

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, October 21, 2012**

**LIFE IN THE BODY
HOW TO GET ALONG WITH ONE ANOTHER**

Ephesians 4:17-32

THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

In the last few weeks, we have looked together at what the Bible says about the church as the body of Christ. While it says much more than this, what the Bible says is that we who have been saved by grace, we who belong to Christ and to His church, are members together of the body of Christ. We are united to one another in this body, which is made up of many parts, just as the human body has many parts. One body. Many parts. Each with its own job to do in the body. Many parts and many gifts. Gifts for service. Gifts to be used in ministry to bless others and build up the church. If you belong to Christ, you have a place, a purpose, and a ministry to perform in the body of Christ right here at Faith.

Unless you are new to Faith, you know that after Worship last Sunday, we had a Congregational Meeting to elect Ruling Elders and Deacons who will begin serving in January. The Congregational Meeting was followed by a Pot Providence luncheon in Fellowship Hall. In addition to lots of good food, everyone present had the opportunity to see posters listing all the ministry teams for each ministry area or committee of the Session, and then to put their names under the heading for any ministry team on which they have an interest in serving or even leading.

We want those of you who weren't at the luncheon last Sunday to get in on this, too. So let me encourage you to take a few minutes after Worship today to check out the posters on the wall in Fellowship Hall – on the side of Fellowship Hall that borders the long hallway. You will find a poster for each ministry area, such as Worship and Music, Evangelism and Missions, Congregational Care, Property and Facilities, and more. For each area, specific ministry teams are listed. Write your name on the poster or on a sticker (if available) and place the sticker on the poster under the name of the ministry team on which you would like to serve or are already serving.

I'll say it again (and again and again): In the body of Christ here at Faith, there is a place, a purpose, and a ministry for you. The church needs you. We need each other. In order to be healthy and strong as God intends, to be at our best to serve God's purposes in this time and place, the body of Christ needs all its parts using their gifts, fulfilling their purpose, and doing their jobs. For the glory of God.

TODAY

Today I want to talk about life in the body. I want to talk about our relationships with one another, about how to get along with each other in the family we call "church."

Years ago I read a book by Bill Hybels that made a major impact on me. The title of the book is *Honest to God?* As it says on the cover, it is about “becoming an authentic Christian” in every area of life. One chapter that hit home with me is entitled “Truth Telling: Pathway to Authentic Relationships.” In it Hybels says that the shape of our lives is determined in large measure by the shape of our relationships (65). If you chew on that thought for a while, I think you will see that there is a pretty good sized nugget of truth in it. The shape of your life is determined in large measure by the shape of your relationships. If not *determined*, it is at least *influenced* to a significant degree by your relationships. That is how much relationships matter. And the quality of our relationships, we might add, is determined in large measure by the quality of our communication with one another.

How we relate to one another matters – not only in the body of Christ, not just in the church, but in every area of our lives. And how we communicate – or fail to communicate – with one another profoundly affects our relationships. Hybels says: “We yearn for relationships where we can be completely honest, open, and vulnerable. Where we can share failures as well as successes, shortcomings as well as strengths. Where we can reveal doubts and fear. Where we can find empathy and confidentiality” (51). And where we can honestly express our differences or disagreements in an atmosphere of mutual respect and love. Without jeopardizing our fellowship.

Don’t you long for that? I do. I long for more and more of it. I know it can sound scary. I know it can be risky. But I believe it is this kind of open, honest vulnerability that God has in mind for us in His family. God created us for relationships. We were made for relationships with Him and one another. God wants us to experience the full blessing of relationships at their best – the kind of relationships where we can both speak and hear the truth in love.

THE RECIPE: TRUTH AND LOVE

I want to key in for a moment on a verse we read last Sunday – Ephesians 4:15, where Paul says: “Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head (of the body), that is, Christ.” Backing up even a little further, to verse 13, we saw last Sunday that God’s goal for us as members of His body is that “we all reach unity in the faith” – unity in the essential truths and doctrines of the Christian faith – “and in the knowledge of the Son of God” – not just head knowledge of Jesus or knowledge *about* Him, but really knowing Him personally in our own experience – and reach full spiritual maturity in Christ. That is God’s goal for the church.

