

## From Division to Multiplication

### Acts 15:36-41

Sermon by Phillip G. Kayser

John Calvin said, “Among Christians there ought to be so great a dislike of schism, as that they may always avoid it so fast as lies in their power.” He hated schism. His desire was not to leave the church, but to Reform it. But Providence dictated otherwise. He was cast out of the Roman church and the Reformed church was born. And as a result of that division, there was a multiplication of the true church exponentially. What Calvin hated, and what Satan intended for evil, God used for good. From division came multiplication.

When it came to his disagreements with Luther on the sacraments, he tried valiantly to make a union work between the two sides, but to no avail. Luther obstinately rejected any compromise. He insisted that unless Calvin believed that he was masticating the literal body of Jesus in his mouth, he could have no fellowship with him. I believe Luther was in the wrong on that one (and he admitted he was wrong on his death bed to his friend Melancthon), and yet God providentially used that division to strengthen the church theologically and to multiply the church. This was especially true in the Reformed passion to apply the Scriptures as consistently as they could to every area of life.

I have seen church splits that have been no doubt intended by Satan to destroy the church, yet God used the two churches to reach more people than one church could have possibly done. I’ve seen that in a number of cities. I am thankful that there are three PCA churches in Omaha. Right from the founding of the first church in Omaha, the leaders agreed that they wanted multiple churches with varying perspective. All three churches agree that we are reaching people that one church could never have done.

And I bring up those examples to indicate that ministry splits aren’t always the end of the world and aren’t always a bad thing. It turns out to have been an incredibly wonderful move on God’s part as both Barnabas and Paul raised more leaders and planted more churches than they otherwise would have done. And that’s not to say that we should promote church splits. No way. Romans 12:18 says, **If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.** But there are times when coming to an agreement simply cannot happen. And sometimes division turns out providentially to be the preferable end. You won’t see many sermons on this

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text that will admit to that. There are a couple of commentaries that point it out. But nowhere is Barnabas accused of doing wrong. Paul had his reasons for the split, and it appears that Luke and the church in Antioch agreed with Paul without in any way disagreeing with Barnabas. And you might think – “Now wait a minute! How can both be right? They get in a fight and go their separate ways. That’s wrong! Surely one of them must be wrong.” And I’m not doubting that sin was in part involved. And I will discuss that in a bit. But I think this separation turned out to be a necessary and good thing. God allowed it to happen because it needed to happen. And yes, both were right in their primary concerns, even if they could have gone about this in a different way. So that is my thesis; that is where we are headed. Let me see if I can demonstrate that.

## **I.A brief description of the division**

### ***A.Background***

First, let me give a bit of background. Barnabas and Paul had just come off of an incredible missionary journey. Yes, there was sickness, danger and even some disasters that had happened, but it drew Barnabas and Paul together in a special friendship. There was also incredible joy of seeing new converts, churches established, victory in spiritual warfare. Earlier in this chapter they both were excited to report on what an amazing trip this was. Paul and Barnabas were friends who would have been willing to lay down their lives for each other. So in one sense, this split was an unfortunate thing. I’m sure it grieved both of them. We will be seeing shortly that it didn’t take them long to not only appreciate the split, but to appreciate each other.

Now, there were some complicating factors that may have helped. In chapter 15 the huge conflict over circumcision occurred. Galatians was written somewhere between Acts 15:1 and verse 5. In that book we have some further information. Paul says some harsh words about Peter and Barnabas, but they were needed words. Barnabas played the hypocrite. That’s what Paul says. The whole Gospel was at stake. Barnabas had showed some weakness in his people-orientation. So that whole fiasco must have had some emotional impact on their relationship. And God was orchestrating that to prepare for this split.

The second thing that has happened is that Barnabas seems to be considered the leader in Jerusalem, and he is definitely the older of the two, but Paul seems to be considered the leader by Antioch. That may have been a bit irritating for Barnabas. Though Paul is younger, he was the more

dominant leader. It appears that earlier, Barnabas was content to have it that way. But at this point, he is exerting his desire to have a say-so on the details of this trip.

### ***B. The plan (v. 36)***

Let's now move on to Paul's new plan in verse 36. **Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing."** That is a perfectly logical plan. The churches of Galatia (and perhaps elsewhere) have been hurt badly by the Judaizers, and Paul wants to see how they are doing. He probably wants to do further damage control and further strengthening of these churches in the faith. It's a straightforward plan.

### ***C. Paul is blindsided by Barnabas's very legitimate desire (v. 37)***

But Paul is blindsided by a very legitimate desire that Barnabas holds steadfastly to. Verse 37: **Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.** The word "determined" indicates that Paul has resisted the idea when it is first brought up, and Barnabas is not planning to back down. This is *that* important to Barnabas, and he is not going to cave in like he usually did to the stronger personality. Before we jump to any conclusions as to who is right and who is wrong, let me make two observations.

#### **1. There is no indication that Barnabas disagrees that what Mark did (13:13) was wrong**

Commentaries point out that there is no indication in the text that Barnabas disagrees that Mark's abandonment of the mission at a critical time was wrong. I am convinced that Barnabas knew that Mark was in the wrong. He agreed with Paul on that. When I preached on chapter 13, verse 13, I pointed out that Mark could not have picked a worse time to leave the team in the lurch. Paul was sick; they had traveled far enough inland that there was no easy way to get a new recruit or to change plans. All the work that Mark was doing up until that point now had to be picked up by Barnabas and Paul. With Paul being in the weakened condition that he was, this could have threatened the whole trip. (We will look at that more in a bit.) In chapter 13, Barnabas clearly sides with Paul, not with his young nephew Mark.

## **2. But Barnabas is insistent that Mark needs to be given another chance.**

But Barnabas sees something in Mark that Paul does not. And Paul sees something about the nature of this trip that *Barnabas* is missing. And it is so easy for people to talk past one another and to be blind to the other person's concerns because they are so intent on proving their point. And this is especially true when emotions get into it, as they did here. It reminds me of the story of the young man who moved from Scotland to New York. After he got his apartment and was settled in, he called his parents on the phone. And his mother asked him, "What are your neighbors like?" "They're a bit strange, actually. On one side there's a man who keeps banging his head against the wall and on the other side there's a woman who just cries and moans and groans" His mum advised, "I'd keep to myself if I were you." "Oh I do," the son said. "I just stay in my room and play my bagpipes." Sometimes you are too close to the situation to see the other person's perspective. What do they have to groan and gripe about? And that is probably what was happening with Paul and Barnabas. Let's look at Paul's reaction, and then I will explain.

### ***D. Paul's reaction (v. 38)***

#### **1. Paul sees this as a serious problem**

Verse 38 says, **But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.** Paul is just as insistent that Mark will be a liability. He obviously sees this as a serious problem.

#### **2. John Mark has left the team at the worst possible place. Perga (13:13) is part way to Antioch Pisidian (13:14) – a very challenging part of the journey.**

Let's try to look at it from Paul's perspective. You've got to realize *where* Mark left them in the lurch in chapter 13:13. They are in Perga, a long way from home, part way inland to Antioch Pisidian and in a malarial marsh area. According to Galatians, by this time Paul has contracted a sickness and is in a very weakened condition. If young John Mark was responsible for a support role while journeying, as many commentators believe, John Mark has left them in the lurch at the worst possible place and at the worst possible time. It would have been better to have not come on the trip at all, than to have the team dependent upon him, and leave them in the lurch in the middle of the toughest portion of the journey. Of course, that's why Mark left – it was the toughest part of the journey. Now, Paul (in his weakened

condition) and Barnabas (whose not exactly a spring chicken – he’s getting on the older side) have to carry the goods and do the duties that Mark was supposed to do on top of all of their own duties. If Mark had even bailed a few days earlier, they might have been able to scramble to find a replacement or come up with alternative plans. But to bail out at Perga shows no consideration for the trouble and possible danger this would leave the rest of the team in. It was just irresponsible. It was a failure of duty. It was not thinking of the team. It was highly inconsiderate. That’s why one of the definitions of that word “to depart” includes in its meaning to desert with “a lack of concern for what has been left” (Louw & Nida). Lack of concern. No wonder Paul is opposed to the idea.

**3. John Mark left them at a particularly bad time – when Paul is sick (Gal 4:13)**

**4. Paul and Luke were concerned about the lack of character that John Mark had shown (15:36-41 – Greek word for “departed”)**

Another thing that Paul recognized was a moral weakness in Mark. Yes, he probably was just a teenager, so you could chalk some of it up to immaturity. But the word “departed” in verse 38 shows that both Luke and Paul realized that there was a moral character weakness that was shown in chapter 13. By the way, most commentaries believe that this was the young man in Mark 14:51 who fled naked from Christ when the young men grabbed his linen cloth. The most common interpretation was that he was a young teenage who had fallen asleep after the last supper, and when he woke up, the apostles and Jesus were gone. Impulsively throwing a sheet around his naked body, he ran to where he expected them to be, and got there as Jesus was being led away. It says, **Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.** Running out without getting dressed shows his immaturity and his impulsivity. He had some growing up to do, and Paul knew it.

**5. The plan for the second missionary trip is to travel the same territories that had worn out John Mark (15:36). If he couldn’t hack it then, why do we think he can hack it now.**

But here’s another consideration: in verse 36 (when they are making plans for a second missionary journey), Paul and Barnabas were planning to travel the same territories that had worn out John Mark before. That’s the context of Paul’s refusal – it’s the same areas that John Mark had bailed out on before. This is why modern missionaries do not want to risk an entire trip to China or India by taking a young recruit who has not proven himself here

in America. I know one team in China that was cut short because the new recruit freaked out and couldn't handle the primitive conditions. Well, that's a pretty costly mistake to make. Paul felt that if John Mark couldn't hack it back then, why should we believe he can do it now? This was not simply a training trip. This was a dangerous ministry trip, and there had to be solidarity for the team to make it. It's one thing to risk the possibility that a new team member might not make it, but to deliberately put a weak link into a critical trip would not be wise. I think Paul was right, even if he was a little too crusty in the way that he handled the problem. I think he was right. And I think that Barnabas realized it too because in verse 39, Barnabas takes Mark on a much, much easier trip. He went to Cyprus, which was a civilized area that both of them were used to. It's their home island. So I think that Paul was right. And (just to fill this out), in a footnote in your outlines I give reasons to believe that Luke (by inspiration) agreed that Paul was right too.

**6. Luke indicates that Mark's action in chapter 13 was a serious moral defect when he (by inspiration) calls Mark "the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work."<sup>1</sup>**

### ***E. The fight (v. 39)***

But they are looking at this issue from two different perspectives. Verse 39 says, **Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another.** This was not a mild disagreement. This was probably a

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<sup>1</sup> Luke's opinion can be seen in the phrase, **who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.** Here's some other translations that bring out nuances of the Greek: "who had abandoned them" (Darby), "who deserted them" (NIVNAB, NLT, NRSV, NASB), "who quit and deserted them" (AMP). Luke is saying that John Mark bailed out of his commitment to the work and secondly, that his leaving had moral problems. The word for "departed" is a word that can mean "rebellion... abandonment... defection." Another dictionary adds to that - the "emphasis upon separation and possible lack of concern for what has been left." (Louw & Nida). Another dictionary says that this can be translated (depending upon the context) as: "rebellion, abandonment, state of apostasy, defection... bill of divorce... deserter... to act unfaithfully, contrary to duty." Strong's says that for the active tense it has the idea of "(actively) instigate to revolt." My main dictionary says, "*cause to revolt, mislead ... to distance oneself from some pers. or thing.*" Every dictionary gives a negative moral connotation to this word. It is clear that Luke saw this as a shameful character issue as well. He sided with Paul. Now which of those nuances of meaning were involved here, we are not sure. The word is used elsewhere in Acts to incite rebellion. Was John Mark undermining Paul's decision to go across the mountains and trying to talk the rest of the team out of it? We aren't told, but Paul obviously felt very hurt by this for some years to come.

shouting match. Here's how the dictionary defines the word: "a sharp fit of anger, sharp contention, angry dispute" (Mounce). So it really wasn't a pretty sight. Both thought they were defending a critical Biblical principle.

***F. This event illustrates the differences between modality leaders (relationship oriented) and sodality leaders (task/goal oriented)***

Barnabas was incensed that a promising young man is being discarded. He is relationship oriented, and it grieves him to see how Mark is being written off. Where is the grace that Paul has been preaching? Didn't Peter deny Jesus too? Can't we give him a second chance? He's obviously repented and he really wants to go. Barnabas is encouraged by the repentance and he does not want to see Mark destroyed. He sees such promise there, and Barnabas was right. Mark goes on to be a marvelous leader who writes the Gospel of Mark. Much later, in 2 Timothy 4:11 Paul says, "**Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.**" But if Barnabas had never taken Mark under his wings, and given him a second chance, he could not have proved himself to be useful in ministry to Paul.

