

Boyce Mouton
19559 Ibis Lane
Carthage, Mo. 64836
(417) 358-5503

BARNABAS AND SAUL

“As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” (Acts 13:2)

“And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.” (Acts 15:36-40)

Fact # 1 - The Holy Spirit selected Barnabas and Saul as co-labourers for a special work.

Fact # 2 - In less than three years they disagreed so sharply that they separated and never travelled together again.

Fact # 3 - Both Barnabas and Saul, later known as Paul, set off in different directions and the church at Antioch did not seem to influence or interfere with their decisions.

In the light of these three facts, let us propose three questions.

Question # 1 - Why did the Holy Spirit select men to work together who would disagree so sharply and separate so quickly?

Question # 2 - Did the church at Antioch have any “authority” over Barnabas and Saul and the men whom they selected as travelling companions?

Question # 3 - What do the Scriptures mean by “being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God”? (vs. 40)

Let us prayerfully attempt to answer these three questions in order.

#1.

Why did the Holy Spirit select Barnabas and Saul to work together? The Greek word used to describe their disagreement is “paraxusmos.” It comes from “para” - beside, intensive, and “oxus” which means sharp. It is akin to our English word “paroxysm” which refers to a sudden attack of a disease, or a sudden outburst of laughter. It is used only two times in the N.T. Scriptures. Once here in [Acts 15:29](#), and again in [Hebrews 10:24](#). In the later passage we are told to “provoke” one another to love and good works. The NIV captures the “sharpness “ associated

with the word by rendering it “spur one another on.”

The disagreement between Barnabas and Paul was a “sharp” disagreement. It had apparently smouldered for many months and erupted into an open flame as they planned their second journey. The confrontation was so severe that they never travelled together again.

If this arrangement had been set up by a computer, we would question whether it was the will of God. It was, however, the Holy Spirit that ordered them to work together. Obviously there was no mistake.

John Mark was at the centre of the controversy. Barnabas wanted to take him on their next journey and Paul did not. The foundation of the difficulty may not just be that John Mark was a relative of Barnabas, but that Barnabas and Paul were just radically different. This may be precisely why the Holy Spirit wanted them to work together.

Deuteronomy 32:11 refers to an eagle stirring up her nest. When it is time for a young chick to soar like an eagle it has to be forced out of the nest. The mother “stirs up the nest.” She makes it so uncomfortable that the young eagle wants to leave. The eagle will never reach its full potential in a nest.

This is what God did with ancient Israel. He stirred up their nest. He made Egypt so uncomfortable that they wanted to leave. Israel would never have achieved its full potential in Egypt.

Perhaps the painful experience between these two godly men was orchestrated by God to stir up Paul’s nest. We know that all things work together for good to those that love God and are called according to His purpose. Therefore it seems logical that the same God who “separated” Barnabas and Saul from the prophets and teachers in Antioch also “separated” them from one another? While we may never completely understand on earth the reason for this disagreement, this first missionary journey did have a positive affect on Paul. It was on this trip that he began to exercise his gift as a leader.

Early in their association Barnabas was always mentioned first. Consistently it was **Barnabas and Saul**. Barnabas was the leader and Saul the follower.

- Acts 11:30 - Barnabas and Saul took a relief offering to the elders in Jerusalem
- Acts 12:25 - Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch.
- Acts 13:1 - When the prophets and teachers at Antioch are listed, Barnabas is first and Saul is last.
- Acts 13:2 - The Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to their special work.
- Acts 13:7 - When Sergius Paulus wanted to hear the word of God he sent for Barnabas and Saul.

Later in their relationship it was **Paul and Barnabas**.

- Acts 13:9 - Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit and his name is change to Paul.
- Acts 13:13 - Paul and his company leave Paphos. Barnabas is in the company but is not even mentioned by name.

- Acts 13:43 - Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas.
- Acts 13:46 - Paul and Barnabas waxed bold.
- Acts 13:50 - Persecution was raised against Paul and Barnabas.
- Etc.

