

TELL the TRUTH!

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"There are only two people who can tell you the truth about yourself-an enemy who has lost his temper and a friend who loves you dearly" (Philosopher Antisthenes the Cynic)

"Even the best writers in the world need editors. In fact, the more something glitters, the more it is in need of spit and polish" (Leonard Sweet)

"The genius of communication is the ability to be both totally honest and totally kind at the same time." (John Powell)

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" (Edmund Burke)

"The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in times of great moral crisis maintain their neutrality" (John F. Kennedy)

Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far" (Theodore Roosevelt)

"Truth without Love is too hard; Love without truth is too soft"

"Because we live in a post-modern society, where the concept of sin is offensive, we instead have started to cater to the idea that we are not sinners, but merely broken" (Paul Tyson)

"Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart" (Psalm 15)

"Men are God's method. The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men." (E.M. Bounds)

"The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil but by those who watch them without doing anything" (Albert Einstein)

A culture of "tolerance"

One of the most decadent characteristics of Western society is how far we do not want to confront and punish evil. The very concept that we should be afraid of doing wrong¹, Or else we may suffer painful consequences is not easily accepted in our culture. For instance, most criminals and sex offenders today are not afraid to maintain their behaviour because they know that laws will "protect" them and even legitimize them as psychological or social victims. From homes to schools, we are more afraid to correct young people than we are concerned about the long-term consequences that a lack of strict discipline may bring upon them. Our desire to be "tolerant" as a society is such that we now tolerate everything, except taking away our cherished freedom to do whatever pleases us. This attitude has affected Western Christianity to such an extent that many pastors are very hesitant to confront their members with the truth of

¹ Rom. 13:4

their sins. If they do, the offended members will leave for other churches, and if they don't, they give the clear message that correction and rebukes are not needed in the Church.

For instance, Christians can be obese and not have the slightest discipline to change this, and no one will correct them. Some can be lazy and abuse the social system because they do not want to do anything with their own lives, and no one will correct them². They can have terrible marriage and ways of treating or neglecting their children, and no one will correct them. To dare rebuking them will be viewed as stepping into private property, and nothing in our contemporary world is more sacred and untouchable than our privacy. Our personal rights and private life are elevated to such a height that we feel we can do anything we want with our lives as long as it does not deliberately hurt others.

Global changes start at the individual level

The reality is that no one is an island, and everything we do has long-term consequences on others. If, for instance, I am sick because I neglect my health, it will affect others emotionally and financially. If I do not want to work, others will pay for my own problems.³ The butterfly effect is taking place every day and everywhere, and no one can escape its long term effects. This is why the very first step to address the global sins of our society is to correct people at an individual level, and this where the Church should play a crucial role. To “reclaim the seven mountains of culture”⁴, which is to bring Christianity in each influential sphere of society, is only a partial solution. To oppose laws and a government that have no Christian values is only touching the surface of the problem. To have spectacular rallies that create a public awareness of the Church is not changing anything to the moral fibre of our society. To even have emotional revivals that have supernatural manifestations and serious resolutions is not producing anything fruitful on the long term *if* individuals are not inserted into a structure and a culture within their own local churches that attacks the problems at the root. If churches are not intentionally organized to produce deep and visible character changes in every single of their members, they are only scratching the surface of individuals. Now, what is one of the most biblical and effective ways to transform individual characters? It is to gently speak the truth in love. It is only when Christians have learnt the lost art of confronting each other with the truth that they can start to really change.

² For 2009's taxes, 47% of tax filers will pay \$0, according to the Tax Policy Center, a Washington think tank. This is an alarming trend. As recently as the 1980s, just 10%-15% of Americans had no tax bill. And in 2000, around 22% paid no taxes, according to www.taxfoundation.org

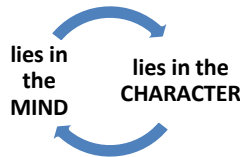
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⁴ These seven pillars are business, government, media, arts and entertainment, education, the family and religion. www.reclaim7mountains.com

The truth is more than the mind; it has to do with our characters

If Satan is called the father of lies⁵, this may give us a good explanation of what the entire world is all about. Everything in this world is built on lies, half-lies, hypocrisy, false impressions, and the one thing that our adversary hates more than anything else is the truth. This is why he will do everything he can to prevent the truth from being told, and he will spread lies in every possible form. This is his very mission on Earth, and this is why ours is to seek and tell the truth.