Barnabas probably sees Paul as too driven and too task oriented. If people get in the way of a task being accomplished, sometimes the people get stepped on. Now, to be fair, in his better moments, Paul is very compassionate. He's not only task oriented. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he said that he related to his churches like a nursing mother (1 Thes. 2:7). But Paul is so goal oriented, task oriented and so missional in his objectives that he was not always as sensitive to the needs of those who were with him as Barnabas was. Paul is being logical about this debate. Barnabas is being relational. Have you seen differences like that? I've seen them many, many times. And then you see others lining up and taking sides on the debate.

And Barnabas and Paul are classic examples of the difference between what has been called modality leaders who rank high on the relational skills and sodality leaders who rank high on what it takes to get things done. Years ago Ralph Winter wrote an interesting essay on the differences between modality and sodality leaders in missions. And interestingly, the best cross-cultural missionaries are almost always sodality leaders – sometimes to a fault. Almost all of the pioneer missionaries were. Sometimes you get irritated with how hard they pushed everyone around them and were so non-relational and non-sensitive. And yet they got incredible things done. The

best missionaries within your own culture have been modality leaders. This has been true to such an extent that he characterizes the local church as modality organization and missions groups like Wycliffe Bible Translators as sodality organizations.

Let me quote briefly an explanation of the differences between the two: This is from Peter Wagner, another missions expert. “The modality is essentially a people-oriented structure, designed to serve the people who are a part of it. Peace and harmony are high values. *Being* is seen as superior to *doing*. Process is often more important than goal. ... On the other hand, sodality is task oriented. People are also important in sodalities, but largely to the degree that they contribute to accomplishing the goal of the organization. Discipline is much higher, and people are eligible to be dismissed if they are found to be incompetent and thereby unable (or unwilling) to help accomplish the task. *Being* is important in sodalities, but *doing* is even more important.”<sup>2</sup> “... about 80 percent of ordained clergy are like Barnabas and essentially people oriented, and only about 20 percent might be task-oriented sodality types like Paul. But, nevertheless, the fact remains that most outreach and mission work gets accomplished by the latter type. This may be one of the reasons Luke never so much as mentions Barnabas again after this volatile incident, although Paul graciously does so in 1 Corinthians 9:6.”<sup>3</sup>

I think with that definition you can see why both modality leaders and sodality leaders are important. Their differing perspectives are important for balance within the church. Each has his strengths and each has his weaknesses. Both of their weaknesses are on display at this point. But it is fascinating that the church is mature enough to recognize that both men had valid issues and both could be valued for their own contributions. I think it is a big mistake when some people try to make one or the other right or wrong in this conflict. The point is that Paul is best suited for cross-cultural missions, and Barnabas was best suited for regional missions in his home area.

### ***G. Parting and forming two teams (vv. 39-40)***

So they split up in verses 39-40. **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.** Barnabas finds a niche in which he flourishes. Paul gets a partner in Silas who is perfectly suited to cross-cultural missions.

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<sup>2</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*, p. 375.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.

### ***H. The result (v. 41)***

F. F. Bruce says, “the present disagreement was overruled for good: instead of one missionary and pastoral expedition, there were two.” But it wasn’t just two teams. As a result of this split, there were two specialized teams who trained numerous leaders and missionaries and multiplied their effectives many times over. We won’t get into the addition of Timothy in chapter 16 or the impact that Barnabas had upon Mark and upon a whole generation of young Christians, but the bottom line was that the church was strengthened. Verse 41 says, **And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.**

## **II. Additional lessons that can be learned**

### ***A. Learn to value the differences in the body. This will help your disagreements to be fruitful rather than scarring.***

So that’s the background. We’ve already learned a bunch of lessons just by going through the text, but let’s dig a bit deeper and see if there aren’t more lessons we can apply. I believe this passage shows us that we ought to learn to value the differences in the body. The heated exchange might have been avoided if Paul and Barnabas could have done so. It may not have helped. But based on Paul’s later statements, I think we can at least say that we ought to value the differences within the body just as the church in Antioch was able to value both Barnabas and Paul. They weren’t able to get them to work together, but they still valued what both sides contributed. And I think we need to have that attitude. There are some people who insist that you’ve got to take sides in all the modern Reformed debates. And I disagree. It is possible to value both without being a sell-out.

Now, I should point out that there will come a time when some of you might butt heads over exactly the same modality/sodality tensions. Just as sodality leaders make some of the finest cross-cultural missionaries, sodality leaders often build fine businesses. And the butting of heads that sometimes occur is often unavoidable because the businessman would not succeed if he was not so driven by his vision and focused. I think there is a place to value such differences in the body, even if you are the one who is on occasion hurt by the differences. I think only Jesus was perfectly balanced between modality and sodality issues. For most of us, we will just need to appreciate the fact that we need each other’s balance.

