

Disagreeing Well
Acts 15:36-41 (June 7, 2026)



The greatest pain in my life has been caused by my own sin.

But a close second would be pain from splits, disagreements, conflicts in the church.

I can't verify this – but I strongly suspect that much greater damage to the mission of Jesus has been done by conflict within the church – than by any persecution or attacks.

I continually meet men and women burned by churches, leaders, members. Some have walked away from the faith. Others won't trust a church again. Some still attend church but struggle to commit.

And it has greatly damaged the testimony of Christ in the community.

My guess would be that most of the adults here this morning have experienced significant conflict in churches.

Some of you have been deeply hurt and scarred and it is a wonder you are here.

It is not just churches. Division in marriages, families and friendships leave some of the most painful wounds in this life.

What I want you to understand is that while you cannot avoid disagreements and divisions – you can and should learn to navigate them well and if you must separate – separate well.

I am profoundly thankful for this morning's passage – because it shows us that yes – conflicts will happen – but there is wisdom to help us work through them.

When you first read this passage, it comes as quite a shock.

It is a bit like seeing the headline – Newsflash – The Dynamic Duo – Batman and Robin have fallen out and their time as a team has ended.

Paul and Barnabas were tight and the pressure of mission had brought them even closer.

You couldn't imagine that anything could cause them to fall out.

But they had a disagreement the word is – *paroxysmos* – it where we get our term *paroxysm*. This disagreement was so sharp – that the result was separation.

Out of nowhere we are told that the greatest, closest duo in church history seems over.

We can be tempted to say – well if even Paul and Barnabas can't get on – what hope for the rest of us?

And sometimes I wonder what Mark thought of this?

It was his failure that eventually led to the breakup of the greatest missionary team in history.

How does he recover from this?

But what I want you to see is that Paul, Barnabas and Mark are a testimony that sharp disagreements need **not** be the end – healing is possible and **can** lead to fruitful ministry and reconciliation.

The lessons for life and ministry around these six verses are profound.

We are in the book of Acts, and we have seen that the message in this book is:



We must strive to see His kingdom come, through the empowering of His Spirit, by witnessing to the nations, until He comes again.

Jesus made it clear we are **on mission** – until our General returns to relieve us.

We are in the part of Acts where **Paul's first missionary journey** lays out:

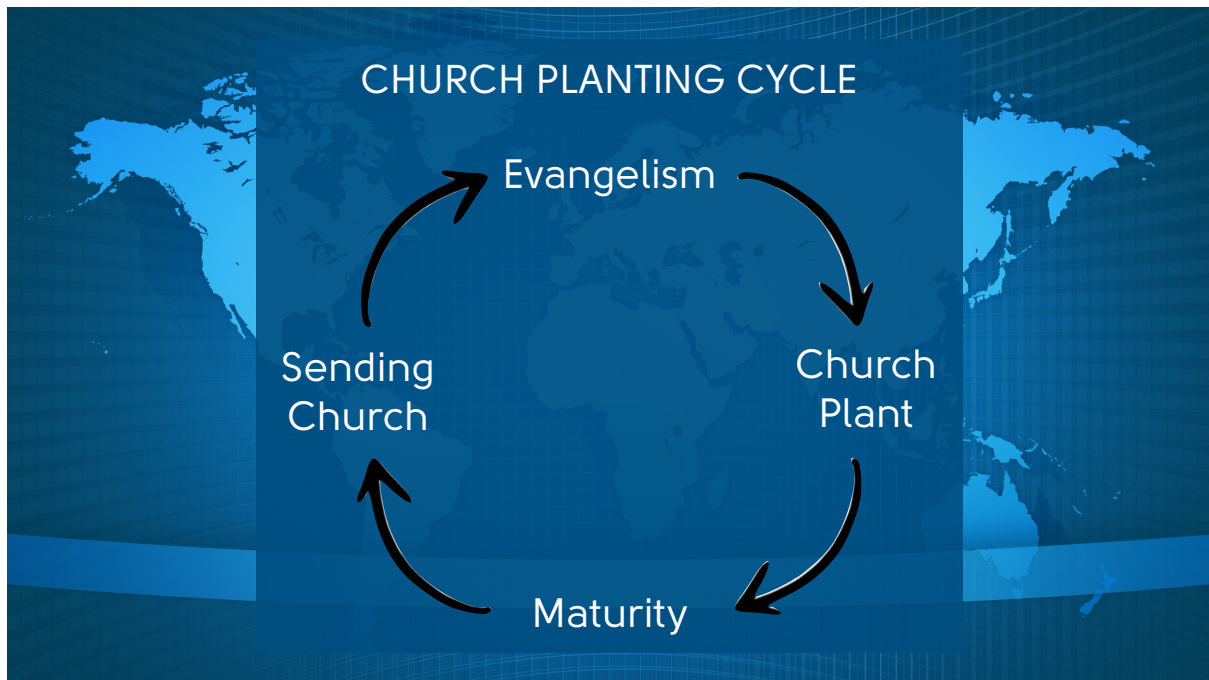


13:4-16:5 The Pattern For Missions

13:4-14:20 Evangelising
14:21-28 Planting

15:1-15:41 **Maturing**
16:1-5 **Sending**

This pattern is often referred to as:



The Church Planting Cycle.



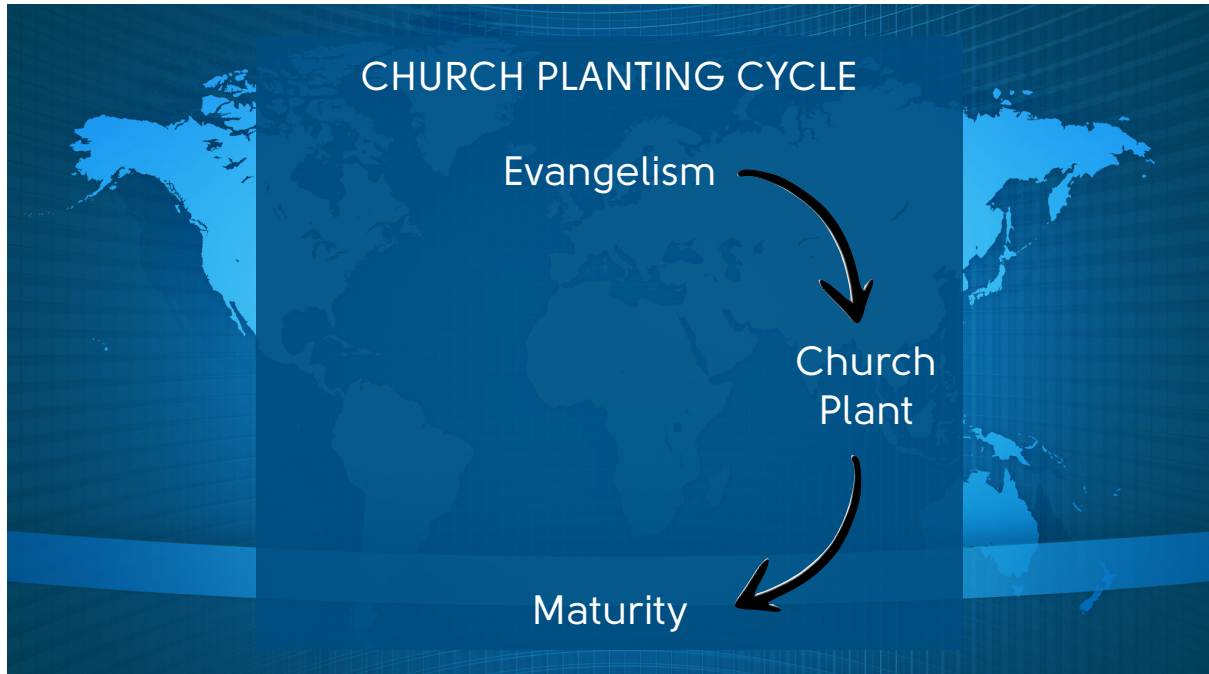
This morning we continue to see these early churches **maturing**.

