

“When We Don’t Agree” An exposition of Acts 15:36-41, November 17, 2019



My way! Not your way! Family conflict. All conflict. Strong wills clash. Emotions fly. Feelings hurt. We hold it in or express it but it’s a fact of life. How do we handle it as believers? Acts 15:36-41 is a biblical classic about conflict between 2 sincere men of God after Paul’s 1st missionary trip. They got into a bona fide passionate argument without fisticuffs, over a young man. One youth, Mark failed on the trip and quit. Barnabas wanted to take him on the next trip.

Paul said, “No way, not going to risk the work because of a quitter.” All 3 loved God. They loved the gospel. But Barnabas and Paul disagreed on how to do the job. One said, “Give the guy who failed a second chance,” the other, “We can’t risk the work with someone who was unreliable.” After the fight, the result was Paul’s 2nd missionary trip with Silas, but Silas wasn’t Paul’s first choice was to go with Barnabas.. Paul took Silas because his original partner Barnabas wouldn’t go *without* Mark, and Paul wouldn’t go *with* him. Barnabas stayed behind to help Mark get on his feet after a failure.

In their last adventure, Paul and Barnabas **stood side by side and fought** for the lambs of God's flock against the wolves in sheep's clothing; the *Judaizers* (those who want to make people follow Jewish rules to be saved).

In this case, **they stood face to face and fought** *each other*... over the next trip. Though they’d done great things for God together, the 2 men of God deeply disagreed with passionate emotion bordering on fanatic. God and/or the church could have intervened; demanding they see eye to eye. But God’s plans and purposes came from their separation. Godly people do disagree-- if they are passionate people, they can disagree passionately.

But God wins when even in disagreement we “**Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness**” (Matthew 6:33). In conflict, the first step is to make sure that our heart is determined to do what is right by God, and for God’s will *and that we don’t fight for our own cause*. God will walk us through conflict, but... our first priority must be that God should be justified, not winning the argument and getting my way. If conflict is necessary, it should be conflict: for what is right before God, to be in His will, *and protects the weak*. That helps me rise above my own agenda.

Usually we’re more concerned for how others treat us, and that’s our weakness in conflict.

Somehow as we follow Jesus more passionately we put our own issues in the background and put God’s first. It is a heart

thing. I know because I’ve had too many conflicts in my life and too often I based things on how I felt people wronged me rather than want God to come out the winner, regardless of how I fared. I still struggle with that.

Expect conflict at times,

- serve God, not a personal agenda,
- be passionate for God's gospel, not your own cause,
- realize that those who've had conflict need lovin' not judgin.'

1. Serve God, not a personal agenda.

36 After some days, Paul said to Barnabas , “Having returned back, we might look into the brethren, how they are, throughout all the cities in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord.”

Good start. They worked well together, they want to check on their work and attend to it. Paul and Barnabas' priority was working for Jesus. God uses those persons. Though conflicts come. If conflict is simply from an ornery nature, bitterness, or vengeance, then it's not acceptable.



Hebrews 12:14, 15 seriously warns about bitterness and lack of grace, *“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness*

springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.” Bitterness is a deep root into the soul and entwines itself in thoughts, feelings, and eventually, words and deeds, like tree roots with pipes and sewers. When we react- from our unhealed hurt, self righteous anger, or revenge, instead of the remembering that Jesus died for me, we step out of God's will. Are we honest to admit to what we really want- our will or God's? When conflict happens, the heart must treasure serving God as priority, *and* recognize bitterness and do away with it. We've all used bitterness in decisions for our interactions with people and directions in life. Greed, envy and coveting also have guided us all at one time or another. Bitterness is like printer ink. When you get t on your hands it goes on to everything you touch.

Purely Material and Self-Interest

Jesus had little taste for personal petty family arguments about money. I do believe that most of my own personal agendas that get trampled by others and irritate at best and infuriate at worst aren't that important to God and shouldn't be to me. This is how Jesus handles what seems to be an important issue, a family inheritance: *“Someone*

in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you? And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (Luke 12:13-15).

When anyone enters conflict, especially over money issues, one needs to ask, “Is my bottom line for God’s purposes or my own?” Lawyers don’t make a fortune fighting for justice, they’re most profitable when they help people get their own way even at others’ expense. That doesn’t mean that one mustn’t fight for what is right even for one’s own cause and especially to defend the weak and helpless, but a Christian must ask, is this a battle I need to choose?

