



Summer Family Reunion

Part – 1 When to Push Back

Pastor Ted Cunningham

I'm going to kick it off today with a message that I've been working on for some time. I'm pretty passionate about this. We're going to talk about when to push back and we're going to talk about when to walk away. We're going to talk about when you take your stand, and when you back down. When do you speak up and when do you remain silent? Our church needs this message. I'm just here to tell you. Our community needs this message. And maybe you have a relationship that isn't working because you've never really figured out when to push back and when to walk away from an issue or something going on in the relationship. Maybe your way isn't working because you push back on everything. You're constantly looking for a fight or maybe there is a confrontation that needs to take place in a relationship and you never push back, you never want to confront it. You think if we don't talk about it, it will just go away. Maybe some of you just got let go from a job because you push back on everything. Or maybe some of you left a job because there was just something that needed to be confronted but you wouldn't do it. You might could have stayed. It could have been a great future for you there... So, where is this line? How do we do this?

This has been passed on from generation to generation and every parent in the room can finish this sentence. Pick your battles. As parents, we only have so much energy. We can't deal with everything happening in the home. My daughter, first born... When she was eight years old, she would look at Amy and me with these judgy eyes... as she helped us parent her brother. Does anybody have a firstborn doing any of that? She would look at us like, "Are you going to put up with that right there?" And we'd be like, "We don't need judgment from an eight-year-old. Back off. I'm tired right now. We're going to let that go because we've got bigger fish to fry,

Some of you, with your sibling, you knew this. You learned this on the playground. Every single person in here, you learned your life negotiation skills on the playground where there were no adults supervising. You learned pretty quickly in the sandbox when to push back and when to back off.

This happens in marriage as well. Some of you push back on everything in marriage and you haven't learned what Proverbs says, which is to overlook an offense and be able to say, "Some things are just not that big of a deal." Maybe in church. Maybe you're visiting this church or are now a part of this church and you came from another church. And before that, there was a church. And before that there was a church. You push back on everything, or you walk away.

Let's deal with it today as we jump into Galatians 2. We're going to look at this confrontation that Paul needs to have with Peter. We're going to look at this framework. How do you confront? When you need to push back, how do you do this well?

Before we get to Galatians 2, I want us to see the skill that Paul is really going to encourage us in. We all need to learn it. I know I need to learn it. Can everybody in here admit at times you're just a bit too much? Can you admit that? I can admit that. I've got an opinion on everything. Raise your hand if you have an opinion on a lot of stuff. We know we can just be too much. So, how do we push back without being quarrelsome? That's the skill of the follower of Jesus. How do you push back without becoming a quarrelsome person?

Here's what Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2: 23 – 24 – **23 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments...** This is why we don't discuss a ton of non-essentials at this church because people just want to drag us into non-essentials all the time. That takes too much time and energy. We need to stay focused on our mission and be others-centered. **You know when you focus on foolish and stupid arguments they produce quarrels. 24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.**

This verse convicts me because sometimes, I just enjoy a good quarrel. Can you admit that? Who can admit that with me? You just enjoy it. You're like, "Ted, I leave the room when conflict hits." I like to stir it up a little bit and then I get out of there as quickly as possible. The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome.

So, can we learn today when to push back, when to walk away, and how do we do all of this without becoming quarrelsome people? What a timely Word from the Lord for us in 2024.

Let's look at a framework today on pushing back, and then follow this through Galatians 2.

So, just four questions we need to ask before we confront:

1. Is this a big deal? This is a big one, this is the most important. Yes or no. If I answer it with Yes, this is a big deal, it needs to be confronted. Question number 2 saves me a lot and helps me walk away from a lot of confrontation.

2 Am I the one to confront it? I may answer yes to this and no to this and guess what? I get to walk away. I'm walking through a store, and I see a kid on the ground, pitching a fit, I praise my father in heaven I'm not that child's parent. I'm not judging that kid. What I'm saying is that in that moment, I'm not the parent, so I don't have to confront. I get to walk away.

