

Main Idea: In Acts 15:36-41 two of the most godly people in the book of Acts differed, namely, Paul and Barnabas. There are three scenes in this tense situation. After walking through the story, we’ll talk about five practical implications.

- I. A decision (36)
 - A. Leading people to Christ is only the beginning.
 - B. We must help them grow, too.
 - II. A disagreement (37-38)
 - A. Barnabas had his reasons (37).
 1. He saw the situation through his giftedness.
 2. He saw a brother in need of restoration.
 3. He felt it would be good for Mark if he came.
 - B. Paul had his reasons (38).
 1. He saw the situation through his giftedness, too.
 2. He saw a man who deserted the team.
 3. He thought it would be good for the work if Mark didn’t come.
 - III. A division (39-41)
 - A. The ministry team divided.
 - B. The ministry potential doubled.
 1. God used Barnabas to restore Mark.
 2. God used Paul to advance the work.
- Implications: We can learn five lessons from this...
1. We can be blinded by our strengths.
 2. Disagreements are inevitable.
 3. We need to learn to think of Christ when we disagree.
 4. God can use our disagreements for His glory.
 5. Even when disagreements happen, the work of the church must go on.

As we return to the book of Acts this morning, we’re returning to His story, which is our story. In Acts 1:1, Luke says that in his first book, the gospel of Luke, he “dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach” until he returned to heaven. The word “began” indicates Jesus is still “doing and teaching”. Where? In His church. So Acts is His story, which is our story, of what Jesus is doing and teaching through His church.

According to 1:8, He gave His people the Holy Spirit and power to enable us to “do and teach.” In 1:11 He said He would return for us, a day for which we long. Until then, He is at work, which means we the church are at work. And what is this work?

Read Acts and you see the Lord in action. He is working now through...preaching, godly living, miracle working, the good deeds of His people, the joyful response of His to persecution, church councils, and through intense disagreements and divisions. That’s today’s message.

Scripture Reading: Acts 15:36-41

It seems shocking the first time you see it as a Christian. Frankly, it’s shocking even if you’ve been a Christian awhile, but it’s reality. At times, God’s people disagree.

Sherry and I had our eyes opened to this shortly after we were married. We were married in July, and moved to Grand Rapids in August. I started seminary, and she found a job as a secretary to the faculty at a Christian college. That job was a real answer to prayer. Not only would it provide much needed income, the thought of working at a Christian institution sounded like music to our ears! After having a secretarial job in the

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Acts series at WBC in 2002.

dog-eat-dog, secular world for the previous four years, it was now her privilege to work every day for professors who loved Christ. I was sure it would be the next best thing to having a job in heaven itself.

We both learned something quickly. There are problems everywhere, even at Christian institutions. Now I believe in Christian institutions and support Christian education, but people are people. People have not only different personalities, backgrounds, and expectations, but also different priorities and agendas, yes, even Christian people. Whether the issue is whose syllabus gets typed first, or how you handle payment of overtime, one thing is true. Even God's people can disagree.

It's not necessarily bad to disagree. The issue is what do we do when we disagree. To put it another way, what does the Lord do when His people disagree? What happens to His mission?

We find a painful, yet hope-giving answer to that question at the end of Acts 15. Frankly, I wish Acts 15:36-41 was not in the Bible. Not really, of course, for this is God's Word and it is all good. What I mean is that I wish the event described in this passage had never happened, for it sort of taints our perspective of two wonderful men of God.

Or does it? God preserved this account in the Bible for our benefit. He's showing us how life works, and how He continues to work out His sovereign saving plan even when that happens.

In Acts 15, two choice servants of Christ, two missionaries, two solid friends who both loved Christ, hit a roadblock that produced a very painful outcome, as well as an eternal weight of glory that outshines the pain.

What does God want us to do when we disagree as Christians, at church, in our ministries, in our homes, in our friendships. Today's text helps us answer that.

Again, in Acts 15:36-41 two of the most godly people in the book of Acts differed, namely, Paul and Barnabas. There are three scenes in this tense situation. After walking through the story, we'll talk about five practical implications.

I. A decision (36)

Verse 36 begins, "Some time [KJV 'some days'] later." Later than what? Let's briefly sketch the background of what led up to this. We'll never fully appreciate the disagreement until we put it in its context.

