

Conflict: Making Us Better Rather Than Bitter **Acts 15:36-41**

Introduction:

1. **Illustration:** A young, Christian, married couple thought that because they loved each other and loved the Lord they were going to live in peace and never have a disagreement or an argument. Disagreements are inevitable! Why is this?
 - First, because we are all made of sinful flesh. This means we all (to a certain degree) have pride and egos. We are opinionated and can be stubborn and obstinate.
 - Second, because we are all so different. We all come from different backgrounds, different cultures, we have different personalities, etc.
2. Here in our text, two very good men had a serious disagreement. Paul and Barnabas just didn't see eye to eye about the issue of John Mark. They agreed as to the necessity of the trip, but argued over who would compose the team.
3. This conflict had the potential of being quite explosive. It could have done incredible damage to the church at Antioch, and it could have also done long-lasting hurt to all three men involved in the conflict. But we don't see this happening.
4. There are some extremely helpful principles that we learn from this text that will help us to not only survive conflict, but become better through it.

First, conflict is inevitable, even among believers.

1. Sadly, we never outgrow our tendency to be in conflict with one another. Conflicts may arise even among mature believers like Paul and Barnabas.
2. They were two different men and they disagreed completely on the issue of John Mark.
3. Paul was a driven man, had a very high calling from Christ, and was very serious about his mission and the task that lay before him. He could not take a chance that John Mark would desert them again. John Mark was too high risk for Paul. vs. 38
4. Barnabas was a very loving, kind, and gracious man that felt very strongly that the young man deserved an opportunity to redeem himself. He was also John Mark's uncle, and I'm sure he had a special love for him. He was willing to take the risk. vs. 37
5. Who was right and who was wrong? I don't believe this was an issue of right or wrong. It was an issue of opinion and preference. Both men had good reasons for how they felt.
6. Not every conflict is an issue of right or wrong. Godly, mature believers can disagree and even part ways. This conflict **would** have become evil if we read about one or both men slandering the other, or one of them trying to rip the church at Antioch apart and get people to take sides. But we don't read of any of this.
7. The two men made their decisions and simply parted ways (vs. 39a). Luke, the writer of Acts, was not inspired by the Holy Spirit to blame anybody for this

conflict. He simply records what happened. Conflict is inevitable, even among believers.

Second, conflict should not cause us to quit.

1. One of the facts about this conflict that is quite striking to me is that, despite this conflict, **nobody** quit serving God.
 - Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus. vs. 39b
 - Paul chose Silas, and departed. vs. 40
2. Each man redirected his efforts, but nobody quit. Nobody threw in the towel.
3. As we learned earlier, conflict is not always over issues that are clearly right or wrong. But Satan desires to exploit conflict in our lives by getting us to overreact and quit in our service for God. Imagine if this had happened:
 - Mark – “If Paul is going to treat me this way, fine, I’ll just go home to Jerusalem.”
 - Paul – “My best buddy has turned on me. What’s the use? I give up.”
 - Barnabas – “Paul is supposed to be an apostle, but he’s a hard man and unforgiving. I quit.”
4. None of these men had this attitude. They all persevered, which means “to persist in an undertaking in spite of counter influences, opposition, or discouragement.”
5. Serving the Lord carries with it many painful bumps and bruises, but we cannot quit. This is what Satan desires. The Bible teaches that we must have an attitude of perseverance. 2 Timothy 2:3; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9
6. Many believers have allowed conflict and hurts to cause them to sit at home and brood. This is both immature and unprofitable. Remember, it is all about Jesus, not us.

Third, conflict should cause us to grow.

1. When you are faced with a conflict or disagreement with another believer, you have a clear choice:
 - You can allow the conflict to make you **bitter**.
 - You can allow the conflict to make you **better**.
2. This had to be quite a humiliating experience for John Mark, yet he refused to get discouraged or disillusioned from serving the Lord because of this situation.
3. He could have grown bitter, resentful, and cynical. Instead he grew in Christ-likeness and matured in his faith. How do we know this? We know this from Paul’s own testimony many years later. Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11
 - Wow! This is amazing. Many years later, the man who was viewed by Paul as a weak deserter who couldn’t be trusted is now **profitable**! God also used him to write the gospel of Mark, later.
4. John Mark determined that he would grow better, not bitter through this conflict. When conflict comes into our lives, it does not have to destroy us. In fact, God can use it to help us to grow and mature in our faith.

Fourth, conflict can lead to greater productivity.

1. Paul and Barnabas both knew that the work of Christ was greater than either one of them, so they kept right on serving Christ even after this clash.
2. Satan tried to bring a major problem and roadblock to the body of Christ, but notice how his plan backfired. vs. 39-41
3. Now instead of one missionary team, there were two! God used this separation of Paul and Barnabas to multiply the mission!
4. There are two major reasons why this conflict led to greater productivity in the cause of Christ. They both have to do with Paul and Barnabas and how they handled it.
 - They did not **nurse** their disagreement.
 - They didn't sit around feeling sorry for themselves and becoming bitter. Bitter people lose their zeal and fire for the Lord. They lose their impact for Christ.
 - They did not **rehearse** their disagreement.
 - We don't read that Paul went through Syria and Cilicia telling all the churches how wrong Barnabas was. There is no indication that Paul and Barnabas became rivals.
 - These men did not attempt to get others in their church at Antioch to take sides. They did not gossip about this and spread it among others.
5. Because of the way these two men handled their disagreement, the work of Christ was multiplied and was not hindered.

In Conclusion:

1. Have you ever noticed that sometimes church members are like porcupines? We need each other, but we needle each other. As one preacher said, many porcupine Christians have their good points, but you can't get near them!
2. Sometimes we can grate on each other like sandpaper. But what does sandpaper do? It knocks off the rough edges, doesn't it?
3. Ask yourself when going through conflict, "How can God use this to make me more Christ-like? What areas do I need to grow in?"
4. Think about this: if everybody always saw things your way, you would never grow in patience, forgiveness, kindness, gentleness, and forbearance. It is through the sandpaper of conflict that we grow in these areas, and the Holy Spirit knocks off the rough edges so that we shine forth Christ.
5. Yes, conflict can make you better rather than bitter!