

WHEN PRIORITIES CLASH

“They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord.”

—ACTS 15:39-40

What happens when personalities collide, priorities clash and both parties are convinced in principle they are right? Both Paul and Barnabas were good men, legendary heroes of the New Testament Church, and had worked together for years. But good men fall out.

Paul was adamantly opposed to bringing Mark along on their second missionary journey because he had abandoned the first one. Barnabas, however, insisted Mark come, and it became such a sharp dispute that Paul and Barnabas parted ways. These are two conscientious men, wanting to do the right thing and are faced with an issue many people in leadership roles are faced with. Is the work bigger than the individuals performing it, or are the individuals more important than the work? In other words, do we compromise the work for the sake of caring for an individual on the task, or does the importance of the work override the lack of ability in that individual?

Paul places the work first and Barnabas the individual first. Paul is a straight shooter, direct, focused and committed. He's a 'Type A' personality and a task-orientated man. Barnabas is people orientated. His name means 'Son of Encouragement'. He looks after the underdog; a caring, nurturing, pastoral role. He had played that role in Paul's life, and wanted to do the same for Mark.

The big question is who is right? Both Paul and Barnabas stood their ground, consistent with their temperaments, personalities and backgrounds. In Romans 14, Paul talks about the difference in the way one person thinks from another, but if they are conscientiously doing this as “unto the Lord”, they are both right. When both parties are acting out of a genuine trust in the Lord, then Paul says, “Let each one follow the path they believe is right.” If Paul had been like Barnabas, perhaps he would never have blazed a trail through Europe, and if Barnabas had been like Paul, he may never have gone to Tarsus to enlist Paul in the church at Antioch, and we might never have had the Gospel of Mark.

Most of us prefer a neatly connected story where there is either black or white, but sometimes we need to live with a little grey. The message here is that personality is not obliterated when we come to Christ. We need different personalities and perspectives as long as we live conscientiously before God. Rather than being a threat to relationships, it can deepen and enrich them. Paul and Mark eventually reconciled and became close fellow workers again in Asia Minor. It is a matter of respecting our opposition, and allowing the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be in charge of the bigger picture.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, grant me your wisdom to make good decisions and the patience and understanding to accept conflicting views. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: Have I ever met with opposition from others in my work with God and how did I respond?