

Speak the Truth

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. (Ephesians 4:25)

We are to speak the truth with each other and in such a way that we are an example to other believers and above reproach by anybody (I Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:6-8). We are to avoid filthy speech, dirty or abusive jokes, or slandering of others (Ephesians 4:31; 5:4; Colossians 3:8-9; I Peter 3:8-10). Should we laugh at or tell the *funny* joke that is crude or derogatory? Should we curse the weather or the inconsiderate driver? Should we speak untruthfully of those in authority? No. Instead, we must be careful to avoid or stop practicing such things and desire to speak the truth with grace.

In speaking the truth with one another, there are times when we must admonish or correct each other. Speaking the truth of God and His word sometimes requires a strong position that is not well received by the hearer. Whereas Christ continually taught and corrected His disciples with grace, He (as well as John the Baptist) called the spiritual leaders—Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes—snakes because of how they abused God’s word and misled the people of Israel (Matthew 3:7; 12:34; 23:29-33). Paul’s letters are full of instructions on how we should live and serve God, but he called the Corinthian believers carnal babes and the Galatian believers foolish because they were misusing their knowledge and liberty in Christ (I Corinthians 3:1-3; Galatians 3:1-3). He also had harsh words about some people who caused harm to himself and other brethren because of their opposition to sound doctrine—the truth of God (I Timothy 1:18-20; II Timothy 4:14-15).

We must be careful, however, how we admonish others because we are not the Son of God nor are we His apostles—we have not been given authority by God to judge or condemn others (Romans 14:10-13). God gave Christ the authority to judge others in His stead (John 5:21-29; Acts 10:42), and Christ gave His apostles the authority to judge those who rejected their message and witness (Matthew 10:14-15; John 20:21-23; Acts 13:44-51). Besides the Apostle Paul and perhaps only his coworker Barnabas (who was considered to be an apostle, also, because he may have been a witness of Jesus’ ministry and was specifically set apart by the Holy Spirit to minister with Paul—Acts 4:36; 13:2, 46; 14:4, 14), believers in this dispensation of grace do not have that authority.

It is true, however, that all Scripture is inspired by God and is to be used for doctrine (teaching), reproof, correction, and instruction (training) in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16-17). We are to exercise a form of judgment—i.e., discernment—between right and wrong among our fellow believers for reproof and correction (Romans 15:14; I Corinthians 5:12-13; 6:1-6; II Thessalonians 3:14-15). If we find that we must admonish others, it should be done with all wisdom (by using the word of God correctly) and grace (Colossians 3:16). We never know when God may grant the other person a change of heart.

We urge you, brethren, admonish [warn] the unruly [undisciplined], encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another [fellow brethren] and for all people.
(I Thessalonians 5:14-15)

The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them

repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (II Timothy 2:24-26)

To elaborate a bit further on speaking with grace and the truth with one another, there are times when it is better to leave things unsaid. We need to examine our motives when it comes to admonishing others. Will saying what we know or believe to be true about a particular situation or what another person is doing help or make things worse? Are we genuinely trying to help, or are we exercising a form of self-righteousness? Are we intentionally, or unintentionally, wielding some sort of power over the other person, thus making that person feel inadequate or subservient to us? Are we being hypocritical in our judgment (Matthew 7:1-5)? Depending on the situation, perhaps it is better to make our point through our own actions—by being a good example—than through words. We need to remember to love our neighbor as ourself and exhibit humility and grace.

He who speaks truth tells what is right, but a false witness, deceit. There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment. (Proverbs 12:17-19)