Prior to Acts 15, Barnabas and Paul had had an amazing relationship. They were the best of friends. After Paul became a Christian, Barnabas endorsed him when nobody else would (9:27). Barnabas took Paul under his wings. Barnabas recruited Paul for missionary work in Antioch (11:25).

Barnabas and Paul ministered together for a year in the church in Antioch (11:26). Then together, Barnabas and Paul took a gift from the Christians in Antioch and delivered it to the famine stricken believers in Jerusalem (11:30). Afterwards, they returned together to Antioch, bringing with them Barnabas' nephew John Mark (12:25).

In Acts 13, they were commissioned by the Holy Spirit and the church in Antioch, and sent out on the first official missionary trip. They traveled together to about eight cities in Asia Minor, facing hardship wherever they went.

They stuck by one another when they were run out of Pisidian Antioch (13:50). In Acts 14, they were run out of Iconium together. When the people of Lystra saw the miracle Paul did, they thought Paul and Barnabas were gods and tried to worship them.

Together, they refused that worship, and when Paul was stoned Barnabas stood by him. They didn't give up, but encouraged each other and kept going. They planted churches together (14:21-22). They returned to Antioch and had a missionary conference together (14:27). They stayed a long time in Antioch together (14:28).

Then came a huge test. When the Jewish traditionalists in Judea criticized what was happening up north in Antioch, Barnabas and Paul traveled together to Jerusalem to defend what God was doing (15:2-3). They attended the tense Jerusalem council as partners. The church leaders appointed the two of them to take a letter of commendation back to Antioch, again *together*. While in Antioch, they once again taught the Word of God together (15:35).

Did you notice a common theme in this? Barnabas and Paul had been through a lot together! They'd been close friends for some ten years, having served side by side in the ministry for several of them.² They had walked hundreds of miles together. They had spent literally hundreds of hours preaching together, praying together, planning together, and dreaming together about the great work God would do through them.

But even the best of relationships can be vulnerable. Often, it's not the big things that disrupt the relationship. It can be the little things.

For Paul and Barnabas it happened "after some days (ESV)," according to Luke. The dynamic duo had just conquered the big contention with the Judaizers in Jerusalem, but then were tripped up by a "little" decision. The major doctrinal challenge couldn't do it. What got them was a choice regarding a ministry approach.

That's so often the case today. Two people will fight for the same doctrinal statement, but won't speak to each other because of differences in methodology.

Here was the decision. Paul proposed a plan in verse 36, "Some time later 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.'" The idea itself was great. Paul knew what we so often forget in ministry today...

A. Leading people to Christ is only the beginning. Some ministry workers do just that, it seems. They travel from town to town to town, get people to make decisions, then move on. The goal is numerical growth.

That wasn't Paul's approach. He knew that when we are privileged to lead people to Christ, it's just the beginning of our responsibility.

B. We must help them grow, too. And so he said, "Let's go back." On their first missionary trip, God used them to introduce many people to Christ. "Let's go see how they're doing," Paul suggested. The discipler is responsible for the disciple.

So far, so good. The proposed decision was great. But Barnabas made a suggestion pertaining to implementing the decision that changed the tone.

II. A disagreement (37-38)

Verse 37 says, "Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark." Why did he want to do that? For starters, we can always use an extra hand in ministry tasks, right? And by the way, John Mark was Barnabas's cousin.

I can just see Paul's jaw begin stiffen at the suggestion. Verse 38 states (NIV), "But Paul did not think it wise to take him." Hmmm. It's starting to getting hot in the room.

² Paul was converted around 35 A.D. The disagreement occurred just prior to Paul's second missionary journey in A.D. 49.

Why did Paul think it not wise to take John Mark along? The text continues, “Because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.”

Paul is remembering an incident that happened three years earlier during their first missionary trip.³ Remember Acts 13:13? John Mark went AWOL. Was he homesick? Did the dangers of missionary life frighten him? We don't know since the text doesn't say.

What we do know is this. When it came to the present significance of that past event, Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement on their hands. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark. Paul didn't.

Do godly people ever differ? Yes they do. In this case both men had their reasons.

A. Barnabas had his reasons (37). I think three factors influenced him.

1. *He saw the situation through his giftedness.* We all do, you know. Barnabas had the gift of encouragement (Acts 4:36). He loved to restore the underdog, the outcast. That's why he took a risk with Paul when others held him at arm's length. Because of the way God wired him, he was able to see what others didn't see. In the case of Mark...

