

Galatians 2:11-16

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Proper 18 A

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Let's Be Real: Tough Love is Tough

This is going to be hard. I know it's something I need to bring up. I know it's something God has called me to talk about. But that doesn't make it easy. Let's be real: **tough love is tough**. And I've got to share some tough love with the apostle Peter. Yeah, that Peter, one of Jesus' disciples and often their leader. He's a leader in the whole Christian church now too. Here's what makes it more difficult: before this I've only been with Peter for 15 days and that was 14 years ago.

Since then I've been working at sharing Christianity here in Antioch, my home base city, and all over the country up north in Galatia. I've been through some awful things for the sake of the good news about Jesus but I'm most nervous about this. Peter's got some things messed up. He needs some tough love. And I'm the one who has to do it. Before you hear my tough love, can we be honest about it? Let's be real: **tough love is tough**.

Put yourself in Paul's sandals for a minute. Would it be easy to confront the apostle Peter? This would have an effect on your relationship with him. News about this would spread through your church in Antioch as fast as words can fly. And soon, Christians everywhere would know what had happened. What could happen to your reputation, your ministry, your life? There was a lot on the line for Paul.

I doubt you need to see from Paul's perspective to get it. You know from experience. **Tough love is tough**. It makes you nervous. Your heart begins to pound. To confront another Christian with their sin does not come naturally

to us who struggle with our own sins. Any time you have to do this, it isn't easy.

But when a Christian needs tough love, there's always a real reason why. Here's Paul's "why." 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. Remember how God gave Peter that dream about eating all kinds of animals? God had revealed how the good news about Jesus was for all people and not just the Jews. And at first when Peter came to Antioch he lived like Jesus was for all people. He ate and associated with everyone.

Then peer pressure hit and Peter's actions changed. Some Jewish believers tried to force Old Testament ceremonial laws on Gentile Christians. And even though Gentiles might be believers, unless they obeyed these laws this group would not be near them. This faction drew a clear line in the sand between "us" and "them." And Peter started to divide himself from the Gentile Christians too.

Peter's actions didn't just stay with Peter. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. Even Paul's mission partner Barnabas, who had been with him for more than a decade, fell into this sinful way of life. Peter caused a sad separation between believers in the church at Antioch so that close friends and family were divided. Paul saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel and he knew Peter needed tough love.

Most confrontations in your lives aren't so dramatic. You argue about what food is better. In America, you draw lines between sports. Packer fans go here Viking fans go there. You debate if you remember something happening in a different way than someone else for way longer than you should. But even in these stupid arguments, you do everything we can to

not be wrong. You love to try to twist and turn things to your perspective. Do you Google things and look up tiny details so you can technically be right? I have. Let's be real, even in the meaningless confrontations you have, you like being right.

So many aspects around it prove its true: **tough love is tough**. Confronting other Christians over sin is not going to be easy. And because it's tough, you try to avoid it. You don't show the tough love they need because you're afraid of what they'll think of you. You don't want to lose the relationship. If things stay the way they are now, it'll be easier. But failing to show tough love when someone needs it is failing to do what God calls you to do.

On the other side of this is another hole. Since you love being right in confrontations you show tough love, not in love, but because you're right and they're wrong. You can use God's Word and prove how sinful someone else has been. You can put someone in their place. To show tough love out of love and not for your own benefit is tough.

Here's why Paul knew he had to do it, though. Peter stood condemned. Peter's spiritual life was on the line. In creating this division between himself and other believers he was making God's love dependent on what you do. Peter's way of living was leading himself and others away from Jesus' free forgiveness, apart from obedience.

This is why God calls you to show tough love to mistaken believers: There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. If you don't show tough love, it can end in someone's spiritual death.

It's what you need to do. So listen to how Paul did it. He confronted Peter. 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? We... know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul brought it back to Jesus. He called Peter out for changing the free and full

forgiveness Jesus won for all people. And he reminded Peter of the truth that God had put into his own heart too. It's not what you do, it's trusting in what Jesus Christ has done for you. **Tough love is tough**, but Paul gives us an awesome example of how to do it.

In general, we like to avoid whatever might be tough in our lives. But recently there's been a movement to face tough head on. Have you heard of this thing called Tough Mudder. It's a 8-10 mile run with 25 obstacles along the way. You have to climb over walls. You have to swim under water and mud. You go through an ice bath. They got the name right, it's tough! And there are lots of events like this that thousands of people sign up for every year. People are getting into the culture that tough things are worth doing because they're tough. Going through tough can prove who you are.

True tough love doesn't prove who you are, it proves who God is. You show tough love because of Jesus' perfect love. It's not something you have to do but something you want to do as a believer. Your sins of failing to show tough love like you should have been justified through faith in Jesus. You are right with God because of what he's done. Jesus' forgiveness enables you to do the tough things you never thought you could do. It's worth it to give Jesus thanks for what he's done for you.

Tough love is tough but it's also worth it for other people. You don't want other people to separate themselves from Jesus. You care when you see a brother or sister struggling because you know they matter to God. You show Christian tough love because the world, the devil, and your own sinful nature are constantly going to try to get you away from Jesus.

Tough love is tough but it's important for all the Christians around you. What happened because Peter got things messed up? Many got further away from Jesus too. You show tough love because if you don't it will have lasting effects. How many friends and family members might go along with

sin? How many generations could miss out on their Savior? **Tough love is tough** but worth it because it brings blessings for so many people!

And here's how you'll do it. You'll warn your brothers and sisters in faith about their sin and comfort with the gospel when they repent. You'll do it with great patience and careful instruction. You'll let love be what motivates you instead of the desire to be right. And if you check your own heart and you find that you're doing it in the wrong way, you'll repent of your own sins and look to Jesus' love for forgiveness and for guidance about how to do it right. **Tough love is tough** and it's what you do as a believer.

What happened with Paul and Peter? How did things end? Years later Peter wrote to another group of Christians, Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. Paul was a dear brother that God had given wisdom. We don't know the details but we know Paul's tough love got Peter back on the right way. We know it brought Peter closer to Jesus. So let's be real too: **tough love is tough** but because it keeps Christians close to Jesus, it's always worth it. Amen.