



Message #35
"GOING SEPARATE WAYS"
(Acts 15:36-41)

After the letter from the Jerusalem Council (affirming that Gentiles are saved by the grace of God without needing to adhere to the Jewish (old) covenantal practices) reached Antioch, Paul and Barnabas and others continued with the proclamation of the gospel to unbelievers and the teaching and encouraging of the church. Then, after a period of time ("some time later") Paul decides it is time to revisit the churches that he and Barnabas had planted and encouraged on their first missionary trip.

Paul was a man born with "itchy feet". He was not one to sit still for long. By the time of Acts 15 he has been in Tarsus, Jerusalem, Damascus (Arabia), Damascus, Jerusalem, Caesarea, Tarsus, Antioch, 'the first missionary journey', Antioch, Jerusalem and back to Antioch! He certainly got around. And now he wanted to go back and revisit the churches and encourage the believers there. It was natural for Paul to want to enlist Barnabas for the return trip...after all, it was a ministry partnership that had been commissioned and sent out by the church, and blessed by God.

Whilst Barnabas was keen to go.....things unravelled when he suggested that they take John Mark with them. Remember John Mark?

Read Acts 13:1-13

Paul was not wanting to take John Mark with them because he had "deserted" them previously. Paul saw him as a liability and a risk.

Barnabas was desperate to take John Mark (his cousin) with them and to give him a second chance. This difference in opinion led to a "sharp disagreement" as Luke puts it.

- Paul was task-oriented....Barnabas was people-oriented.
• Paul wanted to encourage the churches....Barnabas wanted to encourage one young man.
• Paul looked at how John Mark had been....Barnabas looked at how John Mark might become.
• Paul looked at past failures....Barnabas looked at the potential future.

Who are you more like, Paul or Barnabas? Are you task-oriented, or people-oriented?

Luke records that their dispute was so sharp that they could not come to a place of agreement and so they went their separate ways.

Have you ever had such a major falling out with someone that your friendship was broken?

What did you do to resolve it? Did that relationship ever reconcile?

The falling out of these two great men was not over an issue of right vs wrong. It was over a difference of opinion and perspective.

If you had been Paul or Barnabas, how do you think you would have handled the disagreement?

What do you think motivates Paul? What do you think motivates Barnabas?

Any break in fellowship, or ministry partnership, is sad. However, we can be thankful that Luke does not ignore, nor gloss over, such situations in the early church or with its leaders. With the benefit of historical hindsight and Holy Spirit given discernment, we can still learn some valuable principles from this event.

- We must seek to imitate the kindheartedness and forgiving spirit of Barnabas. (Forgiveness flows out of a heart that knows that it has been forgiven by God.)
- John Mark, in a sense, represents us all....we have all made mistakes and chosen wrongly....but that does not mean that we should be viewed as a failure. We are all people in need of a second-chance.
- We can also learn from Paul's commitment, conviction and determination to pursue God's purpose.
- We must always try and balance the "pastoral" with the "missional".

DISCUSS:

"As we read this account of Paul and Barnabas, we see that the real tragedy is not the separation itself, but the manner of the separation. Of course, there are times when ministry teams and gospel labourers need to separate (over doctrinal differences, or even over personality issues). Paul and Barnabas could have separated on good terms, whilst still disagreeing, but with a cordial, Christ-honouring attitude. Instead, it seems that they left each other in bitterness. Disagreements will come, even to the house of God's people. Christians still inhabit a world of sin and bodies prone to rebellion. We must not be surprised when disagreements come. We must, however, learn from this episode between Paul and Barnabas. Separation in the mission might be the right course of action, but it must be done in godliness and holiness."
(R.Albert Mohler, Jr. ACTS FOR YOU)

Now look up **Ephesians 4:31** and **Hebrews 12:15**.

Discuss these verses and what they have to say about how we handle disagreements with others?

Are there people in your life that you have disagreed with, and perhaps even fallen out with, that you have not forgiven?

Is there a root of bitterness in your life as a result of unforgiveness? What can/should you do about it?

Thankfully, God in His sovereignty, wisdom and power, turned this sad situation into a positive one for the church and the gospel outreach.

The splitting up of this one great partnership, now resulted in two effective teams going out on mission trips.

Barnabas takes young John Mark with him and heads off to Cyprus (where Barnabas came from and where the First Missionary Journey commenced).

Paul ends up selecting Silas (one of the two church leaders from Jerusalem that personally delivered the letter from the Jerusalem Council to the Antioch Church).

Silas was an excellent choice of ministry partner for Paul....Silas was a Roman citizen (like Paul and unlike Barnabas); he was a prophet; and he was highly respected by the Jewish Christian Church.

Paul and Silas were endorsed, commended and (presumably) commissioned by the church and then set off northwards from Syria into Cilicia (Tarsus) and beyond. Thus the Second Missionary Journey of Paul had commenced and would, ultimately take three years and cover a lot of new territory.

It is interesting to note that, despite the sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, neither of them gave up on the mission or the task to which God had called them.

POSTSCRIPT:

By God's grace, the relationships between Paul and Barnabas (and John Mark) that were broken in this episode were, ultimately, brought to a point of reconciliation.

Look up 1 Corinthians 9:6 and Colossians 4:10. What do these verses tell us?

Now look up 2 Timothy 4:11. What does this verse tell us?

A key verse for us to always remember is Ephesians 4:3. Write it out here:
