

When We Fail... Երբ կը Չախողինք...

Acts 15:31-41; 16:1-5

Only by faith we enter to the New Covenant with God: Sola Fide.

Two weeks ago, we covered Acts 15, where some Pharisees from Jerusalem who had become Christians demanded that Gentile Christians be circumcised according to the Jewish laws. Paul and Barnabas did not accept this, thus They went to Jerusalem to discuss this important topic.

-Both Peter and James (head of the council) defended Paul and Barnabas's teaching: What was that?

- if we add any other requirement on Christ's sacrifice, we are saying that his sacrifice, the cross of Jesus, the blood of Jesus, the atonement of Jesus is not enough.

We also touched on the issue of how we should handle conflict. When there was a dispute within the apostles, how did they handle it? Instead of seeking personal gain, they all learned to submit to the will of God.

-Today we will start **Paul's second mission trip** (end of chapter 15).

Let me start with an illustration I learned from my daughter.

-Nanor was 17 when she asked me that she likes to join a rowing crew. 5,6, girls and one smaller person sits in the boat and they row together. They really need to work together so that the boat can go forward. The crew needs to learn to synchronize. Did everyone like each other? I don't know, but for the boat to go forward they needed to work together.

Paul and Barnabas, those two who worked shoulder to shoulder.

Let me remind you the relationship between Paul and Barnabas, which means son of encourager:

When he (Saul-Paul) came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. (Acts 9:26-27 NIV11)

No one took Saul-Paul in, except Barnabas. He was the one believed in Paul; he was the one who risked taking Paul in. He was the one took Paul from Tarsus to

Syrian Antioch to introduce the church to this new preacher-teacher. Those two worked side by side. In fact, Barnabas and Paul became Paul and Barnabas. God did marvelous miracles through them; they established new churches; they worked both with the Jewish and Gentile society; they faced all kind of tough situations of rejection and persecution. “There is no doubt that a powerful affection had developed between Paul and Barnabas the encourager up until this point. Yet we read of a dispute that broke them apart, leading Paul in one direction and Barnabas in another.”¹

Now what?

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.”³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them,³⁸ but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. (Acts 15:36-39 NIV11)

Finally, the Jerusalem council solved the requirements of how Gentiles should become Christian, and the result was good. They were united and sent a letter to Antioch explaining their resolution. (Acts 15:22-29)

-Sometime later, (we don't know when), we have a vision for a second missionary trip.

Paul takes the initiative to **“visit the believers in all the towns where we preached.”**

“The term “visit” has the sense of **“exercising watchful care and oversight”** on behalf of someone. **Its related noun, *episkopos* (“overseer”),** was used for the **office of elder**, as one who watches over the flock with care.”²

-Barnabas suggested to bring along **John Mark** with them. Mark is Barnabas' relative and was with them on the beginning of the first missionary journey. But Mark did not finish the journey. He left.

This idea was not received well by Paul.

The Bible says, they had a **“sharp disagreement”**. Luke doesn't gloss over it. Emotions get heated, tempers rise, and a fissure erupts with leaders going different ways.

Why are they disagreeing?

It is about taking **John Mark**. He did not finish the first journey with them. We don't know why?

Two leaders, two ideas:

-**Barnabas was the encourager** (Son of Encouragement). He sees things differently. He was the one who gave an opportunity for Paul in first place. That is Barnabas. He likes to give a second chance to people. Maybe he found out that John Mark was changed, had become more mature. Please notice some time passed over the first incident. (This is my interpretation).

-**Paul was the preacher, teacher, theologian**. Paul was called as an apostle to the nations. He needed reliable staff to work with him.

Paul wanted his "missionaries" to be disciplined soldiers, willing to endure hardships and suffering (2 Tim 2:3-4).

"Sharp disagreement" is not good. Although each had their own gift, I wish instead of a "sharp disagreement" they agreed to separate with love. The Bible is realistic book. It does not cover our sinful, human nature.

Then what?

Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus,⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord.⁴¹ He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (Acts 15:39-41 NIV11)

"You go your way, I go mine", there was a song like this.

Both Paul and Barnabas were gifted disciples of Jesus. Both wanted to preach about Jesus. Yet, each went their different way.

