

PAUL AND BARNABAS SEPARATED

Acts 15:36-41

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Paul and Barnabas

Key-location: Antioch

Key-repetitions:

- John Mark: (Ac 37, 38, 39).
- Leave Antioch: Paul wanted to leave to visit believers in every city where they had preached (Ac 15:36); Barnabas and John Mark left for Cyprus (Ac 15:39); Paul and Silas left Antioch (Ac 15:40).
- John Mark's failure: he deserted Paul and Barnabas (Ac 15:38); he had not continued in the work (Ac 15:38).

Key-attitudes:

- Conflict and hostility.
- Paul and Barnabas' tenacious unwillingness to yield to the other.

Initial-situation:

The church in Antioch sent out Barnabas and Saul (*Paul*) as missionaries to non-Jews. John Mark went with them. When they left Antioch of Syria, Barnabas was the leader. The team first went to the Island of Cyprus. The team left Cyprus and went to Pamphylia. They began to deal with Romans more than with Jews, and Saul started using his Roman name, Paul. Also, Paul replaced Barnabas as the leader of the missionary team. John Mark left Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem.

After preaching in many cities, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch of Syria. Some Jewish Christians argued that non-Jews needed to be circumcised and obey all of the Law of Moses in order to be saved. Paul, Barnabas, and others went to discuss the subject with the apostles in Jerusalem. The Church Council at Jerusalem determined that non-Jewish Christians did not need to be circumcised nor required to obey the Law of Moses. Men who represented the Church Council at Jerusalem returned to Antioch. They gathered the church together and gave them the letter prepared by the Council. Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they taught and preached the word of the Lord.

Initial-problem:

Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing."

Final-situation:

Barnabas took John Mark and sailed for Cyprus. Paul chose Silas, and Paul and Silas left Antioch.

BIBLE STORY

Some time passed after Paul and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem to Antioch. Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord. Let's see how they're doing."

Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them. However, Paul thought it unwise, because John Mark deserted them on their first missionary journey in Pamphylia. John Mark had not continued with them in the work.

Paul and Barnabas had such a sharp argument that they parted company. Barnabas took John Mark and sailed for Cyprus. Paul chose Silas to accompany him on his second missionary journey.

The believers at Antioch commended Paul to the Lord's care. Paul and Silas left Antioch (Ac15:36-39).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Paul and Barnabas have a conflict?
2. Who was more relational-oriented and who was more task-oriented?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of both the relational-oriented person and the task-oriented person?
4. Are you more relational-oriented or task-oriented?
5. How does the church today experience conflict between relational-oriented and task-oriented believers?
6. How should Christians deal with a situation where two sincere Christians have strong opposing convictions; each believes he is right and neither is willing to accept the other's conviction?
7. What can you learn from the conflict between Paul and Barnabas?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **The Christian who seeks to recover a person who made a mistake, may experience disharmony between fellow believers who don't believe the fallen one can recover.** Barnabas made a big sacrifice when he insisted on giving another opportunity to John Mark. Barnabas mentored Paul for several years, and Paul became his best friend. However, Paul refused to continue working with him (Ac 15:39).

2. **The relational-oriented person and the task-oriented person have the potential for conflicts.** Barnabas was relational-oriented. Saul had been the persecutor of the church. After Saul's conversion, followers of Jesus were afraid of him; however, Barnabas took Saul (Paul) to the apostles in Jerusalem (Ac 9:26-25). John Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey, but Barnabas wanted to give John Mark another opportunity. Paul was task-oriented and thought it unwise to take a quitter on such an important trip (Ac 15:38). Paul was committed to follow Christ no matter the cost, to stand firm in his convictions, and to confront those who were in the wrong. Their attributes eventually caused conflict in their relationship with one another.
3. **Situations develop where dedicated Christians cannot work together because of disagreement.** Barnabas wanted to take John Mark on the second missionary journey. Paul would not accept John Mark. The disagreement made it impossible for the two to work together; they separated, forming two missionary teams (Ac 15:36-41).
4. **A Christian's strong points may also manifest themselves as a weakness.** Paul's strength was his commitment to follow Christ no matter the cost, and to stand firm in his convictions. He publicly confronted Peter (Gal 2:11). Paul was beaten, stoned, and thrown into prison, but nothing stopped him from proclaiming Jesus Christ and him crucified as the only way of salvation. Paul's weakness was his inability to accept and work with a weaker man, like John Mark, who had potential, but who had failed him in the past. Barnabas' greatest strength was his ability to encourage the immature Christian and help the weak. He championed the outsider and unconventional person and showed grace to those who had failed. But he erred on the side of showing grace to those who needed to be confronted. At Antioch, Barnabas was carried away with the hypocrisy of Peter and the other Jews who withdrew from eating with the non-Jewish Christians out of fear of offending Christian Jews who were militant legalists (Gal 2:13).
5. **Personality clashes in the church are not a reason for quitting one's service to God.** The work of Christ is greater than any one person, and Christians should keep on serving him even if they have had a clash with another Christian. Neither Paul nor Barnabas let this clash stop them from serving the Lord. They didn't even take time out. Instead of one missionary team, now in the providence of God, there were two missionary teams. They separated from each other, but each continued missionary work (Ac 15:39-41).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Role-playing Drama:

- Ask for two volunteers to pretend they are Paul and Barnabas arguing about taking John Mark on a second missionary journey.
- Ask for two more volunteers to pretend they are shocked Antioch church members. One defends Barnabas for giving John Mark a second chance; the other defends Paul for refusing to take a quitter on such an important trip.