Now, many among us tend to perceive the truth mostly in intellectual doctrines that have to do with how we understand the Bible. We think that the more we acquire insights of the Scriptures, the more we have the truth. This is only half true. The mind is not the only place where truth or lies reside. Every moral value that we ignore always makes its way into our hearts and characters and eventually becomes an intricate part of who we are.



The very nature of our characters is such that we are usually blind to what we have become, and we tend to protect ourselves against anything that tends to alter us. To make matters worse, we can be part of a culture where a certain behaviour or belief is accepted as the norm, such that we do not even see it as being wrong. The deepest lies of our lives are therefore not just in how we think, but in how we live.⁶ They are deeply buried within our very characters, and the only way to bring them out is to have people who recognize them and call them by their names.

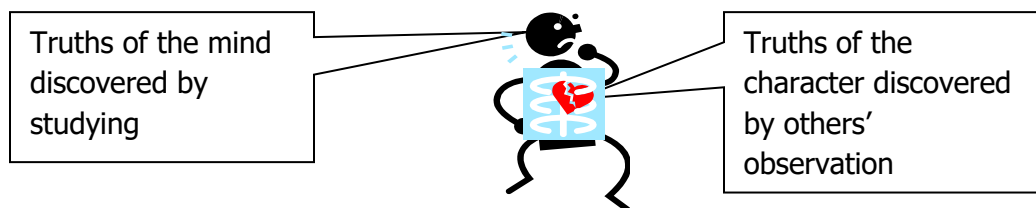
For instance, if I am insensitive, selfish, lazy, or dysfunctional in my relationships, or if I am filled with resentment or easily angry, these are all lies that are deeply locked down in the dark basement of my character. Most of them will stay there as long as I deny or rationalize them to outsiders, and the only way to bring them up is by allowing others to switch the light and help us pick them up. Just reading many books will not do it. The proof of this is that we all know believers who have tremendous knowledge of the Scriptures, who, at the same time, are completely blind to sins which are very obvious to us. It is a tragic reality of life that we are all self-deceived, but, at the same time, it is a wonderful reality that we are as well experts in identifying self-deception in others. For those of us who are humble, there is good news: we have millions of experts around us willing to gladly help us! This is why it is extremely crucial that within our churches we develop a culture where it is completely normal to be frank.

⁵ Jn. 8:44-45

⁶ John 8:32 Jesus said that we should hold, that is practice his teaching in order to be his disciples

between us. As long as we are not intentionally doing this, most of us will never fully know who we really are, and therefore never reach the full potential for which we were created in Jesus.

As Tomas Merton rightly warns us, “there is no greater disaster in the spiritual life than to be immersed in unreality, for life is maintained and nourished in us by our vital relationship with reality”⁷.



Knowing when to rebuke the wise and not rebuking the fools

The book of Proverbs is instructing us to rebuke the wise, so that they will love us, but not to do so with the fools, or else they will hate us⁸. So the one-million-dollar question is who is a fool and who is wise so that we will know when to correct whom? When I was a young Christian, I thought that being full of integrity meant that I should always confront most people about their sins, particularly those who called themselves Christians. After many years and even more useless confrontations, I eventually learnt that I am not always obliged to speak the truth. Wisdom taught me that there are areas where we must always speak the truth, some where we can, and others where we should not. In other words, the territory determines the battles.

So here are my convictions regarding when to speak the truth:

The first area where we must always speak the truth is when a Christian has sinned against us. In this area, we cannot ever be silent or hope that things will be resolved by the passing of time because this is not the biblical way to solve conflicts (Matt. 5 and 18).

The second area where we should always speak the truth is with our very close friends and the people we are discipling. This can include most Christians of our small group, and in general, because of the level of openness, it should be done mostly with those of the same sex.

The third area is with people who are part of our church, which means mostly a group of 50 to 100 people with whom we have a regular interaction. This includes the leaders and anyone who is doing something that we feel is detrimental to the unity and spiritual health of the church.

⁷ Thomas Merton, “*Thoughts in Solitude*”, Shambhala, Boston, MA, 1993

⁸ Prov. 9:7-8, 12:1, 13:1, 15:12, 17:10, 19:25,

Finally, the last area is with unbelievers or Christians from other churches. With them, it is not always wise or even productive to tell everything we see. I include Christians outside of our own congregation. We can have the best truths in the world, but if some people are not willing to listen to our pearls, not only might they “trample them under their feet.”⁹, but they may even “turn and tear us to pieces”. It is rare when unbelievers have the kind of self-esteem to take our criticism in such a way that they will not reject us.

