

Sermon: Speak the Truth Ephesians 4.25

Greetings in the name of Christ and Welcome to the online worship of Christ Church of Wiesbaden. If you have not done so already, I encourage you to download the worship order in the downloads section of our website.

With this you can worship order you can participate in the elements of singing, prayer and the readings which are in addition to the sermon.

Our sermon study today is on Ephesians 4:25 which stands at the beginning of a lengthy section of very practical ethical commands.

These commands show us, in part what our lives are to look like now that we are recreated in Christ.

Last week, the final verse we studied was Ephesians 4:24 which reads:

24 put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Paul does not just assume that we will all know what the new self in Christ is supposed to look like.

And so he goes into detail, delving into every area of life.

And this shows us that in the church, it is not enough to just have right doctrine.

We must also be concerned to apply that doctrine.

Because without application, our Christianity really is useless.

And so we will seek to apply what Paul has taught us.

Our focus is on Ephesians 4:25.

Hear the word of God, as Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

This is God's word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

Pray.

We live in a cynical age that has a very complex relationship with the truth.

On the one hand, we all love the truth because we recognize that falsehood and deception are destructive.

Yet on the other hand, our cultures and our world cannot agree on what the truth is in any given situation.

Whether the field be science, or sports, or politics, or relationships.

We wrangle over what is really true.

And all of this wrangling over the truth has created a great deal of frustration and cynicism.

This is nothing new.

In John 18, Jesus stood before Pilate and Pilate asked him:

John 18:37 "So you are a king?"

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

38 Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

You can just hear the weariness and cynicism in Pilate's words.

What is truth?

That's a great question and God's word has very clear answers.

You have a sermon outline printed in the worship order and the first point there is:

I. The Source of Truth

God himself is the source of truth.

And it is through relationship with him and through his revelation that we come to know the truth.

When God created Adam and Eve, they had an intimate relationship with God.

They trusted God like little children and they walked every day in His truth.

There was no debate in their minds about truth because they knew and trusted God.

But then along came the serpent and he tempted Eve to doubt God.

Remember his first words to her:

Genesis 3:1 “Did God *actually* say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”

Satan’s first tactic was to cast just a shadow of doubt on God’s clear command.

And through increasing deception, half-truths and outright lies, he lured Eve into sin.

Adam quickly followed suit and from that moment on, the human race has had a *conflicted* and *complicated* relationship with the truth.

On the one hand, we greatly value the truth.

We see how necessary it is for life and society.

But on the other hand, we have the tendency to believe all sorts of lies if they further our agenda.

Our ultimate problem is that we have lost our relationship with God who is the truth.

The ten commandments are not just a list of rules.

They tell us of God’s character and because we are made in his image they tell us what we are to be like.

And in the 9th Commandment, God said:

Exodus 20:16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Again this is not just some arbitrary rule.

We are to tell the truth because God has made us for the truth.

The truth is supposed to be part of our essence because it is part of God’s essence and we are made in his image.

He is true.

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Hebrews 6:18 [tells us that] ... it is impossible for God to lie

John 14:6 “I am the way, and the TRUTH, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

And in referring to God’s word, in John 17:17, Jesus prayed:

John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

God loves the truth.

He is true in His essence and in everything he says and does.

And this is why he hates falsehood.

Hear the words of Proverbs 6:16-19:

Proverbs 6:16 There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: **17** haughty eyes, **a lying tongue**, and hands that shed innocent blood, **18** a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, **19 a false witness who breathes out lies**, and one who sows discord among brothers.

In Psalm 5:6, David writes:

Psalm 5:6 You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

God himself is true. He is the ultimate standard of truth. And his word is truth.

Yet in this world, falsehood and deceit run rampant.

And this is because of the influence of the devil and our own sinful desires.

I already mentioned the devil's influence in the garden of Eden.

But Jesus saw clearly the devil's influence in those who opposed him in his ministry.

In John 8:43, he said to the Pharisees:

John 8:43 Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. **44** You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

The bible makes it clear that Satan has a great deal of control in this world and his primary weapon is deception.

Revelation 12:9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world...

The deception of the devil shows itself in our own rebellion.

When we sin, it is because we have exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

Romans 1:24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, **25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie** and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator...

This is our natural state: one where we exchange the truth of God for a lie.

Yet, when we come to Christ, in a very real sense, we re-exchange the lies of the devil for the truth of God.

We no longer looking to this world for ultimate truth.

Nor do we see ourselves as the ultimate judges of the truth.

Instead, we look to God in his word and to his son Jesus who is the truth.

Truth matters because God is true.

His son is the truth.

His word is truth.

He loves the truth.

And therefore the truth is sacred.

And so it is fitting that Paul's first command in applying the life of the new-self deals with speaking the truth.

Because the new self is... **24 "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."**

So have you bought in to the truth of God?

Do you receive his word as the truth?

Or are you non-committal, believing that truth is really just a matter of perspective?

Do you think that truth is ultimately relative and that it ultimately can't be known for sure?

Jesus disagrees with such an assessment.

He tells us that: God's word is truth.

He tells us that he himself is the truth.

And it is my prayer that you would come to believe that he speaks the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Now, because God is true, and he has created us after his likeness, we must put away falsehood and speak the truth.

This leads us to the next point in our outline:

II. The Command: Put Away Falsehood and Speak the Truth

Now this seems like a very simple and straightforward command.

And in one sense it is: Don't lie. Tell the truth.

Yet there are many ways that we can violate this command that may not be evident at first.
And here our Westminster Larger Catechism is especially helpful.
In question 145, the Catechism asks:

Q. 145. What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?

Remember, the 9th commandment is:

Exodus 20:16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Or in layman’s terms: You shall not lie.

And our catechism makes it clear that speaking anything but the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is in some degree a lie.

Now there are all sorts of lies that we can tell one another.

We can embellish stories so that others will be impressed with us.

Are you guilty of doing that?

We can seek to be charming and tell people things that they want to hear that we really don’t believe.

We do this by way of false compliments or insincere praise.

The scriptures speak quite negatively about such **flattery**.

We can bias our presentation of a given subject- presenting only the facts that help our case, and obscuring facts that speak against our case.

This is what happened to Jesus when he was on trial.

They found witness who would say things that were formally true but were taken out of context.

Another way we can be false is by being silent about something when we should instead be vocal.

The Apostle Paul experienced this in one of his court hearings.

In 2 Timothy 4:16, he writes:

2 Timothy 4:16 At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!

We have a duty to speak the truth to ensure justice is done.

And if we don’t, then it is just as though we have lied.

Another way we can be false is by using equivocating speech that is formally true but we know that it will be heard in a way that inaccurately represents the truth.

An example of this is when Abraham lied to the Egyptians about Sarai being his wife.

He said “She is my sister.” And indeed, she was his half-sister.

Yet she was also his wife and that is an important detail that he left out.

We can also conceal the whole truth.

This is what Ananias and Saphira did when they sold a piece of property and then held back a portion of the money for themselves.

They acted like they were giving all of the proceeds to God, but in reality, they were not.

They wanted the glory and praise that comes with extravagant generosity, and so they acted as though they were more generous than they really were.

And so God struck them dead.

One more way that we can speak falsehoods is by gossiping.

When we gossip, we communicate information that may indeed be true but the intention is to wound our neighbor’s reputation.

In Ephesians 4:15, Paul commanded us to **speak the truth in love**.

Yet when we gossip, at best we are speaking the truth without love.

And at that point, we are sinning.

Even though we are not formally lying, we are still in a real sense speaking falsely.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:6:

6 [Love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Yet when we gossip, we rejoice at wrongdoing.

And why are we doing that?

It has to be because we feel so inadequate in ourselves that we desire to see someone else in an unflattering light.

Peter writes in 1 Peter 4:8

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

To cover a matter for the dignity of our neighbor is to love them.

A final way that our catechism tells us we can speak falsely is by giving an overly high report about ourselves or others.

This happens frequently in Christian biographies where a person's failings are not really examined in detail or are left out altogether.

It happens also at funerals where people choose to speak only that which is positive.

This happens also in our social media posts, where we only present the good about ourselves or our families.

People give such glowing praise about the health of their marriages or the accomplishments of their children.

Yet few of us ever seem to speak publicly about our marriage struggles or humiliating parental failures.

To present to people only those things that are good about us is to speak falsely.

When I was in college, I sat under the ministry of a pastor whom I privately regarded as the most godly man I had ever met.

I think more than a few people in the church had that opinion of him and so it was remarkable that one Sunday he shared the following story.

He said he and his wife were on a drive somewhere and they got into an argument.

And as he was presenting his side of the case, his wife just started screaming at the top of her lungs.

"You always win. You always win. But you never sympathize with my side of the argument."

This led to them seeking counselling and in their counselling session his wife revealed the depth of her pain in their marriage.

She said, "Things can be so hopeless that I sometimes believe it would be better if you were dead."

Remember, this was being spoken by the wife of the man whom I thought was the most godly saint I had ever met.

Consequently, my esteem of him only increased because of his humility and honesty.

It's important for us as Christians to not give people the idea that we are more holy than we actually are.

This does not mean that we are to sin in front of people on purpose.

Yet it does mean that we should speak more openly about our failures so that people do not have an inaccurate view of us.

To present only our triumphs is to speak falsehood because it diminishes others perception of our very real need of God's grace.

So, because we are a new self in Christ, we are to put away falsehood and speak the truth with our neighbors.

And this means "standing for the truth; and speaking the truth and only the truth from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully..."¹

This we are to do both publicly and privately.

Both legally and informally.

We are to give praise that is fitting, true and encouraging.

We are not to let our praise run over into flattery.

We are not to minimize the gifts of others but rather recognize them and encourage them in their use.

We ought to be saddened when we hear of others failings.

Jonathan Edwards made it a resolution of his to seek to be as saddened about the report of another's sin as if he himself had committed it.

¹ WLC 144

We are defend the good name and reputation of others.
The seeds of gossip ought to find no purchase among us.
We are to keep our promises, even to our own hurt.

In sum, we are to speak the whole truth and promote the whole truth.

And this is so important in our society today that is divided by partisan politics, slanted news media and quarrelsome social media.
As Christians, we should seek to understand issues as fully as possible, hold them up to the light of scripture and rejoice in that which is good.

Our final point is...the reason for speaking truth

III. The Reason: For We are Members One of Another

Paul doesn't ground his reason for putting away lying in the character of God.
Instead he grounds his reason in the nature of the church.
"...for we are members one of another."

The problem with falsehood is not simply that it offends God's character.
It also divides the church.

Just think of the quick destruction that a lie can bring?
It destroys trust and intimacy.
It makes people want to leave the fellowship or divide the fellowship.

Deception is so destructive anytime it takes place.
Think of societies where lying is a routine part of business or governmental leadership.
It leads to the breakdown of a society.
I don't think it is any wonder why certain nations' economies are struggling the way they are.
In many countries, outright lying in business is as common as telling the truth.
Perhaps you have worked in an office or work environment where people routinely lied to one another.
It makes everyone guarded and possessive.
It leads to a lack of comradery.

And God wants nothing of the sort to happen in his church- because we are in fact one body.
To lie or speak falsely in the church is really like lying to yourself.
It only disintegrates that which should be fully integrated.
The church is a body and we are all members one of another.
Therefore we must speak the truth to one another.

And our model for this is of course our savior Jesus Christ.
Christ was filled with love for his disciples during the days of his ministry.
His living with them, his service and patience are all testimonies to his love.
Yet he never flattered them.
He never gave them false praise or sought to be liked by them.
Instead, he always spoke the truth.
And because the mission that he was preparing them for was so important, he never allowed them to think to highly of themselves.
This was constantly his disciples' problem.

They frequently sought the highest positions and the loftiest praise.
And so he reminded them times and time again of the value of humility and the impropriety of seeking glory.

Jesus loved his disciple and he always spoke the truth to them.
And though his words were often direct, they did not have the effect of crushing his disciples spirits.

Jesus seems to have really taken Proverbs 27:6 to heart:

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

Jesus speaks the same way to us today. The wounds he sometimes gives us are those of a faithful friend.
He doesn't flatter us, yet he does encourage us deeply.
He knows that our tendency is to have an overly high opinion of ourselves.
And so he constantly reminds us of the high standard of God's holiness.
And by his sacrifice he reminds us that he has made the way for us to live in security as the children of God.

His atoning death and resurrection stand at the center of everything.

And because of his work, we are free.

We are free to tell ourselves the truth about ourselves.

Jack Miller coined this great phrase that only a child of God can revel in:

“Cheer up. You are a far worse sinner than you think.

But you are also a more loved by God than you would have ever dared imagine.”

In Christ, we are finally free.

“You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

The truth is in Jesus.

And therefore, we are free to tell the truth about ourselves and we are also free to tell the truth in love to others:

We are free to give encouragement and praise freely and honestly.

And this we should do as often as we can.

Encouragement is the oxygen of the soul.

And we are also free to speak the truth to one another on how we can do better.

So often we are afraid to give any kind of critique because we think that then the relationship will be over.

Yet if we are a body, then it goes without saying that neither of us is going anywhere.

We are members one of another.

And because of this we can speak the truth to one another in love.

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Amen.