

Called to Speak the Truth in Love

Excerpts from Elmer Lehman's RBC Commencement Address

Editor's note: The following are excerpts from Elmer's address, given May 21, 2011.

... At a secular commencement, a speaker is usually expected to motivate the graduates to get out there and seek the American dream, to use your potential and be all you can be if you just try hard enough. I will not do that. We have a higher and a holier calling. For many years the motto of this institution was "Thy Word is Truth." That statement is still true. That declaration has not changed, although now the motto is "Lay a Sure Foundation." How do we lay a sure foundation in the world in which we live? . . . How do we build on a sure foundation in a constantly changing world?

We would like to enjoy a life without suffering and without sadness, a life of comfort, of coziness, of complacency, a life of prosperity, of popularity, of pleasure. God does not promise this. The New Testament gives example after example of those who accepted suffering as a part of the cost of following Jesus. The Apostle Paul testified in Philippians 4:11-13, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything

The Apostle Paul knew that the two components of truth and love are not contradictory or conflicting or compromising.



Elmer Lehman, commencement speaker.



Happy to be here.

through him who gives me strength."

Remember, when the Apostle Paul wrote these words, he was in prison. But even there, he had learned the secret of being content. Paul told the Corinthian church in II Corinthians 12:10: "For Christ's sake I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

During the 22 years we served in Costa Rica from 1961 to 1983, it was not unusual to receive reports of another martyrdom somewhere in the world. To name just a few, including a couple Mennonites, there was Merlin Grove in Somalia, Paul Carlson in the Congo, Betty Olsen in Vietnam, John Troyer in Guatemala, and Chet Bitterman in Colombia, all of these while we were in Costa Rica. They denied themselves, took up their cross, and followed Jesus. For each of them, their response to God's call meant they would pay with their lives. As someone said, "When you commit to Jesus, you sign a blank check. God fills in the amount."

When it comes to speaking the truth in love, here is what too often happens. In our zeal to proclaim truth, we risk sacrificing love. In our zeal to show love, we risk sacrificing truth. We are called to speak the truth in love. Defend the truth with love. The book *UnChristian* [by David Kinnaman



RBC's 2011 graduating class at our 60th commencement. Eighteen students received an Associate degree in Biblical Studies, 13 received a One-Year Certificate in Biblical Studies, and two graduated from the Institute of Pastoral Studies, a nontraditional education program for people already in ministry.

and Gabe Lyons] gives reasons why unbelievers get turned off by Christians. They see too many Christians as judgmental, harsh and unloving.

In our concern to build upon a sure foundation, we may be tempted to proclaim the truth in a way that is hurtful, harmful, harsh, and humiliating. We may be tempted to respond to those who hate truth by proclaiming that truth with hateful attitudes ourselves. This accomplishes little. On the other hand, we may be tempted to proclaim a God of love who would never condemn anyone, so let each person do his own thing, no matter what the Bible says, and thus we have a lenient and lax and lazy Christianity that has no impact upon society.

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The 2011 RBC grads celebrate!



Congrats are in order!



Smiling at the future.

So, you and I are called to speak the truth in love, but it must be centered upon Jesus. Someone has said "Life without Jesus is like an unsharpened pencil. It has no point." People need Jesus. He is the way, the truth, the life.

... [T]he world you live in will continue to change. You, too, have changed. You have been stretched. In the process, RBC has sought to help you lay a sure foundation. You are now expected to go out and build on that foundation. How do you do it in a constantly changing world? You do it by proclaiming the truth in love. We have a message, a sure foundation. Let's build upon it as we speak the truth in love.

The Apostle Paul knew that the two components of truth and love are not contradictory or conflicting or compromising ... [T]hey communicate a message that makes a difference in our society. It is an "as you go" approach, where God provides opportunities for you to speak the truth in love as you go about your daily activity. It does not need to be artificially programmed or awkwardly proclaimed, but becomes our life style.

In Ephesians 4 and 5, where the Apostle Paul tells us to speak the truth in love, he also gives us five aspects of our Christian walk, of our life style. We are to live a life worthy of our calling, live a life of holiness, live a life of love, live a life as light in the Lord, and live a life of wisdom. That is our life style.

... Graduates, you are called to take up your cross and follow Jesus. As you respond to his call, and as you go and as you continue to build upon the sure foundation, do it with a love for God, with love for the Word of God, with love for the people of God, and with love for those who do not know God – as you speak the truth in love.

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