Tragically, many insecure believers today act exactly in the same way, because they have never been taught the biblical concepts of rebuke and humility. My experience has shown me that before we associate ourselves with such Christians, it is wise to first define the biblical foundation of humility, or else we will end up being hurt.

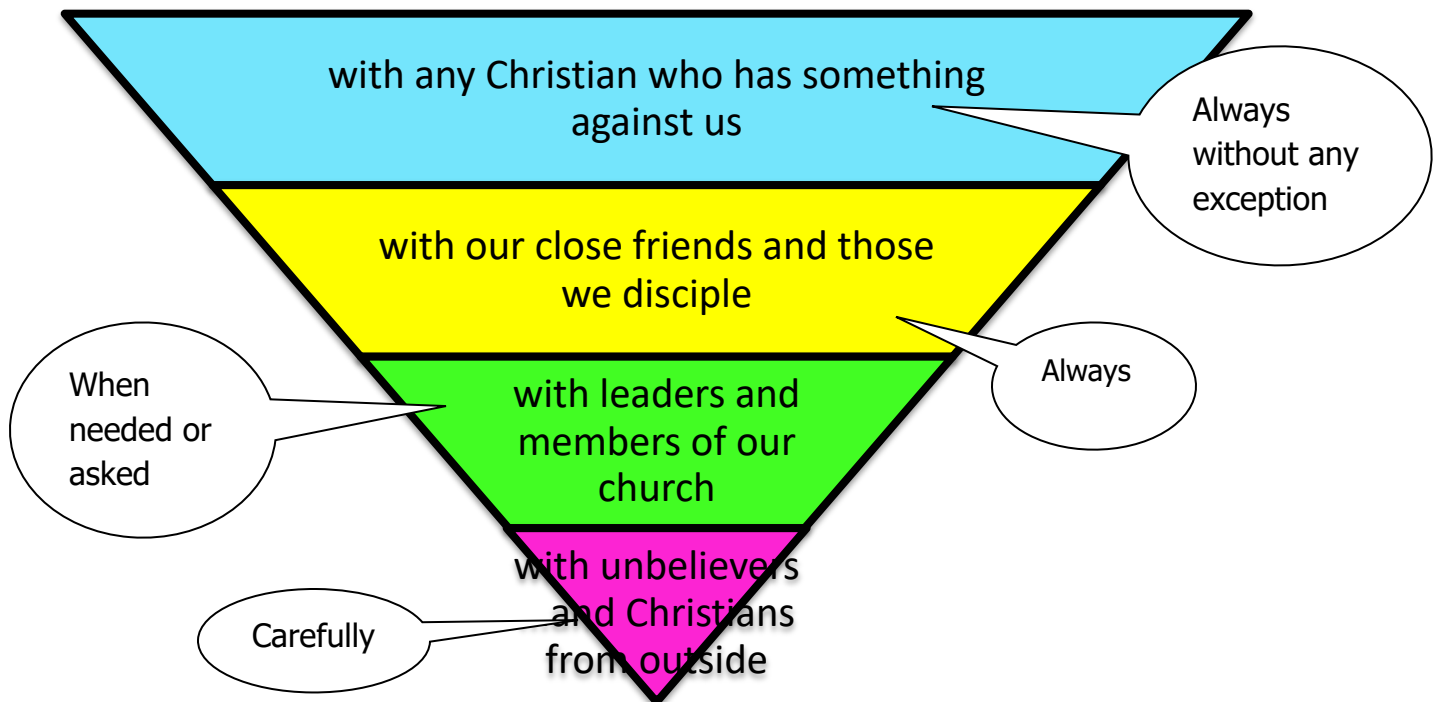
For instance, twice in my life I invited influential ministers to join my work, but since they did not have at all my conviction, I ended up losing them as friends. In both cases, they refused to follow the biblical pattern of Matt. 5 and 18, which calls us to bring mediators between us, because their pride of maintaining their reputation was stronger than their humility to resolve conflicts.

In other words, if humility and mutual correction were a known and spread teaching in the Church today, which is the reason I write an entire chapter about this, we would not have to include ignorant Christians in the same category as unbelievers. Unfortunately, it is so, and therefore we must be wise when we talk with Christians who are outside of our personal relationships.

