

When Church Members Collide

January 31 and February 1, 1998

Rich Nathan

The Book of Galatians Series

Galatians 2:1-14

Mark Twain once told a story of a scientific experiment in which scientists wanted to see how different animals got along. So he put a dog and a cat in a cage and observed them for a while. Initially, they were a little frightened of each other, but after a period of time the dog and the cat laid down together. They were snuggling and licking each other. Then he put into the cage a goat and a pig along with the dog and cat. They sized each other up, but after a while they were huddled together and became friends.

He observed that and he said, "Well, I wonder what would happen if I put in the cage a Catholic, a Presbyterian and a Baptist, along with the dog, the cat, the goat and the pig?" Mark Twain remarked that after an hour there was nothing living in the cage.

You don't have to cross denominations to find people in churches colliding with each other. I read a story of a major lawsuit between church members in Texas that followed years of controversy over the ownership of property, doctrine, and pastoral selection. During the trial as the evidence was sifted, it was discovered that the entire church split and lawsuit sprang from an incident at a church potluck. Apparently, one of the deacon's children was served a smaller slice of ham than another deacon's child.

Why do church people collide with each other? Certainly, there can be legitimate differences about theology and the proper way to interpret the Bible. This is a very big book. And while there is general agreement across all denominational lines about what is known as Christian orthodoxy—all Christians agree, for example, that God is a trinity; one God subsisting in three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit; all Christians agree that in Jesus Christ, a divine nature and a human nature, is one person—but on so many issues both primary and what we might think of secondary, Christians disagree.

They disagree about the timing and sequence of the last days, for example. Will Jesus rapture the church before the great trial and tribulation falls on the whole earth? Or will the church have to live through the great tribulation period? Should we baptize babies when they are born? Or should we baptize people only upon a personal confession of faith. Is the communion open to anyone who confesses Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior or is the table closed and restricted only to those who share our particular view of the nature of the bread and the cup? We could multiply theological disagreements by the thousands.

My own experience of church life over the last two decades is that people don't conflict much over theology any more. A lot of the collisions these days are for different preferences and different tastes. For example, in churches all across America in the last 20 years there has been a war, a battle about musical tastes

as many traditional churches have tried to introduce into their musical mix or services more contemporary songs. Or introduce a guitar, heaven forbid! You will hear comments like Christian rock is an oxymoron—in other words, it can't be Christian and be rock. All contemporary songs are all experienced-based. All they are is designed to make you feel good. They have no content. That is certainly true of some contemporary songs. They are pretty contentless. But not all are. And looking back at the old hymns, it is not that all of them had the theological content of "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty." Many, particularly in the late 19th Century, almost were entirely romantic and sappy.

But we have different tastes and different needs. Some people prefer liturgy. Their lives are so chaotic that they want order when they get to church. They want to know exactly what is going to happen from the moment the pastor does the invocation until the moment he does the benediction. Some people enjoy the pomp and circumstance of a formal service with the bell choir, the incense and the robes. Other folks find that all very distracting. They find a lot of the church rituals irrelevant and unhelpful.

People collide over preference and tastes and style. In fact, you may want to ask the next time you have conflict with another person in the church, is this simply a matter of taste or preference? Church members often deceive themselves into believing that the issue is theological and truth-based. But you know, you really hit a collision in style when you go to church in another country or culture. When I was in India a year a half ago, here in America we are used to excellent sound systems. If there is any distortion at all we put our fingers in our ears. They had in India a sound system that was so bad that in comparison Mr. Microphone is state of the art. The static and distortion and noise were almost unbearable. And they had someone playing the keyboards that honestly did not know how to play at all. They were playing the piano to an entirely different tune, almost a random tune, to the one they were singing through Mr. Microphone.

Sometimes people collide based on their reaction to change. It's often said in church life that change – even good change – is hard for many people. If you want to see collisions, all you need to do is change the church service times or bulletins, and watch people bounce off the walls. We can't change the church service times! My kids need a nap and they take their nap from 10:00 to 11:00, or the roast burns if I get home after 11:30. One pastor told the story of a Civil War that erupted when he changed the service times because a fellow in the congregation always took his aged mother out for breakfast at 8:30 and then dropped her back at her home at 9:30. He was able to make the 10:00 service. When the church changed its service times to 9:30, that pushed his breakfast up and his mother reacted and yelled at him and he, then, yelled at the pastor because Mom's, let's put this delicately, digestive systems and toilet needs were such that she couldn't have breakfast at 8:00. She had to have breakfast at 8:30.