***B. Rarely is conflict due to a single, simple issue. There is usually a complex mixture of factors (both negative and positive) from both sides that leads to the conflict.***

A second application that I think can logically be drawn from this passage is that conflicts are rarely single or simple issues. The people who are arguing frequently think it is one issue, but most of these kinds of arguments are filled with complex assumptions that neither party discusses. They think they are on the same page about those assumptions, but they are not, and they get frustrated. You can't argue the facts successfully without also analyzing some of the assumptions that are being brought to the table unannounced – just assumed.

I won't try to guess what differing assumptions that Barnabas and Paul had. I think there are hints. But it is clear from two things, that they had differing assumptions. First, they couldn't resolve their dispute despite the fact that they both were mature, godly Christians who tried to live by the Bible. There wasn't a clear cut Scripture that they could pull out that says, "You are right and you are wrong and need to change your mind." If they had that kind of Scripture, I'm sure the person so corrected would have immediately repented and submitted. They were both hard core in their radical submission to Christ. Second, the church can't figure out who's right and whose wrong. Antioch doesn't step in and correct one or the other. They can see that they both have legitimate concerns. Those two facts show me that the disagreement was more complicated than one issue. Paul became more aware of this as time passed by, and as a result, it became easier for him to work with both Barnabas and Mark. And you can see that in Colossians, Philemon, 1 Corinthians and 2 Timothy.

***C. Conflicts can happen even among mature Christians.***

But this leads to two more connected observations. Conflicts can happen even among mature Christians. And examples abound in church history. There was the debate between Calvin and Luther that we started with. On his deathbed Luther said that he regretted how he handled the difference. But conflicts can occur. And sometimes the different approaches are serious enough that it's hard to work together. It would be disruptive. Don't write people off simply because they have a conflict. The church in Antioch and Luke himself show real maturity in handling this. And I wish more Reformed people would appreciate differences without feeling like they have to write one group off.

***D. Not all conflicts can be resolved, but they should be amicably finished.***

Fourth observation – not all conflicts *can* be resolved, but they should be amicably finished. How do I know that Barnabas and Paul made up and valued each other? Well, it's hinted at in 1 Corinthians 9:6 where Paul shows a large-heartedness in acknowledging the enormous sacrifices of Barnabas. I think Paul is probably still as convinced as ever that Mark should not have gone on such a difficult missions trip, and that it was better for him to start off on the trip to Cyprus with Barnabas. But he has no lingering hostility to Barnabas. He puts Barnabas on a par with himself. It is hinted at in 2 Timothy 4:11, where he acknowledges the fantastic discipleship that Barnabas did in Mark's life, and says, **Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.** Just because you have a conflict does not mean you can't be friends. Just because you know you need to work on separate projects does not mean that you can't be friends. Sometimes people allow disagreement to make them permanently alienated. Paul and Barnabas were not that way.

***E. Ask God to make you sensitive to the "hot buttons" of other people.***

The fifth point is simply advice. Ask God to make you sensitive to the hot buttons of other people, and try to avoid those hot buttons if you can. Given the personality that biographers draw of Barnabas, I think that this is exactly what Barnabas was doing all through their first ministry trip. There were lots of hot buttons he could have pushed that would have ticked Paul off a lot sooner. It wasn't until this point, when Barnabas felt that Mark's future life and ministry was at stake, that he chose to insist that it had to be his way or the highway. And even there, if he had thought to suggest that maybe they ought to go on separate trips, it might not have come to blows.

***F. Don't be crippled in ministry by focusing on the negative. Move on. Deal with your sins as they become apparent, but don't stop life because a conflict can't be resolved.***

Point F is simply an amplification of points I have already made. Don't be crippled in ministry by focusing on the negative. Move on. Deal with your sins as they become apparent, but don't stop life because a conflict can't be resolved. Both of these men continued to minister with joy, and they did not let this incident take the wind out of their sails.

Another way of saying this is that blow-ups may on occasion be unavoidable, but unless anger is resolved, it will lead to bitterness and other

destructive attitudes and thought patterns. Get rid of the anger as soon as you can. Never let anger continue to fester under the surface. Later Paul admonishes us to let anger go and all bitterness and clamor.