⁹ Matt. 7:6 the symbolic parallel with “pigs” makes it even more clear that it has to do with outsiders

This leaves us the following four areas where we must

Speak the truth:



1) Confront Christian who have sinned against us

The first area where we must always tell the truth is with Christians who might have something against us. This is the command given in Matt. 5:23-24: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift". Telling the truth in this context is not a situation where deep "editing" of characters is the need of the moment, but simply reconciliation.

Unless we are in each other's lives, it is cosmetic surgery, not heart surgery. We only tell whatever is needed to bring back harmony between us and move on. This must be done with any Christian any time anywhere, even if we do not know them at all. It is the best glue to maintain unity within the Church.

The reason for being forced to go and see what the other person has against us might be because either we have done something insensitive ourselves, or that the other person has

some psychological problems herself. Some people indeed are easily offended for anything, or they are so insecure that they look for problems that do not exist. But in most cases, it usually has to do with us. If we are humble, loving, and can read people wisely, we should be able to cruise through life without any major hassle, but if we are not, then Matt. 5 offers us a free ride to completely change our characters! For instance, if within our local church we all practiced this verse between us, what do you think would happen to people who cannot easily go along with others? They would eventually be forced to either change or be fed up with their church, because every time they offend anyone, they would have someone lovingly knocking at their door! A biblical church lovingly confronts such people, instead of avoiding them.

Now, if that person still felt that she had not done anything wrong, Matt. 18: 15-18 commands us to take another person with us and keep on talking until the problem is solved. In other words, we cannot ever escape unresolved problems; we must always be in good terms with each other. For some of us, this is a very painful challenge. We do not like to talk with “problem people”, as we know that not only will we have to clean many dirty dishes, but the other person may even throw some of them at us during the process. Furthermore, the most daunting part in this is that we might suddenly discover that patience, gentleness, and self-control were not our greatest strengths!

The two verses of Matt. 5: 23-24 have an amazing power to force us to kneel before humility and truth. Notice again what Jesus said: he did not say wait until someone comes to you. He said instead that if you are aware that someone has something against you, you have no other choice but to make the first step. It is the divine competition of who is going to go first to the other person. Either we know we have done something wrong, so we must talk, or the other person has done something wrong and ...we must talk. Conflict avoiders have absolutely not the slightest chance to escape, no more than arrogant bullies!

This goes in stark contrast with the general practice of many churches today, that tolerate having members not getting along with each other. In Jesus’ Magna Charta for peace, it is absolutely unacceptable that Christians have the slightest unresolved conflicts between them. For him, things are black and white; either we accept responsibility for whatever that has caused problems in our relationships, or we look for another kind of fellowship, the one that is characteristic of pagans and tax collectors.¹⁰ If we refuse this very culture of manipulation and extortion, then we must learn to speak the truth!

And we must do it quickly. As the two other verses following 23 and 24 show us symbolically, we should never wait too long to resolve our conflicts, or the situation may only become far worse.

¹⁰ Matt.18:17

2) Correct close friends regarding their characters

A second area where we must speak the truth has to do with basic character editing. It is a context which is deeper than just resolving conflicts. It is one where we voluntarily choose to speak in each other's lives, usually within the limited circle of a few friends.

This kind of editing includes two aspects:

The first one has to do with pointing out characteristics in the other person that are sinful or weak. The Bible encourages us to "correct (*elegcho*), rebuke (*epitimao*), and encourage -- with great patience and careful instruction.""¹¹. The Greek word *elegcho*, which has the root meaning to "bring to light, expose" is used to mean "convict or convince someone of something, point something out to someone" and "reprove, correct."¹² Another expression, which is very often used in the NT, is "noutheteo". It not only conveys the global idea of exhorting, admonishing, or instructing, but warning and correcting as well. Our attitude towards us should not only be corrective, but it should be preventive. We see negative traits of character in the other person that will hurt that person and possibly others, and so we warn. This can be habits of laziness, a lack of self-control, the inability to be dependent or punctual; it can involve a lack of discernment, of humility, or compassion. It may have to do with relational issues like anger, forgiveness, or being unselfish. It may even be mood swings that show no self-control or the way the person deals with her appearance, her health, or her finances. It may have to do with less obvious aspects like being a coward or a people pleaser. In essence, it has to do with correcting any negative character trait, and not just some specific behaviour. Certain churches are quick to rebuke Christians who smoke or watch certain movies, while they leave major character issues like, for instance, pride or selfishness untouched.

