

A good technique for resolving conflict and misunderstandings



One short phrase from the New Testament can help maintain healthy relationships both at home and work. It provides a quick and sure way to clarify misunderstandings, resolve problems, and properly express anger.

Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

There are three parts to this precept and you've got to get all three right or it doesn't work. It's like a recipe with three ingredients—each is essential.

So let's consider each part.

Speak

If you're upset at someone or think there's been a misunderstanding, talk—initiate a conversation. Being mute will not solve problems and there's no virtue in ignoring difficult issues or avoiding unpleasant discourse. When you're upset at someone, there are two extremes to avoid: don't be a stuffer or a spewer. Stuffers don't say anything; spewers are quick to speak, but what they say and how they say it is often offensive. This verse is an antidote for both extremes.

Speak the truth

When engaged in a peace-seeking conversation, be careful to speak only truth. Most of us wouldn't tell a

bold-faced lie, but we may be tempted to distort facts, exaggerate facts, make assumptions, or only speak part of the truth (naturally, the part that substantiates our position). Instead, we must speak *only* the truth and *all* the truth. This will require *pursuing* facts to verify truth; investigate until you're convinced you have good facts regarding the issue.

Speak the truth *in love*

Some people, armed with the truth, think they have a "007 license to kill"; there are no restraints on how and when they express themselves and no concern for the impact their words will have on the recipient. But this verse governs and restricts our speech such that we must frame our words *in love*. This will impact *when* we share, *how* we share (tone of voice, body language), and even our *motivation* for speaking.

Begin by considering your motivation for initiating the conversation. Are you motivated by love for the person you approach, or is your intent to belittle, embarrass, or insult? Perhaps you're just wanting to vent because it will make you feel better. Proceed only when your motivation is pure.

You'll also need to consider how "in love" might be defined by the person(s) you speak to--what is his or her individual criteria for what "in love" means? For instance, someone's preferences may be expressed as: "I don't mind you bringing up a potentially difficult subject, but,

Not as soon as I get home from work.
Not in front of the kids.
Don't raise your voice at me.
Allow me to share my side of the story.
Not when I've just returned from a business trip.
Not in front of the entire staff."

Before you engage with an individual, consider how he or she would prefer to be approached so you can customize your conversation to accommodate his or her individual preferences.

Most misunderstandings and minor conflicts can be resolved through civil discourse. Ephesians 4:15 offers a good template.