

There is an old joke... perhaps you have heard it... about the man who asked God how long a million years was to Him. God replied, *"It is just like a second of your time, My child"*. ... The man then asked God what a million dollars was to Him... and the Lord similarly replied, *"It is just like a penny"*.

The man hesitated a while... and finally he gathered enough courage to ask a third question. *"Well, Lord ... Could I have one of Your pennies?"* ... And God said, *"Certainly, My child, just a second!"*

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all be on the same wavelength with God...? ... **It** would be fantastic to always have the mind of God... on every issue ... every time. . . But His ways are much higher than our ways . . . (His thoughts... higher than our thoughts.) So... what about having the same understanding as our fellow human beings...? ... Well... that seems just as impossible.

Have you ever considered how much time and effort you put forth – every day – to get others to see things the way you see them? Many of our most common concerns . . . problems . . . and frustrations ... we attribute - to others not viewing the same matter the way we do. ... *"Oh! ... If only they would recognize THIS or THAT... we wouldn't be having this problem."*

Maybe some of you... as you got ready for church this morning... felt the need to change someone's thinking to be more like your own. But how many of you woke up ... telling yourself, *"Boy! I sure would like it if someone would just thrust **their** perspective on me today, and try to*

*change my point of view" ... ?* My guess is that not very many of us did. It's highly unlikely.

Isn't it true ... that we really are such egotists ... that we head through our day believing that **others** need to change. .. and start seeing things the way we do . . . ? So we busily go our way and some of us even build strategies to "enlighten" those we expect to encounter - to adopt **our** attitudes . . . **our** thoughts ... **our** perspectives ... and **our** personal preferences.

We may be willing to acknowledge that we have a problem like this in our own lives ... because we know our humanness ... (We know that we have blown it on many occasions... and we recognize how fallible we really are.) ... But what if we saw it in our Christian heroes ...? (You know... those "Super-saints of Scripture" who we admire and look up to... .. Do they ever get into knock-down drag out fights... trying to force the other to change... and see things the way they do. Yes! ... In fact we come to a passage this morning that demonstrates such a contention. ... And we want to learn from both the good and the bad... that we will encounter in it.

In today's brutally honest passage of Scripture... two of our "heroes of the faith"... (Paul and Barnabas)... get into quite a ruckus with each other. ... In fact. . . these two friends go at it so intently ... that there is no record – anywhere – of them ever getting together again on this Earth. It seems . . . once they departed – that was it!

The two men loved and respected each other, greatly so. Few men ever mean to each other what Barnabas and Paul meant to each other. When Paul needed help, Barnabas was the only believer who stepped forward to help him. Barnabas was the spiritual brother or father to Paul.

Barnabas was one of the most senior figures in the church at this stage. He had come to Christ very near the beginning of the history of the church when the Spirit descended upon believing people, on the day of Pentecost. We know that he was part of the first generation of those who believed in Acts 4. Throughout the years that followed, Barnabas became a key figure. He was known for his obedience and humility of heart. His given name was Joseph; Barnabas, or Son of Encouragement, was his nickname. He was a man of stability. In Acts 11:24 he was called "a good man who was filled with the Holy Spirit." If I were to pick one word to describe Barnabas, it would be "depth." He was a man of deep conviction who had walked long with the Lord, who was unflappable in any circumstance. Barnabas was one who could see good in other people when they couldn't see it in themselves anymore.

Twice he had been used significantly to bring Paul (then known as Saul) into fellowship and service in the church. When Paul first came to Jerusalem in Acts 9, known by everyone there as a persecutor and violent destroyer of Christians, it was on Barnabas' authority that he was given access to fellowship in the church. It was Barnabas who brought Paul to Antioch as a teacher and church leader.

Barnabas was patient enough to believe in good results that took a long time to achieve. God was at work, and Barnabas had unflappable confidence in God's sovereignty. He was a man who had depth of faith and overflowing encouragement.

Paul was different. He came late to the party. He started his Christian adventure by jailing Christians and enthusiastically cheering at their execution. Paul lived his whole life on fire. Everything he ever did, he did at a hundred miles an hour. When he hated Christ, he hated him vigorously. When he loved him, no one ever loved him more. He was a scholar. In his defense before Festus, Festus' response was, "*Your enormous learning is driving you crazy!*" (Acts 26:24).

The word I would use to describe Paul, in contrast to the depth of Barnabas, is "passion." Everything mattered to Paul. There was never a moment to lose. Paul knew what it was like to be saved by grace, and he was determined that, having experienced such grace, he would never stop speaking of it.