2. *He saw a brother in need of restoration.* What Paul said was true. Mark *had* gone AWOL. But that was *then*, and Mark's been on the shelf since then. Today's a new day. It's time for Mark to get back in the game.

Reminds me of high school basketball. Once the opening tip went up, my high school basketball coach was all business. If I threw a pass out of bounds, I'd get a stern look. If I did it again, I'd probably get benched. But in time Coach Kauffman would put me back in the game. He knew the difference between teaching a player a lesson and demoralizing him.

Barnabas would have made a good coach. For him, the bottom line was this...

3. *He felt it would be good for Mark if he came.* Mark needs to start over. He needs to face his failure and get going again. And it's our job to help him, Paul.

To which Paul said, “I don't think it's a good idea.”

B. Paul had his reasons (38). In Paul's case the reasons were threefold.

1. *He saw the situation through his giftedness, too.* Whereas Barnabas had the gift of encouragement, Paul was a visionary, an apostle to the Gentiles. By God's design he was a gifted teacher, a very logical man, a *thinker*. When he made a decision he looked at the facts and took action. And what were the facts here? Short and simple...

2. *He saw a man who deserted the team.* “Come on, Barnabas! Look at Mark's track record! Don't you remember? When we needed him, he left us high and dry in Perga. He didn't keep his word. He didn't finish what he started.”

And so for Paul the bottom line was this...

3. *He thought it would be good for the work if Mark didn't come.* I don't believe Paul's motive was personal. He had nothing against Mark as a person. Look at the last two words of verse 38. “The work.” It was “the work” Paul was thinking of. “Barnabas, the Lord has given us a job to do, to proclaim Christ to the world. This work is so important that we need to be all in, or not at all. There's no room for half-hearted workers.”

You may be thinking that Paul was a little too harsh, and maybe you're right. But let me ask you a few questions. Would you loan more money to a man who still hasn't paid

³ Luke devoted only a passing remark to it in Acts 13:13, “From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.”

you back for the \$1,000 he borrowed from you last year? Would you loan your car again to a teen in our youth group who wrecked it the first time around? Would you let your sister's son use your condo in Florida if he trashed the place on spring break last year? Do you still think Paul was overreacting?⁴

I get the sense from reading Acts that something else contributed to this disagreement. It may be an overgeneralization, but I believe the record supports it. When it came to decision-making, Barnabas tended to *feel*, while Paul tended to *think*.

Barnabas was a "feeler." That's what made him such a good encourager. He felt for the needy Christians in Acts 4 and sold his land. He felt for Paul in Acts 9 and took a risk in his behalf. He felt for the ostracized Christians in Antioch and went to bat for them. He was a feeler, and that can be a good thing.

Several years ago while attending a class in Chicago, I heard Stuart Briscoe make an observation that struck me as being profound and true. Briscoe, a well known author and pastor in Milwaukee, said, "Our pews are full of people who think they cannot do what they have never attempted."

He's right. John Mark was a man with potential. Barnabas saw it. And Barnabas was determined to develop it. He felt for John Mark.

What about Paul? He was a careful *thinker*. He didn't think it wise to take him. Not that Paul was a perfectionist. He was very patient with unregenerate people—that's why he kept reaching out to them even after they rejected him over and over. And he exhibited great tolerance with young believers—as his work with the Corinthians verifies. But he had very little sympathy for the unfaithful, particularly for those who hindered the church's mission by being undependable.

To put it another way, Paul was a thinker who had feelings. Barnabas was a feeler who had thoughts.

Which is best? The church needs both. But both have their pitfalls. Wiersbe wrote this, "Paul looked at people and asked, 'What can they do for God's work?' while Barnabas looked at people and asked, 'What can God's work do for them?' Both questions are important to the Lord's work, and sometimes it is difficult to keep things balanced."⁵

How do you look at people, particularly those who've let you down in the past? You can't be involved in ministry without addressing that question. In reality, you can't live a God-honoring Christian life without addressing that question.

How am I going to treat this person who let me down? Of course, when I'm allowing the gospel to shape my view of that person, it changes everything. The truth is, I am that person. I let God down, yet what did He do? He came after me. He restored me through the gift of His Son, who died for me, an undeserving, unfaithful sinner.