The second aspect in correcting believers is not just when they do wrong things, but when they do not do right things. Jesus commanded us in Matt. 28:20 that we should teach disciples to obey him. As we know it with children, obedience does not come without corrections, and this is what we should respectfully do with adults. Whenever people do not obey what Jesus asked, we are to correct them. For example, if they hardly ever share their faith because they do not care about unbelievers, we should gently and lovingly speak to them. If they never spend time regularly praying or being with their children but have plenty of time to watch TV, we should rebuke them. If Christians have lost their first love or passion for Jesus, as, for instance the churches of Ephesus and Laodicea had, we should bring them to repentance. The sins we omit are as serious as the one we commit.

¹¹ 2 Timothy 4:2

¹² BAGD 249 [Baur-Arndt-Gingrich Greek English-Lexicon]

The ultimate purpose of this “holistic” correction is to bring each other to become more like Jesus. This is in essence what Paul says in Ephesians 4: 15 and 22-25, and Eph. 5:10. Since we are to “grow up in him who is the head, that is Christ” or “put on the new self, created to be like God” (that is becoming like Jesus), we must “speak the truth in love”, “put off falsehood and speak truthfully”, and “have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them”. The result of this behavior of loving confrontation is that we will “grow and build ourselves in love” and we will “put off our old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires and made new in the attitude of our minds”.

Speak the truth within your inner circle and small group.

If we are to follow the structural model of Jesus, the most important area where we must always and thoroughly speak the truth is with Christians who are within our “inner circle”. Jesus had more direct conversations and intense experiences (transfiguration and Gethsemane) with his three closest friends than the other nine disciples, and so did Paul with his protégés Timothy or Titus.

In the same way, we should strive to have the same intensity within our small group but limit ourselves in some areas with members of the opposite sex. We may be limited in our time and therefore may not have the same depth that our master had in his own small group, but we should try. For instance, in just one passage, in Luke 9:37-56, we see Jesus rebuking his disciples regarding their unbelief (9:37-41a), their inability to understand Jesus' coming betrayal (9:44-45), their pride (9:46-48), their intolerance (9:49-50), and their racial bigotry! (9:51-56). Jesus was quite intense, and he certainly was not afraid to speak his mind to his friends!

Paul himself said that he tried to do the same when he wrote that “we proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me”.¹³. If we want to imitate Jesus and Paul, an essential goal in coming together as a small group should therefore include teaching, encouragements, and mutual corrections in a spirit of love and humility.

Outside of the small group, we may do it only for the believers who strategically need it, usually the people we disciple, for the simple reason that our time and attention are limited. We must remain focused, just like our master who limited his training to no more than twelve people.

¹³ Col.1:28-29

Speak the truth to people under your direct responsibility

Besides our inner circle and small group, we should not be afraid to expose the sins of the people we are personally discipling, because they are under our personal responsibility. This, for example, is something we naturally do with our own children, and in many ways, we should do the same with our spiritual children, that is, the people we have converted or the people we train in the ministry.

For instance, Paul felt that the Corinthian Christians were his children.¹⁴ and this is why he felt free to warn them through all his letters. Paul did this for all “his” churches, where he would not hesitate to ask if he should “come with a rod or in love”¹⁵, and he used “boldness”¹⁶ in saying to them that he would not spare anyone¹⁷. He likewise encouraged Titus in 1:10-14 to have the same attitude with the people under his responsibility by silencing and rebuking sharply the rebellious and deceivers. No one was allowed “to despise him, but instead he was to rebuke with all authority”¹⁸.

We see the lord having the same attitude with his children and his churches. This is why we are being reminded that it is normal to be corrected as such “My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes (*elegcho*) you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son”¹⁹. The same idea is found in Revelation where Jesus says: “Those whom I love I rebuke (*elegcho*) and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.”²⁰

Interestingly, of the five “bad” churches in Revelation, two had the problem of tolerating in their midst people who tolerated sin (Pergamum and Thyatira). In essence, Jesus was correcting them for not correcting their members. If we were to accept the overall symbolism of Revelation, we could say that 40% of the bad churches (two out of five) had a problem of not wanting to confront their members with their sins. It seems that this proportion has not changed today. Many churches and pastors do not like the idea of rebuking, even if it has a very biblical foundation.