With patience and passion, Barnabas and Paul made a marvelous team. They had already been sent out once together by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3). They went to Cyprus and Pamphylia, did battles with a sorcerer and angry mobs. Paul was stoned and left for dead. They were mistaken for gods. They traveled by sea and by land, and founded believing communities. Their complementary strengths in ministry served them well.

But today... we will see them fall into angry disagreement... as they

contemplated a return trip to the places where they brought the Gospel. This can be very instructive for us. Most of us have been either in or close to some awful disagreement between Christians, some painful inability to get along. This passage of Scripture can help us try to make sense of why God allows such things... and how we can best navigate through them.

Two weeks ago (the last time we were together in our study of Acts...) you may remember... our passage dealt with “Conflict in the Church” (when issues divide the whole church). Today's text will deal with personal conflict (issues between individual believers – believer with believer). We want to draw out some God-honoring principles for when we are involved in conflict with a fellow believer... (even one... with whom we have previously enjoyed powerful ministry together!)

How nice it would be if Believers never had any conflict with each other. But as long as the church remains on the earth... there will be conflict. The truth is... that the church is not a society of perfect people who are without fault and error. The church is - rather – a society of redeemed people... who are in the process of being perfected by the means of God's grace. And tragically... our conflicts arise out of our own selfish desire. ... But Paul and Barnabas' conflict wasn't that way.

As we turn now to our opening verse... I would like for you to notice how this struggle began as a sincere and proper concern... on the part of both parties in the conflict... (They both shared a right goal. There was no selfishness in it.) It was the means for accomplishing this right and proper goal... where the divide occurred.

## ACTS 15:36

Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch from their 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary trip... when a church dispute had broken out... (over whether or not observing the Law of Moses was a condition to being saved.) In my last message... we saw how Paul and Barnabas brought the issue to the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem to decide the matter. It had been decided... and they were sent back to Antioch with an authoritative letter for diffusing the contention.

Paul and Barnabas had just returned home... and they were victorious! They brought the wonderful news that Gentile Believers did not have to adopt the Jewish laws and lifestyle in order to be saved.

Then... we left off... last time with this verse...

### **Acts 15:35 (ESV)**

*But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.*

Now in today's opening verse... Paul says to Barnabas, "*Let's get moving, again!*" For the Apostle Paul, the church at Antioch was not a "parking lot". It was a "launching pad". He could never settle down to a "comfortable ministry" anywhere, as long as there were open doors for preaching the Gospel.

One of the many joys that I have in ministering among you here at Living Water... is that this seems to be the prevailing attitude

around here. We are a “launching pad”! ...and not a “parking lot.” We have quite a few people who have been involved in ministry for many years... and who we might expect to have the attitude in their “Golden Years”... that what they need now is... to simply park themselves and watch others now do the work of ministry. But instead... we see these being launched into Wednesday night AWANA ministry with kids... and Sunday night ministry with older students. We see ministries being launched that reach out and minister to the needs of others... and we have seen Colombia Grace Foundation launched and maintained from this church.

I believe that God would have us continue with the prevailing mindset that we are a launch pad... and not a parking lot. ... Paul and Barnabas wanted the same.

### **Acts 15:37-41**

Before we get into the nitty-gritty of the dispute ... I would like to point something out. ... When did this dispute occur...? I mean... what just happened before this conflict...?

Paul and Barnabas had just scored a huge spiritual victory at the council of Jerusalem. With the white-HOT issue that they took down there ... their side prevailed! ... The whole Christian movement waffled for a while . . . but now the whole Christian movement had been won over to their perspective!

I think there is a principle here that worth pointing out. The time to be most concerned about falling down hard ... is AFTER the spiritual battle – perhaps even more than during! ... And the more victorious you may feel – the more careful you really ought to be!

When you hear someone rejoicing over a spiritual victory -rejoice with them! ... And then pray fervently for them. ... Pray for their protection against falling.

Here were two dedicated men who had just helped bring unity to the church. ... But then such a disruption occurred among them that verse 37 uses a word that is very pointed... in the original language of the New Testament. ... It says Barnabas was DETERMINED ( Βουλομαι ) to take John mark with them.

This word, "determined" ( Βουλομαι )... is to be "minded with a strong purpose". It is the same word that Scripture uses elsewhere for the immutable ... irrevocable purpose of God. ... So... in other words – Barnabas was non-reversible in his decision. He was fixed in his position!

And Paul was equally as strong-minded . . . because in verse 39 ... the word translated as "sharp disagreement" ( παραξυμοζ ) was a violent term for "cutting". The idea is that of differing to the point of suffering pain. ... The picture seems to be that both men were hurting... and they were having an out-of-control shouting match. The difference was sharp... and both hearts were cut deeply. ... Each man was thoroughly



convinced that he was right before the Lord... therefore... each argued strongly for his position.

