



May 7, 2023
Acts 15
“Butting Heads”

³⁶ Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are doing.” ³⁷ Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Conflict number one and conflict number two

The reading of the letter and the report of the delegation resulted in **four responses from the assembled believers**.

1. The **first** was celebration: they rejoiced...
2. The **second** response was consolation, because of the letter’s encouragement...
3. A **third** response was confirmation, as Judas and Silas... strengthened the brethren...
4. The **final** response was continuation... Paul and Barnabas picked up where they had left off and continued their ministry of teaching and preaching... the word of the Lord.”

III.- Creating the ending of the story

III.- Improvisation

Let's look at four different segments involved in the conflict.

➤ **The causes of the conflict**

That's what John Mark did. He had started on a missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas, but when they entered Asia Minor he abandoned them and went back home ([Acts 13:13](#); [15:38](#)). We're not told why he left, but the apostle Paul saw it as a shameful desertion.

Barnabas was **Determined**- **bouleúō**, bool-yoo'-o; from [G1012](#); to advise, i.e. (reflexively) deliberate, or (by implication) resolve:—consult, take counsel, determine, be minded, purpose.

Luke 14:31

John 11:53; 12:10

Acts 5:33; 27:39

2 Corinthians 1:17

Paul **Insisted**- **ἀξιόω** **axiōō**, ax-ee-o'-o; from [G514](#); to deem entitled or fit:—desire, think good, count (think) worthy.

Where was God in the conflict?

➤ **The considerations of the conflict**

Were they both right or were they both wrong?

Illustration: In a Dennis the Menace cartoon, Dennis was sulking in the corner during his timeout. He muttered what so many people believe about their own problems, Dennis said, "It's not my fault that everything is my fault!"

Sadly contentious communication often leads to separations between believers.

And do not use this text as a [proof-text](#) to excuse Christian quarreling!

"These three elements—**personality**, 'who's in charge;' **policy**, 'how things are done' and **pride**, 'who gets the credit' -are at the heart of conflict in the church."

the verb is in the imperfect tense, which mean a continual quarrel—unending, unyielding, ongoing, heated, intense, deep disagreement between them. Their argument was continual and it was contentious. They didn't just argue once and then let it go. They argued over and over again. And the more they argued, the angrier they got. Because Barnabas knew he was right. And Paul knew he was right. That does raise the question, doesn't it, who is right here? Was Barnabas right or was Paul?" ([When Christians Disagree](#))

paroxysmós, par-ox-oos-mos': contention ... so sharp (1x), to provoke unto; an inciting, incitement; irritation ("**paroxysm**")- NOUN

(a sudden attack or violent expression of a particular emotion or activity
"a paroxysm of weeping"

spasm
attack
fit
burst
bout
convulsion
seizure

MEDICINE

(a sudden recurrence or attack of a disease; a sudden worsening of symptoms)

1. an inciting, incitement: Hebrews 10:24.

2. irritation (R. V. contention): Acts 15:39; the Septuagint - violent anger, passion,

Jeremiah 32:37
Deuteronomy 29:28

Acts 17:16

David Jeremiah adds, "It was not Paul's heart to win people to Christ and then allow them to struggle on their own. He was a spiritual pediatrician as well as an obstetrician! He wanted to return and make sure the new believers they had left behind were growing in the Lord and being built up in their faith."

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "That Barnabas would champion John Mark is certainly no surprise. He and Mark were cousins, and the family ties would be strong. But even more, Barnabas was the kind of man who eagerly tried to help others, which is why the early church named him 'son of encouragement.'"

Swindoll - A disagreement is a collision, an ideological crash that occurs when two different personalities drive their agendas along the same issue from opposing directions. That's not to say that all disagreements occur because one person is wrong and the other right. Sometimes both parties of a conflict are correct yet cannot agree. Consequently, a resolution becomes especially difficult because both people see the issue correctly, just from different points of view. The solution requires clear, objective, respectful, and patient communication and may result in compromise or an amicable separation. Yet, because we are fallen creatures, disagreements can be occasions for Christians to mistreat and hurt each other, even for pillars of the Christian faith such as Paul and Barnabas. Although there is evidence these two missionaries reconciled later, and the goals and methods of both were vindicated in church history, Luke indicates their clash was painful at the time. (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – Acts)

Emotions get involved often in relationships because we are emotional beings.

They separated ([apochorizo](#) from **apo** = from + **chorizo** = to separate) means to part from, split up, move apart, part company, go one's own way. In the only other NT John records "The sky was **split apart** like a scroll when it is rolled up." ([Revelation 6:14](#)).

John MacArthur writes that [apochorizo](#) describes "an apocalyptic disaster, the Heavens departed. So when they departed, they departed. There wasn't a lot of love there. They were a little bit bitter, and they blasted off in two directions and Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus."

It is interesting that Paul—the man who didn't want to take John Mark—writes more about the unity of the church than any other man in the New Testament.

➤ **The challenges of the conflict**

Charles Swindoll gives good advice on "Relationship Rescue"

My observation of the friendship shared by Paul and Barnabas and the dispute that ended their association suggests three guidelines for anyone hoping to avoid a similar fate.

First, when involved in a dispute, pray for the ability to see both sides rather than just your own.

Years after his partnership with Barnabas ended, Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, “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](#)). I can’t help but think Paul looked back on how he had responded to conflict and regretted his conduct.

Second, when both sides of an issue have reasonable support, seek a wise compromise.

