

WHEN TWO GOOD MEN DISAGREE

TEXT: Acts 15:36-41

Before we study Paul's second missionary journey, it is important that we address something that is important; the Holy Spirit, inserts this most human event into the story of the early church. One of the most powerful missionary enterprises the world has ever seen was the dream team of Paul and Barnabas. In five verses the team was ended and they never worked together again. There is sadness in this story, but there is also some encouragement. G. Campbell Morgan comments on this encounter: "I'm greatly comforted whenever I read this. I am thankful for the revelation of the humanity of these men. If I had never read that Paul and Barnabas had a contention, I should have been afraid. These men were not angels, they were men."

I. THE COMMON DESIRE

Acts 15:36

Paul and Barnabas had been to Jerusalem and back and now they both agreed that it would be good to return to the churches they started and check on their spiritual growth.

A. The Blessedness of Agreeing

Psalms 133:1, 2: "A Song of degrees of David. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments." Acts 2:1: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place."

B. The Power of Shared Burdens

Matthew 18:19: "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." Galatians 6:2: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

C. The Importance of Follow-up

II Peter 3:18: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." I Corinthians 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

II. THE CONTRASTED DEMARCATION

Acts 15:37, 38

Barnabas was focused on the man. Paul was focused on the mission. Both are important. In Acts 15:37, the word "determined" appears in the Greek in the imperfect tense, meaning "to will something forcefully." This takes on the meaning that Barnabas was demanding to take John Mark along on the next journey. Paul's response was, "...Paul thought it not good..." (verse 38). The word "good" is translated from the Greek word, *axioo*, which means to deem entitled, fit or counted worthy. So we see two men with their minds already made up. Can you use your imagination with me on what the conversation might have sounded like?

Barnabas: "This is going to be a great mission, Paul. This will be a great opportunity for John Mark to prove himself."

Paul: "Prove himself? He quit when we needed him most. I'm sorry Barnabas, I know he's your nephew, but we just can't trust him."

Barnabas: "But Paul, we're all human. Everyone needs a second chance."

Paul: "Barnabas, souls are at stake. We are trying to disciple these young Christians. We don't need a young man that is not fully disciplined himself to be helping us do a work that requires spiritual maturity."

Barnabas was focused on the future. Paul couldn't get past the past.

A. The Patience of Love

We see this exemplified in Barnabas. I Corinthians 13:4: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up."

B. The Pursuit of Excellence

We see this demonstrated in Paul. Philippians 1:10: "That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."

C. The Personalities Appreciated

I Corinthians 12:27: "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." It is interesting to note that the Bible doesn't choose sides. As crazy as it sounds, both seem to be right and both seem to be in error. We can appreciate the fact that in the church, Christ's body, there is a wide range of diversity. With every gifting comes benefit and with every gifting comes liability. Conflict can more easily be resolved if we place ourselves in the shoes of the other person.

III. THE CONFLICT DECIDED

ACTS 15:39-41

The Bible says, "the contention was so sharp"(Acts 15:39a). The word "contention" in Greek, is *paroxysmos* which means, "to sharpen in anger." The tension is palpable. This must have been an incredible quarrel for kind, compassionate Barnabas to use harsh words. For the Apostle Paul to stay calm, even in the face of his stoning to "come apart" with fighting words had to surprise even his most serious critics. The falling out was so serious, that after this passage, we never hear of Barnabas again.

They now agree to disagree. Barnabas takes John Mark and Paul chooses Silas. Barnabas and John Mark sail to Cypress. Paul and Silas head north on foot.

Paul and Silas see great adventures in seeing people saved and disciplined, while Barnabas is on a mission to see his nephew strengthened in the work of the Lord.

CONCLUSION:

Although God's Word doesn't seem to take sides, we see that the Lord does reveal that no matter how great a Christian we may be, we are all susceptible to falling. The reformer Phillip Melanchthon said, "In essentials unity. In non-essentials liberty. In all things charity."

It is important to note that eventually, we see that John Mark returned to do a great service for the Lord. In Colossians 4:10, Paul says, "...receive him." Mark is called Marcus here.

Then in Philemon verse: 24, "Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers." Peter said in I Peter 5:13: "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you,

saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.” Here we see the union between John Mark and Peter, which led to the first Gospel ever written, i.e, The Gospel of Mark, which was penned by John Mark. As Paul was about to enter eternity, he wrote in II Timothy 4:11, “Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.”

Thank God for the over-compensating power of the Living God who can bring us to a level of usefulness, even after we have failed Him. Lamentations 3:22, 23: “It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness.”

-Pastor Pope-