

1 PP Acts: To the End of the Earth

Part 41 Acts 15:36-41 *From Division to Multiplication*

11/13-14/2021

Acts 15 took place in Antioch, the 3rd largest city in the Roman Empire, modern Turkey
It was called 'cradle of Christianity' as it was the base for missionary work to the Roman Empire
In that city was a thriving church and two of their leaders, Paul and Barnabas, had spent a significant time helping these believers grow

But Paul's heart beat to reach the unsaved with the gospel, and a desire began stirring him to go back and strengthen the churches they had started in their first missionary journey

He said to Barnabas, ***"Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."*** Acts 15:36

Barnabas agreed, but he ***'wanted to take with them John called Mark.'*** 15:37

"But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work." 15:38

The word 2PP ***'withdrawn'*** means to forsake, to desert, and suggest being seduced to follow

The devil is masterful at tempting us through our weaknesses

Perhaps young Mark was fearful of what they would encounter on this missionary journey

After all, he deserted them just as things started to get tough

They had landed in Perga (13:13) which was an historic pirate stronghold in Asia Minor

The climate along the coast was brutally hot and humid, a hotbed for Malaria

He left them as they were to set off into the wild, bandit-infested mountains of the interior lands

He was young and perhaps just not ready for this difficult a ministry, and difficult it was

Paul and Barnabas would be chased out of two towns, worshiped as gods one day and

condemned as heretics the next with Paul stoned and left for dead in another,

Even after these experiences, they passed through all those towns again, strengthening the

disciples and raising up Elders for the churches

Ministry is not for the faint of heart at all and Mark seemed to just not be ready for the challenge

But before we look at the rest of this incident, let's recall a point from two weeks ago

Even though the devil not mentioned in Acts 15, his influence and fingerprints are all through it

The name 3PP ***'Devil'*** is the Greek word *diabolos*, translated to *divide or separate*

He is always trying to divide, be it marriage, family, friendship, ministry or a church

We tend to see division in a church and automatically assume the problem was with the leaders, and certainly the leaders and mistakes and sin was often involved

But what we overlook is the one behind it all, hatching plans and strategies that are often years in the making by the a being whose evil heart beats to separate and divide and attack

This diabolical enemy was loving that ***'there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other.'*** 39

Yet even though the devil was undoubtedly involved, we must never blame him for our failures

Paul and Barnabas are also responsible as James wrote: 4PP ***"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?"*** James 4:1

Barnabas and Paul each had desires raging in their hearts

Barnabas ***'wanted to take'*** Mark with them, and Paul ***'thought best not to take'*** him

Barnabas said yes, Paul said no, and back and forth it must have went, until it escalated into a sharp disagreement

5PP *'sharp disagreement'* is one word in the Greek which gives us paroxysm
Imagine the instant bubbling of peroxide on an infected wound, or think of a seizure, or
convulsion, and you have this word

The hearts of these two bubbled up in a convulsion of disagreement, this is how strong it was
They clung to the desires in their hearts, and those desires were opposite, producing conflict
And we ask, how could these two godly men who ministered together separate from conflict?
The question could be similarly asked how a Christian couple who raised children divorce, or
Christian business partners start a company together and then litigate against one another
Or how could someone that has been in a church for decades leave their church family in anger?

Let me offer **6PP** 2 observations that were possibly factors in their division:

7PP First, *the rotten fruit of division often comes from a seed of betrayal*

For Paul and Barnabas, it is not unlikely that the seeds of their division started before this
conflict, in an incident that happened previously in Antioch: **8PP** ***"But when [Peter]
came***

***to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain
men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew
back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party...so that even Barnabas was
led astray by their hypocrisy."*** Galatians 2:11-13

Barnabas sided with Peter over Paul and was led astray in a theological error
Even though this disagreement was eventually resolved, seditious betrayal by a ministry partner
can easily lead to division between those in ministry together
This is true in a marriage, in a friendship, at work, as well as ministry, and one wonders if indeed
this is a clue that helps explain this sharp disagreement that led to their separation

