

What is Truth – 5
Ephesians 4:11-5:2
Truth, Love and Life

Sermon

Hobart, September 20th, 2014

Devonport, September 26th, 2014

Launceston, September 27th, 2014

Ps 85:4-13

- 8 I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying,
for he speaks peace to his faithful people.
But let them not return to their foolish ways.
- 9 Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,
so our land will be filled with his glory.
- 10 Unfailing love and truth have met together.
Righteousness and peace have kissed!
- 11 Truth springs up from the earth,
and righteousness smiles down from heaven.
- 12 Yes, the LORD pours down his blessings.
Our land will yield its bountiful harvest.
- 13 Righteousness goes as a herald before him,
preparing the way for his steps.¹

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Ps 85:4-13). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

Ephesians 4:11-5:2

¹¹ Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

Living as Children of Light

¹⁷ With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. ¹⁸ Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. ¹⁹ They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.

²⁰ But that isn't what you learned about Christ. ²¹ Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, ²² throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. ²³ Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. ²⁴ Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

²⁵ So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. ²⁶ And "don't sin by letting anger control you." ²⁷ Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

²⁸ If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. ²⁹ Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

³⁰ And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own,* guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. ³² Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Living in the Light

5 Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. ² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us* and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.²

* Ps 4:4.

* Or *has put his seal on you*.

* Some manuscripts read *loved you*.

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Eph 4:11-5:2). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. TOO OFTEN OUR WORLD IS DISRUPTED BY HATEFUL ACTS

A. THE SITUATION WITH THE MURDERS OF CAPTIVES BY THE GROUP CALLING ITSELF “THE ISLAMIC STATE” IS ONE OF THE MORE DRAMATIC EXAMPLES

1. People claiming to be Muslims are seeking to impose their view of truth through violence, coercion and terrorist acts
 - a) They see the world in black and white
 - b) They are right everyone else is evil and need to change or suffer the consequences
2. According to an ABC News article the goal of ISIS is an Islamic state;

The ultimate objective is the establishment of an extremist Islamic caliphate across the region, incorporating Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

Other Islamist rebels have accused the Islamic State of being "worse than the Assad regime".

In 2013 ... the group had kidnapped hundreds of people, including activists, politicians, Christian priests and several foreign journalists, adding that "anyone who opposes the Islamic State fighters, or who is simply considered an unbeliever, disappears".³

3. The temptation is to respond with similar hatred
 - a) But it is interesting to hear the response of the most recent ISIS victim, British charity worker David Haines' brother Mike, to David's murder,

In a statement, Mr Haines's brother Mike remembered a man who was "most alive and enthusiastic in his humanitarian roles".

³ Mark Corcoran and Freya Petersen, Islamic State explained: Jihadist group fighting in Iraq, Syria, additional reporting from Reuters Updated 11 Aug 2014,

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-12/explainer-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-syria-the-levant/5519404>

He said his brother "was and is loved by all his family and will be missed terribly".

"He was, in the right mood, the life and soul of the party and on other times the most stubborn irritating pain in the ass. He would probably say the same about me."

Mike Haines appeared in a video statement on Sunday speaking out against religious radicalisation.

"We are seeing more and more radicalisation in every walk of life. It is not a race, religion or political issue, it is a human issue," he said. ⁴

Mr Haines read out a passage from the Koran saying: "Since good and evil cannot be equal, repel thou evil with something that is better." He added: "The Muslim faith is not to blame for ISIL (also known as ISIS or the Islamic State), nor is it the fault of people of Middle Eastern descent."

4. His point about radicalism being not just a political or religious problem but a human one is something to think about

B. TRUTH IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS

1. Today we are continuing on with our "What is Truth" series, this time let us have a look at "truth" in everyday life and relationships.
2. In the light of God being the ultimate reality and truth of all things, and Jesus God living the truth as one of us, here on earth,
3. He made clear that he was and is, as the way, the truth and the life,
4. So let's focus on what can we learn from his word about living and sharing in his life, in our everyday lives and relationships

C. PRAYER

⁴ ABC News, Islamic State: British PM David Cameron vows to 'hunt down' killers of 'British hero' David Haines, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-14/islamic-state-britain-to-hunt-down-david-haines-killers-cameron/5743004>

BODY:

A. FUNDAMENTALISM

1. How would you describe religious fundamentalism?

a) Scott Bidstrup offers the following description;

In my view, a fundamentalist religion is a religion, *any* religion, that when confronted with a conflict between love, compassion and caring, and conformity to doctrine, will almost invariably choose the latter regardless of the effect it has on its followers or on the society of which it is a part.

Fundamentalist religions make this choice because they uniformly place a high priority on doctrinal conformity, with such force that it takes higher priority than love, compassion and service.