And people collide because of different callings and gifting. Certainly, callings can extend to the kinds of people we are called to minister to, the areas of town we are called to minister to, the emphases that God wants to give one church over against another church as he highlights different aspects of his character and mission in the world through different parts of the body. In today's text from

the book of Galatians, we are going to discover that we are not the first people in history that experienced a collision between church members. A lot of folks these days talk about us getting back to the early church. We are trying to create a New Testament church, they say. I often think to myself, "Have these folks ever read the New Testament?" Because certainly although the early church did experience blessing of God's presence and power at a level that many churches today do not experience. The early church was not the high water mark in Christian history of Christian maturity. It was the beginning. It was the church in its infancy. And if you want to see people collide and conflict and argue with each other, just read Paul's letters. Almost everyone deals with an issue of conflict or disagreements or a collision between members in the church. I have called today's message, "When Church Members Collide." Let's pray.

We have been going through the book of Galatians. You will recall, if you were here, that the apostle Paul was a missionary church planter who was sent out from his home church in Antioch, along with Barnabas, to plant churches in South Galatia, which is now South Turkey. He successfully evangelized a previously wholly unevangelized group of people. He planted these fledgling churches. Paul never considered some fully evangelized when they made a decision for Christ. The goal of the apostle Paul was to get people involved in the local church. He didn't hold crusades and then allow people to scatter to the winds. The Apostle Paul's evangelistic method was to make people into responsible church members. You are not fully evangelized, biblically, until you become a responsible church member. That is why we here in the Vineyard have a membership class. We have lots of classes to assist people to become responsible church members. We don't consider our task down simply when someone raises his or her hand. We want people to move all the way into connection, not only with Jesus Christ, but also with the body of Christ.

Paul evangelized this region. He planted new churches and then went back to his home church in Antioch where he got a report that false teachers were going into these new churches, unsettling the faith of many, by bringing a two-prong attack against Paul's authority as an apostle on the one hand, and Paul's message of the gospel on the other. They were suggesting that Paul, not being one of the original Twelve, and therefore had less authority than the Jerusalem apostles. That his authority was derivative, because it wasn't tied to Jesus' earthly ministry. And the false teachers said that Paul was short-changing the Galatian churches by not telling them that you needed to do something beyond trusting in Christ and his bloody death on the cross to be saved. They said that you also needed to observe the Jewish ritual laws of circumcision and food cleanliness.

"Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem this time with Barnabas." The 14 years measured from the time of Paul's conversion to Saul. It was completed around 32 AD – the events in Galatians happened in 46 AD. "I took Titus along also. I went in response to the revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain."

Let's stop there for a moment. Paul has been on the mission field. He has been away from Jerusalem for eleven years. He doesn't have a deep and intimate relationship with the Jerusalem apostles. And he got wind of the fact that some of the folks in Jerusalem had real questions about his message and methods. There was a lot of speculation about Paul and whether Paul had gone too far.

Paul entered these meetings with a degree of trepidation in his heart. He was concerned about two things. First, he was bringing Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile, with him. Now I think that was quite deliberate. Titus was going to be a test case. How would these Jerusalem apostles, these Jews, relate to the idea that Titus had equal footing with them before God solely on the basis of Titus' trust in the bloody death of Christ on the cross? Would they say, "Titus, you are a second class believer" and command him to be circumcised? That was Paul's concern.

And then he was concerned about how the Jerusalem apostles would view his message. He says in verse 3, "I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain."

Not that Paul had any question about the validity of his message. He knew that Jesus Christ had personally commissioned him. Paul was certain that his faith in Christ alone saves and there is no Christian requirement to obey Jewish rituals. He was afraid, however, that the apostles would think it was false and that this would create a rift in the church. He wanted to maintain the unity of the body.

And so Paul went to a very challenging series of meetings with some questions in his heart. Would the apostles who were in Jerusalem require Titus to be circumcised? Would the apostles in Jerusalem accept Paul's message that salvation came through faith in Jesus Christ alone plus nothing?

