

Sincere Strong Disagreements

Ponder: How should you handle differences of opinion?

Scripture: “Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work” (Acts 15:37-38)

Who was right – Barnabas or Paul? I’ve actually witnessed brethren debate that question rather strenuously! In fact, however, Scripture reveals nothing about the Lord’s preference, if indeed He had one.

It’s easy to understand both men’s convictions. Barnabas’ very name means Son of Encouragement. He was determined to give his kinsman, John Mark, an opportunity to correct his error of bailing out during the first missionary journey. After all, everyone makes mistakes.

Paul, however, insisted that they should not take John Mark. Effective evangelism is demanding; John Mark’s dereliction of duty had only made it more difficult. They absolutely did not need a repeat performance!

“Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. So Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God” (Acts 15:39-40). Though “sharp contention” makes us uneasy, let us notice two positive aspects of this incident.

First, neither Barnabas nor Paul accused the other of being unfaithful to God, nor did they withdraw Christian fellowship from each other. Their vigorous disagreement involved no doctrinal or moral issues. They simply couldn’t work together in this particular endeavor at this particular time.

Second, now two evangelistic teams went to work rather than one. Silas accompanied Paul, and they picked up Timothy on the way. The Lord gave great increase as they planted and watered the seed of the kingdom.

Let us learn from Barnabas and Paul! Doctrinal and moral issues affect Christian fellowship. But in matters of judgment even strong disagreement must not be allowed to damage or destroy the bond we share in Christ.

Hymn: “Blest Be The Tie”

Prayer: Loving Father, we thank and praise You for the precious fellowship we enjoy with You and with each other through Jesus. Help us, we pray, not to mar that relationship by treating our personal judgment as though it were Your word. Keep us humble. In Jesus’ name, Amen.