**G. We should not allow cynicism to make us unable to take some risks with people who have failed. John Mark was restored:**

**1. First by Barnabas**

Point G says, “We should not allow cynicism to make us unable to take some risks with people who have failed.” His young nephew John Mark had really hurt Barnabas. But Barnabas takes the risk of another failure by reaching out to him. In hindsight Barnabas probably wished he had suggested a different context for giving Mark a second chance.

But I think we can learn a lot by looking at the life of John Mark. Some of the people who have irritated you and hurt you may be a John Mark in the future. And you need to consider that possibility. Don’t write them off.

**2. Eventually (after 20 years) by Paul (Col. 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Tim. 4:11)**

Twelve years after this incident we find John Mark working with Paul (which is amazing all by itself), facing risk of imprisonment himself by visiting Paul when others had forsaken Paul. We see that Barnabas had ministered to his weakness and infused some backbone in his young nephew. Let me give you a small summary. In Colossians 4:10 Mark is listed as one of Paul’s team members some 12 years later (61 AD). He speaks of the greetings from **Mark the cousin** [or you could translate that “nephew”] **of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him.** Paul is being a little relational here. He himself wants to make sure that people do not judge Mark for what happened in Acts 13.

In Philemon 24 he sends greetings from his fellow laborer Mark. By this time Mark is not just an apprentice. Paul treats him as a peer.

In 2 Timothy 4, in context of lamenting that all had forsaken him when he was defending himself before Caesar, he says, **Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me in ministry.** He knows that Mark will have the boldness that no one else had. That shows a lot of water under the bridge. Mark was able to prove himself. What a great tribute to the change that can come over a quitter and make him someone who is faithful. God’s grace is so good.

**3. God raised him up to write a Gospel.**

Of course, the ultimate glory that Mark had was to write the Gospel that is named after him (the Gospel of Mark). Quitters can change. Quitters can be given backbone by God’s grace. And so I love the character of John

Mark. And we need to realize that the people who have failed us could change by God's grace just as Mark did. If they repent and want another chance, don't allow fear to stop you. Sometimes faith takes risks.

***H. God can sovereignly use even these painful events to bless the church***

**1. God used both Barnabas and Paul to mature Mark**

Point H is the lesson of God's sovereignty. If God is sovereign over all things (as He says He is) then we can have confidence that He used even this painful event for their good and for God's glory. The Lord used the love and relational skills of Barnabas to restore Mark and give him a sense of belonging. Without Barnabas, Paul's approach to life could easily make people give up. But God used Paul's example to make Mark long to be more than he was. Sure Paul was way out there. Sure it was hard to keep up with him. But the Spirit used Paul's example to stir up Mark's desires as well.

**2. God turned a division into a multiplication**

So I would just encourage you to trust God's sovereignty in these situations. You do what you can to keep relationships solid, but sometimes you have to trust that God is sovereign over even the divisions. When it comes to all the denominationalism out there – I don't like it, but I have to recognize that God has used it to preserve certain distinctives of truth that might otherwise have been lost. One person said, "Many people tend to forget that God is sovereign and is able to turn seeming tragedies into triumphs; defeats into victories; problems into opportunities; divisions into multiplications; humiliations into character building experiences." Well, that's exactly what he did through this.

***I. Like Mark, don't allow humiliating failures to keep you from trying again.***

Two more observations, very briefly. If you are the Mark who has failed, and Paul has already written you off, don't allow your humiliating failure keep you from trying again. Ask forgiveness, humble yourself, and seek to be mentored out of your weak areas. Prove yourself. Mark refused to get discouraged just because of what one leader said. I have known people who have given up ever trying again because someone had told them that they were a washout. Well, don't let man dictate your future. Your future is held in God's hand. And rather than growing bitter, cynical or resentful, lay hold of God's grace, and let him exalt you in his good time. Just keep being

faithful.

***J. Trust God to bring beauty out of ashes***

The last exhortation that I have is that you should trust God to bring beauty out of ashes. I love that Scripture. Isaiah 61 describes the work of the Spirit-anointed Jesus, and it says that the purpose of His coming was:

**To console those who mourn in Zion,  
To give them beauty for ashes,  
The oil of joy for mourning,  
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;  
That they may be called trees of righteousness,  
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”**

God is indeed glorified in bringing beauty out of the ashes of your life after you flame out. He loves to do it. And He didn't make you for nothing. He made you for His glory and for His kingdom. Every one of you has an important role to play in it. Whether you are a Paul, a Barnabas or a John Mark, lay hold of God's purpose for you and trust Him to bring multiplication from division. Amen.