

- 30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:
- 31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.
- 32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.
- 33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.
- 34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.
- 35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.
- 36 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.
- 37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.
- 38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.
- 39 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;
- 40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.
- 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

Introduction. I had thought to make this passage just one point in my sermon for today, but I thought better of it because I think that it will be useful to you to explore the meaning of this famous quarrel between Barnabas and Paul and the reasons for it. Each part of the Bible was inserted for a reason by the omniscient Holy Spirit and it useful for us, and we must not lay anything aside. Last night it was impressed upon me that I should take a bit more time with this story, for there are useful lessons for us in this day and age.

There are those in the church who think that the greatest sin is judgmentalism. Influenced by humanism they accuse Christianity of being too harsh and judgmental, that all offense should be tolerated and every lifestyle accepted, even child abuse, homosexuality, and baby killing in abortion. We must be kind and do good to all men.

Then there are those who believe the church is too soft and offers a “cheap grace.” They think there should be more discipline and stronger preaching against sin and evil and wrong doctrine. Churches are torn apart over these issues. I will not go into great detail, because you all have knowledge of what I speak about. It seems that mercy and truth are in conflict in our church; one side calling for more tolerance and acceptance; the other side calling for more truth and strong teaching.

So my text today is Proverbs 16:6 By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil. Repeat. First. The Quarrel; Second, The Cause and Resolution; Third, the Aftermath. Then I will make some applications.

- I. First. The quarrel;
 - A. The quarrel took place in Antioch, the place where the controversy over circumcision had taken place. You remember that Paul and Barnabas had been sent to Jerusalem to enquire about the issue, and had shortly come back to Antioch with Judas and Silas who were delegated to inform the church of the instructions from the Apostles concerning the matter.
 - B. There was great rejoicing in Antioch, for it seemed that this bitter quarrel about circumcision had been answered and the church, uniting Jew and Gentile, would be at peace. After a while, they sent a delegation back to Jerusalem to report on the reception of the instructions of the apostles. Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, preaching and teaching for some days.
 - C. The quarrel included three people.
 1. John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, both from Cypress. His mother was Mary, a woman of some wealth in Jerusalem in whose house the early church met for study and prayer. He was a young man of great promise and ability, but he had turned back from the labor of the first missionary journey. The early histories all attribute the Gospel of Mark to him, but some moderns doubt it. It is very difficult to decide at this late date whether or not he wrote the book; I personally think it safe to take the witness of those closer to the fact. If so, then he became a confidant and helper not only to the Apostle Paul, but also to the Apostle Peter, well qualified to write the Gospel. But this latter is not important, for the book is inspired by the Holy Spirit, whoever wrote it.
 2. Barnabas was with the church from the beginning. He was a rich man who sold property and laid it down at the apostles' feet in order for the gospel to be preached and the church established on solid ground. He had sought out Paul after Paul's conversion and introduced him to the apostles at Jerusalem. His partnership with Paul had been commissioned by the Holy Spirit himself at Antioch, resulting in the first missionary journey and the great gathering in of the gentiles and the growth of the church among them. He was no flyweight in the early church.
 3. Then, of course, the Apostle Paul. We know his history and prominence in the church. These were the three principles in this famous quarrel.
- II. Second, The Cause and resolution;
 - A. Paul wanted to return and strength the churches that had been founded on their first mission. Paul had a pastor's heart, and desired to see growth and maturity in the believers. He put it this way, “that Christ be formed in you.
 - B. Barnabas agreed, but he wanted to take John Mark with them, who had abandoned the mission, leaving Perga to return to Jerusalem. This was evidently because of weakness and inconsistency on his part, and Paul didn't want to take him on this trip, having failed once in his responsibilities.
 - C. Barnabas insisted and the quarrel became intense between Barnabas and Saul, and the team was split, Barnabas taking Mark and going home to Cypress; Paul choosing Silas and receiving a commission from the church of Antioch began his second journey.
 - D. Analysis. Who was to blame?

1. Paul was a hardliner. He knew that the battle was tough and he didn't want weaklings on the team. The RCUS recognizes this and we examined candidates for the ministry to see that they are not weak and ignorant men. Elders and deacons must be strong, not caving when the battle is tough. There is certainly a strong case for Paul in this matter, and he was always valiant for the truth and he wanted his associates to be strong also, not fearful, vacillating, and giving up.
2. On the other hand, there is a case to be made for Barnabas. John Mark was a very promising young man, with great ability, and Barnabas knew his nephew, that he was young in the faith and perhaps had been exposed to battle before he was ready. He felt that he was ready now, and mercy should be extended to him so that he could be reclaimed as a valiant and useful soldier of Christ. Mark was not guilty of gross moral failure or treachery; he had just been weak and failed in the fire. It would be different the next time.
3. So we could say: Paul, show a little mercy. Mark is a good guy. Give him another chance. Barnabas, don't be a wimp. The work is too serious to trust it to a weak link. Mark failed once, and probably will again.
4. This highlights one of the basic problems that we humans face with respect to sin: to we deal with it in truth, or do we deal with it in mercy. Mercy or truth? Truth or mercy.
5. With all due reverence, this problem is even in God, how to be just and the justifier of those who believe in Christ. How can God vindicate His truth and still show mercy. God's law is the truth, and it is true that sin will damn the soul. It is also true that God is merciful and has found a way to be just and still save sinners.
6. This resolution is beyond us, and even split Paul and Barnabas. We need to fear, for how are we better than they? It the Holy Spirit warning us of our infirmity and weakness, and the need to divine wisdom and grace in dealing with sin. You better believe it. Neither unrighteous judgment nor turning away and pretending not to see—neither is godly nor wise. But what to do, with children, spouses, neighbors, friends, fellow church members.

III. Third, the Aftermath.

- A. Barnabas takes John Mark and goes to Cypress, to home. Barnabas disappears from the divine record. Nothing more is said of him.
- B. Paul and Silas receive the support of the church of Antioch and he continues in a profitable and rewarding ministry until his course is finished and he is beheaded in Rome when Nero was emperor.
- C. John Mark is sent for when Paul writes to Timothy, and Paul says of Mark: “He is useful for me for ministry.” Mark had evidently become mature and stronger and his potential was realized and Paul recognized it.

Application: Then I will make some applications.

- A. Mercy and Truth can only be reconciled in the Cross of Christ. It was on the Cross that God vindicated His truth by punishing the Lord Jesus for your sins and mine; and found a way to receive us and forgive us and include us in His fellowship.

- B. In the soul of a person, mercy and truth meet in the fear of the Lord, as our text says, so that we find forgiveness of sins, and acknowledge God’s truth and righteousness.
- C. The fear of the Lord teaches me to repent toward God and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ: the two are included in the fear of the Lord.
- D. The fear of the Lord teaches me to believe Him, that whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. It also teaches me to acknowledge my sins and turn from them, so that mercy and truth meet together in my soul.
- E. Jesus loved His Father in Heaven. This is the reason that He took our flesh and blood and suffered on the cross, to take away the wrath of God for sinners like you and me.
- F. Jesus loved the righteousness of His Father in Heaven, and that is why He sends us the Holy Spirit, so that we might be conformed to the image of Christ and walk in newness of life.
- G. Men do not depart from evil because we hammer them with the truth. They do not depart from evil because we love them to pieces. They depart from evil by the fear of the Lord, and only He can teach that by the Gospel. Amen and Amen.