So now I have opportunity to put the gospel on display in the way I treat the person who let me down. Is it hard? Yes. But the same God who saved me by His grace now enables me to do hard things that display His grace.

I'm not sure who was right. It does seem to me that both Paul and Barnabas had other options that day. So often we lock ourselves into thinking there are only two alternatives, when usually there are several.

⁴ C. Swindoll develops this thought in *Paul*, p. 175. Paul might well have quoted Proverbs 25:19 to Barnabas, "Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in times of trouble."

⁵ Wiersbe, p. 466.

Paul could have said, “Not yet, Barnabas. He’s not ready for the big trip *yet*. But you’re right. We need to do something for Mark. Why don’t we take him on a trial run to Tarsus first? Then we’ll evaluate how he’s holding up. If he does well, he can go with us the rest of the way.”

Barnabas could have responded, “You’ve got a point, Paul. And maybe we should take someone else along, too, just in case Mark struggles again. That way the work won’t be hindered like it was last time.”

There’s something I find striking by its absence in the text. There is no mention that Paul and Barnabas *prayed* about this decision. Nor that they asked the church for its prayer support and counsel. Maybe they did, but maybe this time they did what I so often do when things seem black and white.

When you make decisions, do you pray and seek the Lord’s will? I mean *really* pray? As in, “Lord, we need your mind in this matter. What would please You the most?” Again, maybe these godly men prayed together fervently to know the mind of their Savior. Or maybe, they just made the decision based on what they felt or thought best.

The decision led to a disagreement. Sadly, the disagreement led to...

III. A division (39-41)

Next to Luther and Calvin, one of the most important leaders in the Protestant Reformation was a man named Ulrich Zwingli. Zwingli was once a Catholic priest, but like Luther, experienced a transformation by the power of the Scriptures around the year 1516. He became a pastor in Zurich, Switzerland. Zwingli was committed to the authority of Scripture and to biblical reform in the church. He was a great man of God.

Yet history records he had his share of disagreements with other godly men.⁶ One was a momentous dispute with Luther over the issue of the Lord's Supper. And an even greater clash broke out with a man named Felix Manz. Manz, who also lived in Zurich, was a leader of a group known as the Anabaptists (ancestors of the modern day Mennonites). Manz and the Anabaptists believed in baptism by immersion for those who were converted. Zwingli believed and practiced infant baptism. What's more, Zwingli had political power, and declared it illegal to "re-baptize" anyone who was already baptized as an infant. Manz was convinced that Scripture taught otherwise, and defied Zwingli's order. Do you remember what happened?

Zwingli said (my paraphrase), "Okay Mr. Manz, you think baptism is so important. I'll baptize you for good." And Zwingli ordered Manz to be tied up, taken to a body of water, pushed in, and drowned. When he was being led out to his execution, his mother and brother met him, and admonished him to be steadfast to the end. His final words were heard, "Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."⁷

Throughout history, godly people have disagreed. And godly people disagree today. The problem is not disagreeing. That’s inevitable in this sin-cursed world. The problem is what we do when we disagree.

Watch what happened with Barnabas and Paul. Verse 39 says, “They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.” Two things happened that day.

A. The ministry team divided. Right down the middle.

⁶ *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Elwell, 1204

⁷ *The Reformation*, Hillerbrand, 234

The KJV puts it this way, "And the contention was so sharp between them that they departed asunder one from the other." The word "contention" is a graphic word (*paroxusmos* in the Greek). We get the word "paroxysm" from it. I think of what happens when you pour paroxide on a wound. It boils and bubbles and burns.

Sometimes we get the idea that there were no "church fights" in the first century church. William LaSor reminds us (239), "The men and women of the Early Church were the same kind of human beings that you and I are. If God hadn't been watching over His Church, it would have disappeared quickly!"

But He was watching over His church. That's the point of the story. More about that in a moment. But...

Do you think Paul and Barnabas raised their voices with each other? Or grew cold towards each other? I certainly want to be careful here. These are two heroes of the faith, upon whose shoulders we stand. But the text says (ESV), "There arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other."

Strong language. Separated from each other. Keep in mind that in the book of Acts Luke is telling a story, telling us what happened, not what *should* have happened.

