

I'm not sure how much you all know about Judaism, but you likely are familiar with: "Kosher" laws. Jewish people don't eat pork. This goes back to the Old Testament where God told the Israelites that they so they need to be "clean" to be in his presence and stay away from unclean things and unclean animals, like pig. As time went on, they started to go beyond what God said. Not only did they avoid unclean animals, they avoided unclean people- gentiles, or non-Jews- to the point where they wouldn't even eat with Gentiles- too dirty.

When Jesus the promised Messiah came and was himself the all-atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, then the kosher laws were made obsolete- they were meant to impress upon God's people that in order to be in God's presence, you must be clean, but now the ultimate cleansing sacrifice had been made, and you are cleansed, justified before God through faith, not through obedience. You'd think that all the Jewish believers would hear that and say, "That's great news! Our cleanliness before God doesn't depend on my performance, it's about faith, not ethnicity." But they didn't, instead, they clung to the Kosher laws and actually insisted that Gentiles needed to eat like Jews, men needed to get circumcised like Jews, they needed to live according to the Jews traditions if they wanted to be Christian. This was one of the first main theological controversies of the Christian Church . Do we need to adhere to the Jewish cultural traditions in order to be saved? In other words, is salvation by faith alone, or faith plus circumcision, kosher eating, and Jewish customs? Is it faith alone, or faith plus?

This is what the book of Galatians is about- Paul is writing to Christians that he converted in Modern day southeastern Turkey. At first they embraced grace alone, faith alone Christianity. But then some teachers had snuck in and started saying, "Well, yes, Jesus saved you, but you need to get circumcised. You need to eat like us. You have to do some more stuff. It's not a big deal." And Paul is showing why it IS a big deal, and points them to this event that happened years earlier at a Christian Church where this very issue was at hand and Paul had to speak hard words to none other than Peter. As we study this episode of Paul's life, we are going to be talking about the times when we have to confront our fellow Christians. **We're going to see that hard words are:**

1. **Risky**
2. **Necessary**
3. **Humble**

1. Antioch was one of the biggest congregations in early Christianity- this was the home congregation of the Apostle Paul and the base of operations for his mission journeys. In Antioch, the Christian congregation wasn't only big, but it was ethnically diverse. It was so diverse that this is where Christians were first called "Christians," because although Christianity started among Jewish people, there were so many non-Jewish people in the congregation that the group couldn't be called "Jewish" or "Greek" because their ethnicity wasn't their defining characteristic, but their faith in Christ. This was a place where Jews and Greeks ate meals together, the ancient sign of friendship and fellowship. And by eating with these Greeks, these Jewish people were openly saying, "Our Jewish traditions are just that, traditions, no longer mandated by God in order to be saved. These Gentiles are just as loved, just as saved as we are, and they do not need to be circumcised or eat like us."

That's where Peter and Paul come in. Peter, James, and John, Jesus' disciples, were the early leaders of Christianity, and they had recognized that because Jesus' sacrifice has made all people clean before God, Gentiles do not need to be circumcised or eat kosher in order to be saved- they are clean by faith. Afterward, Peter goes to this ethnically mixed congregation at Antioch and at first lives out this truth- he's eating with Gentiles, giving them his fellowship, and communicating to them that they are truly one in faith. But then "people from James," Jewish Christians from Jerusalem came, and Peter got scared. If word got around in Jerusalem that he was eating with dirty Gentiles, that may his life at risk. And Paul sees what Peter is doing, not associating with Gentile brothers and sisters because of his reputation, and Paul knows. If he openly criticizes Peter, other Jewish people are going to hear about it, and his life will be in danger. If he openly criticizes Peter, Peter might retaliate and argue back, and there might be a huge rift in the new, young, Antioch church. Paul may be slandered as arrogant or insolent- how dare he talk to Peter like that! Peter's been an apostle longer than he has! And would Peter forgive him for this? What if Peter gets mad and goes back to Jerusalem and tells them all that Paul's no longer one of them? Then there's a huge split in Christianity as a whole, and the Church would die before it even started! These words were incredibly risky for Paul!

2. But they were necessary. Why?

They were necessary for the Antioch Church. Peter's actions led everyone astray. All the Jewish Christians in the Antioch church started thinking, "Oh, Peter's saying that the Gentiles are dirty, I guess we shouldn't eat with them either. They were all negatively affected by Peter's actions. And so were the Gentile Christians!. Can you imagine that? Peter, the one who actually learned at Jesus' feet, is eating with us, well then I guess we truly are equal in this Church. But now he's pulling away, and so are all the people we thought were our brothers and sisters. What did we do wrong? Aren't we sacrificing just like they are? Why aren't we clean enough for them anymore? Was Jesus' sacrifice for us not enough, do we have to do some more to be clean enough?"