9PP Second, *division often comes when the lines of authority are blurred*

I mentioned earlier in this series, that the order of their names shifted in Acts, and what was once
Barnabas and Paul, switched almost exclusively to Paul and Barnabas
Name order in the bible is important, and communicates prominence, significance and authority
Pastor Kyle noted in his sermon on Acts 13:13, what humility Barnabas would need to have as
Luke wrote, ***'Now Paul and his companions set sail...'***

Paul was the prominent Apostle in God's call to bring the gospel to the Gentiles
Jesus had said of Paul, **10PP** ***"Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name
before***

the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." Acts 9:15

In their disagreement over Mark, Paul had the authority and right to make the final decision
Barnabas kept on insisting (Greek tense for ***'wanted to take'***) and Paul kept on saying no, he just
could not trust Mark and they could not find agreement on this matter
Perhaps Paul was concerned that Barnabas wasn't discerning clearly because after all, Mark was
his own cousin...**11PP** ***'Mark the cousin of Barnabas'*** Colossians 4:10
Their disagreement was not about vision, but strategy, not about taking the gospel to the
unreached Gentiles, but specifically, who should go with them

Which one was right, was either right, and even there we have a small clue to the answer
"And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took

Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.” Acts 15:39-41

Divorce grieves, fights with friends hurt, and church division is demoralizing!

No one comes out smelling like a rose, everyone in the church is affected

These two men of God separated, Barnabas taking Mark to Cyprus, Paul taking Silas on his second missionary journey and here is where we see a clue we may want to address

Paul and Silas were ***‘commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord’***, but the same is not said of Barnabas and Mark

What we do know and what we will see is that Paul’s ministry will continue to thrive, and we are left wondering what happened to Barnabas as he is not mentioned again in Acts

This may be no more significant than that Luke focuses on the spread of Christianity in the Gentile world, but we might see here the lack of approval toward Barnabas of the church

But one cannot read of this division without being left grieved

We wonder with saddened hearts, why couldn’t these two just resolve this and stay together?

Let’s remember first and foremost, **12PP** *There is significant spiritual war that church leaders face*

Notice this connection in Paul’s final words in the book of Romans

13PP ***“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive....The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” Romans 16:17-18, 20***

Pray for your church leaders, and pray we all watch carefully for those who cause division

Pray that God would help us resolve our differences well, with love and truth and unity

Remember that **14PP** *Every godly leader has clay feet and needs humility*

Barnabas was an encourager with the gift of mercy while Paul was an exhorter with the gift of discernment

There is a danger with mercy gifts to seek to please people, and there is a danger with the gift of discernment to be harsh with people

15PP *Encouragers tend to minimize truth for the sake of relationships, while discerners minimize*

relationship for the sake of truth

Whatever your spiritual gifts friends, they are not meant to operate in silos

We need others to complement us, and help us be humble, teachable and faithful

Every godly leader has feet of clay that prove their weaknesses when pressures come

16PP *Finally, God has a way of changing division to multiplication*

We should not doubt that Barnabas would continue to serve God faithfully, for Paul would later write of his hard working nature: **17PP** ***“Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to***

refrain from working for a living?” 1 Corinthians 9:6

As unfortunate as their separation was, there were now two missionary teams instead of one

And we know that Mark would mature and he would become a ministry partner of Paul's, and in fact, as he knew his death was drawing near, he requested that Mark be with him

18PP *"Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for*

ministry." 2 Timothy 4:11

And through this, a new leader would emerge in the person of Silas, who would be an encourager like Barnabas, and who would be a faithful friend and ministry partner for both Paul and Peter

Friends, the devil, the separator, will never have the final say, and our weak, fallible hearts will never thwart the sovereign purposes of God

God will have His way, and He will change division to multiplication!

For those of you who are aware of the division we have recently experienced, let me encourage you to not look at this sermon as anything but an effort to exposit the sermon accurately

This is no attempt to blame anyone specifically, but to acknowledge that all of our leadership has a responsibility for what happened, certainly including myself

We learn, we go forward, we strive to be humble, teachable and faithful, and be on guard against our true enemy, while we trust that our God will change division to multiplication

Pray