

## Truth, Love, and Pronouns

Scott R.

*“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.”*

*Ephesians 4:14-15 NIV*

Growing up, I never heard the word “pronoun” used very much. It was only ever used in English classes to distinguish referring to first-, second-, and third-person. That has since changed dramatically. Pronouns are talked about constantly. One of my grad school classes started the semester by having us introduce ourselves and, among other things, what our pronouns were.

The question of pronouns is the single most common question people bring up during Outpost seminars and trainings. Should I use someone’s pronouns when I have known him/her from a long time or since he/she was a child? How do I address people I’ve just met when I feel like I’m getting conflicting messages about their identity? People feel very confused and scared. They are afraid to lose the relationship with someone, yet they want to adhere to what the Bible says.

I have a strong opinion about how to handle the pronouns issue, and I believe it is biblically based. I also know other smart Christians—some of whom have worked at Outpost—who have sought the Bible and arrived at slightly different conclusions. We are seeking to be true to God’s Word, yet we land in different places. Talk about a tough subject!

Rather than attempting to assert my position on the subject, let’s discuss how we can navigate the topic of pronouns. The Ephesians passage above talks about how Christians are to “speak the truth in love.” I’d like to give you five questions that you and your church community should ask in order to understand what this passage calls us to do.

### Question 1: What does it mean to speak

**truth?** Ephesians 4:25 tells us to “put off falsehood and speak truthfully to [our] neighbor, for we are all members of one body.” Seems simple enough, until you reflect on the “members of one body” part. What does that have to do with telling the truth? Because humans are made to be interdependent in healthy relationships. And while this passage is speaking directly to Christians, why would this principle be different with those who do not yet know Jesus? Falsehood and withholding the truth from someone are actually dehumanizing because a person is no longer walking in light of reality. To live in a lie, whether generated by oneself or someone else, leads to crashing into reality with disastrous results. Being truthful, then, is more than simply communicating facts: you can be untruthful by being silent when you should speak up, or even by giving facts in such a way as to mislead.

It is also possible to “speak the truth” in a way that is not intended to help someone. An example is that you might be angry at someone and don’t actually care how the person feels; the “truth” you are supposedly giving is actually meant to punish the person and make yourself feel better. At that point, you are likely not speaking truth at all because of your sin and bitterness. In the end, truth you speak without compassion does not help someone engage with reality.



### Question 2: What does it mean to love

**someone?** The word “love” is very charged in our culture. The LGBTQ-affirming phrase, “Love is Love,” can be found on yard signs and bumper stickers. Experiencing love is the ultimate need to us, and any attempts to squelch what a person defines as love is considered bigoted and hateful. However, is what the world calls “love” actually love? The Bible makes it clear what love truly is and where it comes from: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for

our sins” (1 John 4:10 NIV). We understand how to love from seeing how God loves us. God’s love for us is not self-seeking; God doesn’t gain anything from loving us! God does not need our love and adoration, and we do not fill Him up or benefit Him in any way. Yet God loved us so much that He suffered so that we might be able to come into relationship with Him, a relationship of deep intimacy and joy. God’s love for us, then, is completely self-giving.

However, if 1 John 4:10 is true, that also means that God showed His love by showing us the truth of just how wicked and sinful we are. It is impossible to receive God’s love without embracing the hard truth of one’s absolute sin and condemnation before God. The Bible teaches that to truly love someone means that you ultimately seek what is best for them (see Ephesians 4:29 – 5:2). Yet God ultimately dictates what is truly best for human beings, not us. This is why the phrase “Love is Love” is completely nonsensical; you cannot define something by itself. Our culture says your feelings for someone, however destructive they might actually be to the object of your affection, cannot be squashed because it tramples on “love.” When we examine people’s motivations, however, we see that culture’s definition of love is actually confused with using someone else to benefit you. We love people because of how it makes us feel. Talk about selfish! Using someone to make you feel good is not love at all; it is objectifying and consuming someone. In order to pursue love in the truest sense, one has to die to oneself for the ultimate good of another. Sometimes, that love requires really hard conversations and pointing out painful realities in a person’s life. Love sometimes requires crossing another’s will. To avoid hurting someone in the name of “love” can actually be the most unloving thing to do sometimes.

**Truth and Love.** I hope you notice something odd about what I’ve just shared between these first two points. I haven’t been able to write about truth or love without talking about the other. The reason is simple: truth and love aren’t really separate issues or ways of doing things. As one preacher has put it: truth without love is not really truth, and love without truth is not really love. If someone “speaks the truth” but doesn’t have love, the person doesn’t care about the other person receiving the truth.

Likely, the speaker is bitter or angry, hoping to punish the other person by cutting him/her down. On the flipside, you cannot truly love someone who is sinning by ignoring the sin and destruction in that person’s life. Granted, you may not be the best person to point out the other person’s flaws or behavior. However, to see someone who is rebelling against God and wish that person a “happy” life is to wish that person to hell. In short, truth and love and more like two sides of the same coin than they are different ways to relate to someone. To emphasize one over the other is to lose both.

**Question 3: Who or what am I responsible for?** One of the foundational books Outpost uses is the book *Boundaries* by Cloud & Townsend. The book defines boundaries as the point in which one person/thing ends and another begins. One of the greatest problems when it comes to boundaries is the difference between responsible for and responsible to. Cloud and Townsend argue that while we may be responsible *to* other people, we are only responsible *for* ourselves. Our own actions, thoughts, feelings, and responses are our responsibility, not someone else’s. In contrast, we are not responsible for someone else’s actions, thoughts, feelings, and responses. That does not mean we can do whatever we want or not care. It does mean that we cannot take ownership for someone else’s reactions, thoughts, etc. As the book puts it: “We are not, for example, responsible for other people. Nowhere are we commanded to have ‘other-control,’ although we spend a lot of time and energy trying to get it” (p. 32). We cannot “fix” ourselves, let alone anyone else. This is actually very freeing: you can have hard conversations with the people you love because you are only responsible for you. How the other person reacts is not your responsibility. If you are truly rooted in Christ and are called to love another, then you can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, speak the truth in love without fear.

**Question 4: What does the person need right now?** We can never discount the Holy Spirit. If we do, we will make costly mistakes. Praying and asking the question, “Lord, what does this person need right now?” is always proper and right. God has a way of prompting us in order to engage people how they need it the most. We are not called to rely on our

own wisdom or power, but on His. God may even point out that you are not the person to address this issue. There are times where, based on a particular relational history or position, you may not have the relational equity to speak into someone else's life. It requires a lot of prayer and humility to recognize what God may or may not be calling you to do or be in someone else's life.

**Question 5: Do I have to utilize pronouns?** A lot of people don't realize that, at least in English, it is perfectly possible to talk about someone without using pronouns altogether. Prior to my employment with Outpost, I worked at a business with a co-worker who identified as transgender. As I engaged with Outpost's teachings and resources, it occurred to me that I could talk about this co-worker without ever using pronouns. Granted, careful, on-the-fly sentence structuring can be tricky. However, it was not impossible. I simply used the co-worker's name in place of pronouns. I respected where the co-worker was at while being able to avoid the pronouns issue altogether. Though it can be a bit

tricky, people are perfectly capable of communicating while not using pronouns.

**Conclusion.** The issue of pronouns is complicated and nuanced in many respects. I hope, however, that what I have shared here can be a good starting point for you as you approach both this topic and your relationships. Without engaging with these questions, we cannot truly love those who are struggling with or identify as LGBTQ+, and we cannot meaningfully share the truth of God's extravagant grace and love. The question now remains: what are you going to do with this information? I urge you to go before God and see how you need to relate with the LGBTQ-identified people around you. This is also a subject that should be discussed in a safe community of believers, those seeking to follow Jesus at any and all costs. My prayer is that all Christians would grow in humility, grace, love, and courage as they put their hope and identity in Christ alone. May we as the Body of Christ grow in being compassionate without compromising as we ourselves receive God's truth and love for us!

---

*Originally published on [www.outpostministries.org](http://www.outpostministries.org) on May 29, 2024. © 2024 Outpost Ministries and Twin Cities Justice House of Prayer (TCJHOP). All rights reserved. No copies may be made without prior permission. For questions or more information, contact our office: TCJHOP, PO Box 22429, Robbinsdale, MN 55422. Phone: 763-592-4700. Email: [outpostinfo@outpostministries.org](mailto:outpostinfo@outpostministries.org)*