It seems that another facet of fundamentalist thinking is belief in the correctness of their thinking. Invariably, they will make the claim that they are right to the exclusion of others, even *all* others, and that they, and they alone offer the path to salvation.⁵

B. WE WILL COME BACK TO THIS LATER;

1. But first let us read through our passage in Ephesians that puts our topic of Truth, love and life in perspective

⁵ Scott Bidstrup, Why The "Fundamentalist" Approach To Religion Must Be Wrong, <http://www.bidstrup.com/religion.htm>

II. EPHESIANS

Ephesians 4:11-5:2

¹¹ Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

A. DISCUSS; WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM EPHESIANS 4:11-16 ABOUT TRUTH IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH?

Living as Children of Light

¹⁷ With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused. ¹⁸ Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him.

1. Peter O'Brien, commentary;

Because it lacks a true relationship with God, Gentile thinking suffers from the consequences of having lost touch with reality and is left fumbling with inane trivialities and worthless side issues.⁶

2. This is one of the attitudes of the Pharisees and religious people as well

- a) They were moral, in contrast to the Gentiles
- b) But they used their morals legalistically, and also wandered far from the truth and into confusion

3. Why?

⁶ Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Eerdmans, 1999, p. 320

- a) Because they too, had wandered off from the life God gives, and lost touch with the reality and truth that is God, and was confronting them in Jesus himself
- b) And they couldn't recognise him because their minds were so deeply embedded in trivialities and side-issues

4. O'Brien adds,

To know God means to be in a close personal relationship with him. Knowledge has to do with an obedient and grateful response of the whole person, not simply intellectual assent.⁷

5. Isn't this where fundamentalism and dogmatism tend to go astray, focusing on being right to the letter of the law, to the exclusion of the more important issues of God's way of love and relationships

B. WHY DOES PAUL SAY THEY END UP FAR FROM THE LIFE GOD GIVES?

1. "because they have closed their minds"
 - a) This is often translated ignorance, or the ignoring of God
 - b) To know God and the truth in Jesus, we need to humbly listen and have a thirst for his life, for his loving and gracious way of living
 - c) It is no wonder that James warns us about being too quick to want to be teachers
2. "and hardened their hearts against him." The Greek means *stubbornness*
 - a) Something we all need to be wary of
 - b) Stubbornness can lead us to be hard and resistant to hearing what others both saying in day to day conversations or in theological discussions, closing our minds to what they and perhaps the Holy Spirit is saying to us.

¹⁹ They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.

⁷ O'Brien, p.321

²⁰ But that isn't what you learned about Christ. ²¹ Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, ²² throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. ²³ Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. ²⁴ Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

C. DISCUSS; WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM EPHESIANS 4:17-19 ABOUT TRUTH AND THE WAY WE ARE TO LIVE OUR LIVES?

²¹ Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, ²² throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.

1. The truth about God and life is found in Jesus
2. We need to learn from Jesus how we are to live in relationship with God and one another
 - a) Rather than living according to our former way of life which corrupts our thoughts and actions and thus our relationships with others because our hearts are dominated by selfishness and wrong thinking
 - b) We deceive ourselves when we are trying to get our way, to bolster or enforce on others our opinion and desires
 - c) This is sadly, the all too human and ungodly approach that characterises legalism and fundamentalism, as we read earlier
3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our living God's life or truth and love?

²³ Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. ²⁴ Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

4. Rather than hard, stubborn, opinionated thinking and closed mindedness, the Spirit opens our hearts, our thinking and attitudes and refreshes and breathes the love and truth of God into them.

a) As James admonishes us, we learn to become slower to speak and quicker to listen⁸

b) Not judging matters before we have heard all sides and even then acting with grace and respect

5. We become more like the people God created us to be, like him, like his Son, who is the way, the truth and the life

6. O'Brien

Accordingly, *the truth*, which comes from God himself (v.24) and is found in Jesus (v.21) should be the distinguishing mark of their speech.⁹

²⁵ So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.

D. MOST OF US DON'T TELL LIES ON A REGULAR BASIS

1. But sometimes we may not respect our brothers and sisters in the way God does, and that Jesus and the Spirit lead us to do

2. Max Turner writes, we are "no longer alienated, independent beings, but people who now belong together in unity with others whom we must not rob of the truth according to which they will decide and act."¹⁰

a) Fundamentalist and legalistic attitudes too often put rules and narrow and often incomplete doctrinal views ahead of relationships

b) After all the heart of right teaching and doctrine should be God himself, and his love, and gracious forgiveness and redemption through Jesus Christ

c) Jesus spent much time and effort opposing judgmental, unloving, legalistic attitudes

⁸ James 1:19-20

⁹ O'Brien, p.337

¹⁰ Max Turner, in O'Brien, p.338

²⁶ And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.”* Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