Opinions may differ, yet... is there *willingness* for peace as commanded in Romans 12:18? ***“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”***

Unforgiveness

Matthew 6:15, 18:35, 5:27

No option but to forgive and attempt to reconcile

Jesus seriously warned about unforgiveness (Matthew 6:15, 18:35) saying forgiving others must go deep into the recesses of the heart, and demanded to attempt reconciliation, even before

worshiping, ***“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”*** (Matthew 5:23-24). Jesus died holding no grudges. When Jesus said, ***“Father forgive...”*** the bad guys didn’t repent nor did the pain go away at the moment, but he forgave their ignorance of sending Him to the cross, ***“they know not what they do.”*** Jesus left no options about what our heart attitude should be, even in disagreement.

We need always to give ourselves a heart examination. How do we know we hold a grudge? Relationships between children (of any age) and parents and also between siblings were designed by God to be close, or at least, able to communicate and spend time together freely and joyfully. If that doesn’t happen on my end (for I can’t control the other), lack of affection, concern, or desire to connect with a family member, roots of bitterness may need to be dug and yanked out.

Sometimes we need to set necessary boundaries for physical and emotional safety but does the heart long for the best relationship possible? God looks for, and expects a believer to, ***“forgive your brother from your heart”*** (Matthew 18:35). We’ll face pain in our lives and we’ll also cause pain. Hurt people usually hurt people. It is in the heart Jesus wants us to learn to share the pain we feel and also have caused with Him so he can put it on the cross and begin the healing. In that experience, pain dies with Him and from His resurrection victory we are healed. It’s not merely a psychological experience but supernatural, a spiritual healing that penetrates the psychological part of our being.

2. Be passionate for God’s gospel, not your own cause.

37 But Barnabas, had it in his mind to take with them also John, the one called Mark.

38 But Paul, made up his mind not to take along this one, having abandoned them from Pamphylia and not having gone with them into the work. 39 But a sharp

provocation took place so that they (had) to separate from one another..."

Barnabas and Paul, Men of Passion

Barnabas' Passion and agenda-
restore broken people

Paul's Passion- get the job done,
it's the most important work!
Saved souls!

Barnabas' passion was to develop broken people and put them to work for God. He did it with Paul in Acts 9:26-28. Paul who had made a career out of taking away possession of Christians, leaving them homeless after confiscating their property, having them beaten, and like a Mafia

don, standing and holding the coats (so blood wouldn't spatter on them) of the assassins who murdered Stephen the faithful deacon. When he converted and no one wanted to come near him, Barnabas went to his side and vouched for his conversion. Paul was down, Barnabas lifted him, vouching for him as sincerely converting against all of the harm he'd done. It was Barnabas' effort that brought the early church to accept Paul as an enemy turned brother. We can assume he expected Paul to do the same with Mark. He just couldn't see preaching the gospel without developing people.

Paul's passionate agenda was to get the work done with no risk of someone ruining it. The lost needed the gospel. Interruptions in the work were intolerable. They both sacrificed to serve the Lord. That is Christian maturity in conflict. Paul was stung by Mark's abandonment (Acts 13:13) and even at his life's end it is obvious that those who left him hurt him deeply (2 Timothy 1:15, 4:10). It's safe to say that Paul felt deep pain when abandoned.



His emotional pain showed in the **"sharp provocation,"** other bible translations, "sharp disagreement," or "contention" (KJV) a compound word meaning, to sharpen and divide; like a surgeon's knife, or scissors cutting through paper. Also used in Hebrews 10:24 to **"sharply provoke"** one another to love and good deeds. This strong word pictures extreme emotion by both parties in the argument. They probably shouted at each other. Barnabas to restore a broken man, Paul not risking that someone would disrupt the hard work and sacrifice of others and upset him by abandonment.

Time justified Barnabas to stand by Mark when Paul rejected him. He became assistant and adopted son to the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13), wrote the gospel of Mark, and even Paul admitted Barnabas' success with a man he discarded!

