

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Part VI: The Ministry Of The Universal Church In Its Spread To The Ends Of The Earth, Acts 8:26-28:31

E. Christ's Use Of The Apostle Paul To Spearhead Worldwide Outreach, Acts 14:4-28:31

9. Christ's Gracious Solution To A Humanly-Caused Division

(Acts 15:36-40)

I. Introduction

- A. We believers are to seek to preserve the unity in the Church created by the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 4:3.
- B. However, the reported division between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36-40 seems to conflict with this call, for both men went their separate ways to do God's will over an insolvable difference between them!
- C. However, this disagreement could have been avoided had they **followed** the *Lord's directives* with greater **ACCURACY**, a lesson of great importance for us today (as follows):

II. Christ's Gracious Solution To A Humanly-Caused Division, Acts 15:36-40.

- A. Paul and Barnabas had a deep disagreement in planning for a second missionary journey, Acts 15:36-39a:
 1. After some time at the "home" Church in Antioch of Syria, and after their first missionary journey, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they revisit the churches they had established to edify them, 15:36.
 2. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, his cousin (Colossians 4:10) with them in an apparent effort to give him a second opportunity for victory over his initial failure of abandoning Paul and Barnabas to flee home to his mother in Jerusalem, cf. Acts 13:13 (with 12:12); Acts 15:37.
 3. However, Paul did not want to take a man unless he had been first proved (cf. 1 Timothy 3:10; 5:22) and who might actually harm new believers were they to see him flee home again, Acts 15:38.
 4. Consequently, "a sharp disagreement" arose between the two missionaries (Acts 15:39 KJV, ESV, NIV) with no apparent hope of immediate resolution!
- B. Thus, Paul and Barnabas went in different directions on different ministry functions, Acts 15:39b-40:
 1. With their disagreement being so strong, two missionary teams were created: Barnabas took John Mark and returned to his native Cyprus (Acts 15:39b with 4:36-37) to disciple John Mark, and Paul took Silas to visit the believers he and Barnabas had evangelized on their first missionary journey, 15:40a.
 2. The leaders of the Church of Antioch wisely commended Paul and Silas to the grace of God, leaving with the Lord this origination of two missionary outreach teams, Acts 15:40b.
- C. In God's grace, this division did not lead to a break in Christian fellowship, but it ended victoriously:
 1. Shortly before his martyrdom years later, Paul asked Timothy to bring John Mark with him to minister to Paul because John Mark was then profitable to him in the ministry, cf. 2 Timothy 4:6, 11; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978 ed., fn. to 2 Timothy 4:11.
 2. Paul also continued to think highly of Barnabas, referring to him respectfully in 1 Corinthians 9:6 after they had parted company and Paul had evangelized the Corinthians on his second missionary journey!
- D. However, the whole division could have been avoided **HAD** both Paul and Barnabas **INITIALLY followed** the *Lord's directives* back in Acts 13:2 on their first missionary journey:
 1. When the Holy Spirit first told the leaders of the Antioch Church to send "Barnabas and Saul" (called Paul) on the missionary work to which He had called them, He had not mentioned Mark, Acts 13:2.
 2. Nevertheless, Barnabas and Saul had taken along (or let) John Mark accompany them, cf. Acts 13:13 with 15:37-38. This was a *HUMAN* decision by these men that had NOT come from their **PRECISELY FOLLOWING** the *LORD'S COMMAND*!
 3. Thus, when John Mark who had not been ready or called of God for the hard work of missionary outreach, left with the team on their journey, and then had failed there, it created a crisis for the second missionary journey that was solvable only by the painful parting of Paul and Barnabas.

Lesson: *God graciously created two teams to solve a deep division between Paul and Barnabas, and He blessed in the end, but the division could have been avoided had they initially accurately followed God!*

Application: *(1) If deep divisions among believers occur, may we trust God for the solution, and not harbor malice toward others. (2) May we obey Scripture precisely to diffuse opportunities for division!*