

## Growing in Grace

### Lesson # 9

#### “Graciously Disagreeing and Pressing On”

##### Acts 15:36-41

[Taken from The Grace Awakening by Charles Swindoll. (Dallas: Word, 1990)]

One of the marks of maturity is the ability to disagree without becoming disagreeable. That takes GRACE! Handling disagreements with tact is the crowning achievement of grace.

You would think that the church is the one place where you could find; tolerance, tact, open-mindedness, and plenty of room for disagreement. But it's not...the doors are often closed to differing viewpoints. More often than not, these disagreements give rise to dissension. Christians disagree in such a blunt, tactless, and even sometimes sarcastic ways.

Some advice from scripture: Ephesians 4:29 – *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”* (NAS) *“That it may give grace to those who hear.”* WHAT A GOAL! What an incentive to clean up our critical attitudes and speak the truth in love! Rudeness is never appropriate and without exception kindness is!

#### I. THINGS WE AGREE ON REGARDING DISAGREEMENTS

##### Four Facts

A. Disagreements are inevitable. Pick any subject and you can be sure there will be people sitting on either side of the fence. But that's what freedom is all about—respecting other people's differences. Tolerance does not mean that we have to change our theological stance but it does mean that we have to leave room for others with differing opinions.

B. Even the Godly will sometimes disagree. For some, it is difficult to understand - or even accept—that two people who both love the Lord can stand diametrically opposed on certain issues. Godly people, who love the Lord and want to live by the Bible can hold different opinions on theological issues.

C. In Every Disagreement, There Will Be The Same Two Ingredients: an issue and various viewpoints. The issue involves principles and is usually objective. The viewpoints involve personalities and are typically subjective. The main problem with disagreements is the differences in points of view. Understanding these facts will help you deal more effectively with disagreements in the future.

D. In Many Disagreements Both Sides Have Validity. Differ-ing viewpoints are not so much a matter of *“I am right and you are wrong!”* as they are a matter of *“I see it from this perspective, and you see it from a different perspective.”* Both sides in any disagree-ment have

both strengths and weaknesses.

## II. A DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN TWO GODLY LEADERS

Consider the confrontation between Paul & Barnabas in recorded in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas took John Mark with them on this first missionary journey (13:5). But when they reached Pamphylia, the honeymoon was over and John bailed out (Acts 13:13). When the going got tough, John Mark got gone. His timing couldn't have been worse. Now Paul & Barnabas had to carry all of the gear through the mosquito-infested mountains. This was where Paul was beaten and stoned and left for dead a little later on in the journey.

A. The Critical Issue: Should a Person who has defected from the work be given a second chance? (Acts 15:36-41).

*"Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing." (37) Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. (38) 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. (39) Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; (40) but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. (41) And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches."*

Remember: in every argument there are two ingredients:

(1) An objective issue: In this case it was "Should a person who defects from a mission and leaves people in the lurch be given a second chance on a similar mission?" And (2) Subjective viewpoints: In this case Paul's viewpoint was, "No, absolutely not." and Barnabas viewpoint was, "Yes, by all means."

### B. The Opposing Viewpoints

Both Paul and Barnabas was each fully convinced he was right, because each viewed the issue from a differing vantage point.

- Barnabas was people-oriented
- Barnabas was a man of compassion
- Barnabas was a builder of men
- Barnabas looked at the issue from the viewpoint of the overall good of the man, in this case, Mark
- Paul was more task-oriented
- Paul was a man of conviction
- Paul was a planter of churches
- Paul looked at the issue from the viewpoint of the overall good of the ministry

A close look at the Scripture text reveals the intensity of Paul's feelings. The Greek word translated "departed" in v. 38, is translated in some versions as "deserted" and is the term from which we get the word apostatized. In Paul's mind, John Mark had done more than jumped ship; he had apostatized. Was Paul being harsh, while Barnabas greathearted? Proverbs 25:19 – "Like a bad tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in times of trouble." (NIV)

The Old Testament Commentator Delitzsch amplified this verse, *“He who in a time of need makes a faithless man his ground of confidence, is like one who seeks to bite with a broken tooth, and which he finally crushes, and one who supports himself on a shaking leg, and thus stumbles and falls.”* [Proverbs 25:19 amplified by Franz Delitzsch, Proverbs, in Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans. James Martin (reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), vol. 6, p. 165. as quoted by Charles Swindoll, in *The Grace Awakening*. (Dallas: Word, 1990) p. 183]

A. T. Robertson stated it this way; *“No one can rightly blame Barnabas for giving his cousin, John Mark a second chance, nor Paul for fearing to risk him again. One’s judgment may go with Paul but one’s heart goes with Barnabas.”* [A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament, The Acts for the Apostles*. Vol. 3 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 241 as quoted by Charles Swindoll. *The Grace Awakening* (Dallas: Word, 1990) p. 186.]

But Acts 15:39 tells us that, *“Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another.”* The Greek word for “contention” is literally paroxysm and means *“sharp disagreement.”* Such a rift resulted from Paul and Barnabas’ disagreement that the torn relationship could not be easily mended. The final outcome was that *they parted company.”*

### C. The Permanent Separation

As far as we know they never ministered together again. If you take a map and study where each went you will see that they traveled in opposite directions. Acts 15:39 says, *“... And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; (40) but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. (41) And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”*

Paul and Barnabas had a long history together. It was Barnabas who had introduced the converted Paul to the apostles. We do not want to minimize this conflict. It was painful, but all is not lost. Just as a violent storm leaves a nourishing rain in its wake, so did this disagreement. Who knows what ministries arose in Cyprus and blossomed in the regions beyond because of the new ministry team of Barnabas and John Mark? Furthermore, it was John Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark.

Time eventually healed the wounds. Later in his life, Paul wrote favorably of Barnabas. No grudges were held. He even wrote favorably of John Mark. Later Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:11 – *“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”* (NIV) The best part of this story is that both of them got over their disagreement. In too many cases, the battles go on and on, long after the dust of the original conflict is settled. Paul and Barnabas didn’t spend the rest of their lives getting back at each other—that takes GRACE!

CONCLUSION: MODELING GRACE THROUGH DISAGREEABLE TIMES

1. Always leave room for an opposing viewpoint. Sometimes, these opposing viewpoints will even allow us to see things in a better light. Don't assume you're right and everybody else is wrong.

2. If an argument must occur, don't engage in character assassination. Character assassination is when impugn the character of a person who disagrees with you by suggesting that anyone who disagrees with you can't be right with God, or they are stupid or lazy, etc!

3. If you don't get your way, get over it and get on with life. If you wind up on the short end of the stick in a congregational vote, don't take your ball and pout all the way home. Everybody gets ONE vote. And be careful that you don't criticize your church to your lost friends or relatives, you will be inviting to attend should be building the church up to and inviting to attend with you.

4. Sometimes the best solution is a separation. The situation with Paul and Barnabas could not be resolved so they decided to go their separate ways. If separation is the best solution, do it GRACIOUSLY! If you can't resolve your conflict in a particular ministry then you may need to move, but there is no support for you trying to drag as many people with you as you can. Separation is never easy, but it may be God's way of moving you on to another dimension of ministry. That new ministry may be the mountaintop experience of your life. Separation is merely the valley you have to go through to get there. Sometimes God uses a major disagreement between two capable servants of His to spread the Gospel in different directions.