Can we be specific with this and go where angels dare to tread? Last month, a controversy hit our community, dealing with another church in our community in an event. My phone starts blowing up. "Ted, need your opinion. Need your thoughts." "I want to know what you think about this." You don't need to know what it is, but is it a big deal? Yes. Does it need to be confronted? Yes. Am I the one to confront it? No. Praising my Father in heaven. And you know why I'm not the one to confront it? I don't pastor that church. And neither do you. And guess what? Do you know why I'm not giving energy

to that? Because I'm going to have to confront something at this church next week? That's what it's called when you do life as a church family.

So, maybe I say "Yeah, it's a big deal, but am I the one to confront it?" No. I get to walk away. But what if I answer that with yes and it's our church or our community? As I look at the aldermen in our church family. **Am I the one to confront it?** Let's say I answer yes. This is very important. Here's the next question:

3. Is it urgent? Not everything is urgent. If something happens at work on Friday, you have to answer the question: Is it a big deal? "It's a big deal. This doesn't go with our values, vision, or staff culture here. Am I the one to confront it? I'm the direct supervisor. Yes. Is it urgent? You may answer, "It can wait until Monday. And I'll probably be more prepared for it. I'll be in a better place."

But then, if you're not careful... Some of you have dealt with this. I worked at a Lowes Distribution Center right out of college. I sat down for my six-month employee review. I love employee reviews. Don't you love employee reviews? I love it when they are front and loaded. It's like all this positive stuff and the whole time you're listening, you're like, "He's going to drop the hammer here really quick. He gets to the end, and I remember him going, "Now, Ted, there's this one thing you've been doing that is just not part of who Lowes is and we just need you to stop doing this. I can't even remember what it was. All I remember was asking, "Well, I've been doing that for six months. You should have said something to me the first time you saw it or maybe in the next couple of weeks." So, is it a big deal? Yes. Am I the one to confront it? Is it urgent? We are going to see the answer to these first three questions in Galatians.

Is it urgent? Yes. But in the next one, I have to ask, Am I emotionally ready for this? Sometimes, I might need a nap. You all know what a nap does to you. You've seen that viral video online with the brother and sister sitting at the breakfast bar and little sister is losing her mind, screaming out of control. Big brother goes, "Did you get a nap today?" she screams, "NO!" He goes, "Well, you need one!" And I'll say that to you as your pastor. Some of you need a nap before you confront. So, as we see in this text, Paul, an apostle, has the authority. He's in relationship with Peter. And here's how he starts in Verses 8 – 10. Before we get to Verse 11... Do not jump ahead in Verse 11. You've got to read Verses 8-10. Get context before we look at this face-to-face, in public confrontation.

Galatians 8 For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles... This is so good. He establishes Peter's calling. He says, "God is at work in Peter. The first lesson we can learn when we do need to confront a situation or even sin in someone's life. I don't need to destroy a person to confront them. I don't need to assassinate their character to confront them. I can actually call out the good work that God is doing in their lives. This is where Paul starts with the confrontation as he is sharing with the Galatian church. What he says is he's at work... By the way, they have the same message. Paul and Peter's message is the exact same. What is the Gospel? What does it mean to be saved? How are you saved? Where do you get salvation? It's very clear. Salvation is in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone... Period.

The problem is the Judaizers have Crept into the church and they are wanting to add the law to salvation. They are saying if you are going to save, you must be circumcised. And Paul is saying no it's

by grace alone, through faith alone. And he is passionate about this. And that is the exact same message that Peter preached. But Peter went to the circumcised, the Jew. Paul to the Gentiles.

9 James, Cephas, and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me... So, not only are they in ministry together, they have relationship and they have partnership. ... **They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.** **10 All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.** We were partners in ministry, and we are partners in ministry is what Paul is declaring here.