Well, regarding whether they required Titus to be circumcised, verses 3-5 gives us the answer. "Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you."

Regarding Titus, the test case, the Jerusalem apostles said, "He doesn't have to be circumcised. We don't care what the false brothers – the Jewish legalists thought. He is accepted on an equal basis with us. God accepts Gentiles and Jews without distinction. Based on faith alone in Christ alone."

I find it interesting as we are considering the issue of Christians colliding that the apostle Paul mentioned false brothers infiltrating our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. It is difficult to know if the false brothers were not Christians, that is their profession of faith was false, or they were false in their theology that they just added to a sincere faith in Jesus Christ this view that you also needed to observe the Jewish law in order to be

saved. I don't know if they were not Christians or if they were confused Christians.

But, I tell you friends there are still people around today who really do go to meetings to spy out the freedom that others have in Christ. One doesn't have to go too far or turn on the radio too long before you hear of a certain so-called Christian brother who went to a meeting and brought in a tape player, recorded the sounds of someone being ministered to or prayed for. Maybe they could get a snippet of a teaching, a sentence, and a line in which a person sounds like they are teaching something that maybe a shade off. There has been throughout church history self-appointed policemen of orthodoxy who go to other churches and various meetings with a goal of criticizing, finding someone in error so that they can pounce on it. The great Jonathan Edwards had his brutal detractors. Billy Graham has been picketed at his crusades for 50 years. These folks are generally flawed in their own theology and certainly false in their motivation. They go not to bring correction in love, not to bring about health in the people they are spying out, not to create restored relationships and maintain unity in the midst of conflict. They go to shoot down, to condemn, restricting liberty. They remind me of the very cynical definition of Puritanism. One cynic referred to Puritans (he is not accurate) as people who have an overwhelming fear that someone somewhere was having a good time. Collisions in the church can and do happen because of people who are self-appointed policemen of orthodoxy. These folks seek disillusion and confusion, and suspicion.

Well, Paul didn't yield to these spies, these false brothers. It is one thing to remove stumbling blocks that are in the way of the sincere. It is another thing to yield any ground to abusive, divisive false brothers. These people just need to be opposed.

The apostle Paul also says that not only was Titus not required to be circumcised, but the apostles also didn't add anything to his message. verse 6 states:

"As for those who seemed to be important – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance – those men added nothing to my message."

Was his message in vain? No. They added nothing to the message. They didn't say, "Paul, your message sounds fine, but you need to add this little caveat in regard to salvation, a person must be circumcised." They added nothing.

Well, those are the things they didn't do, what did they do?

Well, they agreed with the message that Paul preached. And they recognized that the apostle Paul had a different calling on his life than they did. verse 7 states:

"On the contrary, they saw that I had been given the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been given the task of preaching the gospel to the Jews." And verse 9: "James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews."

They recognized they had different callings. I think so often that many disputes in the church would be solved right here if we said, "Brothers, we have the same message, faith in Jesus Christ alone plus nothing. You are orthodox in your theology. I am orthodox in my theology. This is not a theological problem, at least about primary theological issues. This is an issue of different callings. You are called to minister to one group of people in the world, and that is why you express yourself that way, where I am called to minister to a different group and I, therefore, express myself this way."

If the Columbus Vineyard was called to minister to the super wealthy who came from mainly traditional Episcopalian backgrounds, we might want to adopt a very different style. We might want to design our building different and have a steeple and stained glass. We might wear suits and ties and robes and not be casual in our dress. If the Columbus Vineyard was primarily ministering to Appalachians in our city, again, we might have a very different sound up here. Our sound might be a little like Kentucky Blue Grass. Our worship leaders would sing with a twang. If we were ministering primarily to Hispanics, we also would adopt a different style, a different form.

The apostles recognized a different calling. And, too, the apostles recognized a divine calling. verse 8 says, "For God, who is at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me."

Even when we have differences, brothers and sisters, can we say I still recognize that God is at work in your emphases, in your ministry, in your different calling, just as God is at work in my emphases, in my ministry and in my calling? Lots of times we can say, "okay, this brother, sister or church is different." But we don't go on to say, "God is still at work there despite the differences"?