This dispute led to broken fellowship. It seemed like the only solution for these two veteran servants of Christ was to divide the ministry territory and part company. And that's what they did.

Verse 39—"Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus." That was his home country.

Verses 40-41—"But Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."

So was Barnabas wrong for wanting to take Mark along? The text doesn't say, nor will I. Personally, I think both men were right, *and* both men were wrong. My opinion (and it's only that) is this. *Both were wrong and right*. Barnabas was wrong for running from an unresolved problem. He took Mark and sailed to Cyprus. I don't doubt his motive. He removed himself from the church in Antioch because he didn't want to be divisive. But nonetheless, he left an unresolved problem behind him. And Paul was wrong for not listening to Barnabas, for not giving ear to his insight, for not insisting, "We must work through this!" From another perspective, *both were right*. Verse 40 says that the church "commended" Paul as he left. But history bears record that Barnabas did restore John Mark. Mark wrote the second gospel. And eventually, even Paul recognized his usefulness in ministry (2 Tim 4:11).

But that's my opinion. The text is short and simple, Barnabas and Paul separated. Was it a total waste? Providentially, *no*. Why not? Because now there were two missionary teams instead of one! As I said, *two* things happened on that day. First, the ministry team divided. And because it did, second...

B. The ministry potential doubled. The two men split up the territory covered on the first trip. Barnabas took the first part, the Cyprus portion. Paul, taking Silas, headed west and covered the second portion, the cities in Asia Minor.

The irony of it all is this. Both men got what they wanted. Think of the outcome.

1. *God used Barnabas to restore Mark.* And...

2. *God used Paul to advance the work.* Wiersbe is right, "God changes His workmen, but His work goes right on...If God had to depend on perfect people to accomplish His work, He would never get anything done."⁸

Where's the Lord in all this? The answer is, He's *doing and teaching*, just as He always is, making Himself known in and through His church. That's true in Acts 15 as much as it's true in Acts 13 and Acts 16.

That's true at WBC, in 2020, just as it was in 1998. This is a good time to re-tell our story. The Lord brought WBC into existence in 1878. He brought Sherry and me into the story in 1987. In 1990 He enabled this flock of about 145 people to build this new \$600,000 auditorium, classroom, and office facility, and soon after we started growing. We were "the place to be" in Wheelersburg, and grew to around 220 or 230. One Easter we had 350 people attend.

Then 1998 happened. It's amazing what four numbers can bring to mind. Sort of like saying, 1929. Or 1941. For me, 1998 is a year I will never forget, the most painful ministry year of my life...out of which the most fruit has come for God's glory.

It's a long story, but the short of it is that in February God's people differed. The church learned that the combined board was considering granting me a three month sabbatical break that following summer. I had shared with the leadership that I wasn't burned out, but was weary, and while many pastors leave at that point, I didn't sense my ministry was done at WBC. So the deacons presented a motion to grant a love gift to its pastor of a sabbatical break.

Before the vote took place, there were meetings to address people's questions. There was very little talk about the sabbatical possibility, and lots of debate about what we like and don't like about our pastor and church.

God's people differed, and the sabbatical was the catalyst that brought a host of differences to the surface. Differences over Bible versions, and methodology, and the doctrines of grace, and whether we should practice church discipline, and sing with the overhead projector, and several other differences.

When the vote took place, forty percent of the congregation voted against it. I remember the morning after the vote pulling out my preaching calendar that I'd mapped out *before* the controversy began, to see what I had scheduled to preach that coming Sunday. At the time we were going through Romans, and I saw the upcoming text and sermon title. It said, "What to Do When Christians Differ," part one, Romans 14:1-4.

I remember laughing out loud in my study, not because it was funny but thinking, "How in the world, Lord, can I preach this message when people are so upset?"

Then I scanned to the following weeks. The next week's sermon would be: "What to do when Christians Differ," part two, Romans 14:5-12. The next week, "Learning to Major on Major Issues," Romans 14:13-18. The next week, "Working at Unity," Romans 14:19-23. The next week, "Pleasing Others in a Self-pleasing World," Romans 15:1-6. The next week, "Learning to Accept One Another," Romans 15:7-13.

So I reached out to the deacons. "Men, this is my preaching schedule. As you know, it was set long before this controversy we're in now, but if I preach these messages, I think people will think I'm trying to force my agenda."