So, if it is yes, I need to confront, here are just three things we can take from this text. It's very important. **4 Before you confront, as you confront, Affirm the relationship.** I just learned this in marriage. Amy and I need to confront each other on something, we understand that the whole relationship isn't at stake when we do it. I can say to her, "I love you. I'm committed to you. But I need to share this." She says it to me. You can start with the relationship, saying, "I want our relationship to be better. I want us to grow." You don't see Paul, throughout the New Testament, canceling believers in Christ Jesus. His desire is that their lives would align with the gospel of Jesus. That was his passion. So, Affirm the relationship.

Then we also saw this in the text, Acknowledge the other person's strengths and calling. Let other people know and then, this is key for all of us:

5. address the issue at hand. Let's say you're confronting someone and they see it. They agree with you, they begin to repent, and you see them soften. How many of you have done this in a relationship? You're like, *Whoa, they seem to be receptive. This would be a good time to bring up the other five things I was thinking about. Let's just do it; they seem tender. Let me beat them into the ground the best I can right now.* No. Confront and keep it with the issue at hand.

In Verse 11, we see this confrontation. And here it is. This is central to the whole text. **11 When Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.** Now, understand the confrontation we are going to see here. He opposes him to his face and in public, in front of others. But understand the situation going on here. Is this urgent? Yes. Is Paul the one to confront it? Yes. Is it a big deal? Yes. But not all of our confrontations are going to be at this level. And you know most of our confrontations are done one-on-one, in private. Why was he opposing him to his face?

12 For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. Gentile believers. Peter enjoyed fellowship. He enjoyed meals with gentile believers. **They weren't bound together by dietary laws or circumcision...** they were bound together by Christ because in Christ, they had salvation so they enjoyed meals together, but then the Judaizers crept in, the false teachers crept in and said, If you're going to be saved, you need to be one of us. You need to become a Jew. **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.** Peter was being influenced by those saying this was not right. And he was enjoying fellowship and now withdraws. **13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.**

We know this. When leaders misstep, others follow suit. When leaders aren't aligned with the gospel, now everyone that follows them starts to follow suit. It says even Barnabus was led astray.

14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel... "You're getting drunk. You're forgetting the whole purpose. Get back to the gospel." So, As you read through the New Testament this week, you get to Corinthians and the Lord's Supper. When you gather for the Lord's Supper... the Lord's Supper right now, he tells them, is not aligned with the gospel. So, **I said to Cephas in front of them all, I said to Cephas...** Confronted him to his face **...in front of them all...** So this is a public confrontation. **"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?"**

Paul was the man for this confrontation. It was clear. He preached to the Galatians the gospel, and they received it, but he later received reports that False teachers were calling people to add works, specifically circumcision, to the requirements of salvation. And he says, "No." He's pushing back on racism among leaders and he's pushing back on the perversion of the gospel creeping into the church. It's a big deal. Paul is exactly in the right place at the right time, and it is urgent.

But when we talk about confronting, we also have to talk about when to walk away with that. Because not everything needs to be confronted at this level. Not everything needs to be confronted by you or me. Not everything is a hill to die on or a battle to fight. And someone else's cause or fight does not need to be your cause or fight.

And with every single person on campus today and watching us online, there's somebody in your family who is outraged all the time. They're just mad and they are constantly looking for a fight. I'm here to tell you that if you get up every day looking for a fight, you'll find one. Our world has plenty to offer you to be mad about today.

But then this person not only looks for the fight, but this person picks fights and they are trying to draw you into it. You don't wake up looking for a fight and you don't pick fights, but you have family and friends constantly drawing them in. I fall for this. I fall for this too much. I have an elder at this church that is a dear friend and he texts me this all the time. I'm fired up and I'm ready to go at it. Travis Brawner will tell me this. He'll say, "Don't take the bait." And I'm like, "It's too late. I'm fully hooked. I am in and they are reeling me in. I'm almost at the net. Don't take the bait, my friends. Don't be baited in as we often are.

