

## SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

By Ken C. Cross

We've all been there. You're at a corporate function and find yourself at a table with seven to nine total strangers. You soon learn that one of your tablemates is the company's executive vice president in charge of pencil sharpening.

Some small-talk ensues. Inevitably, the VP exercises his authority as the highest ranking person at the table and changes the subject.

You soon find yourself part of an unwanted discussion on politics, religion, or some combination of the two. You try to be entranced by your chicken dish, but sooner or later, one of these total strangers will ask your opinion on the topic.

What do you do? Do you fake ignorance? Do you become even more interested in the chicken? Do you say what you think everyone else wants to hear? Or do you make a really bold move and express your honest opinion?

With 2008 being a presidential election year in the United States, the likelihood of being involved in a politically-oriented discussion increases dramatically. Over the last 15 to 20 years, Americans have become more and more polarized in terms of their political views.

The Internet and the growing availability of cable and satellite news outlets have created a paradoxical condition. There is more information available to the average person than ever before, but all most seem to want is what amounts to a sound bite or a headline.

Furthermore, many modern journalists seem more concerned with getting a "scoop" instead of getting their facts straight. Add to this the continued expansion of the Internet and you have a journalistic world where anything goes and opinions are distributed as facts.

Also, the concept of "political correctness" often comes into play. One can't express a view, no matter how factual it may be, that doesn't conform to what has been deemed "acceptable" without fear of being labeled a racist, extremist, or some other "-ist" and being forced to apologize to anyone who "may have been offended."

What these various factors have caused to happen is the creation of a society where most people simply parrot the opinions of media members or celebrities that they feel most align with what they think they are supposed to believe. This happens on both the "liberal and conservative" sides in America and probably most other countries as well.

As Christians, we see the world through Bible-colored glasses. However, to many people outside of Judaism or Christianity, the Bible is simply a collection of ancient stories that has no bearing or relevance to modern life. So how are we to follow Paul's advice in Ephesians 4:5 and "speak the truth in love?"

The first thing to remember is to listen to the opinions of others whenever you find yourself discussing sensitive topics. This is easier said than done, as it is human nature to attempt to formulate one's own answer in lieu of actually paying attention to what someone else is saying.

Secondly, take the time to gather a variety of views on subjects you feel you might have to discuss. Try and read news stories from different outlets. Another idea (one that I find particularly interesting) is to watch (or read) programming produced by secular entities on Biblical topics. It is quite helpful to know specifically what the non-Christian world believes regarding the Bible.

Hopefully, you have gathered your information prior to the situation and have listened to the other person. Now, you are in a position to factually discuss specific points of what they have said.

In doing this, two things are likely to happen. First, you will oftentimes discover that the individual you are speaking with has only superficial, parroted knowledge of the subject. This leads to the second—you will be attacked personally. Since the other person cannot deal in the facts, they usually resort to assaulting your character.

Here is where being a Christian becomes difficult. We must remember to react as Jesus did and not retaliate in kind to these types of personal attacks. First, try and lovingly move the person away from you, the person, and focus on your views on the topic.

If they are unwilling (or unable) to do so, the most Christ-like course of action is often to remove yourself from the discussion. Later, when you have a chance, try saying a prayer for this person. God can, and often does, soften even the hardest of hearts.

The fine line that we, as Christians, need to walk is to find ways to express our Biblically-influenced views without being overtly offensive and without compromising our faith. Since God has made each of us individuals, there is no one size fits all answer to this dilemma.

The good (great) news is that the same God that turned Saul into Paul and an uneducated fisherman (Peter) into the leader of the early church makes the same Holy Spirit that filled their lives available to all who call on his name.