The brothers said to me, "Everyone knows you just preach through the Bible. It may be hard, but you need to go ahead and preach those messages."

⁸ Wiersbe, p. 466.

And so I did in the months of March and April of 1998. And people started leaving, brothers and sisters that we loved dearly. A few were divisive, but most who left simply and sincerely differed with the direction the church was going. In three waves, over the next two years we lost a third of our congregation.

We went from being the place to be, to the place people didn't want to be in this community. And yet, that's not the whole story, because though painful, 1998 is part of a bigger story that our Sovereign Lord is writing for His glory at WBC and for our sister churches too, in this community and around the world, frankly.

When God's people differ, and they will at times, it doesn't mean the Lord is done with His church. Amazing things happened as a result of our 1998 experience.

For starters, most of our brothers and sisters who left WBC ended up in a couple of sister churches, who benefitted from their gifts. Several eventually became a vital part of a couple of new church plants that continue to advance the gospel in our community. In God's kindness, some have returned to us, for which we're grateful.

And the Lord has made it clear He's not finished with WBC. The year after the split, our general fund giving was actually up \$1,000. We were smaller, but very united in our purpose and philosophy of ministry. We knew what kind of church the Lord wanted us to be—a God-centered, gospel-centered church, with a high view of the Scriptures, committed to preaching the whole counsel of His Word (even the controversial parts), seeking not just to produce decisions for Christ but to make disciples of Christ, locally and worldwide.

We looked like a freshly pruned vine at first, not much to look at initially, kind of a stubby look frankly. But then our Heavenly Gardener started sending fruit to the vine.

He opened up our biblical counseling and discipleship training ministry in 2000, and in the past twenty years He's privileged us to equip some 500 people from about 50 area churches with our "Biblical Answers for the Problems of Life" courses.

Also in the past two decades He's allowed us to provide free biblical counseling for hundreds and hundreds of hurting people, and we've seen marriages restored, and people struggling with depression and anxiety find hope. And on top of that, many of our sister churches are now providing similar help with godly servants we've been privileged to train.

In the early 2000s the Lord gave us the joy of becoming a sending church once again⁹. That means He enabled us to send from our own number individuals to make Christ known to the nations. We sent Kristen Wawro to Indonesia, and I had the privilege to visit her there in 2005. We sent Gary and Nancy Storm to do Assisting Christian Camping Globally in Ukraine and Slovakia, and Erin Wawro to be part of a church planning team in south Brazil (which resulted in the salvation of our dear brother Douglas Goncalves who now serves with us here as Director of our Youth Ministries as well as being part of our Scioto Hills ministry). Just last year He gave us the joy of sending Jade Burley to the Dominican Republic to make disciples of Jesus with Freedom International.

We have Shane Henry serving as a pastor in Sharpsburg, Kentucky, Aaron and Laurie Cook at Cedarville University, Chuck and Amber Spears with World Vision, and on and on. When you start reflecting on the fruit, it's hard to know where to stop.

He enabled us to purchase the building across the street and start our community center ministry. He's allowed us to ordain Matt Wilson whose gifts are benefitting us

⁹We were privileged to become a sending church back in the 1960s when we sent Bob Litteral to PNG.

tremendously as associate pastor, whose leadership has resulted in vital community group ministry, and much more.

And not only are we debt free, but our general fund income through July is \$41,000 above our budgeted need (budget is \$119,000, income is \$160,000). And these past two Sundays, the Lord has brought 22 first-time visitors to us.

So what happens when God's people differ? We see it in the text, don't we? A ministry team divides, with all the pain and frustration that involves; and then, a ministry potential multiplies. That's what we've seen at WBC too. To God be the glory. The One who said, "I will build my church," continues to do just that.

Implications: We can learn five lessons from this...

What do we learn about how to handle disagreements from the incident with Barnabas and Paul? I see five lessons here. By the way, these lessons apply to all types of relationships. They can help us in our marriage relationships, in our relationships with our children or parents or siblings, as well as in our relationships in the church.

1. *We can be blinded by our strengths.* Barnabas focused on the good of Mark. For Paul it was the good of the work. We all tend to see things through the lens of our gifts and backgrounds. It's true. Your strengths can become your blindspot.