Swindoll- Today, I see this passage very differently than I did as a younger man. As I examine the issues involved in the dispute between Paul and Barnabas, **I don’t see any doctrinal points at stake.**

Third, if a conflict persists, don’t give up, stay at it. We live in a fight-or-flight world. A broad range of choices, increased mobility, and declining value on relationships all have contributed to a society that says, “If you don’t get your way, get out.” Rather than doing the difficult work of seeing another’s point of view, rather than bearing the discomfort of compromise, rather than seeking the greater good of all, we leave, hoping to find what we want somewhere else. Don’t like the way things are done at church? Go to another. Don’t like how your marriage turned out? Divorce and start over. Tragically, the choice to leave often occurs shortly before the solution God has prepared can present itself. Stay at it. Don’t give up on a resolution when the conflict goes on longer than you expected. Don’t sacrifice the relationship when you’ve run out of options. That’s when you need to trust the Lord to solve the problem on your behalf. Maintaining the relationship through the difficulty then becomes a matter of faith. If you stay at it and trust Him to accomplish what you cannot, He will be faithful. Even if the other party makes reconciliation impossible, God will honor your faithfulness.

Having said all that, I admit that times will come when a conflict simply refuses to be resolved, when no possible solution can be found and agreed upon. On such rare occasions, the best response is an amicable parting of ways. (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary – Acts)

- ✓ **The question of love**
- ✓ **The question of unity**
- ✓ **The question of freedom and not bitterness**

- **Though all Christians worship the same Lord we don't always agree on every point.**

If you've been around the evangelical church very long, you know that we disagree about almost everything. Recently I saw a list of some of the things that Christians disagree about:

- The movies: Should we go or not?
- Drinking wine
- Watching TV
- Eating out on Sunday
- Playing cards
- The King James Version
- Men wearing beards
- Women wearing pants
- Divorced men serving as ushers
- Home schooling
- Mixed swimming {we used to call it mixed bathing}
- Fishing on Sunday
- Smoking
- Cooking with wine
- Playing guitars in church
- Rock music
- Christian rock music
- Long hair on men
- Short hair on women
- Women working outside the home
- Birth control
- Should we let our kids go to the high school prom?
- Women ushers
- Working in a bar where liquor is served
- Christian schools versus public schools
- R-rated movies
- Sex education
- Rush Limbaugh
- The ecumenical movement
- Halloween
- Christians in politics, how far should we go?
- Sunday night services
- True Christians in liberal churches, should they stay as a testimony or should they come to an evangelical church?
- Seeker services
- Communion: How often?
- Christian counseling

- Christian psychiatry
- Faith-Promise Giving
- Women wearing makeup
- Clapping in church
- Traditional worship versus contemporary worship: which one pleases God more?
- **On issues of deep personal conviction, our disagreements will sometimes be very sharp.**

Paul Looked at the Ministry - Barnabas Looked at the Man –

Every commentator has his own opinion about this. On Barnabus' side you've got G. Campbell Morgan and Lloyd Ogilvie; on Paul's side you've got F. F. Bruce and R.H. Lenski. So who do you think was right? Your answer tells us a whole lot more about you than about this text of Scripture.

Inside with Barnabas 😊

- Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [Ephesians 4:3](#).
- Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. [Romans 12:10](#)
- Live in harmony with one another. [Romans 12:16](#)
- If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. [Romans 12:18](#)

Philippians 2:1-8

Isn't it interesting that Luke includes this in the Book of Acts? He could have skipped over it. He could have glossed over the whole ugly affair. He could have skipped the disagreement and said that Paul went north while Barnabas went west and we never would have known why. So this text is very honest. It's also very comforting. Why? Because it tells us that men of the Bible were not angels. They were men with human passions, with strong feelings and with strong convictions.

- **God's word is sometimes advanced through disagreement.**
- **If we must separate from one another, let us do so with respect, not with bitterness.**

It's not a sin to disagree. We don't have to agree on everything.

Three Warning Signs –

Number one: When the issue becomes a controlling passion of your life.

Number two: When you've started thinking about revenge against those who have hurt you.

Number three: When you begin to attack the person and not the problem. When it gets personal, you've gone too far.

It is a huge trap to become bitter towards a believer that has departed from you!

- **In all things, we should hold our convictions firmly yet graciously knowing that God may lead someone else differently than he has led me.**

[Romans 14:5](#) says “each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.” [Romans 15:5](#)

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” ([John 13:35](#))- “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,”

- **Number one: Pray for guidance.**
- **Number two: Search the Scriptures to see what God has said.**
- **Number three: Seek Godly counsel.**
- **Number four: Ask God to give you specific direction.**
- **Number five: Cheerfully do whatever God tells you to do.**

➤ **The conclusions of the conflict**

So years pass, tempers cool down, a new perspective comes, they begin to see things in a different light, and the Holy Spirit does his healing work. Let's run the clock ahead about 10 years. How does Paul feel about Barnabas now? We only have one hint. In [1 Corinthians 9:6](#) he mentions Barnabas as a fellow apostle and a fellow worker in the cause of Jesus Christ. Ten years pass from the time of the argument and Paul is able to look at Barnabas and say, “My friend, my fellow apostle, my partner, my co-worker.” Something had happened to bring about reconciliation and healing.

II Timothy 4- “10 Be diligent to come to me quickly; 10 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for

Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. 12 And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. 13 Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments. 14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. 15 You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words. 16 At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.”17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. 18 And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

In his last days Paul wanted John Mark by his side.

What can you learn as you live life with the family of God?