Hard words were necessary not just for the Church, but for the clarity and purity of God's Word. Peter's actions weren't just hurtful, they were theologically confusing. By refusing to eat with the Gentiles, he was giving validity to

the biggest false teaching of that day- that Jesus' sacrifice makes you clean, but you still need to get circumcised and obey all of the Jewish customs if you really want to be accepted by God and his people. They were putting conditions on the Gospel. They were adding to God's Word their own rules, and thus robbing God of his glory and robbing his people of the comfort that God wants them to have! If this would have remained unaddressed, how many Jewish people would have put their faith in their own moral performance and not in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection? How many gentiles would have been forced into religious bondage where they never truly know if they are clean before God? This wasn't just about being theologically correct. It was about each and every soul being able to stand before God's throne with confidence and joy, and this false teaching was robbing that away from them. Hard words were necessary!

They were necessary for Peter. The greatest irony is that Peter should have known better. Look at what Paul says, he doesn't say Peter messed up, or was confused or even wrong. He was condemned. Peter's actions made God angry. It was Paul's Christian duty to call him out because Peter was on the road to Hell, and he needed to do it publicly in front of the Antioch Church because everyone who followed his example was condemned as well. This wasn't Paul trying to one-up Peter, or embarrass him. He was saving him, and the people who were led astray. It wasn't out of pride, but love. Paul's hard words were necessary, and if you actually look into them, they were humble.

3. Notice what Paul says about Peter's actions- he doesn't say that they were breaking the Christian moral code, which was true. He doesn't say, "You're breaking the Law," but "You're not walking in step with the Gospel." In other words, you say you believe that salvation is by faith, not by works, but your actions are showing that you believe otherwise. That's why he calls their actions hypocrisy. Literally, that word in Greek is associated with the theater, where ancient actors would put on a mask and pretend to be something else. Peter and the Jewish Christians said that they believed that they were saved by faith, their actions are saying to these Gentile Christians, "well, not you. You still need to earn it a bit before you can be one of us."

And look at what Paul says to Peter: "You act like a Gentile, not like a Jew, and yet you compel these Gentiles to live like Jews." For we who are by Nature Jews that it is by faith that one is justified before God. In other words, "Peter! You were just eating with these Gentiles, why are you now acting like they're unclean? Why are you adding to God's Word? Peter, you and I know the Law of the Old Testament, and we are the first ones to know that if our righteousness is based on our obedience to the Law, we're doomed. If we are saved only by faith in Christ's sacrifice, why not them? You see what he's doing? He's being incredibly direct, but he's also being incredibly humble. He's pointing them all to the Cross. He's pointing them to the Gospel. He's saying, "Don't you believe the Gospel? Don't you know that Jesus loves us and saves us for free? Your actions are showing me that you don't know that, and because I love you, I have to confront this."

There will be times in all our lives where we have to confront a fellow Christian. And Paul's example shows us that 1, it may be risky, but 2, it's necessary because if that person keeps on going down that road, they may suffer forever in Hell, but also 3, it's the Gospel that inspires us to do this, not the Law. When you confront a Christian, it's not, "you need to do this for Jesus," but "Don't you remember what Jesus has done for you?"

Students: you are in a unique part of life where you have freedom and choices that you've likely never had, which means that if you're here worshiping, it's because you want to, not because your parents made you, which gives me so much joy. I'm going to assume that you have friends. I'm going to assume that some of them are Christian. I'm also going to assume that there will be times that their and your decision making doesn't reflect what you know about Jesus.. There are going to be times when you have to have enough courage and quite frankly, love for your Christian friends to confront them. I can't imagine a greater act of love than to risk being liked, risk ridicule, risk the relationship for their sake, because you love them and want them to enjoy the glory and peace and joy and Gospel comfort God wants them to have. And it's likely you'll need someone to have hard conversations with you. So as you share hard words, do it with courage and love, but also humility- you're not better than them, you want them to share your joy. Members of St. John's. There's a reason that I picked "Hark the voice of Jesus crying today. It's an evangelism hymn. The thing is, you likely already know someone who should be in Church, but isn't. You likely know people who profess to be Christians, but are traveling down the road to Hell. It's unloving or tolerant to say "stop" to someone speeding toward a cliff. And I know many of you are already doing this, reaching out to your children, your friends, your family, and I want to encourage you to keep doing it.. And do it from a place of love and humility. Remind them what the Gospel- that we are justified before God not by our Works, but through faith. It's the Gospel, not the Law, that changes hearts, brings repentance, and saves lives, like Peter's. Amen.