

Acts

Part 41 – “Conflict and the Sovereignty of God”

Acts 15:36-41

Conflict

Conflict: a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires*

Four primary causes of conflict*

1. Misunderstandings resulting from poor communication
2. Differences in values, goals, gifts, calling, priorities, expectations, interests, or opinions
3. Competition over limited resources, such as time or money
4. Sinful attitudes and habits that lead to sinful words and actions

*Taken from *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande

A few observations regarding the conflict between Paul and Barnabas (15:37-39)

1. The conflict takes place in the context of Paul and Barnabas anxious to visit the brothers they had visited on their first journey. (15:36; chs. 13-14)
 - a. They had great hopes for encouraging the brothers in the Gospel, and yet this conflict interfered with their plans.
 - b. When you have two or more people gathered to do something, you have two or more opinions of how to do it. Conflict in ministry is normal. Even when the overarching goal to glorify God and enjoy Him forever is shared amongst us, conflict can enter.
2. The conflict appears to be a wisdom issue, not a sin issue.
 - a. It wasn't a matter of who was right, but rather a matter of competing values and opinions.
 - b. This coincides with the second of the four primary causes of conflict according to Sande.
3. The conflict was intense. Luke describes it as a “sharp” disagreement that actually leads to them separating.
4. The conflict appears to be unresolved at the time.
 - a. Not all conflicts will be resolved.
 - b. We often hear the verse, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph. 4:26) and we misinterpret it.
 - c. This verse does not mean you have to resolve the issue before you can sleep. It does mean you work through your anger, and confess and repent if necessary.
 - d. Know that there are some things that will be unresolved this side of heaven.
5. The conflict highlights the fact that character matters.
 - a. Whether or not John Mark would have been helpful, his past actions caused doubt regarding his character and trustworthiness.
 - b. Paul describes John Mark's leaving their first journey in two ways. (v. 38)
 - i. He withdrew from them. - The verb used here sometimes refers to apostasy.
 - ii. He had not gone with them to the work. – The work referred to here is the evangelizing of the Gentiles in Cyprus and Galatia. They were about to embark on a similar trip, and Paul thought it unwise to include him on such an important mission based on his past actions.
6. The conflict happened between two men who were seeking to follow after God.
 - a. Paul operates out of a principle that the work of God is too important to allow someone who let them down before join them in this new work.
 - b. Barnabas operates out of the principles of restoration and second chances. (He was the one who vouched for Paul in the early days - Acts 9:27.)

God sovereignly uses our conflict to accomplish His purposes. (15:39-41)

1. God used the conflict to send out two missionary teams.

- a. Whereas Paul and Barnabas were going to retrace their steps from the first journey, God now sends out two groups with greater impact over the region.
- b. Luke summarizes this account saying the church commended them to the grace of the Lord and that the churches in Syria and Cilicia were strengthened. (vv. 40-41)
- c. "In sum, here is an example where a disagreement was so great that the ability to work side by side was affected. What resulted was a solution that allowed the advance of the Gospel to continue, but in a way that recognized the need for distinct ministries. Sometimes this is the best solution." – Darrel Bock



2. God used the conflict to eventually strengthen the relationship between Paul and Mark.

- a. In Paul's letters we see glimpses of some type of restoration of his confidence in Mark.
 - i. Col. 4:10-11 – "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me."
 - ii. 2 Tim. 4:11 – "Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry."
- b. We are not guaranteed full resolution of issues, but the Gospel calls us to work toward unity and peace. Sometimes we get the joy of seeing issues resolved and relationships mended.
- c. For Paul and Mark it seems that time, and most likely Mark's proven character over that time, helped heal the wound and resolve the conflict.

3. God uses conflict to accomplish His ultimate purpose – the salvation of His people for His glory.

- a. The conflict we experience in this world demonstrates that things are not as they are supposed to be, whether the conflict is just a difference in opinions or whether it is sin related.
- b. God, in His great kindness, has not left us alone to deal with this.
- c. God sent His only Son into this world to engage the cause of our brokenness (our sin) and overcome it.
- d. Through Christ's obedience, death, and resurrection He has reconciled us to God, and we are now equipped with the Holy Spirit to engage brokenness, to engage conflict with the eyes of redemption and reconciliation.
 - i. 2 Cor. 5:18-19 - "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."