E. HOW DOES ANGER GIVE THE DEVIL A FOOTHOLD?

1. While Christians need to uphold the truth of the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith, as Paul is telling the Ephesians, anger can make statements of truth ungodly
 - a) In other if our words our attitudes and actions belie the truth we purport to be communicating, in the end we would be better having said nothing, and avoiding bringing the truth into disrepute
 - b) Otherwise relationships can be damaged in such a way that our ability to convey the truth of Jesus and the other person’s ability to hear are likely to be severely impaired.
 - c) As the old saying goes, “Your actions are speaking so loud that I can’t hear what you are saying”
2. Anger is a huge topic
 - a) But Paul is saying that it can fester and grow
3. And of course we are told in John 8:44 that the devil is the father of lies and in Revelation 12:10 the accuser of the brethren.
 - a) O’Brien (commenting on the statement in v. 27 about the devil getting a foothold), translates it as “Do not give the devil a chance to exert his influence.”
 - b) He adds that if anger “is prolonged, Satan can use it for his own ends, exploiting the strains that develop within the Christian community.”¹¹

F. HAVE YOU BEEN MISJUDGED?

1. How did you feel, how did it effect you?

* Ps 4:4.

¹¹ O’Brien, p. 441

2. The whole incident with the serpent in the Garden of Eden shows how, subtle and not so subtle, lies and distortions about the nature of God can lead to wrong decisions and attitudes

a) So we need the truth of God, but that truth is always founded and surrounded in love

b) Godly truth is never merely facts and doctrine no matter how correct they may be in the letter

²⁸ If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. ²⁹ Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

G. AGAIN THE PRIORITY IS ON LOVING RELATIONSHIPS, ON THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT AS OPPOSED TO THE FRUITS OF THE FLESH

1. It is like raising children

a) Much more is gained by a carrot approach versus the stick

b) Even business psychologists push the principle that statements of encouragement and affirmation need to outnumber criticisms many fold

c) Children tend to become deaf very quickly to parents or teachers that constantly criticise or condemn them

2. Abusive, angry and accusative or judgmental words are the opposite of being good and helpful

3. Appreciation, encouragement, good and helpful words build others up, and help them grow and learn much more readily than negative and hurtful ones .¹²

³⁰ And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own,* guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.

¹² There is a helpful article on this whole topic in the latest GCI Today, entitled, Nurturing Healthy Family Communication. (Nurturing Healthy Family Communication , article in GCI Today, Spring 2014, Grace Communion International, Australia)

* Or *has put his seal on you.*

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.

4. Fruits of the flesh, bitterness, rage, anger, hatred, harsh words, pride, stubbornness, slander and divisiveness, all lead to damaging of family, church and individual relationships

a) Imagine where we would be if these character traits described God, and the life Jesus lived and how he treated us all

5. These attitudes and actions—including harsh words and misrepresenting, slandering or bad mouthing others—bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit, because they are the opposite of God and his loving plan through Jesus and the Holy to forgive and redeem and transform our lives to be like him

6. As James tells us,

James 1:19-20

“You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. ²⁰ Human anger* does not produce the righteousness* God desires.¹³

a) There can be on very rare occasion, place for righteous anger, but as F.F. Bruce points out, too often there is the “subtle temptation to regard my anger as righteous indignation and other people’s anger as sheer bad temper.”¹⁴

Ephesians 4:32

³² Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

* Greek *A man’s anger*.

* Or *the justice*.

¹³ Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jas 1:19-20). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

¹⁴ F.F. Bruce, quoted in O’Brien, p. 340

7. Most of us are insecure, and needing encouragement and support, rather than being loaded with stressful burden of angry and life sapping negativity let alone foul or abusive language or harsh accusations directed at us

a) None of us are perfect, we all need more than an ounce of gentleness, kindness, tender-heartedness and forgiveness

b) And of course that includes gentleness, kindness and forgiveness towards any who may direct harsh words towards us

8. That is why God sent Jesus to be with us, because we have such deep needs and vulnerabilities

a) And that is the heart of the gospel, the heart of the message of truth, the heart of who God the truth is

b) The heart of the way, the truth and the life that we find in Jesus

H. TRUTH THEN, IS MUCH MORE THAN JUST BEING RIGHT,

1. It is about trusting in the one who is the way, the truth and the life

2. Trusting him to be with us and transform and renew our hearts and minds, step by step and day by day

a) It is; “being kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”



CONCLUSION:

Living in the Light

5 Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children.

² Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us* and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.¹⁵

3. This brings us right back to where we began in chapter 4;

Ephesians 4:15

¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

I. SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

1. If we are imitating God, who is truth, we will be living a life filled with love, following the example of Jesus Christ

a) We will be speaking the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ

b) The way of love and rescue, of restoration and renewal, of encouragement, patience and a generous and humble spirit

Ephesians 4:16b

As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

J. PRAYER

* Some manuscripts read *loved you*.

¹⁵Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Eph 4:11-5:2). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.