Several years ago, we in the Vineyard organization made a very difficult decision to withdraw endorsement of the Toronto Area Christian Fellowship and the so-called Toronto Blessing. A large part, not entirely, but a large part of our withdrawal of our endorsement had nothing to do with orthodoxy. We came to the recognition that we had very different callings. That in fact the Toronto Area Church was called to be a renewal center. That the Vineyard was not trying to produce renewal centers. We are trying to produce and plant churches. Despite the differences and certain things that I believe were errors in their practice, I have regularly maintained the view that God is at work there just as he is at work here. Are you able to say that with churches whose emphasis or calling may be different than ours – God is at work there?

Paul then tackles the next challenging issue that causes a collision between people. That is the issue of giving in verse 10 where he says, "All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do." Gosh, if there is anything church members collide over its leadership requests for money.

They asked that we should continue to remember the poor. I love this verse. Largely part of the reason why I love it is because God, I believe, personally

underlined this verse for me by waking me up three times in the course of the night several years ago. I had, at least for me, a very unusual experience several years ago. On a Saturday evening before I was going to get up and preach on Sunday morning, three times I was awakened from sleep with this very strong impression in my mind, “Rich, tell the people every single week at the end of the service, ‘Remember the poor.’” Tell the people every week before you dismiss them to remember the poor. And three times over the course of the night, I believe it was the Lord, showed me that we were to put boxes in the back of the church and encourage people in the church to leave a dollar in those boxes just for the poor. I remember waking up and reflecting on the night. I thought, oh my goodness, Lord, how am I going to do this today? We don’t have boxes. We aren’t prepared. And I felt the Holy Spirit deeply convict me with this simple thought, “Rich, will you obey me? When I tell you to do something, will you obey me?” And so I thought, “Well, yes. I certainly want to obey you. I keep saying, Lord, lead this church. You are the head of the church.” So we have been doing that over the last several years. And I think it has real value for us who are mainly middle class to be reminded week after week that there are poor in our community that need our help. When you put money in those boxes, the money goes not to this church; it goes to people in the community who lack resource(s). Over the last year we did six funerals for victims of violent crimes in the community where the families couldn’t supply caskets, decent burials, funeral services. We did all of that from Vineyard Church of Columbus for free. The money also goes to the poor through our food pantry.

Now there are several reasons there were many poor Christians in Jerusalem. This might have been written during the time of a significant famine in Jerusalem. We read about the prophet Agabus in Acts 11 prophesying about a major famine that was to take place in Jerusalem. It may also have been the case that Jewish Christians find themselves economically discriminated against by Jews who rejected Jesus. Some Jewish Christians having come to Christ may have been fired from their jobs by their Jewish bosses. Some Jewish Christians may have found themselves the subject of economic boycotts. Others may have been discriminated against in hiring. Some Jewish Christians may have found themselves hundreds or even thousands of miles away from their homeland, choosing to settle in Jerusalem and near the mother church in order to receive fellowship and teaching. But they couldn’t find means of work because of their Christian profession.

I find it wonderful that this little request made by the Jerusalem apostles to Paul, that is that we should continually remember the poor got radically underlined in Paul’s consciousness and that the request shows up over and over again in many of Paul’s letters. When Paul said “This very thing that I was eager to do” he really means it. He was thrilled at the opportunity to have his Gentile Mission Churches give financially back to the Jewish Mother Church.

Why was Paul eager to collect money from the Gentiles to give to the Jews? Why does the issue of the collection show up over and over again in Paul’s writings? If you are taking notes, you might want to jot down 2 Corinthians 8-9 and Romans 15:25-28. While the issue was bigger than just helping out a

brother in need, which is certainly motive enough, Paul saw it as a major way to strengthen the unity of Jewish and Gentile churches. Financial giving is a way to grease the wheels when brothers collide. They knew that lots of members of the Jerusalem church would look with suspicion on the Gentile Missions. "Look at those guys out there with those uncircumcised people. Why are they worshipping God that way? Why don't they eat following the food rituals we were raised with?"

He knew that a collection and kindness from the Gentiles would move the Jerusalem believers to brotherly affection. One wonderful way to break down walls of suspicion and to heal collisions is to give generously. If you are in conflict with someone, along with kind affectionate words, you might show your kind desire to be friends by giving a gift. Give a book with a kind note; bake something and give it as a gift. Unity is often maintained.

