

Relational Intelligence 101

The Law of Confrontation - Part 4

Meaningful Relationships Require Healthy Confrontations

May 2, 2021

Rev. Dr. Tony Soldano

Background

When people hear the term “confrontation”, they immediately conjure up visions of an aggressive fight that ends in a negative outcome. Usually, people imagine the end result where parties are hurt and/or offended. However, every meaningful relationship and any relationship worth fighting for requires confrontation.

But because most people are not skilled at confrontation, they would rather avoid it like the plague. Therefore, these “crucial conversations” either never take place, or on the rare occasion that they do, it ends very poorly.

The truth is that confrontation is absolutely essential. We must be able to face ourselves and others and achieve healthy and positive outcomes.

Main Passage

Paul Opposes Peter

Galatians 2:11-14

¹¹ Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; ¹² for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But **when I saw** that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

Main Points

Confrontation Truisms

Confrontation:

1. Allows the truth to be unearthed and reveals the hidden self
2. Must be based on the standard of the truth
3. Challenges and ultimately develops people
4. Requires due diligence.

Observations from The Passage

- At the heart of the letter to the Galatians, Paul communicates and reiterates the “freedom” that they had found in Christ. Unfortunately, some of them had been bewitched (i.e. a spell cast on them), as Paul called it, and were returning back to a dead religious system. Instead of living out their liberty and faith in Christ they were being influenced to retreat to old Jewish rituals. This was in contrast to the grace that was purchased at the cross.
- In the midst of the letter, Paul describes an incident that occurred with Peter and himself in Antioch—confrontational no less. Paul uses this confrontation as an example of how quickly believers can be drawn back into old behaviours and religious systems. The situation was so subtle and subversive that even Barnabas and other Christians and other Christian believers were impacted.
- Paul labelled their behaviour as “hypocrisy”. He was quick to point out that they were not in step or in line with the truth of the Gospel.
 - Hypocrisy is - *believing in one thing and behaving in an opposite way*
- We can draw some incredible lessons from this confrontation and how we should have crucial conversations in order to get to the truth and ensure our freedom in Christ.
- Upon further investigation and what is at the crux of the matter is that this is racism. The Jewish believers of faith in Christ were still struggling with the fact that Gentiles were now part of the new covenant.

Peter

- Despite his heavenly vision of the blanket coming down from heaven in the book of Acts, Peter continues to struggle when it comes to the non-Jewish believers in Christ.
 - The incredible lesson he learned regarding Cornelius seems to have been lost on him.
- Peter seems to continue to struggle with his ethnicity, the fact that he is Jewish, and his newfound faith in Christ.
 - He wrestles with the idea that Gentiles have now come to faith in Christ and how this should be handled in light of conservative Jewish ways.
- Peter is influenced by a mob mentality; he behaved a certain way with the believers at Antioch but when certain Jews from James (Jerusalem) visit Antioch Peter retreats from the non-Jewish believers.
- Peter is clearly unaware of how his actions impact others. We know this because Paul pointed it out to him publicly.
 - Peter’s leadership and influence even impacts Barnabas, and he is called the “son of encouragement”. Paul writes that Barnabas and other believers were carried away with the hypocrisy, however, this started because of Peter’s failure to lead correctly.
- Peter was being hypocritical regarding the newfound faith in Christ and yet he was considered to be the leader of the new movement. Peter was being motivated by fear and not by faith.

Paul

- Paul seems to be better equipped to navigate the reality of being Jewish and the existence of non-Jewish believers. This can probably be attributed to the fact that Paul was actually assigned to the Gentiles, in other words, it was his assignment to bring these people to faith in Christ by sharing the Gospel.
- Paul was able to see and discern the hypocrisy that was occurring while giants of the faith like Peter and Barnabas got caught up in it and were even carried away by it.
- Paul confronts Peter to his face in public because a public incident had occurred.
- Paul was qualified to confront Peter because the issue was not in his heart and he did not succumb to its reality. In fact, Paul acted according to the truth of the Gospel.
- **The Christians at Antioch** - How did these Christians feel after they were set apart by Peter?
 - Did it impact their faith in leadership or in Christ?
 - Did they sense they were second class citizens in the Kingdom?
- Interestingly, Paul never tells us the end of the scenario, he just begins to talk about the liberty that is found in faith in Jesus Christ.

Main Points Expanded

Confrontation Truisms

1. **Confrontation allows the truth to be unearthed and reveals the hidden self**

- a. In this story, the confrontation allows the truth of the Gospel to be revealed, communicated, and spoken. Furthermore, motives of the heart were brought to light.
 - i. Confrontation allows us to get to the truth, sometimes you have to dig and dig hard
 - ii. Nothing is harder than having to confront ourselves with the truth
 - iii. Peter seems to have a continuous struggle with his Jewish background and his newfound faith in Christ
 - iv. Despite Peter being a very strong, bold and forward leader, he seems to be influenced by others, particularly in a mass or mob scenario:
 - There seems to be a weakness in Peter that, he retreats under pressure
 - v. Quote - *Effective confrontation ultimately removes tension.*

