

# Christians in Conflict

## *When Godly People Disagree*

Acts 15:36–41 | Acts 13:13 | Colossians 4:10 | 2 Timothy 4:11

### Key Thoughts

1. **Conflict among believers is real — and biblical.** Acts 15:39 says the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas was “sharp.” Scripture does not sanitize it. Godly people who love Jesus can see a situation differently and feel it deeply.
2. **Different convictions do not always mean different loyalties.** Paul prioritized mission readiness; Barnabas prioritized restoration. Both values are thoroughly biblical — the tension was over timing and risk, not over the gospel itself.
3. **God multiplies what we think division has ruined.** One missionary team became two. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; Paul chose Silas and went through Syria and Cilicia. The gospel advanced further, not less.
4. **Redemption gets the last word.** Years later, Paul writes from prison and calls Mark “useful to me for ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11). The man Paul once refused to take became the man Paul asked for. Barnabas’s investment was vindicated.
5. **How we handle conflict reveals what we believe about God’s sovereignty.** Bitterness says the story is over. Faith says God is still writing. The Paul-Barnabas-Mark story teaches us to hold convictions firmly and hold people graciously.

### Discussion Questions

1. Read Acts 15:36–41. What specifically was the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas? What does the word “sharp” (NKJV) tell us about the intensity of this conflict?
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2. Look back at Acts 13:13. What did John Mark do, and why do you think Paul considered that disqualifying for the next journey? Was Paul wrong to feel that way?
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3. Barnabas’s name means “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36). How do you see that character trait driving his position on Mark? When has someone’s belief in you made a difference in your life?
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4. The result of this disagreement was two missionary teams instead of one (Acts 15:39–41). What does this tell us about how God can work through imperfect situations? Does this mean all conflict is productive?

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5. Read Colossians 4:10 and 2 Timothy 4:11. How does Paul's later relationship with Mark change the way you read Acts 15? What does this arc teach us about patience in broken relationships?

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6. Personal: Is there a relationship in your life where a disagreement has created distance? What would it look like to hold your conviction firmly while holding that person graciously?

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## Applications

1. **Own the conversation you've been avoiding.** Identify one relationship where unresolved conflict is creating distance. Before Sunday, take one step toward that person — a text, a call, a coffee. You don't have to agree to pursue peace (Romans 12:18).
2. **Be a Barnabas to someone who failed.** Think of someone who stumbled, quit, or walked away from something they were called to. Reach out this week — not to fix them, but to remind them that failure is not final and God is not finished.
3. **Refuse to let disagreement become division.** Commit to one ground rule in your next conflict: no gossip, no silent treatment, no scorekeeping. Bring it to God first and to the person second (Matthew 18:15).

## Closing Prayer

*Father, thank You that Your Word does not hide the mess. Thank You that Paul and Barnabas were real men with real convictions and real emotions — and that You used all of it to advance Your gospel. Forgive us for the conflicts we have handled poorly: the gossip, the silence, the grudges we have nursed instead of bringing to You. Give us Paul's commitment to the mission, Barnabas's heart for people, and the humility to hold both when they pull in different directions. Where relationships are fractured, bring healing. Where trust has been lost, build it back slowly and honestly. Remind us that You are sovereign over every disagreement and that redemption always gets the last word. In the name of Jesus, who reconciled us to You at the cost of His own blood, amen.*