(This was not a mild gentleman's disagreement but an intense and passionate conflict!) ... These two missionary partners... and close friends... cut one another off. They separated and went off in two different directions.

What a difference from what we saw last week! ... There... we saw them both approach the situation in Jerusalem with greater humility. They came looking for God's point of view . . . checking it out before the Apostles and Elders ... fearing that they might have been wrong.

(You know)... Paul and Barnabas were just men like you and me – not super-saints! (LISTEN!)... Christians walk with a limp. We all do! ... Therefore we have to rely on the grace of our Lord.

And do you want to know something else . . .? Some of the church's greatest leaders have been difficult people. Listen to Luther describe himself:

*"I am rough, boisterous, stormy, and altogether war-like, fighting against innumerable monsters and devils. I am born for the removing of stumps and stones, cutting away thistles and thorns, and clearing wild forests".*

God used a man like this ... named Martin Luther to launch the Protestant movement. If Luther were any different – the Reformation would not have started with him. It took someone with his personality to

accomplish that work. The same thing can be said of George Fox, John Wesley, and scores of other effective Christian leaders . . . who were there to "get it done" for the Lord.

In today's passage we see one of these personalities plus one more. We could hardly encounter any more vastly different personalities.

As I've already noted... Barnabas was the kind of person who eagerly tried to help others. While Paul... on the other hand... was a very goal and task oriented person.

This is the way I picture the shouting match... once it was fully ablaze... Barnabas perhaps said: "*This young man can be salvaged. Yes... He has been a bit of a coward... but he won't be a coward forever. ... And 'Yes'... He has his fair share of shortcomings and inadequacies... but that's exactly the kind God uses. ... God cares for this son of his. Mark not a reject.*"

And I am almost certain that Barnabas would have reminded Paul... "*Remember, you yourself were once rejected in your immaturity. You didn't get it right the first time. The Lord and I showed you grace and mercy... The same kind I am asking you to show to Mark...!*"

Paul might have come back with all his passion and said... "*Yes... but I was in recovery for years before we ventured out on our first mission. I had a lot of growing to do. (God had to mature me.) ... It took several years... and He did. ... Now... Mark needs time... just like I did. Barnabas, This work is too important for us to spend our time baby-*

*sitting a shaky young man... getting him over his personal traumas. The mission is far too important. Let's not cause the young man to dishonor the Lord a second time... Jesus Himself said... and I quote: "If any man puts his hand to the plow and turns back... he is not worthy of the kingdom of God..."*

Paul looked at people and asked, "**WHAT CAN THEY DO FOR GOD'S WORK?**"

Barnabas looked at people and asked, "**WHAT CAN GOD'S WORK DO FOR THEM?**"

Nearly every commentary that I read... in preparation for this message asked the same question: "Who was right?" ... Was Paul following God's will... or was Barnabas...? ... (It is... as if only one is important to the Lord's work.) ... I saw this question raised so often... that I began to wonder... Am I missing something here...? ... I don't even think that is an intelligent question to ask. ... Both perspectives are **vital** to the Lord's work. ... Ministries get into trouble if only one exists. ... Of course... often... it is difficult to keep them balanced. ... And sometimes when we have two differing and strong personalities... who favor one or the other... it can get out of hand (just as it did here.) ... But (you see...) the point that I think God wants us to understand... is that **both** of them are necessary and useful for God's kingdom work.

Here is why I think that: Our passage concludes... and the rest of Acts goes on to show... that in the sovereignty of God... out of this disagreement... came MORE than a doubling of their labor. ... Barnabas went to strengthen the churches in Cyprus... and Paul went to the churches in Syria... Cilicia... Galatia... and then over to Europe

(which wasn't in the original plans.) In addition, both of their assistants (Mark and Silas) went on to have significant ministries themselves.

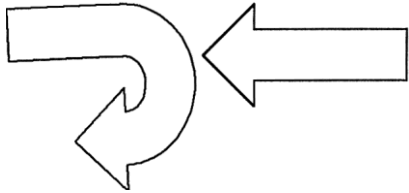
Let me tell you what I have noticed about our Church's ministry efforts. There have been many times that I am more of a Paul ... and someone else is more of a Barnabas. There have been occasions when I have been more interested in getting a task done ... and another leader was more interested in cultivating and nurturing someone. On occasion when we discussed issues . . . the Paul inside of me will come out ... and the Barnabas in the other person will come out. ... It leaves us all wondering – “Who is right?”