Paul's words honored Mark from Colossians 4:10-11, **"Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me."** and Philemon 23-24, **"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers."** These 2 passages suggest

that not only Paul restored his trust of Mark but that Mark was *with* Paul. As an old man about to die he told Timothy to call for Mark, whom he once deemed useless as, **“useful to me for ministry.”** (2 Timothy 4:11).



Christian leaders who disagree may still respect each other greatly. Whitfield and Wesley clashed over theology. Whitfield, though a great evangelist was a Calvinist. He believed that God foreordained who would be saved and condemned. Wesley held to Arminian theology, that people must choose to be saved. Their disagreements made the front pages of newspapers at the time. A woman asked

John Wesley if he'd see George Whitfield in heaven

"Dear Mr. Wesley, may I ask you a question?"

"Yes, of course, madam, by all means."

"But, dear Mr. Wesley, I am very much afraid what the answer will be."

"Well, madam, let me hear your question, and then you will know my reply."

"At last, after not a little hesitation, the inquirer tremblingly asked, 'Dear Mr. Wesley, do you expect to see dear Mr. Whitefield in heaven?'"

"A lengthy pause followed, after which John Wesley replied with great seriousness, 'No, madam.'" "His inquirer at once exclaimed, 'Ah, I was afraid you would say so.'"

"To which John Wesley added, with intense earnestness, 'Do not misunderstand me, madam; George Whitefield was so bright a star in the firmament of God's glory, and will stand so near the throne, that one like me, who am less than the least, will never catch a glimpse of him.'"

3. Those who've had conflict need lovin' on.

"Barnabas having taken Mark to sail into Cyprus. 40 But Paul, having chosen Silas, went out, having been handed over to the grace of God by the brethren.

41 He was passing through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches".



Barnabas stood by Mark, and then he brought him home to Cyprus—love and food! The church **“handed over”** Paul and Silas to the grace of God; the word for handed over, *paradidomi* (literally, *para* close to the side + *didomi* give over) same word for what Judas did to Jesus! It would be like saying “after careful thought of what had happened, we turned him in, turned him over to the authority of God’s

undeserving favor.” In Christian code language, Paul *needed* grace. Grace is favor to those who don’t deserve it. When he left, he went to his home to Cilicia— once again, love and food! His next trip would bring the gospel to Europe. Even with conflict, God will use who is willing to serve Him! I think we too often want to take sides when good people have a conflict. It may be just necessary to love them, feed them, and point them back to Jesus, looking to ourselves as well, and serve the Lord, together.

Paul was about the task and Barnabas the person. God wants His gospel to get out and He even uses our weaknesses to get it done. God used Paul, though he didn’t give a

second chance to someone who failed. He got the job done and many churches were planted and many saved and great sidekicks became great servants. Barnabas may have had lower quality control standards for the work of God. But he may be unmatched among New Testament heroes as a visionary for people weakened by a bad reputation. He helped them rebound and fulfill their calling from God. Paul was about establishing the work *for the gospel*, Barnabas about fixing broken people *for the gospel*. Wayne Jackson in the *Christian Courier* wrote, "To their credit, neither Paul nor Barnabas let the conflict distract them from their respective efforts of *spreading the gospel*." We're often much more concerned about how we're treated than if God's message gets out. How do we deal with others' conflict of opinion *when they both want to serve God*?



The answer?... Don't get bitten, "***Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears***" (Proverbs 26:17).

Once upon a time in a certain village, a person in a dispute approached the wise man of the village, told his side of the case, and the sage said, "You're right." The person of the other opinion did the same and the wise man said, "You're right." The wise man's wife said, "What are you saying? They were completely opposite-- they can't both be right!" He said to his wife, "You're right." He just didn't want to get bit.

But Jesus *was* willing to get bitten. He entered the great conflict between defiled ruined sinners and a holy God of moral perfection. Instead of dog's teeth, he was bitten by iron nails. The anger of a holy God terrorized Him, and the bitter hatred for God by a sinful species of *homo sapiens* infected him. His suffering because of man's hatred of God, (that's what sin is) and God's angry wrath toward sin, his place in the middle of both that put Him to death, is what brought peace between those who will believe, making the sinner justified and God satisfied, "***Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ***" (Romans 5:1).

Jesus remained holy and though He never sinned, He became sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us *why* Jesus got into the conflict, got more than bitten, He was crucified. He rose from the dead. "***For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***" For those who believe, CONFLICT RESOLVED.