

Well That Was Awkward

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Reading Time: 5 minutes

“I don’t like confrontation.” “I don’t handle conflict well.” “I’m so awkward.” How many times have we heard these excuses—or even made these excuses—when trying to avoid a difficult conversation? On the surface, it sounds kind (loving even) to want to avoid conflict or a potentially hard conversation. You want to come across as considerate and thoughtful. And yet we know that the Bible says things like, “If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one” (Gal. 6:1), and “If any among you wanders from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that he... will save a soul from death” (Jas. 5:19-20). We hear verses like these preached on from the pulpit, and we know that they are true, but how often do we avoid putting them into practice because they are hard and oftentimes awkward?

As God has given us all things pertaining to life and godliness (1 Peter 1:3), He has not left us without an example of how to go about handling confrontation. In Galatians 2:11-14, God provides us with an example of how someone else dealt with an awkward situation. In the first two chapters of Galatians, Paul has to defend his apostleship—to fellow Christians!

Toward the end of chapter 2, in vs. 11-14, we see that Paul withstands Peter to his face because he was treating a certain people group poorly. In other words, Paul confronted Peter and had what must have been an awkward conversation with him. Often today, we think of Peter as the headstrong, almost thoughtless, apostle who acted impulsively and think of Paul as one of the greatest evangelists of all time. However, that is not necessarily how these two were viewed in the first century. Only a few verses earlier in Galatians 2, it seems that some of the Galatians may have been esteeming Peter as a better apostle—indeed even a better apostle than Paul! Over and over again throughout Scripture, we see Peter speaking first and filling a leadership role both among the apostles and the church. In essence, Peter was popular.

So here we find Paul—whose own position is being questioned—standing up to Peter, a much more popular and perhaps influential person at the time. Let's notice a few things that the text does not say about the situation, a few things the text does say, and learn how we as Christians can humbly and genuinely correct those around us.

What Galatians 2:11-14 doesn't say.

It doesn't say that Paul was angry, that Paul raised his voice, or that Paul was belittling towards Peter. Paul's attitude was not one of superiority or mocking. Instead, as Galatians 6:1 commands, it must have been a spirit of gentleness or meekness. He was not saying he thought he was a better Christian than Peter or that he was somehow more righteous. He was not using this as a way to possibly get even with Peter. There is no "You always..." in this conversation, and there is no name-calling or calling up of past sins. Paul doesn't bring up the three times Peter betrayed Christ immediately before his crucifixion, and notice that Peter does not bring up Paul's past either. The text also does not say that Paul heard about Peter's sins from someone else, that Paul brought his friends with him as moral support to confront Peter, or that Paul stopped being friends with Peter after this. Peter and Paul were brothers in Christ with the same hope and the same goal. How could they have expected to enjoy heaven together if they could not even be friendly while on earth? How could we expect to be in heaven with a brother or sister in Christ if we cannot be friendly here on earth?

What Galatians 2:11-14 does say

Paul withstood Peter "to his face" (vs. 11). As stated previously, Paul went directly to Peter and spoke to him face to face. He didn't text Peter about it later (accommodatively speaking) or wait to address the issue because "it did not seem like an appropriate time."

Then notice Paul's reason for saying something; it was "because he was to be blamed" (vs. 11). Verse 12 gives a specific instance where Peter was at fault that Paul witnessed himself. Therefore, in this conversation with Peter, Paul addresses one concrete, factual event that was clearly contradictory to the Word of God. He stated the facts—not his feelings. Paul saw, "That they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel" (vs. 14). When we do confront people, do we talk about a specific time we witnessed them do something sinful? Or do we allow our emotions to run away without our minds and become argumentative, nondescript, and perhaps historical? Finally, notice the scope of the issue and why Paul confronted. Peter committed this sin in front of the entire congregation, so Paul confronted Peter "before them all" (vs. 14). In fact, Peter's sin had led others to sin as well. The "rest of the Jews played the hypocrite with him" (vs. 13). In the minds of the Galatian Christians it seems that Peter's actions permitted them to sin as well. After all, if one Christian who has a good reputation can do it, why can't everyone else? By confronting Peter and initiating the awkward conversation, not only did Paul fulfill the commands of God and potentially save Peter's soul, but he also saved the church at Antioch from division.

Later on in life, Paul writes to the young preacher Timothy, who is having to deal with confrontation in the local congregation. It could be that Timothy had a more timid personality and that he might just fit into the category of people who say, "I'm not good at dealing with conflict." In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul tells Timothy, "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." See, just like Paul and Timothy, God has not given us a spirit of fear. Fear says, "I can't handle this person being angry at me," or "I might not be included in this friend group if I stand up for the truth," or "That would be so awkward." But God has given us a sound mind, with the ability to understand that the gospel is God's only power to save (Rom. 1:16), and love that motivates us to love the souls around us (1 John 4:9-10, 19). Many commands of God are simple to understand and hard to apply. But God has not left us without an example in the lives of Paul and Peter. So friends, next time you witness someone sinning, intentionally or out of ignorance, consider that eternity is much, much too long for the potential awkwardness of a moment to supersede our love for those around us!

Other verses to consider:

1. Ezekiel 3:16-21 (specifically verse 18), where we find: "When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning... that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand." (In Acts 20:20 and 26, Paul applies this principle to himself)
2. Proverbs 27:6, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."
3. Matthew 18:15-17, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone..."
4. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, specifically vs. 6, "[Love] does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in

the truth.”

5.Ephesians 4:15, “...speaking the truth in love.”

1 John 3:18, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”