



Sermon Series: Acts

Sermon Title: Different Roads, Same Mission

Date: 8/2/2026

Acts 15:36-41

Disagreement tests love, but it must never destroy it.

Paul and Barnabas were about as close as two ministry partners could be. Barnabas vouched for Paul when the church was still afraid of him. He recruited Paul to help lead in Antioch. Together they survived beatings, riots, and a nearly disastrous first missionary journey. So when these two men have a sharp disagreement and part ways, it's tempting to read it as a spiritual failure. But Acts 15 shows us something different: disagreement tests love, but it must never destroy it.

1. This Wasn't a Truth Fight. It Was a Wisdom Fight.

A few verses earlier in this same chapter, the church faced a true theological dispute at the Jerusalem council - whether Gentiles needed to keep the law of Moses to be saved. That question had a right answer, and the church worked through it together. Paul and Barnabas's disagreement is different. It's a wisdom fight - a judgment call where two godly people look at the same situation and land in different places.

Barnabas wanted to bring John Mark on their next trip; Mark was family to him (**Colossians 4:10**), and Barnabas had already proven what grace toward a risky person looked like when he vouched for Paul. Paul disagreed - not because Mark's character was bad, but because of Mark's track record. Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and hadn't finished the work. Both men were protecting something true and good. That's what makes the sharp disagreement in verse 39 so striking: it was a real blowup between two men who had survived riots together.

2. Disagree Without Disliking

God wasn't caught off guard by the split, and he didn't sit it out either. Instead of one missionary team, there were now two - Barnabas took Mark

to Cyprus, and Paul took Silas through Syria and Cilicia. Two coastlines reached instead of one. God didn't need Paul and Barnabas to agree in order to use them; he worked through two stubborn, godly friends and ran the mission in two directions at once.

As a culture, we're losing the ability to disagree with someone and still appreciate them. Disagreement itself has started to feel like proof that the other person is dangerous or not worth staying close to. That's not what's happening in Acts 15. Paul holds his position without tearing down Mark's character, and both men keep caring about the mission without treating each other as the enemy.

3. Hold the Line, Keep the Door Open

Scripture never gives us a reconciliation scene between Paul and Barnabas - no apology on the page. But years later, Paul writes about Barnabas as a respected coworker, and he asks for Mark by name, calling him useful for ministry. Their fight didn't get the last word.

So what do you do with a disagreement like this? First, figure out what kind of fight you're in. If it's a truth issue - something core to who Jesus is - hold the line. If it's a wisdom issue, hold your opinion loosely; a godly person can land somewhere else and still be faithful. Second, ask what good the other person is protecting before you write them off. Third, remember Paul's words: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (**Romans 12:18**). Sometimes that means creating distance for a season while you keep praying blessing over the relationship. That's not weakness - it's what keeps your heart from turning bitter while the distance is still there.

Paul and Barnabas may never have traveled together again, but real affection outlasted the blowup. God wasn't thrown off by their fight - he ran right through it. Disagreement tests love, but it must never destroy it. This week, think of one relationship where disagreement has cooled things off, and take one step - a prayer, a message, an honest conversation - to keep the door open.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Paul and Barnabas were close friends and ministry partners before this conflict. Why do you think it's important to know their history before reading about their falling out?**
- 2. What's the difference between a 'truth fight' and a 'wisdom fight', and why does that distinction matter when you're in a disagreement with someone?**
- 3. Both Paul and Barnabas were protecting something true and good about Mark, just from different angles. Can you think of a disagreement where both sides had a legitimate concern?**
- 4. Read Romans 12:18. What does it look like practically to 'live at peace' with someone when you still disagree with them?**
- 5. Is there a relationship in your life right now where disagreement has created distance? What's one step you could take this week to keep the door open?**