Ed Stetzer wrote a great book. Rene shared it with us last year and he encouraged me to read it. *Christians in the age of outrage – How to bring our best when the world is at its worst.* In this book, Ed says, *"Our world seems a wash in anger, division, hostility in an age of outrage, we are perpetually encouraged to view others purely in categories of friend or foe. When we meet someone, we're always sizing them up. Are you with me or against me? Are you on my side or the other side? Do have my point of view or not my point of view? We're constantly measuring people like that."*

Dale Carnegie, a farm boy from Missouri released a book in 1936. Does anybody know the name of that book? *How to Win Friends and Influence People.* It's a great book. Issac Newton said, *"Tact is the art of making a point without making an enemy."* If that book were released today, it would be called, *How to*

Make Enemies and Win Arguments. That just seems to be what we're all about. But Ed Stetzer says, *"We are living in a day and this indeed is our moment when we need to be and live like Christ in the midst of the shouting anger and Hatred."*

1 Peter 2: 23, we read the life of Jesus. ***When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges.*** Don't take the bait.

There are a lot of my friends at church... I'm not going to name your names yet. But you love the stories of Jesus flipping tables. They are your favorite. Or when he confronts the Pharisees. But what about when Jesus walked away? Or allowed people to walk away from him without giving chase? In 2020, our friend, Gary Thomas was here after his book was released, *When to Walk Away – Finding Freedom from Toxic People*. This book has been so fantastic for me in helping me conserve energy for what matters most. He says, *"Christians tend to think that walking away from anyone or letting anyone walk away from the truth is failure on our part. And yet, Jesus let people walk away from him and he walked away a lot. We've got more than two dozen distinct times in the gospels where Jesus walked away or allowed people to walk away from him."*

Here's what Gary says, *"Jesus didn't let the needs, pleas, attacks, or unresponsiveness of others distract from the mission given to him by his heavenly father. Sometimes to follow in the footsteps of Jesus is to walk away from others or to let them walk away from us. You see, a toxic person will make it their goal in life to get you off mission. It becomes their mission to make whatever you're talking about be Don't worry about that; be focused on what I'm focused on, be passionate about what I'm passionate about."*

Gary goes on to say, *"Jesus never appears desperate, manipulative, or controlling as if when people didn't agree with him, his feelings would be hurt. He is mission-focused and other-centered to his deepest core."*

Pick your battles, my friends. And don't take the bait. In other words, save your energy and influence for what matters most.

When I heard that Pat Kershaw was going on hospice, it was the exact same time... That day, when I got up to go visit her, was when this controversy in our community with another church was blowing up. People were texting and direct messaging me. I'm driving out...I'm going to say this: Visiting Pat was the most important thing for me to do that morning. So, right now, I want you to start thinking about the most important thing on your schedule this week. Because as I was driving out... I live out in the country. Pat lives in Kentucky. She's a long way out. I usually lose cell phone reception on the way out.

I remember all the messages and sending me blogs and videos to watch. When I got out of coverage, I got this little SOS thing and a little satellite thing on my phone. When that popped up, I broke out into a worship service. I was praising my Father in heaven that I didn't have coverage. I didn't want to give one ounce of energy. I didn't want to take one ounce of emotional energy away from what was the most important thing for me to be doing that morning. I knew when I got back people would be like, "Did I get ghosted by you?" No, you got Holy Ghosted, that's what happened.

I want this for every single mom and dad, grandma, grandpa, at your work. Are you going to bring your best this week to what matters most? Bring your best to what matters most. Psychologists call it emotional flooding. We have a psychological and a physical reaction when we get worked up when we're scrolling online or whatever. Our heart races, our mind races, and we struggle to focus on anything outside of our own racing thoughts. For some of you, that means today you're with family at a family gathering, and guess what? Spending time with that family you haven't seen for a while is the most important thing for you to do right now. Don't get outraged about something. Stay focused. Tomorrow, you might be at a kid's game. Giving your attention right there in that moment, Mom and Dad, that is important.

You're like, "It's time out. I've got a second." Now you're yelling at the ref with anger that's coming from something else that was said online. That's emotional flooding. Let's say it's date night. On date night, Amy and I connecting is the most important thing, in that moment, for me to be doing. She gets up to use the restroom and I'm wondering what I missed online. She comes back and I'm like, "We've got new topics."