Paul wanted to move the Jerusalem believers to kind affection toward the Gentiles. He also wanted to make sure that the Gentiles would never have any arrogance or pride regarding their Jewish brothers and sisters. "We don't like those guys anyway. Why should we care about them at all?" The apostle Paul understood that the Jerusalem brothers were the ones who gave the spiritual blessing and in return they ought to get a material blessing.

I believe that along with unity in the body, giving makes love practical. It proves unity in love. It is so easy for us to talk about love and unity overcoming our conflicts with each other. We can have all these loving feelings and sweet service where we all hold hands and sing "Pass it On" and "We are One in the Spirit", but you know money brings it all down to earth. It brings us past talk. What exactly is the nature of your relationship with the church? It shows up in your pocketbook, in your checkbook. Money is often the acid test that the Bible uses regarding the reality of our love and unity with each other.

1 John 3:17-18 says: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him. Dear children, let us not love just with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

With your checkbook and not just with your words. Not just with your heart attitude of unity with the church. Money is often the proof of your real attitude toward the local church. Jesus said, "Where your money is, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

It is so important that we Christian leaders and pastors underline the issue of money, which is frequently the source of conflicts and collisions in churches. We Christian leaders must disciple the post-war generations regarding the issue of money, especially folks who have been raised in an instant gratification, consumer-oriented, debt driven culture. We must teach principles of self-sacrifice and generous financial giving. A lot of people resent the talk about money in church. "I can't believe I went to church and the pastor talked about money." I love one Christian pastor's response to the idea of all the talk is about money around here. The pastor said, "If Jesus was your pastor you would hear a lot more about money than you ever do around here from me." I challenge you. If you resent the teaching on money at church, I challenge you to read the gospels. You will find that Jesus our Lord spoke about money and spoke about it

more stringently and as a higher call, than you will find in virtually any church anywhere in America no matter how money grubbing the church is.

Let me talk about money for just a moment. What are some of the biblical principles that we have to operate with regarding money and giving? My first biblical principle is this, high accountability. I have taught over and over again for you to say to financial requests for a ministry, "Show me your ministry and your integrity before I show you my wallet." Show me your ministry and your integrity before I show you my wallet. Everyone in the universe has a vision from God. Everyone, every Christian, wants to do great things for God. You can't turn on the television without some preacher telling you that they have a vision from God to build a satellite network so that the gospel will be preached.

I would never give a dime to a ministry unless they have proof, have high standards of financial integrity and accountability. The apostle Paul said that he made it his aim to not only do right in the sight of God, but in the sight of men. We take that very seriously in the Columbus Vineyard. The fact is, friends, we are one of the few churches in the state of Ohio that receives a completely certified set of independently audited financial statements each year. I am not in any way suggesting that we are one of the few churches that operates with high financial integrity. But because of our size, and because of the principle to whom much is given, much will be required, we decided to each year invite into our church independent auditors to certify our financial statements, the ones we give to our members at our annual business meeting. We want to assure every contributor to this church that money goes exactly where we say it goes and that all of our financial systems are operating at the highest possible level. It is not our money; it is God's money. I believe God holds me and the other leaders personally responsible for the way we steward our finances here. So a principle we employ here is high accountability.

Another principle we employ here is high challenge. Not only should every church member learn to pray and study the Bible and worship and be honest in their business dealings and have good and healthy families, but they should also handle their money and give up to the standards laid out in the Bible. We believe that financial giving is an opportunity for us all to show our gratitude towards God. God has blessed you with a variety of blessings, material well-being, family, church and health. How many ways do we have to say thank you to God? We say thank you through finances.

Financial giving is an opportunity to imitate God. God is a giver. We share our faith when we heal the sick, when we are holy. We are imitating God. God is a giver; we give.

Financial giving is a way for us to support what we believe in. People give millions of dollars to support political organizations. Millions of dollars go to Planned Parenthood, to universities, to major orchestras, to foundations. We Christians who say we believe in Jesus Christ and we believe in the local church should be exemplary in our giving. We believe in high accountability around here. We also believe in high challenge.