40% of all bad churches do not correct their people!
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¹⁴ 1 Cor. 4:15

¹⁵ 1 Cor 4:21

¹⁶ 2 Cor 10:1

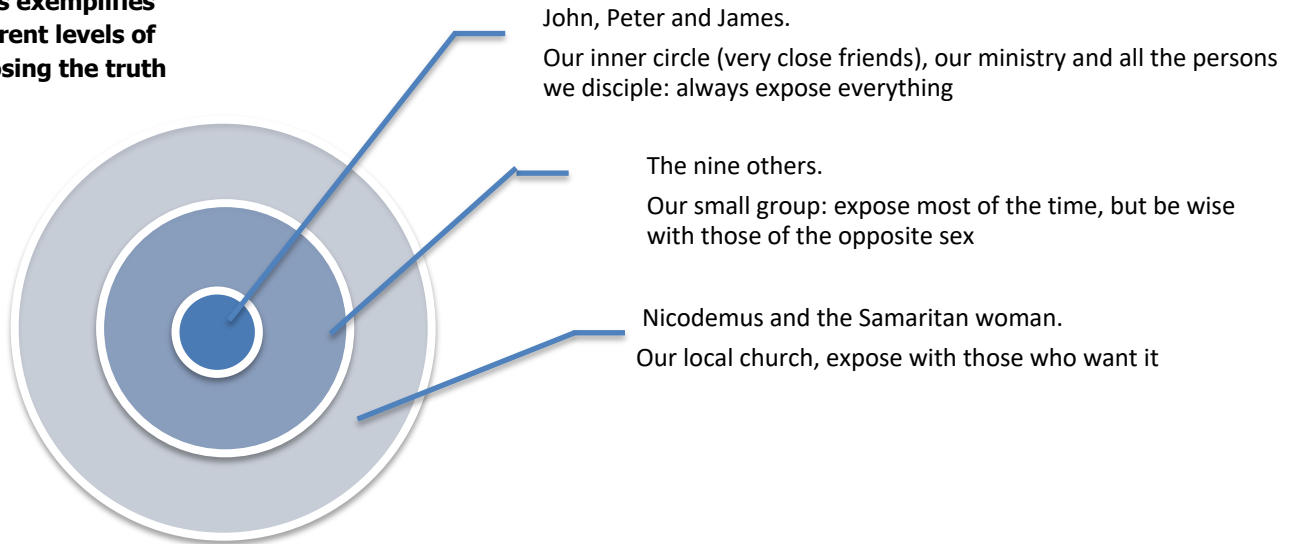
¹⁷ 2 Cor 13:1-2.

¹⁸ Titus 2:15

¹⁹ Hebrews 12:5

²⁰ Revelation 3:19

**Jesus exemplifies
different levels of
exposing the truth**



3) Correct Christian Leaders:

Correcting Christian leaders who have sinned in a way that influences many other believers.
(Only with leaders who are within or under our responsibility)

Whenever people read Jesus publically correcting the Pharisees and the merchants of the temple, or Paul correcting Peter²¹, they feel legitimized to become prophets to the entire church. If a church leader has a behaviour that has a bad influence on many others, they feel they have the authority to publically confront him. This seems to be confirmed by the verse saying that if elders sin, “they are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning”²².

On this basis, entire ministries are built on criticizing what is wrong in other ministries, while the internet is full of sites dedicated to what is wrong in some religious leaders. Does this have a biblical legitimacy? If we study all the passages that deal with public rebukes of leaders, we have the following three situations:

We can rebuke leaders who share a common responsibility.

If Paul rebuked Peter, it is because they were buddies in the same ministry. If we correct other leaders it is because we are in a relationship of mutual authority with them, within the

²¹ Matt. 21:12-17 and 23, Gal. 2:11-21

²² 1 Timothy 5:20

same work. On this basis, a true recognized NT prophet may have some authority to speak within *his own* network.

We can rebuke leaders under our own personal responsibility.

If Paul, Timothy or Titus rebuked elders or anyone else²³, it is because they were their own people of their own churches. If Jesus cleansed the temple, it is because he considered it to be his own responsibility, as he called the temple the house of *his* father. It was his business. Some churches make it their life goal to attack and criticise other churches for what they see as being wrong teaching or wrong behaviour. Most of their emphasis is on attacking other teachers, rather than keeping their main focus on making disciples and protecting them from outsiders.