When that happens, Paul goes on to say, “we will no longer be infants,” spiritually speaking, in our understanding, easily deceived and led astray by false teachers. We will no longer be at the mercy of every wind of doctrine that comes along (4:14). Instead, we will combine truth and love as they are meant to be combined – in perfect harmony. Always truth. And always love. Never truth without love. And never love without truth. Not one or the other, but both and. Which is part of what it means to be like Jesus, who was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Grace *and* truth. Truth *and* grace. Love *and* truth. Truth *and* love. They were inseparable in the life of Jesus. It is to be the same with us. We are not to separate what God has joined together (cf. Matthew 19:6).

So, truth matters. But so does love. Paul comes back to this theme of the importance of truth and truthfulness in the Christian life in verse 25. But notice first what Paul says, leading up to it. Keep in mind that he is writing to Gentile converts to the Christian faith. These are new believers whose lives had been steeped in a pagan culture and a pagan way of life. Starting in verse 17, Paul says to them (and to us as well) that if you're in Christ, if you're a follower of Christ, you can't keep on living like an unbeliever. You may live in a pagan culture, but you can't keep on living like a pagan. If you belong to Christ and His church, your life has to change. You've got to "put off your old self" – your old sinful nature with all its selfish and deceitful desires (4:22). You've got to kiss it goodbye. You've got to take it off like a raggedy old set of clothes and leave it behind. You've got to "be made new in the attitude of your minds" (4:23). In the words of Romans 12:2, you've got to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." A mind renewed. A new way of thinking. A new, God-centered way of looking at life. And that's not all, says Paul. You've got to "put on the new self" – the new nature that is yours in Christ (4:24). You've got to put on the new clothes of a Christ-like character and life, the clothing of Christ's righteousness. You can't live like a pagan any longer. You've got to live like a believer. In the grace and power that come from God Himself.

Then, starting in verse 25, Paul begins to spell out in practical terms what the "new self" and this new life in Christ look like. We're only going to look at the one in verse 25 today. "Putting off falsehood," Paul says, "let each one of you speak what is true to (your) neighbor, for we are members of one another." The word translated "falsehood" really means "the lie." So, after reminding us of our calling to "(speak) the truth in love" in verse 15, Paul speaks again of the importance of truth-telling here in verse 25. As members of Christ's body, we are to be done with lies and lying, deceit and deception. And we are to embrace the positive trait of speaking the truth. But always in love. Always.

Paul is not giving anyone a license here to use the truth as a hammer or club with which to beat others into submission. He is not giving us permission to use the truth to manipulate another person. The truth is not a license to humiliate or abuse another person in any way. If you verbally pound someone into the ground, don't try to justify it by saying you were just speaking the truth. Truth is always to be saturated with love. Even when the truth is hard. Each of us is to speak truthfully to our neighbors and brothers and sisters. But please don't misunderstand this: Speaking truth to one another doesn't mean your lips have to say everything your mind thinks or your heart feels. Some things are better left unsaid. Yes, we are to speak truth into each other's lives - God's truth. Even when the truth is unpleasant and painful to hear. But the truth is always to be marinated with love.

Why is love so important? Because, as Francis Schaeffer would remind us, love is the mark of the Christian. It is the measuring stick, the standard others use to gauge the integrity or authenticity of our faith and commitment to Christ. Jesus made this plain when He said to His disciples: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

Listen to this as well. This is from 1 Corinthians 13 in *The Message*: “No matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I’m bankrupt without love.” Bankrupt. Kaput.

Or, as Rick Warren has said: “Life without love equals zero.”

All of this is to give you a sense of how important love is. It is indispensable. Never, ever leave home without it. It is of far greater value in life than your American Express card or any credit card you will ever possess.

But truth is essential, too. I’m not talking about “truthiness.” Do you know what “truthiness” is? It is the word coined by Stephen Colbert to describe “the truth we want to exist,” instead of the truth as it really is. It refers to the things we want to be true, regardless of the facts. In the world of truthiness, not only is everybody entitled to their own opinion, they are even entitled to their own facts as they perceive them, completely aside from the question of whether their “facts” are objectively true. (For examples, see political campaigns. Just about any of them.)

