

It's not been just once that I leave a conversation knowing I should have just dropped it. I have fought for what I know to be correct, and I don't back down. The word is pronounced this way. It happened in this year, before that other thing, I'm certain. No, the rules of the game go like this, and this is the reason why that makes sense. I shake my head in shame after these moments, but during them my heart races. It becomes a game that I need to win. It's not healthy, but in my mind it's not wrong—I don't need to be right all the time, I'm simply protecting them from being wrong.

But you can't tell me I'm alone in this. Everyone likes to be right. Whether it's over the newest diet that you swear is the best way to cleanse your body and get things on track again or if it's the most reliable investing method to ensure financial gain with minimal risk, or if it's the best way to care for a baby (we're stumbling onto a lot of that these days) or the most efficient way to organize your stuff and your time to get the most out of life. We all make our opinions, we set up camp, and then we and everyone like us defend what we say and try and win over the enemy. Just look at comments on social media and try and tell me I'm wrong.

We like being right, and it makes sense. We want the methods we've used to clean our house to be effective, the ways we've taught our children or the way we've committed to voting, we want our lifestyles to be healthy and good and valuable, so we convince ourselves that they are. That just means we've got to defend our choices against the other choices.

Sometimes we're making arguments where there just doesn't need to be. Sure, one type of swaddle might have certain benefits, or one method of staying muscular and energized may give certain advantages, but the reality is, there's more than one way to get the job done. And that's okay.

But not everything has multiple viable paths to success. And the one on Jesus' radar today, and honestly the only true single-option issue to exist, is that of faith. Are you for Jesus or against Him? We know that only one way leads to heaven, and that is Christ.

And while we're quick to make arguments over the other issues in life, do you find that Christians have a strange interest in being on the other side of the fence from everyone else? Jesus promised persecution; He assured His followers that they would be hated and when it happens, it's Him the world is hating and hurting, not them; they, you, are strangers in a foreign land, awaiting a place to call home.

So it's no surprise when we feel ostracized, when our morals don't line up with the world's and they refuse to listen to the proclamation of the Gospel. And the Church has almost felt vindicated in its suffering, as if to suffer for Christ is proof that His Gospel is true, our beliefs are right. And honestly, there's something to this. We can argue that the Gospel is true because the apostles were willing to die believing what they proclaimed, and even those who weren't alive in the time of Christ, He has given them hope even in death.

But it ends up that we jump the gun, assuming that we're suffering for our faith when the truth is, we haven't even seen the tip of the iceberg. Even when we are persecuted, when others challenge us, mock us, or abandon us for what we believe, we've still had it relatively easy compared to the early church or to Christians today who will lose not simple privileges for being a Christian but will lose their family or even their lives.

But Christians are enticed by the idea that the Church is suffering. It equates to faithfulness. But we don't like the personal suffering that Jesus teaches about today, when we end up divided from parent or child or sibling because of what we believe. Here it doesn't feel like being on the winning side of the argument, but rather it seems like you're stewing in a lose-lose situation.

You're called to love your mom, your sister, your son. They are placed into your life in order to be a blessing, to bring support and enjoyment and laughter throughout your days together. And yet what you believe, and what they believe, these opposing factors can very easily ruin Christmas and Easter celebrations, weddings and funerals too. And honestly, the tension exists whether the

conversation is on the table and things are getting heated just as much as when the conversation is being ignored and we're feeling like we should maybe say something but don't know if now is the appropriate time. The conflict endures even when you lay awake at night wondering how that kid making a Jesus puppet in Sunday School could end up so mad at Jesus these days.

I get it. And I don't have an answer how to deal with it. What to say when, when it's okay to simply go with the current versus when to bring up the issue and risk the relationship—all of this is messy and unclear and we go with the grace of Christ, trusting He will carry us through when we need to speak, and there is forgiveness for the words we spoke when we should have been silent and for our silence when we should have spoken. I don't come with answers to these questions, but as the situations arise please come for prayer, and receive some compassion to this very difficult situation. We don't know exactly where to go, but let your pastors, your church, go there with you.

What Jeremiah brings us today, though, is some wisdom to help us through these difficult conversations. He unpacks well for us the reason why conflict persists between people with faith in the true God and those who lack it. And it's not what our initial idea is.