If you have the gift of mercy you'll probably be great at feeling for the person who's hurting, but you might fail to be firm when necessary. If God has given you the gift of knowledge you'll probably be great at articulating truth in simple ways, but the downside is that you may have trouble applying truth to real life.

It's been said that all Christians walk with limps. That's a key reason why you need the church. There's not one of us that has all the gifts. The Lord has distributed the gifts to His body, the church. If you isolate yourself from the church, you will become warped. If you are living like an island right now, you are in great danger.

2. *Disagreements are inevitable.* Relationships can be fragile, including the best of them. Even godly husbands and wives disagree with each other from time to time. We are all different. We see things from different perspectives and backgrounds. That's true in marriage, in business, in the church. I can't explain it but it's a reality. God sometimes uses people who disagree with me!

So the question is, what do you do when you find yourself in a disagreement? Do you dig in and prepare for battle? Do you run? What should we do?

3. *We need to learn to think of Christ when we disagree.* There's only been one person who responded perfectly to every situation. It was Jesus Christ. He always did what was right, so much so that He was willing to die in our place in obedience to His Father. He died for us so we could be reconciled to the Father. But that's not all. Through His death we have the power to experience reconciliation with one another. He conquered death and is a *living* Savior.

Jesus Christ is our Savior. If you are a Christian this morning, it's because Christ has reconciled you to God. And He's also intent on reconciling us to each other. So when we disagree, He wants us to think of Him. He wants us to be like Him, to disagree in love.

The world doesn't know how to do this. They can't do this. They get even. They keep score of wrongs. But we must not.

What do you do when someone disagrees with you? Do you attack them? It bothers me not just a little when I hear the way some Christians talk about others who hold

different positions. I hope we have strong convictions, but how do we talk about those whose convictions don't agree with ours? If they are in Christ, they are our brothers, and we will spend eternity together. So when we disagree now, we need to learn to think of Christ, and resolve to please *Him*.

4. *God can use our disagreements for His glory.* How good it is to know this!

Some of us this morning have the baggage of a wrecked relationship in our past. We think God can't use us anymore. Beloved, trust in God's grace.

How do you think the split in Acts 15 affected the believers in Antioch? Remember, Paul and Barnabas were two of their spiritual heroes. Were they hurt? No doubt. But notice something. The work of the church went on. The dispute between Paul and Barnabas didn't paralyze the church from its mission.

Verse 40 says the new missionary journey was "commended by the brethren." And three chapters later, in 18:22, we find the church at Antioch was still going strong for Christ. Why?

They knew that the success of a church does not rise and fall on the shoulders of one person. It didn't in Antioch. Acts 15:35 indicates that Paul and Barnabas taught the Word at Antioch. But "many others" did to. And though two leaders disagreed, the work went on. The Word prevailed.

Answer this. Is God in control of everything? Yes. Is He in control of our disagreements with people? Yes, He is. That means, amongst other things, once a division has occurred, it's *time to move on*.

Some people—actually, *many* people—brood over past conflict. They never get over it. If you read all of Paul's letters after this event, you'll find not one slam against Barnabas. Nor any indication that Barnabas undermined Paul's ministry. To the contrary, Paul spoke favorably of Barnabas in 1 Corinthians 9:6. And the fact that John Mark later assisted Paul indicates that Barnabas didn't badmouth his former partner, but did whatever he could to support him.

I can't leave this point without asking you a question. Have *you* gotten over it? Perhaps you're still stinging from an unhealed wound in the past. Maybe the gash was inflicted years ago, but the sore festers to this day. I urge you to face it right now. No, you can't undo the past, but you can choose to stop living in it. Maybe you weren't at fault. Maybe you were. Maybe you both were.

Perhaps the wound is a parent you locked horns with, or a child that locked horns with you. Maybe it's a friendship that went sour. Possibly it's an ex-spouse. It could be a former church member.

My friend, if you need to seek forgiveness, seek it. If you need to grant forgiveness, give it. If you need help, get it, for the grace of Jesus is sufficient. But it's time to move on.

You say, "But I can't. It hurts too bad." Granted, *you* can't. But God can. He knows how to use past pain for His glory in the present. Just look at the cross of His Son.

5. *Even when disagreements happen, the work of the church must go on.* And it will go on, says the Lord of lords. The question for us is, "Will we be a part of it?"

Closing Song: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" #43, verses 1 & 3