Jesus incarnated the truth. Not truthiness. But real, objective, eternal truth. Because Jesus is Himself the truth (John 14:6), and because He is the truth that sets us free (John 8:32), we who are members of His body are to speak and live the truth in love.

One of the keys, then, to getting along with one another in the body of Christ is to be done with falsehood and to speak truth into each other’s lives. There is no place for lying or deceit or falsehood in the body of Christ. *The Message* paraphrase of verse 25 says it all adds up to this: “... no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ’s body we’re all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.” And, just in case you’re wondering, lying is *not* a spiritual gift. Deceit is *not* a gift of the Holy Spirit. In fact, it grieves the Holy Spirit (4:30).

Proverbs 12:22 says: “The LORD detests lying lips, but He delights in those who are truthful.”

In Proverbs 6:16-19, we read that there are six things the Lord hates, seven (things) that are detestable to Him. Among the things detestable to Him are a lying tongue (6:17), a false witness who pours out lies (6:19a), and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers (6:19b).

It is pretty clear, isn’t it? There is no place for lying or deception or falsehood among members of God’s family. The Head of the family detests it.

I heard about a family with seven children that moved to a new city. The parents didn’t want to buy a house right away. They decided to rent a townhouse for a while so they could get a feel for the area and then buy a home where their kids would be in good schools. They found plenty of townhouses that were large enough for them, but the landlords always objected to having such a large family occupy the place.

Frustrated, the dad came up with a plan. He asked his wife to take the four youngest children and go visit a local cemetery. The mom wasn't sure what he was up to, but she went along with it. The dad and the three other children headed off to check out another townhouse they had found. The place was perfect. The father told the landlord he would take it. Then came the usual question: "I see you have children. How many are there in the family?"

The father let out a deep sigh, then said: "Seven ... but four are with their dear mother in the cemetery."

He got the townhouse. Now, you know, he wasn't technically lying. But he was definitely being deceitful.

We are to "put off falsehood" in our relationships in the body, and speak truth to one another in love. With love. Why? Because we are members of one another. We belong to each other. We belong to God. We're family. And honesty is the best policy in God's family. In every family. It is the foundation on which trust is built. John Stott has said that fellowship is built on trust. And trust is built on truth and love.

A RISKY PROPOSITION

But – O boy! – there are times when truth-telling, even in love, can be a scary and risky proposition. It may be a risk of conflict that we prefer to avoid. It may be the risk of pain or hurt, the possibility of anger, of criticism or rejection. Because of the risks, sometimes we back off from the truth. We cringe – most of us – at the thought of conflict, and we keep silent when we should speak up. Or maybe we keep silent because we simply don't know what to say or do. And so, too often, we try to maintain a shallow kind of peace. We buy peace on the surface, but below the surface there are unresolved feelings and hidden hostilities just waiting to erupt (Hybels, 53). And sometimes they do erupt, in a myriad of unhealthy ways. Even among God's people in the church. Even in the body of Christ. We are not immune.

Too often, because of the risk involved, we settle for surface-level relationships. Some marriages are like that. Some families are like that. Some friendships are like that. Some churches are, too. No one will say anything "unsafe." Hurts, misunderstandings, and complaints go underground. Gossip takes the place of truth-telling in love. Nobody wants to rock the boat. Nobody wants to disturb the peace. But it is a counterfeit peace. And relationships suffer.

Sometimes, as Hybels says in the book, the pathway to authentic relationships takes us through what he calls "the tunnel of chaos." That sounds scary to me. I am not a fan of chaos. I have gone through the tunnel of chaos more times in my life than I wish had been necessary. But sometimes it *is* necessary, for the sake of a relationship, for the sake of another person, for the sake of the truth.

It is not fun when you're in it, but when you go through the tunnel and, by the grace of God, come out on the other side, you realize that going through the tunnel was worth it. Worth the

pain. Worth the uncertainty. Worth the chaos. Because of the blessing that *can* result on the other side.

Not only in the tunnel, but in all our relationships in the body of Christ, we must take care to speak the truth in love to one another, because we belong to one another.

Truth and love. Truth in love. They are essential ingredients in the recipe for getting along with one another in the body of Christ. In *this* body of Christ at Faith. Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.