Again, I do not mind that some shepherds want to protect their sheep against doctrinal influences from outside, which forces them to take a position against some teachings. The problem is when they attack the teachers more than the teaching, and when they attack leaders who are not even threatening their own sheep. We cannot correct the whole world with all what is wrong and we should therefore only concentrate ourselves on our own people.

We can rebuke leaders from outside *attacking us*.

If Jesus attacked the Pharisees, it is because they attacked him. If Paul rebuked the high priest, it is because he painfully stroke him on the mouth²⁴. If we are to take any time to gently correct our opponents²⁵, it is because they initiate against us. We do not have the time, nor is it our mission to correct all what is wrong in other leaders, whether they are running other churches or our government. Our responsibility is to inform our members against teaching from such leaders if we feel they are misleading them, but going beyond this should not be our focus.

We can *defend* ourselves, but it is none of our business to publically rebuke Christian leaders who are not within or under our own responsibility.

The conclusion from the above is that if people attack us, we should correct our opponents and protect our sheep from outside critics. In all other cases, we should take care of our own sheep and “mind our own business”²⁶. As Paul clearly wrote: “What business is it of mine to judge those *outside* the church? Are you not to judge those inside?”²⁷

²³ 1 Tim.5:11, Titus 2:15, 2 Tim.4:2

²⁴ Acts 23:3

²⁵ 2 Tim. 2:25

²⁶ 1 Thess. 4:11

²⁷ 1 Cor. 5:12

4) Correct Unbelievers:

Correcting unbelievers who have sinned (with few and with wisdom)

This area has to do with unbelievers only. As we have seen, if some attack us, we may defend ourselves by rebuking them, but since our primary goal with them is to bring them to salvation, we should be wise when and how to rebuke. Even if they may give us the permission to criticize them, as for instance at work or in political spheres, we should remember from Proverbs that our corrections with some may lead them to repent and turn to God, while with others, it may just create the opposite effect.

Paul in 2 Tim. 4:2 commands evangelists to correct and rebuke with patience. This quality implies that we should not rush and be impulsive when we correct but choose the best settings and times. If one studies Paul in Acts, he will see that there are times when he chose to be silent, and when he chose to correct, it was with the hope of bringing changes in the hearts. This is why Jesus instructed us to imitate doves, that hurt no one, and serpents, that run away from dangerous situations.²⁸.

What are some of the reasons why we are afraid to tell the truth?

-We do not want to appear hypocritical. In some areas, we feel we have no right to speak because we are not practicing ourselves what we would like others to change. But we can still do it, with the humility that says: “I am struggling with this problem, but I call you nevertheless to change together with me”. In this way we will not only become an inspiration to others, but we will force ourselves to take measures to change. Challenging others to change is one of the greatest WIN-WIN of the Church!

-We are more concerned about ourselves than we are about the other person. The classic example is the one where we prefer to let someone have his zipper open in front of everyone, instead of having to tell him the embarrassing truth ourselves. Somehow, the same is true with every other situation when we do not confront others with their sins. We show we care more about what the confronted person will think of us, rather than thinking what others might think of that person, which is selfishness.

-We are afraid of being rejected or misunderstood. Every truth telling has the potential of bringing tensions and negative reactions. (Gal. 4: 16 « Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?»). People who are afraid to tell the truth, as they want to please

²⁸ Matt.10:16

everyone, usually end up pleasing no one. This is particularly tragic when leaders act this way. “One who rebukes a man will afterward find more favour than one who flatters with the tongue” (Prov.28: 23)

-We are afraid to hurt others. Often the reason behind this is because some truths have hurt us in the past, so we do not want to hurt others. The desire to be sensitive is legitimate only up to a certain point. When we let others suffer because of sins they are not seeing in themselves, we stop being loving.

-We think that it is not our problem if the other person has a problem against us. According to Matt. 5: 22-24, it is always our responsibility to speak up.

-We think that we should not bring judgments. According to Matt. 7:1-6, we are not to judge *people*, but only their sinful behaviour, and this must be done with humility and grace. 1 Cor. 6 :1-4 in fact, calls us to make judgements, for one day we will judge angels. When we do not judge, but remain silent, we have already made a judgement anyway.