In order to see this missionary journey in its proper perspective we must remember that God had separated Paul from his mother's womb to preach the Gospel to the gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16.) Jesus personally informed him of this decision on the Damascus road. God did not want Saul to be a follower, God wanted him to be a leader. He was a chosen vessel to take the name of Jesus to the Gentiles, to kings, and to the children of Israel (Acts 9:15.) He would labour more abundantly than any of the other apostles (1 Cor. 15:10) and write more books of the Bible than any other inspired man.

It was not the purpose of God for Barnabas and Saul to be travelling companions for all of their lives, but God did use Barnabas to help Paul realize his full potential in Christ.

- Barnabas received his name from the apostles. He had a piece of ground and sold it. This was such an encouragement to the brethren that the apostles called him Barnabas, which means, "son of encouragement." (Acts 4:36.)
- When the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of Saul, it was Barnabas who brought him to the apostles and explained his conversion and bold witness in Damascus (Acts 9:26-27.)
- After Saul spent years in obscurity in Tarsus, it was Barnabas who brought him to Antioch that he might teach much people (Acts 11:24-26.)
- Barnabas was a man full of the Holy Spirit and faith (Acts 11:24.)

I conclude therefore that the call of the Spirit for Barnabas and Saul to work together was not a mistake at all. Among other things, Barnabas was used by God to stir up Paul's nest and help him develop his full potential in Christ.

#2

Did the church at Antioch have any "authority" over Barnabas and Saul, and the men whom they chose as travelling companions?

As we reflect upon this question it is important to remember that the nature of Christ's Kingdom is diverse and distinct from that of human kingdoms. Jesus said: **"Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. "** (Matt 20:25-28)

We are told in Revelation 2:15 that God hates the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. The word "Nicolaitane" comes from "nikao" which means to "conquer," and "laos" which means people. Human kingdoms exercise "authority" on those whom they have "conquered." Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18,) but He does not use his authority to dominate and control us. Jesus was tempted to take control of the world, but He did not. He told the wicked one that we should worship the Lord our God and Him only should we serve (Matt. 4:10.) He could

have called twelve legions of angels to dominate and control mankind, but He did not (Matt. 16:53.)

King David had mighty men who were considered “great” because of their ability to dominate others. The top three of David’s mighty men were Adino, Eleazar, and Shammah. All of them were great warriors. Adino killed 800 men at one time, Eleazar killed Philistines until his hand clave to his sword, and Shammah attained greatness by killing Philistines to defend a plot of ground (2 Sam. 23:8-12.)

Jesus, who was the Son of David, was asked by His disciples who would be the greatest in His Kingdom. Jesus did not exalt those who were powerful and could dominate others. He showed them a little child and made him an example of greatness. He warned them unless they were converted to become like that little child they would not enter into His kingdom. He continued that whoever became humble like that little child would be the greatest in the Kingdom (Matt. 18:1-4.)

The Kingdom of Christ is so radically different from human kingdoms that only those who are born again can even see it (John 3:3.) To try and combine the Kingdom of Christ with earthly kingdoms, or even with the Kingdom of Israel, would be like putting new wine in old skins, or new cloth in an old garment.

There is nothing in Scripture to indicate or suggest that the church in Antioch had “control” or “authority” over Barnabas, Saul, or their travelling companions. It was the Holy Spirit who separated them from the church in Antioch to their special work, and it was the Holy Spirit who separated them from one another for a different special work. If Paul and Barnabas sought counsel from gifted leaders in the church at Antioch we are not informed of it. It was God who was guiding their steps, and not some authoritarian individual or congregation.

We are told in Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 12: and other passages that God has placed gifted people in positions of leadership. Certainly godly people are to submit, and obey, these spiritual leaders for they watch for our souls as they that must give account (Heb. 13:17.) The model for this leadership, however, is not a human government or corporation, but Jesus Christ. The “Servant Leadership” of Jesus is unique. His guidance does not come from external authority, but from His indwelling Spirit. His guidance comes from within!. Ezekiel predicted this revolutionary concept with these words: **“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” (Ezek 36:26-27)**

#3

What do the Scriptures mean by “being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God”? (Acts 15:40.)