Why am I letting myself get emotionally flooded in that moment? You need to bring your best as an ambassador for Christ to your work tomorrow. And I have to tell you. Work is going great. You just had a great meeting, but then you go to the bathroom. I speak on behalf of everybody at Woodland Hills. It doesn't take you 20 minutes to go to the bathroom. But you go back to the staff meeting and they're like, "What happened to you?" You're like "I just saw a family member say something stupid online and now I'm ticked." That's why my pastor friend told me a couple of years ago, "I'm completely off social media." I was like, I don't think you can be. Who gave you permission to get offline?" He said, "I had to get off because I was emotionally flooded every time I stepped up into the pulpit, and I found myself just every week preaching while mad. I was just mad all the time."

You see, if you push back on everyone, you will influence no one.

Proverbs 25: 17 says ***Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house. Too much of you and they will hate you.*** Can you allow the holy spirit to call you by name this morning with that and admit you're too much? I can. As an ambassador of Christ, I don't want to walk into a room and have people be like, "What did he see on the news this morning? What's he fired up about today?" To every mother-in-law and father-in-law in the place, Seldom set foot in your son-in-law's house. Too much of you and he will hate you. You can't push back on everyone, or you'll have influence with no one. And you can't push back on everything because then you won't be taken seriously on anything. A fool takes no pleasure in understanding but only in expressing his opinion.

Social media has given us the outlet to share our opinion without sticking around for a conversation. Be a follower of Jesus this week who is more passionate and concerned about the conversation than just expressing your opinion. You've heard us say this for years around this church. You don't have to show up to every fight you're invited to. You get to choose where you put your energy this week, where you put your voice this week, and where you put your influence this week.

When you wake up tomorrow, you're going to have plenty of people giving you homework in direct messages, and giving you homework in text messages. "I need you to watch this 30-minute video and

then respond.” “Nah, I’m not going to do it.” But are you not serious about this?” “I have a lot of opinions on that, but you have no idea what else I have. I have no idea what else you guys have going on this week.

For some of you, it’s going to be sitting with a parent in a doctor’s office. That’s the most important thing for you to be doing. Why would you give your energy and influence to something... Just stay focused. For some of you, you are going to say goodbye to a family member. That’s the most important thing. Find a widow in this church and go have coffee with that person. I promise you it’s far more important than what you’re going to be all fired up about or getting dragged into. One reason you can’t show up to every fight you’re invited to is because you have a mission, and you have to stay focused.

2 Corinthians 5: 20 – ***We are Christ's ambassadors and God is making his appeal through us.***

And we know from research that people now... I know it doesn’t feel like it in our age of outrage and all the hostility that people are open to spiritual conversations or conversations about the Lord. But research says they are. They just shut down when you bring in all the other stuff. So, I’m here to remind us today that our priority, our mission, and our focus should be the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it’s the most important thing. And I don’t want to miss out on those conversations because I’m too much in all the other areas. I don’t want to close down rich conversations about Jesus because I’m too much. And we don’t want that for you either.

Father, teach us when to push back and when to walk away. Teach us when to take a stand and when to back down. Teach us when we need to say something and when we need to remain silent. We never want to be known as quarrelsome people, but people who stand for the truth of God’s word, that we stand for the gospel, and that we continue to preach and teach it. Don’t let this church get distracted by all the other things we can be outraged about. Let us stay focused and save our energy and influence for what matters most.

For mom and dad and grandma and grandpa, and co-workers in here, sons and daughters, may they prioritize what matters most and bring their best to it this week.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day of their salvation. That they would repent of their sins, that they would acknowledge the fact that their way leads to death and their way has not been working. That they would confess that, confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he’s been raised from the dead that they would be saved.

Thank you for all of those being baptized today. We’re grateful for the decisions made. We look forward to how you continue to use this church in the future.

We pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus, Amen.