

May 28, 2016 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Ephesians 4:15 The Challenge of Change: Honesty by Andy  
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I love to start new adventures. Love the start of trip on vacation. Love seeing the house in the rearview mirror and being off on an adventure. It is fun to go and it is fun to come home. To turn the corner down our street after being away, no matter good trip or bad there's something good about it being over.

There maybe some of you who might have preferred that we not have taken this journey into church etiquette. In this place where grace abounds, and where our regular routine is about recognition that salvation is a work all of God and his grace and not hinged on our behavior, going on this foray into talking about etiquette, civility, respect, consideration and today honesty, may have felt a little behaviorist.

Few of us would argue that when we recognize God's favor towards us as humans, a favor totally independent of our meriting it in any way, that when we accept the gift of God's favor in the righteousness of Christ being our only righteousness that matters, that once recognized and accepted that it influences how we behave. We don't get our lives together, we don't behave so God will be gracious, but he is gracious and when we recognize that reality there are results in how we honor his grace in our lives, in how we respond.

This month we began to delve into this idea of church etiquette by asking, is civility biblical. We recognized how globally our world seems to be in an error of incivility: throwing insults, being impolite, discourteous, disrespectful, rude, ungracious and dismissive with those who see things differently.

I reminded us of Jesus' call for us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, and to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

For me these two directives from Jesus are enough of an assignment to occupy my efforts for a lifetime. Really to practice letting the Holy Spirit transform us into lovers of our enemies, into people who pray for those who actively wish us harm, and to be towards others how we wish people would be towards us. Tall order, but we recognized that at least part of this would evidence itself in civility toward one another.

In politeness and courtesy good manners, respect, graciousness , consideration and honesty.

The second week of the series we explored the idea of respect, and Peter's clear directive "Respect everyone." While this may stretch us at times, the Bible is clear that we are created in the image of God, that we are each divine originals, we are fearfully and wonderfully made and so even if we disagree, I mean seriously disagree, come at some issue of life or theology from very opposite poles, we are still called to respect everyone.

Last week intent in the story of the woman who wrestled with feeling invisible, was to remind us of why we are to be people who offer other people our consideration, thoughtful and sympathetic regard. This is to be our life practice 24/7 as we are the church without walls fully engaged in serving the people of our community. One of the ways we want to serve the people in our circle of influence is to offer them consideration: thoughtful and sympathetic regard.

And then when we gather in this place for worship we be even more aware of the importance of noticing people, of looking not just to our own interests, our own needs, our own wants but, considering others better than ourselves we put our agendas, our preferences, our comfort aside to care for one another, to give everyone thoughtful and sympathetic regard.

This is the way we grow in grace when to the extent of our ability we help and bless those who need the help we can give them. And we best know the help they need when we give them thoughtful and

sympathetic regard—we notice them. And amazingly just being noticed may be the first giant step toward their lifelong friendship with God.

So in facing the challenge of change we've explored, civility, respect, consideration and today we come to honesty or candor.

We've all heard "honesty is the best policy." So why is it that sometimes it's really really hard to be honest to communicate with candor?

I mean if honesty is the best policy why don't we just say the honest thing? If you have a friend who has really bad breath or body odor what keeps you from saying anything? Why don't you just tell them? Right now there are about 2% of you saying to yourself, I would say something, while 98% of you grasp the idea that this might be challenging. For those of us who would hesitate why? Why not just be honest?

When I've asked people this question I get answers like, "I don't want to hurt their feelings. Or It might get them upset. Or they might not want to be friends any longer.

But if we explore a case where hard truth is shared lovingly and carefully; when it is shared only in the other person's best interest, what often happens is that the two become even closer better friends as the person with the issue discovers a person who really cares and is willing to speak up.

Our best and deepest and closest friends have one thing in common. Those friends we value the most are the ones who cared enough and loved us enough to speak things into our lives that weren't necessarily comfortable for them to say or us to hear.

Maybe you've had the experience of someone wanting to tell you the truth about you. What they said might have been true, it might have

even been helpful if we could have heard it, but the way they said it was mean spirited. They were so sure they had the truth we needed but their spirit was so angry or hostile or superior or super sanctimonious that to our ears it was as impossible understand as understanding some foreign language we don't speak.

That's one end of the spectrum of communicating—just dump unfiltered, mean spirited, derogatory truth all over a person.

At the other end of the extreme are people who tried to tell us but they so didn't want to hurt our feelings or offend or make us angry that they never spoke directly enough for us to understand what they meant.

The first ones came after us with a baseball bat and all we could do was run physically or emotionally. The second came all with roses and candy and so much fluff we zoned out and missed the message.

In all our relationships in life when a conflict arises its like we are coming along on level ground and when the conflict happens we immediately tumble down to the bottom of a shaft. And we can look back up to where the conflict started and we can see light, and the other direction is a dark tunnel of chaos and the unknown path of actually managing that conflict.

So often times what one or sometimes both parties in the immediacy of the conflict will say things like, never mind, no big deal, or forget it, no problem and run back up to the light and get just behind the conflict. While it may seem like all is well and the conflict has vanished the reality is that often in short order the pair will arrive back at this same point of conflict, tumble to the bottom of the shaft and if there is not the bravery and courage and tenacity needed to enter the tunnel of chaos they can get stuck at this point of unresolved conflict. And intimacy gets blocked and the relationship can become stagnant and artificial at best or end at worst.