-We do not believe that the other person will change anyway. 1 Cor. 13:7 “Love believes all things.” We can never be assured whether people will listen and change accordingly, but we can still plant seeds on which God will water and produce changes in his own way. A loving correction can be remembered and eventually bring its fruits in time.

-We love ourselves more than we love God. Finally, this is the bottom line reason, because as difficult as it may be, if God tells us to be truthful with others, either we obey God or we don't.

How should we tell the truth?

Do not tell the truth while you are angry. (Eph. 4:26 when we speak while being angry, we can create all sorts of problems!) Pray until you can be quiet and self-controlled, or else you may have to eat words you never meant to say.

-With humility. (Matt. 7: 1-4 and 12). We can be wrong or not have the full picture in what we perceive being the truth, which is why we should come across with caution and humility, or else we will embarrass ourselves.

-Briefly and clearly. If you cannot define yourself the issue in less than 5 minutes, than you do not see the problem clearly! For this, you may want to think well before you open your mouth.

Furthermore, if you drag on and on what you see as being wrong in the other person, you may bring heaviness and discouragement. The best rebukes are short and up to the point.

-With gentleness. This quality is one of the most difficult ones to develop in the process of telling the truth, because most of the time we only tell the truth with some tension or even irritation. But it has incredible power to break any kind of opposition (“through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone”-Prov.25:15). Together with a firm attitude, softness can create wonders (“Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far” - Theodore Roosevelt).

-With love. “Truth without Love is too hard; Love without truth is too soft”. As human beings, we have all the difficulty to bind truth and love together, but this is exactly what Jesus brought. (“Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” John 1:17). Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that “Human love has little regard for the truth. It makes the truth relative, since nothing, not even the truth, must come between it and the beloved person.” This why the more we love some people, the more difficult it becomes to confront them with the truth. In the opposite way, the less we love them, the easier it becomes to tell them the truth. We constantly live in tension between loving people and being totally frank with them, as “love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with or in the truth” (1 Cor.13:6). To have a good balance between those two qualities is not easy, and it is interesting how this is clearly revealed in some cultures. For instance, most Swiss and Canadians are gentle and kind, but then they have all the difficulty in the world to tell the truth and be direct. Other cultures, like the Americans or the French, have no problem to be direct and boldly address issues, but gentleness and patience are not their greatest strengths. God himself is both stern and yet kind (Rom.11: 22) and to develop the same perfect duality is the very challenge of our lives. This is why when we tell the truth in love, as Eph. 4: 15 commands us, we grow up into the One who said that “those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline.”²⁹

The Truth Test

(Circle the Yes or the No)

- 1) Of all the people you are aware have something against you, have you taken the initiative to go and talk to them? Y-N
- 2) Among your close Christian friends, have you spoken to them openly about some issues of their character that need to change? Y-N

²⁹ Revelation 3:19

3) You have a small group, in which you were for more than one year. Of the few people you know well (let's say 5-6) and in whom you see all sorts of things to change, have you taken time to tell them your view of things? Y-N

4) The people you are discipling: are you thoroughly speaking to the issues of their characters so that they have a clear idea what need to change? Y-N

5) There are some people within your own local church or with whom you share ministry responsibilities in whom you have seen some negative traits which have frequently created problems. Have you spoken to them? Y-N

6) Do you mind your own business with other believers who have absolutely no shared responsibility with your own work? Y-N

7) Are you wise with unbelievers, or rather the kind of person who feels that she has to always correct everyone? Y-N

8) Do people close to you know you as someone who is NEVER afraid to speak the truth, usually doing this with love, gentleness and humility? Y-N

If you have answered yes to most of them, you have some convictions and biblical knowledge regarding the truth. If you answered yes to only one or two, you may want to review the whole biblical concept of telling the truth

Conclusion

The deepest changes in my life have come through close friends who had enough love and patience to confront me with particular issues of my character. I would not exchange this aspect of Christianity for anything else, because tremendous blessings have come by getting in touch with the reality of who I really am. In fact, I am convinced that it is only when we really see ourselves truly as we are, through the mirror of others, that we can start to truly contemplate God face to face. It is only when feel helpless, naked and sinners, as we stop protecting ourselves before others and God, that we can taste grace and authenticity as we were meant to taste in this world.

This is why I want to encourage you to be a truth teller to others in the same way that God has been to you, and what some friends were to me. We desperately need to restore a culture within our church where telling the truth will be honoured and practiced, as it is one of the best ways to change and, as a paradox, to feel safe and secure.