[29 : 08] There's a greater need for this expression of love when there's disagreement or disobedience forgiveness or the need for forgiveness generally. That's when this love is called into its real place, isn't it? When we're called to show the same kind of love that Jesus showed to us. And that's what we as parents have got to seek to show to our children. When they're being difficult, that's the greatest time for love. Not when they're all being nice and it's easy to cuddle them and so on, but when they're being bad and rebellious, that's the time for this love. Forgiveness is to be full and free just as we have been forgiven. Forgiveness is so important, isn't it, in the family situation as well as in the church and society in general. It needs to be real and full and free, not something that's always cast up again.

And this love, of course, is permanent. One of the worst things I've ever heard a parent say to this child was, if you do that, I won't love you.

How could we say that if we know the great love of the Lord Jesus Christ for us? His love is forever. He said, He'll never leave us nor forsake us. The father never stopped loving the prodigal son. He was still waiting.

He said, He'll never stop loving the prodigal son. He said, No matter how far your child may wander from the truth, you will never stop loving.

We will never stop praying. This love ultimately speaks the truth. It's not just a wishy-washy emotional love. It's not something that just is based in ourselves. It's founded on eternal realities. It is unafraid to say what has to be said. We see it in the way Jesus treated people. Think of Nicodemus who came to Him by night.

[31 : 37] Jesus surprised him. He spoke the truth to him. And that was how He expressed His love to him. He said, You must be born again. Yes, you may be a religious teacher and what not, you must be born again.

Or think of the Samaritan woman that He met by the well. She was intrigued by this stranger, engaged him in conversation, a bit bantering conversation. But Jesus came to the point where He had to say to her, Yeah, it's right, you have no husband. You've been married five times and now you're living with another man. He had to speak the truth to her to expose that He knew the reality of the hurt in her life and the loss of satisfaction and fulfillment. He spoke that in love though.

The same we see with Peter. He had sometimes to rebuke Peter, but He did so in love. He had to rebuke Judas and the other disciples when they were so critical of Mary who anointed Jesus.

And even before the high priest, Jesus showed His great love by telling the truth. He was challenged. He was put on oath.

He was asked, Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, the Son of God Almighty? Jesus could have continued to say nothing, but He didn't. He chose to say the most clear statement of who He was. He said, I am.

[33 : 21] The very words that God used as His own name in the Old Testament. So, Jesus was unafraid to speak the truth, although He knew it would condemn Him because it was so important out of His love for all present and for every generation ever since to know who He is.

We must speak the truth and speak the truth in love. So, how can our children grow to Christian maturity? How can any of us grow to Christian maturity?

How can we grow into Jesus Christ, growing into this relationship with Him? We need to speak the truth in love to ourselves first of all, to each other, and to our children.

Truth without love will be cold and hard. Love without truth will be soft and formless. We need both and, not either or. Let's pray.

Our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we praise Your holy name for the great things You've done for us in Christ, that great love that You showed us, that is a love that is a truthful love. It is true and abiding and dependable. And we praise You that through the truth of Your Word we know about this love. And Lord, we pray that You would grant us guidance and help and grace as we seek to live this out, speaking the truth in love. Living the truth in love. So, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.