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# **Resolving Our Disagreements To God's Glory**

## **Acts 15:36-41**

### **Introduction**

1. There is a truth that exists in all of our relationships: At some point we will disagree.
  - a. Husbands and wives, parents and children, siblings
  - b. Employers and employees, co-workers
  - c. Elected officials
  - d. Even brothers and sisters in Christ
2. One of the evidences of the inspiration of the Bible is the complete honesty with which it treats its heroes.
3. Not only does it share with us their successes, but also their failures — God's inspired writers tell it like it is.
4. Since we all have our own weakness and conflicts, would it not seem strange to you if those flaws in others were never mentioned in the pages of Scripture?
5. Our lesson this morning has to do with one of the more prominent altercations:
  - a. Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13:1-12)
  - b. Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3)
  - c. Neither of these compare with Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41)
    - 1) This is the last time Luke mentions Barnabas in all of Acts.
    - 2) Paul did, however, refer to Barnabas and himself in his letter to the Christians in Corinth several years later as examples of those who served the Lord without a wife by their side (1 Corinthians 9:6).
5. It is this altercation which issued from a difference in priorities that we want to examine this morning for two reasons:

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a. The command to love one another is not a minor one!

1) It is the second great commandment (Matthew 22:39).

“The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”  
(Matthew 22:39, NASB95)

**2a**

2) John tells us that if we do not love our brother whom we have seen, we cannot love God whom we have not seen (1 John 4:20).

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20, NASB95)

3) Besides, Christian unity is not a minor matter.

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4) Jesus prayed just before His death that we would be complete in our unity so that the world would know that the Father had sent Him (John 17:23).

“I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” (John 17:23, NASB95)

b. Many Christians become discouraged and quit serving the Lord as the result of a disagreement with a brother or sister in Christ.

1) Sometimes they become disillusioned or even cynical about the Christian life because of a disagreement they have either witnessed or experienced first hand.

2) They are hurt by what has happened and reason, “Christianity doesn’t work. Christians are just hypocrites.”

3) As a result, they fall away from the Lord.

6. It is important that we see what God’s word teaches us about our disagreements so that Satan does not pull us away from following our Lord.

**Slide 4****I. Spiritual Maturity Does Not Prevent Disagreements**

[Disagreements can arise between those Christians who . . .]

**4a****A. SHARE THE SAME DOCTRINAL BELIEFS**

1. Both Paul and Barnabas had just come away from their meeting with the apostles and elders of the church in Jerusalem where their teaching among the Gentiles concerning salvation had been affirmed.
2. Both of them were in mutual agreement about this and other doctrines of the Christian faith.
3. However, Paul and Barnabas clashed not because of any doctrinal issue, over a practical matter concerning their second missionary journey — whether or not to take John Mark along with them.

**4b****B. ARE GODLY AND COMMITTED TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST**

1. Neither Paul nor Barnabas were new Christians.
2. Both men had been disciples for many years .
  - a. Barnabas had been a Christian since the beginning of the church (*Acts 4:36-37*).
  - b. Paul had been a Christian for approximately fourteen years (*Galatians 2:1*).
3. Both were committed to the cause of Christ, even to the point of risking their lives for the Lord's sake (*Acts 15:25-26*), and yet they clashed.

“it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*Acts 15:25–26, NASB95*)

**4c****C. HAVE WORKED TOGETHER FOR YEARS IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOSPEL**

1. Both men had a long history of serving together.

2. It was Barnabas who came to Paul's defense when the Christians in Jerusalem were doubting his conversion (*Acts 9:26-27*).
3. It was also Barnabas who went to Tarsus looking for Paul in order to help him with the growing work in Antioch (*Acts 11:25-26*).
4. Both men had been sent out by the church in Antioch on the first missionary journey, a mission work in which they had both suffered for the cause of Christ (*Acts 13:1-14:28*).
5. However, these two co-workers who had suffered so much together in the cause of Christ now were at odds with each other.
  - ❑ Spiritual maturity does not erase personality differences that can lead to strong disagreements.

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## **II. Our Differences In Personality Can Result In Disagreements Which Cause Us To Sin**

### **A. WHO WAS RIGHT, PAUL OR BARNABAS?**

1. Both men were right:
  - a. Paul was right because he placed the interests of the work first:

“But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.”  
(*Acts 15:38, NASB95*)

    - 1) He was constantly venturing into the enemy's stronghold.
    - 2) He needed co-workers who . . .
      - a) Were dependable
      - b) Wouldn't waver in the face of hardship or adversity.
      - c) Wouldn't run in the heat of battle.
    - 3) For this reason, he couldn't take Mark, because Mark hadn't proven himself to be such a man.