Someone recently came up to me and said, "Rich, are you opposed to wealth? You often challenge materialism and consumerism." I am not in any

way opposed to wealth. I have no problem Biblically with someone making honestly as much money as they can. I do have a problem, Biblically, with a person consuming as much money as they make. I really believe in John Wesley's little maxim, you are to make all you can, save all you can, and you are to give all you can.

Here in the Vineyard we teach tithing – giving 10 percent of your income to the church. Let me underline something for those of you who are doing a little better financially than average. In 1 Timothy 6, the apostle Paul says, "Teach those who are rich in the world to be generous and willing to share." Since this is in the beginning of the year, why can't you get on a plan to tithe to the church if you are not giving? If your income has gone up in the last several years, if you are making more than the median income, if your income is above \$50,000 a year, I want to challenge you, and if you are married to take a moment to pray with your spouse and say, "This year why don't we begin to tithe to our church on our gross income" if you are not already doing that. Give off of your gross income rather than your net after you have paid your credit union and taken money out for your 401K and your medical insurance and your social security, and everything else that concerns you. Give off the top and not off the bottom. If you are currently not giving and you are part of this local church, high demands with high accountability.

Finally, the apostle Paul deals with the cleanup job necessary when church members collide. He deals with the issue of challenging error. In verse 11, the apostle Paul says:

"When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'"

The issue of confrontation. Folks never have enough money to tithe. We never can afford to tithe. It's always a sacrificial decision. Rarely is there 10 percent of income just sitting around gathering dust. And it is never a convenient time to confront error. We have a thousand reasons why we don't speak the truth to someone about a major error they are making in their lives. It is not a good time. I am afraid. They won't receive me. You know, we are talking in this talk about unity, about trying to get people who are colliding to work together. It is so important that we remember that love is not sentimentality.

Some of us by way of temperament can't imagine ever getting in another person's face. Some of us because our temperamental preference can't imagine doing what the apostle Paul did, opposing another person to their face and calling them out in public. We would rather die than hurt someone's feelings like that. I know we are all wired differently. Some of us find challenge and confrontation easier than others. Marlene and I have pretty traditional

male/female role distinctions in the way we relate to our kids. Marlene is tenderhearted. She is a nurturing mother. She is definitely motivated by a desire to have our kids be comfortable all the time. She regularly just wants to relieve any pain they feel, any difficulty in a relationship at school or in the church, or any struggle with a teacher. Marlene wants to intervene and make sure they feel okay, that the pain, the problem and the stress are taken away. In the same way that she ran to hold them when they cried as babies, Marlene's instinct is to relieve their pain now that they are teenagers. I kid her about having a 5'11", 185-pound baby still sitting on her lap. As a tenderhearted person, she is very present-oriented.

In a brutal world, we sure need people who are tenderhearted, don't we? We need people who are sensitive and compassionate and warm. We need folks who are comforters, who are gentle, and who care about our feelings.

Like a lot of men, and some women, I am more tough-minded. If the kids are in pain, I think well, life is not real fair. A little crisis or distress is okay for them to wrestle through. They are going to have to learn how to deal with relational problems with some counsel from me. But I don't want to interfere too quickly. They are going to have to learn to deal with bosses on the job and I don't want to jump in the middle of low-level problems with their teachers.

To confront their bad behavior, especially through disrespect or self-pity or selfishness, because in the future, as a tough-minded person, is far more important to me than someone's present feelings. See, I want my kids to thank me for being a good Dad when they are 30 years old. But you know I will feel like a bigger success if their spouses thank me for the kind of people I have raised. I think about this, honestly I do. I think about my future son-in-law and daughter-in-law coming to me and saying, "Thank you, Dad, because Dan is such a good man. You and Marlene raised a good guy. He works hard. He cares about my needs. He listens well. He is never harsh. He respects me when it is inconvenient. He is not lazy. Thank you."

I want my future son-in-law to say, "Thank you. Sharon is such a good wife and mother. She is not absorbed with herself. She works hard. She is fun. She respects me. She cares about my needs. She is not manipulative. She doesn't use emotional blackmail. She doesn't nag. She is not involved in self-pity."

If you are a tenderhearted comforter like my wife, you need to be challenged that on occasion you must become a tough-minded confronter. To care about something more than just making people feel comfortable. If you are a toughminded challenger like me, you need to stretch in tenderness. To be gentle, to make sure you take people's feelings into account, to be kind.

I believe this text gives us a model for confrontation. The first thing we see is that Paul confronts directly. It says:

"When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face." He confronts directly.

Last year I wrote an article in our church newsletter, *The Grapevine*, about people who send to the pastoral staff anonymous complaints. I said in the article that I have instructed our staff to throw away anonymous complaints because frankly I view them as drive-by shootings. You open up the letter and you are

stung by the criticism and there is no opportunity to respond to the criticism. There is no opportunity to be reconciled to the person who has the criticism. There is no opportunity to defend yourself or to correct any distortion. All you are is shot. Frankly, I believe if a person can't sign their name to a letter, then the letter is not worth writing. If you can't stand behind your opinion, don't offer it. It is, actually, an act of cowardice to not speak directly to an individual regarding a particular issue in their life. Of course, there are other ways to not directly confront. We can gossip; we can pout; we can pretend nothing is wrong; we can avoid.

Paul not only confronts directly, but he challenges self-destruction. In verse 11 it says, "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he was clearly in the wrong." Literally, in the Greek it reads, "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he was condemned." That is he stood before God condemned.

Here is why we confront someone. Because they are on a self-destructive course and we love them enough to want to move them back to life and peace with God. It is not okay to watch you drink yourself away from God. It is not okay for me to watch you hang around with a really bad crowd and get pulled down to their level or to date someone who has no morals and get yourself compromised. It is not okay for me to watch you get a divorce and wash my hands of it and say, "I have other friends whose marriages in the congregation are good." If we love someone we confront him or her. We challenge them when they are on a self-destructive course.

And we challenge a self-deceptive course. Paul challenges Peter because of Peter's hypocrisy. The other Jews joined in his hypocrisy so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. The reason we tell the truth to someone is because they have told themselves so many lies that they can't distinguish between a lie and the truth any longer. They may have lied to themselves and said, "God doesn't really care that I am getting a divorce." Or God doesn't really mind what I do with my body. Or this is a private issue. Sex really doesn't make me an immoral person.

We pull the mask away and say, "No. You are self-deceived. You are claiming to be a Christian, while living like a non-Christian."

Finally, we must distinguish between those times when we confront privately and those times when we confront publicly. Biblically, most confrontations are to be private. Most words of correction are to be between you and another member of the church alone. Jesus says, "If you have something against a brother, go speak to them between you and them alone." Not in public. We speak gently. We speak kindly. We have Marlene's tender heart that I described.

There are a few occasions, and this is one of them described here, when it is appropriate to speak publicly. I don't know that Paul didn't go privately to Peter. The text doesn't mention that. But it is appropriate to go public when the sin is notorious, that is everyone knows about the sin, we correct to the scope of the notoriety of the sin. If there is open sin, we have open rebuke.

We correct according to the scope of the person's authority. Leaders are to be judged more strictly. The Bible says, "Don't let many of you be teachers. He

who teaches will be judged by a stricter judgment.” And so the greater the leader’s authority, the more public and open the rebuke.

We correct according to the scope of the effect of the sin. If the sin has a great consequence, in that case we might be more public in our correction. In this case, the gospel was at stake and the implication of the gospel. The way Peter was going, the Jewish church and the Gentile church could have been split. The consequences were enormous. Even Barnabas was being led astray. Jews were judging the Gentiles. The Gentiles were being treated like second-class citizens.

Now this text does not give license to a church to haul before the whole congregation an 18-year old teen that gets herself pregnant by falling into bed with her boyfriend on one occasion. Let’s make that poor little teen get up and confess her sin before the whole church. I have heard of churches doing it based on something like this text. That little girl was not in a position of great authority. Her sin was not widely known, yet anyway. And it is not the case that this particular sin has a devastating consequence for the gospel or the rest of the church.

So often public confessions only serve the prurient interest of the church so that people can cluck their tongues in self-satisfaction. We restrict public rebukes for situations like Peter and Paul. Like a kinship leader or a pastor or a leader of a church movement; someone who has broad authority and who has committed a significant sin. Most often we go privately, prayerfully, gently and kindly to challenge problems in another person’s life.