

PAUL AND BARNABAS ... whom we invite to a debate
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(ACTS 15: 37-40)

Dear Brethren,

The story of your quarrel reminds us of an old query-What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object? We are intensely sorry that your fellowship was marred by the bitterness of a quarrel, for we feel your discord could have been avoided. Yet, brethren, we are strangely attracted by your difference of opinion, and we feel constrained to ask you to state your case. If we are able to understand the pros and cons of the matter, we shall appreciate the reasons for your actions. Barnabas, we have always liked you. Please explain to us your position in regard to this difference of opinion.

A Great Tenderness

" Brethren, I don't know that I'm glad to respond to your invitation, for these things are best forgotten. You want to know why I desired to give John Mark another chance. Does God cast us off for ever when we make mistakes? Did Christ refuse to take Simon Peter back? Did the Eternal Father and the Eternal Son quarrel over the matter of His restoration? No. God's love is greater than man's sin. Indeed, I would like to ask my brother Paul if he ever failed, and whether or not the Lord refused to reinstate him. Of course, John Mark had let us all down ; but he was only a child, and Paul's own doctrine says, ' Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness ; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted ' (Gal. 6: 1). My brother's action condemned the boy in the eyes of all the Church. Paul himself had committed far worse crimes, and who was he to refuse to overlook the faults of a mere boy?" Thank you, Barnabas. You will not mind if we reserve judgment. There are always two sides to a picture, and now Paul will give us his side.

A Great Testimony

" Barnabas, my brother still, and brethren. There is much truth in all that has been spoken. In the final analysis, I should be the last person in the world to accuse anyone of unfaithfulness. I, who was a murderer and a persecutor of the faith, should always be willing to grant mercy to others. And indeed I am ; only circumstances alter cases. Our Lord had died to redeem us, and it was with His great commission that we went forth into the unknown. Our standards of efficiency were provided by Christ Himself. He declared that if a man once put his hand to the plough and looked back, he was unfit for the kingdom. John Mark deserted his duty, his commission, his friends, for the one purpose of returning to his mother and his home. Supposing our Lord had acted similarly when the anguish of Gethsemane brought blood from His temples. No. How could we expect unbelievers to accept our message when weakness was manifest in the missionaries? Indeed, I was kind to John Mark. I prevented an even greater tragedy, for if he failed in the least of his troubles, what would he have done later? I did my duty to Christ and the Church, and the fact that I received the recommendation of the brethren proves my case."

A Great Tragedy

Brethren, you are waiting to hear our findings. What shall we say? Surely you were both right, and you were both

PAUL AND BARNABAS ... whom we invite to a debate wrong. The fire in your hearts reached your heads-and that is always dangerous. John Mark was never meant to be a preacher, and you, Barnabas, made a mistake in trying to fit a round peg into a square hole. John Mark was destined to sit at a desk, to collect the facts which in after days were to thrill a world. Mark was never fitted to become a pioneer missionary. Barnabas, you allowed sentiment to blind your eyes to this obvious fact. And you, Paul, must share the blame, for you also had earlier encouraged the young man. You were quite right about the wisdom of not taking him the second time ; but oh, brother, that wretched quarrel! And you, Barnabas, were right in helping the boy ; but when you persisted in the effort to make him a preacher, you merely walked into obscurity. If only you two fellows had held a lengthy prayer meeting first, your business meeting would have been happier. Mark was meant to fill another niche in the plans of God, and if you had paused to consider the matter, your mutual aid would have placed Mark on the road to success. Barnabas, we are so sorry that you disappeared from the sacred record. Paul, we are glad that in the end you sent for Mark, recognizing that he was profitable to you in the Gospel. Well done, both of you ; but you were foolish to quarrel-weren't you?

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