Now... if one of the significant points to our passage today is... both are necessary... then we need to try to abandon our “either/or” mentality... and search for the best possible way... for the task to be accomplished – while people are nurtured at the same time.

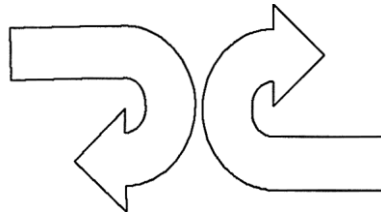
In a personal conflict... it is always best to appreciate... and to try and utilize the differences of Godly positions. ... Sometimes merely recognizing the difference... and that each one has its own strengths before God... is enough to keep the conflict from getting out of hand.

Husbands and wives ... or Christian co-workers . . . whenever you sense a conflict is brewing between you and another . . . as soon as you see the signs of it coming on ... try and take a moment and think of the other person's perspective and thank God for its strengths. Name them - specifically.

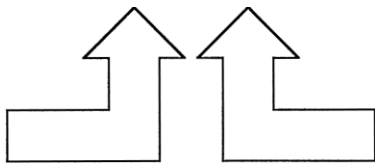
The next thing I would suggest that you consider is something that a fellow pastor shared with me several years ago. Pastor Brad developed it for counseling those who are dealing with conflict. He says you need to realize that there are really only three directions conflicts will take:



One party dominates



Both parties go opposite directions



Both parties seek God's will

Only the third diagram represents the desired outcome. Keep these simple pictures in mind. If conflict ever arises between you and a fellow Believer, do all that you can to make the third diagram your experience.

Nowhere in the account that we read about Paul and Barnabas does it say that the two prayed and it seemed good to them and the Holy Spirit that they should go their separate ways for the rest of their days on this Earth. How sad that they settled for diagram #2! Don't be caught making the same mistake.

But when we do blow it and end up on a course other than what diagram #3 represents . . . realize that God may even still be able to

bring you into increased fruitfulness and service. For in the splitting-up of this great missionary team... there were now two missionary teams instead of one.

John Mark definitely had some growing up to do. His one-on-one opportunity with Barnabas would have afforded him that opportunity.

Sometime after his time with Barnabas... (traveling the island of Cyprus)... we have strong evidence from six different 1st Century writers - Iraneus, Cletus, Origen, Jerome, Eusebius, and Papias – all of whom lived and wrote during John Mark's lifetime (or shortly thereafter) . . . and they all tell us that John Mark met with Peter in Rome. While being with Peter in Rome... we are told... Peter taught John Mark the things he would later write... which we call the Gospel of Mark. ... It was the first Gospel that was written. ... Barnabas put young John Mark on the Road to Reconciliation ... which Peter completed.

Barnabas settled in North Africa. The efforts of his missionary work helped establish a thriving Christian community in Alexandria... out of which came some of the most productive theologians the world has ever known. Much of the theology we hold dear today... comes from the first couple of Centuries... and is the product of theologians from the community Barnabas helped establish.

Out of this terrible conflict ... even though Paul and Barnabas did not handle it properly ... God led them to increased ministry. Each of them planted more churches... two of them wrote the very Scripture we have in our Bibles today... and one influenced a community that produced

much of our precious held doctrines.

God has a way that He wants for us to handle personal conflict. But in His grace... even when we don't... He can bring such glory to Himself out of the ashes.

Perhaps God is speaking to you today about a personal conflict in your life that went terribly wrong. Maybe you have told yourself that "Its over! Its done! Nothing good will ever come from it." ... My encouragement to you this morning is to not give up hope. Ask the Lord to work behind the scenes (like He did here) to bring glory to Himself from it.

And then some of you may be experiencing personal conflict right now... or one is just around the corner. Here are some things we can take away from our passage this morning... that I think can serve as an excellent guide.

# 1. RECOGNIZE THAT YOU ARE VERY PRONE TO BE INVOLVED IN ONE FOLLOWING A SPIRITUAL VICTORY.

#2. RECOGNIZE THAT GOOD AND GODLY PEOPLE DO GET INTO CONFLICTS

#3. RECOGNIZE THE OTHER PERSON'S DIFFERENCE OF PERSPECTIVE, CONTEMPLATE ITS STRENGTHS, AND THANK GOD FOR THOSE STRENGTHS.

#4. REMEMBER THE THREE DIAGRAMS AND SETTLE FOR NOTHING LESS THAN THAT THIRD DIAGRAM.

#5. Then, even after the most mis-handled personal conflict SEEK TO LEARN FROM IT AND GROW THROUGH IT.