

July 9th – Disagreeing Without Derailing

“Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And 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)

After the church’s victory over false doctrine at the Jerusalem Council, Paul desired to go back and revisit the churches that he and Barnabas had established on their first missionary journey around 48 AD. It had been three years since they had last visited with their brothers and sisters in Christ. When Paul indicated his desire to Barnabas, he was also eager to return but with one stipulation – Barnabas wanted to “take with them John called Mark” (Acts 15:37).

The Bible identifies John Mark as the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10) and traditionally he is also seen as the man who penned the Gospel of Mark. It’s understandable why Barnabas would want to take his cousin on a second missionary journey, but there was a problem. John Mark had abandoned Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey and returned to Jerusalem. The Bible doesn’t tell us exactly why John Mark left the disciples – only that he left them both “high and dry.”

“Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them” (38). The contention became so sharp that they parted company – Paul carried on with Silas, and Barnabas took off with John Mark. But, the good news is that they disagreed without derailing the mission of the church. Disagreement is part of the human experience, even in the church! But our disagreements should never keep us from seeking reconciliation and continuing the work of the Gospel. Because Paul and Barnabas disagreed like brothers in Christ, the Gospel spread even further than before.