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- b. Barnabas was right because he placed the importance of the individual first:

“Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also.”  
(Acts 15:37, NASB95)

- 1) He saw the undeveloped potential in his cousin, Mark.
- 2) In spite of Mark's earlier desertion, Barnabas who was always the encourager sought to extend God's grace.
- 3) He wanted to give John Mark a second chance.
- 4) Barnabas' choice was proven right by history:
  - a) Paul later exhorted the Christians in Colosse to welcome Mark (Colossians 4:10).

“Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him);” (Colossians 4:10, NASB95)

- b) In his final imprisonment, Paul told Timothy to pick up Mark and bring him with him, because he was useful to Paul for ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

“Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.” (2 Timothy 4:11, NASB95)

- 5) Barnabas' efforts concerning Mark paid off.

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2. Both men were also wrong:

- a. The “sharp disagreement” which erupted between them comes from the same root word from which we get the word “provoked” (1 Corinthians 13:5) — “love is not easily provoked.”
- b. Instead of graciously agreeing to disagree and parting in a spirit of mutual respect, they had a “sharp disagreement” (contention, KJV).
- c. While it may have been God's will for the two men to separate, I do not

believe that it was His will for them to separate as the result of a heated quarrel.

**Slide 8****B. OFTENTIMES OUR GREATEST WEAKNESSES COME OUT OF OUR GREATEST STRENGTHS**

1. Paul's greatest strength was his resolution to follow Christ and stand firm in his convictions no matter what.

- a. He confronted Peter with his own hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11-14).

“But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.” (Galatians 2:11, NASB95)

- b. He was beaten, stoned and thrown in prison, but he would not stop to proclaim Christ as the only way of salvation.
  - c. His weakness, however, was his unwillingness to accept and work with another, weaker man, like Mark, who had potential but just wasn't there yet.
  - d. Paul's later comment regarding Mark, including what he wrote (e.g., Romans 15:1, 7) indicate that he overcame this weakness.

“Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves.” (Romans 15:1, NASB95)

“Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” (Romans 15:7, NASB95)

2. Barnabas' greatest strength was his ability to encourage the fainthearted and help the weak:

- a. He reached out to the outsider, the person on the fringe.
  - b. He knew how to show grace to those who had failed.
  - c. We see his weakness, however, in that he let slide those things which needed to be confronted (e.g., the hypocrisy of Peter and the other Jews, Galatians 2:13 )

“The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that

even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.” (Galatians 2:13, NASB95)

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### **III. We Must Not Allow Our Differences To Prevent Us From Serving the Lord**

#### **A. ALWAYS KEEP THE EMPHASIS ON PROCLAIMING CHRIST**

1. The work of Christ is greater than any of us, and we should keep on serving Him even if we've had a difference of opinion with a brother or sister in Christ.
2. Neither Paul or Barnabas let their disagreement stop them from serving the Lord.
3. Instead of one mission team, there were now two.
4. They were able to cover twice as much territory:
  - a. “Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus” (Acts 15:39).
  - b. Paul and Silas traveled “through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches” (Act 15:41).

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#### **B. REFUSE TO VINDICATE YOURSELF**

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:3–4, NASB95)

1. At no point do we read of either Paul or Barnabas going around strengthening the churches and talking of how the other had wronged them.
2. There is no indication that they became rivals or competed with one another.
3. Both men were committed to proclaim Christ to every person.

4. Every time after this that Paul mentions Barnabas or Mark, he does so in a kind, supportive manner.
5. When we seek to vindicate ourselves we take the focus off of Christ and His church and put it upon ourselves.
6. Over the years, I have learned that those who have done the most for the cause of Christ have also suffered the most.
7. However, they always keep the focus upon Christ, His church and the good that is being done.

## **Conclusion**

1. When we face such disagreements in the church, it is vital that we diligently work to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
2. We need to work out our disagreements in the spirit of love.
3. If we must part ways then we should continue serving the Lord and not let the Satan push us to attack the person with whom we disagree.
4. If you are here this morning and are not a Christian, I hope you have learned that God's people are not perfect.
5. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's grace.
6. It is that same grace that reaches down to us in Jesus Christ and takes away our sin.
7. Apart from His salvation we are lost, eternally separated from God.
8. Today, if you find yourself in this condition, Jesus invites you to come to Him.
9. He will make you whole through the salvation found only in Him.

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**Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?**

**Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?**

**Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour?**

**Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?**