The world thinks we hate them, thinks we think they're wrong, because of their actions, their life choices, and their ethics. They think the purpose of the Church is to teach a certain way of life and then help people conform to that. Do this. Don't do that. And if you can't or won't conform, stay away.

You can see why this is off-putting.

But then you add to the tension how they see us failing to live up to these supposed standards and yet carrying on as is. They see us condemning others for sin while having unlimited patience, or blind spots, for the sin that goes on in our midst. So they don't feel welcomed in and then they see us as hypocrites, so of course they stay on the other side of the street. Whether they're strangers reading our social media posts or family members watching us and our church, they see it and they don't want anything to do with it.

And we can't blame them for thinking this way—what we do and don't do is the only framework the world is able to operate in. What we do and say and think is the religion of the world.

But actions are not the real issue between us and the world. The real issue is that they listen to the prophets that proclaim peace even when peace is entirely absent. Their ears itch to hear that all is okay, or that okay is easily achievable in a few steps. Have this conversation and your family will enjoy time together again. Eat like this, exercise like this, and you can have mastery over your body, living with health once more. Be a little kinder and the higher power that might be there will be satisfied; or there is no higher power so you don't need to worry about your actions. The world and the people in it might not be quite right, but it's not all entirely broken and hopeless.

Christians come with a different message. We see the world and recognize that it's a beautiful gift, but one that is decaying because of our sinful actions. We see the relationships and aim to make them better but also know that our sin cracks them apart and tries to splinter them completely. We look in the mirror and see that, in spite of our best intentions, we are greedy and proud and envious and lustful and slothful and hopeless—no self-help book is going to drag us out of this pit.

We see the destruction that this chaos deserves and we rejoice that Christ knew our need as well. He knew the vengeful wrath that sin deserves and He became incarnate that He could cast that fire upon Himself. He knew the cleansing that needed to occur to wash away the guilt, and He walked straight towards the cross that He would be baptized, all the world's sin washed away like under the boat God commanded Noah to build. We have peace knowing that we have been saved from this hopeless world, saved even from ourselves.

And while we rejoice, that declaration is an affront to those who don't believe. If we believe that Jesus had to die for sinners, and we say that Jesus died for them, that means your family too are sinners, helpless to save themselves. It means they don't have the peace they believe they do. Apart from Christ,

the sinner is secure, or hopes they can secure themselves someday. They are proud instead of humble, they are self-righteous and content rather than repentant. And they don't want to be told otherwise.

And as you live your life in faith, whether speaking it to your parents or simply living with faith in something outside of yourself, namely God, there will inherently be a dissonance, a tension between you and non-believers.

But note this—this is not the design of Jesus. He isn't stating this is His purpose or will. He is not desiring that some people stay on the other side of the fence. This is simply what happens when a sinner runs up against the Word of God and all its truths. It's the same tension that happened within us as He was working on us to save our sorry souls, and it continues to happen to us daily, but by the grace of God we are washed clean again and disciplined to live in God's truth rather than the world's false peace. And may this humble us and encourage us as we yearn for our loved ones' salvation. We didn't figure this out or earn it; we didn't even seek it out. By God's grace alone did eternal peace just fall into our laps.

And this change, ultimately, is what we're hoping for for each of our family members. It's what Jesus is working towards as well. He desires not the death of any sinner; He wants none to perish in the lie of peace that the world's prophets proclaim. He already endured the wrath of God, so they don't have to.

This is the peace that Christ brings, that Christ proclaims. That even in a world that is perishing, even in the midst of our sin that endures, even in the midst of relationships we struggle to maintain, our sins are forgiven and He is forming us into His image. Because He took the destroying fire of God's wrath, we are now refined by this fire, made into loving servants who are willing to sacrifice and to suffer. And He goes with us every step, through every conversation. This is a peace that is real even if it can't be seen but only believed. This peace goes with you through tense dinners, and this peace, Christ

crucified for you and for your loved ones, is the only thing that will one day steal them from the grasp of the world and place them firmly in the hands of God.

God, sustain us all as He continues this difficult but glorious work.

Amen.