Almost every relationship, marriages, friendships, families, business partnerships that I've seen end, have some form of this conflict avoidance as part of the pathology that killed the relationship.

What is needed to manage that tunnel of chaos is found in the counsel in Ephesians 4:15 where Paul is inviting the Ephesians to use their varied gifts, see there not all being the same as an asset. He encourages each one to use the gifts they have been given that we can be mutually built up and become mature in our unity and walk with God. We won't be infants tossed around on the waves, or misled by crafty deceitful scheming, then vs. 15 "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ."

Speaking the truth in love.

Some of us relish speaking the truth. We even relish it more if we are able to speak truth to someone who has it wrong! There's nothing more wonderful having holding knowing and then sharing the truth about something especially if it counters what someone has previously thought true!

I've seen parents who were attempting to communicate true information to their kids but their harsh style, the manner of their communication was so wrong that it nearly obliterated the truth they were trying to communicate.

We want truth. We need honesty. We crave candor. In our heart of hearts we know it is better to have dream shattered than to believe a lie. Truth is meant to set us free.

Some of us are most at home in the lovey dovey realm. We want everything to joy and light and fun and nice and cozy and sweet 24/7 and we want that so much that we may bury the truth that needs to be heard because don't want to even imagine creating discomfort.

Jesus's word to us through Paul is to pull these two together. Blended together they become a balm of healing communication.

Always speaking the truth—no compromise with truth, no little addition or subtraction. BUT Always speaking in love.

Let me just say that this is a plan for individuals, groups, local churches and denominations.

The Apostle John wrote, "Jesus came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Philip Yancy picks up on this theme and says, "The church has worked tirelessly on the truth part of that formula: witness the church councils, creeds, volumes of theology, and denominational splits over minor points of doctrine. I yearn for the church to compete just as hard in conveying what Paul calls the incomparable riches of God's grace. Often, it seems, we're perceived more as guilt dispensers than as grace dispensers."

This is what happens when we speak the truth outside of love.

The daughter of the famous atheist Bertrand Russell says that her father's "whole life was a search for God...that somewhere at the back of my father's mind, at the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul, there was an empty space that had once been filled by God, and he never found anything else to put in it."

She mentions one reason. "I would have liked to convince my father that I had found what he had been looking for, the ineffable something he had longed for all his life. I would like to persuade him that the search for God does not have to be vain. But it was hopeless. He had known too many blind Christians, bleak moralists who sucked the joy from life and persecuted their opponents; he would never have been able to see the truth they were hiding."

When we speak the truth in love, with civility, respect, consideration and honesty people can hear.

It matters. Because Jesus is truth. People need to be in a lifelong friendship with God.

But this call isn't just an individual call it is a collective one. Nine times the word "church" is used in Ephesians and each one is not a reference to some one local church but it is the church universal the body of Christ.

And so the challenge of speaking the truth in love is one for every division of the body of Christ in relationship to every other division. Jesus prayed that his followers be one. And we make a step in that direction when we are careful to speak the truths we understand in love with others who see that same truth differently.

As we wrap up this series on the challenge of changing our culture of worship lets make application of this truth to our corporate gathered participation in worship.

How will we call each other to accountability regarding civility, respect, consideration, and candor? How will I take it when I'm the oops and in some choice for my pleasure, comfort or benefit end up blocking the optimum worship experience for another and someone calls me on it?

When there is candor and honesty and truth spoken to me to curtail my "freedom" how will I take it? How will you take it? Will I bristle up and think "how dare you." Or will I believe that you have my best interest at heart, that we are going through a brief tunnel of chaos, you are speaking the truth in love to me because like everyone I have blind spots.

And listen the blind spots are real. If they are true blind spots we are ignoring directives, or being rebellious, or trying to cause trouble, or ruin someone's worship experience, IF it is a blind spot we are blind to it. And we all have them. And we all need someone who cares to

come along side and help illuminate us to be able to see the blind spot so we can make corrections.

The first week of our series a couple watched the video about not talking during services, laughed, heard, but it didn't get through to their blind spot because they sat in service and chatted for 20 min about the video.

The next week there's a video about use of technology in worship but someone had a blind spot and didn't see themselves in the video.

Last week we saw the video about how to enter. One of the great moments was the person coming in and out in and out. But then in that very service there was a double visit from the back to the front brief conversation and out and in and out again.

It's going to take some time. You have my permission to speak truth in love to me. And I hope that will be the case all across the board. Not just because we might be block one another's worship but because we want everyone who comes here to experience connecting with God in worship.

May we be a congregation clear that God saves us. May we be so grace filled that it is safe for us to speak the truth because we speak it in love.



Review:

- How can we practice greater civility 24/7?
- What does it mean to show people respect?
- When is it important to show people thoughtful sympathetic regard?

Why do you think people say “honesty is the best policy”?

Who has been one of those friends who will say what you need to hear even if you don’t want to hear it?

What kind of difference have those friends made in your life?

What do you think about speaking the truth in love as a means for conflict resolution?

How do you think you would react if someone spoke the truth in love to you about something you were doing in worship service?

Who do you care about enough to speak the truth in love?

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