-Now please notice, **God is sovereign** and in control. In the midst of angry disciples, **God orchestrated two mission trips. Both had the same purpose: to reach out to the nations with the Gospel message.**

N.T. Wright says: "this doesn't excuse sinful human wrath, of course. It simply shows once again what the **gospel message** itself massively demonstrates; that God can take the greatest human folly and sin and bring great good from it."³

-**John Stott** says, "this example of God's providence may not be used as an excuse for Christian quarreling."⁴

We need to be careful; neither should we assume that such disruption is the norm when there is a disagreement among Christian leaders.... Conflict is a fact of life in

this fallen world, and sometimes conflicts in Christian relationships do end up unresolved.”⁵

Watch out...what kind of conflicts we face in the church?

The outcome:

-Barnabas took **John Mark** with him and went to Cyprus.

-Paul took with him **Silas** (or Silvanus, 2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). This was an excellent choice for Paul. Silas was a gifted prophet, highly respected in Jerusalem (Acts 15:27). He was a Roman citizen. They went to north **to Cilicia**, the land of Paul’s birth, most likely with them they had the letter of Jerusalem.

The result?

Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. ²The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. ³Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. (Acts 16:1-3 NIV11)

They went to the cities where Paul and Barnabas visited in the first mission trip.

-They healed a lame man, and people thought they were Greek gods?

-Here we find new names, **Timothy**, whose mother **Eunice** and grandmother **Lois** were Jewish-Christians (both had strong faith 2 Tim 1:5; 3:15), and his father was Greek. He was raised in a good Christian home.

Do you see what God is doing? God provides new disciple to Paul.

-**Timothy** had most likely witnessed Paul’s sufferings in **Pisidian Antioch** and **Iconium**, and also his stoning in **Lystra**. (2 Tim 3:11). It seems he left a good impression on Paul, so Paul wanted Timothy to follow him. He became Paul’s faithful disciple.

-**Paul asked Timothy to be circumcised**; although we all agreed that this sign is not required to become Christian, yet Paul prepared him to travel places where he did not want Timothy to become stumbling block.

“To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law” (1 Cor 9:20).

This passage keeps me humble. Keeps me careful to be sensitive with people who do not think like me.

Finally

⁴As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. (Acts 16:4-5 NIV11)

Don't you love how ends this section. Churches were strengthened in faith and grew daily in numbers.

What else we want? What else?

Debates, different personalities, different gifts, issues, hot heads... the sovereign God is the master of orchestra. The music continues, and churches grow in faith and number, quality and quantity.

Application

1. God can use our failures

“Winston Churchill was basically a failure till he was 65 years old. Douglas MacArthur was basically a failure until he reached that same age, and then he became one of the greatest heroes in American history.”⁶

Are you facing failures? (elaborate)

As I said before, I wish Paul and Barnabas were separated much better terms. Yet, God worked in our failures.

Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus, and their mission was on a smaller scale.

That is fine, God had other tasks to Mark. **He was introduced to apostle Peter.**

Mark became like a “son” to Peter. **Peter knows what it means to be a failure.**

God used Mark, and he did something very important in the scriptures.

Mark wanted to preserve the oral teachings of Peter in a written form. Just think about his Jewish and Greek background. **We have the Gospel according to Mark.**

2. God can open a new, restored page in our lives

You wonder what happened between Paul and John Mark.

Do you know that Mark visited Paul in prison and ministered to him? (Colossians 4:10)

In another prison again we see Paul writes to Timothy saying:

Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. (2 Tim 4:11 NIV)

Here is a man (Mark) given a good reputation as servant by the man who did not see that Mark fits for the mission trip.

Well, things can change.

“Paul had not only come to appreciate Mark but also to depend on him so much that he asked for him to come to him towards the end of his life” (2 Tim. 4:11; cf. Col. 4:10; Philem. 24).⁶

It takes great humility to set aside your pride to love and serve the one who initially rejected you.

I will end with James who says:

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” (James 4:13-16 NIV11)

May God guide us to seek Him in every step we take.

1. R.C. Sproul, *You Will Be My Witness to the End of the Earth Acts* P242
2. Brian Morgan, *When Leaders Disagree*. PBCC Sermon, 05/13/2018
3. N.T. Wright. *Acts for Everyone (Part two)* P 55
4. John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World, the message of Acts*. P 253
5. Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary, Acts* P 435
6. R.C. Sproul, *You Will Be My Witness to the End of the Earth Acts* P242