2. **Confrontation must be based on the standard of the truth**

- a. Paul writes, “that they were not straightforward about the truth of the Gospel”. Paul based his confrontation on the truth of the Gospel of the grace that has been achieved in the death and resurrection of Christ.
- b. Paul declares the truth of freedom is found in Christ, and that it was useless to retreat back to the law and bondage
 - i. Paul set the standard as being the truth of the Gospel, it was the truth of the Gospel that motivated him to confront Peter and resolve the situation
 - ii. Paul sets the standard for his confrontation
 - iii. Why do you expect Gentiles to live as Jews, if you as a Jew do not live that way?
 - iv. The confrontation must be based on levels of authority – these were two super Apostles

- c. You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

Quotes

“Any life decision that draws you away from the grace and freedom that is found in Christ, is evidence that you have been bewitched.”

Do you really need the affirmation of the world to make you feel better about yourself, that you matter and that you are important?

3. Confrontation challenges and ultimately develops people

- a. The purpose of confrontation should be to develop people and ultimately make them greater disciples of Christ. Our objective should never be to destroy, humiliate or conquer individuals. The Spirit of Christ is always at work to redeem and to restore.
- b. In the story Paul challenges Peter and his behavior in hopes that he will rise to the level of leadership that is required of him. However, Paul also wanted to ensure that the Jews in Antioch, and the Jews that came from Jerusalem, and even Barnabas would align themselves with the truth of the Gospel and not traditions and historical rituals and background.
- c. Paul was qualified to confront Peter because he was an Apostle and because the issue was not in his heart
 - i. Others are impacted by our actions, words and behaviors, sometimes we can be oblivious to what is going on around us
 - ii. Paul addressed the scenario publicly because the incident had occurred publicly
- d. Surround yourself with people that love you enough to confront you

Quotes

If you care enough about people, you will confront them.

All growth begins with self-confrontation.

Love and care are demonstrated when we are willing to confront people, in other words, if we do not care we will not confront.

4. Confrontation requires due diligence

- a. “When I saw” – Paul clearly indicates that he observed the situation and came to a final conclusion.
- b. Paul assessed the situation and deducted that the toxic situation was spreading. Therefore, he was compelled to act and say something.
 - i. Paul’s filter was the lens of the Gospel – the new life and freedom that was purchased by the blood of Jesus
 - ii. *Healthy confrontations stop the “spread” of poor behaviour in their tracks*

- iii. He assessed the behaviour of everyone that was involved, and he was aware of how Peter withdrew himself from the non-Jewish believers
 - o Paul indicates that Peter was motivated by fear and a desire to impress a more conservative group that have come from Jerusalem.
 - o He identified that Peter's behaviour was very different before the people from when James had arrived.
 - iv. He also assesses the behaviour of the Jewish believers that were in Antioch and how they set the non-Jewish believers aside.
 - v. He was astonished that even his friend and partner in the ministry, Barnabas, had been carried away with the hypocrisy.
- c. Therefore, Paul only confronted Peter once he had done his due diligence, had observe the situation, and had noted the behaviour of everyone that was involved.
 - o It is unwise to enter into a confrontation without having done your homework, making sure that you know all the facts, and making sure that you understand how everybody has been impacted.
 - d. Quote – *It is entirely possible to say the right things but in the wrong ways.*
 - e. Half-truths, missing information and miscommunication leads to strained relationships.

Definitions

Violence – “Consists of any verbal strategy that attempts to convince, control, or compel others to your point of view. It violates safety by trying to force meaning ~Crucial Conversation – Patterson

- **Controlling** – coercing or forcing, domination or intimidation
- **Labelling** – placing labels on people and situations, stereotypes
- **Attacking** - Belittling, name calling – you move from winning the conversation to making people suffer.

Silence – “Silence consists of any act to purposefully withhold information...It is almost always done as a means of avoiding potential problems, and it always restricts the flow of meaning” ~ Crucial Conversation – Patterson

- **Masking** – not understanding, sarcasm, sugar-coating
- **Avoiding** – steering away from sensitive discissions – we talk without addressing real issues
- **Withdrawing** – pulling away from conversations entirely.

Group Questions & Discussion

- 1) Do you believe that Peter was being malicious in his hypocrisy or do you think he was just blinded to his behavior? Please explain.
- 2) Is it always a good idea to confront people to their face? Why or why not?
- 3) Describe a scenario where a confrontation resulted in a positive outcome and one that ended in negative outcome. What was the difference?
- 4) Provide more details on how you think people are developed in confrontations.
- 5) Describe a scenario when you jumped into a confrontation before you had done your due diligence. What was the outcome?

- 6) Why do you believe it so easy for Christians to fall back into religious ways? What is the main motivator?
- 7) How did fear play a part in Peter's behaviour in the story?
- 8) What sort of self-confrontation measures have you utilized? What change(s) has it made in your life?
- 9) When you are under pressure, what is your number one mode of confrontation that you fall back on? In other words, what is your natural style?
- 10) Have a deeper discussion on the definitions/terms of violence and silence and how they play out in your relationships.