The word translated as “recommended” in the King James Version is the Greek word “paradidomi.” It comes from “para” (over) and “didomi” (to give.) It means to “give over.” It is used 120 times in the New Testament Scriptures (84 in the Gospels, 13 in Acts and 19 times in the Pauline Epistles) The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Vol. 2, p. 368) indicates that the basic meaning of the verb in the New Testament Scriptures is to deliver up, or

“give over,” to judgment and death. Most references refer to the passion and suffering of Christ.

In Matthew 27:26 we are told that Pilate “delivered” Jesus to be crucified. This is the Greek word “paradidomi.” Pilate “delivered” or “gave over” Jesus to be crucified. It means that Pilate was relinquishing his control over Jesus to others. He symbolized this transfer of responsibility by publicly washing his hands. He said: **“I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.” (Matt 27:24)**

The same word is translated as “committed” in Acts 8:3. Saul of Tarsus persecuted the early church. Entering into every home he dragged out men and women and “committed” them to prison. Saul may have been responsible for the prisoners for a while, but when he “committed” them to prison he relinquished that control. He gave them over to the custody of another.

This is the same word, and the same idea, involved in “recommending” or “giving over” Barnabas and Saul to the grace of God. If the church in Antioch ever had any “authority” or “control” over Barnabas and Saul they relinquished it. Once these godly men began their journey the church was powerless to do anything but pray. They could not contact them by phone or wire them funds in an emergency. They were utterly dependent upon God. This “giving over” was symbolized by the laying on of hands, fasting, and prayer (Acts 13:2-3.)

Jesus, as you know, went with them on their journey. He promised to be with them unto the ends of the earth. He said He would never leave them or forsake them. He was there at Paphos when a false prophet tried to impede the power of the gospel. He was there at Antioch of Pisidia when Paul and Barnabas were driven out of town. He was there in Lystra and Derbe to point out Timothy to Paul by prophetic revelation (1 Tim. 1:18.) He was there when Paul was stoned and left for dead. Jesus is perfectly capable of delivering the godly out of temptation and reserving the unjust unto punishment. It was indeed a brilliant strategy to “give over” Barnabas and Saul to the grace of God.

When Barnabas and Saul were “recommended” by the brethren unto the grace of God it meant that these men and their mission were being intrusted to God for His guidance, protection and care.

APPLICATION

Jesus reminds us that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4.) Surely there is spiritual nourishment in these Scriptures for everyone who will allow the Word of God to have free course in their lives.

Someone has said that a church cannot rise above its leaders any more than a river can rise above its fountainhead. This is obviously not true. Saul of Tarsus advanced beyond any of the leaders of the Antioch church. This was possible because they were not the source of His spiritual strength, Jesus was. They had the wisdom to give him over to the grace of God. Jesus is the ultimate source of wisdom, strength, and knowledge and we can never rise above

While we may fear the loss of control, from a human point of view, it is important to remember that all true growth in the Kingdom of Christ is out of man’s control. Man can plant and water, but it is only God who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:7.) Only God can add to His church those who are being saved (Acts 2:47.) Imagine what it would be like to be in a congregation of

120 and have 3,000 additions to the church in a single day. This is precisely what happened to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41) Before these new brothers could be trained the number of disciples grew to about 5,000 men (Acts 4:4.) Then we are informed that believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women (Acts 5:14.) While this great number of new converts was beyond man's ability to control, it was a situation easily managed by God. He knows every star by name and even numbers the hairs on our head. It is no problem for God to guide and direct the members of His own body.

Your church, or your denomination may routinely seek to direct and control ministers and gospel workers. You may give them assignments and restrictions as a hedge against moral corruption and doctrinal error. Perhaps, however, there is within your fellowship a man like Saul who is destined to rise above your highest hopes. Such a person should not fish close to shore or play it safe. He should free to follow wherever Christ leads. Those who trust in the Lord with all their might, and do not lean unto their own understanding, will claim the wonderful promise that God will direct their steps.

Let's give them over to the grace of God!