Luke chose to look at maturity in terms of dealing with the divisions that can arise from our diversity.



Here in Acts 15, he looks at **two** areas of diversity that can lead to division – **cultural** and **personal**.

Last week we looked at **cultural diversity**.



This morning we will look at **personal diversity**. Learning to navigate this well is crucial for maturity.

Let me state the glaringly obvious – churches are filled with very diverse sinners – so **disagreement will inevitably arrive on our doorstep**.

But a mark of maturity in a church – in a Christian – is that we deal with it well.

Here is the point of today's passage.



Disagreement happens. Navigate it well and the mission continues. Navigate it poorly and the mission crumbles.

We now have 2000 years of church history.

Disagreements and division have been a constant.

However, despite our failures – Jesus continues to build His church.

But our role, our part in building the church and reaching the nations can be greatly diminished through division and sin.

Frankly, most divisions are not over crucial doctrines like the trinity.

Nor even important doctrines like baptism or women in ministry.

Hard as it is to accept, most divisions have been over some minor decision. What colour to paint the hall, how much to subsidise the church camp or whether to switch from instant coffee to espresso?

But regardless of the root issue – in a fallen world before you know it – even the most mundane dispute can get totally out of hand and have the capacity to undermine our ministry and derail our mission.

In Luke 11:17 Jesus said:

Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.

When you are fighting within – you are not on mission without.

So, that is the **bad** news. In this fallen world you **can't** avoid disagreements – in your marriage, with your parents, your friends, in the workplace, in the church.

But there is *also* **good** news. You **can** learn to navigate disagreements well.

First, we need to know:



Disagreement happens even among the godliest 36-39a

One of the great things about the Bible is its realism.

These six verses give us a not so flattering story about two of the heroes of the faith.

On one level it is surprising that Luke included it – do we really need to know these guys had a fall out?

If these verses weren't here, we would just assume Barnabas just never went out the second time with Paul. It wouldn't change the message of Acts.

God sovereignly included it to show us that even the godliest of us are flawed – and yet the Lord still works His plan to reach they nations through such flawed people.

Acts 15:36–39:

And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought

best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a **sharp disagreement**.

After some time, Paul is ready to go back to the churches they planted encouraging them and seeing how they are doing.

Barnabas is all in but he wants to take along John also called Mark.

But, Paul is not having that.

Remember back to when they set off on their first missionary journey they arrived in Cyprus.

But when they set sail to leave Cyprus – Acts 13:13 drops this little nugget – and John (Mark) left them and returned to Jerusalem.

We aren't told why.

We can only speculate. But Paul's reaction tells us there was no good excuse for it like getting a message his mum was dying.

We can only speculate.

We know Mark came from a wealthy family so maybe the rigors of the mission field were too much.

Maybe seeing the Satanic opposition of Elymas made him reconsider whether this was for him.

Maybe he was just homesick.

All we know for sure is that very early in the mission – Mark left them and went back to his home in Jerusalem – and at least Paul and probably Barnabas – were not at all pleased.

Now we are 3-4 years later and Barnabas wants to give Mark another chance and Paul says – sorry he is not ready.

Reading between the lines there seem to be two perspectives here.

Barnabas' Perspective

We all make mistakes. We all deserve a second chance. Younger men often get it wrong, but we need to allow them to learn from their mistakes.

Remember, Paul was a murderer and persecutor of the church. No one trusted him. It was Barnabas who saw the potential and gave him a second chance.

Where would Paul be if someone hadn't given him another chance?

Paul's Perspective

Missions is hard. You should only take those committed to the task into the fire of the mission field. We can't risk Mark bailing out again and putting our outreach in jeopardy.

Paul has been stoned and left for dead. He has been run out of several cities. Missions is spiritual warfare. You only go into battle with those you **know** will have your back.

OK – a decision has to be made – do we take Mark or not?

Barnabas is adamant – **yes**.

Paul seems just as adamant – **no**.

It leads to a **sharp disagreement** and a **separation**.

Two things are notable.

First, on one level I am surprised these two guys ever fell out.

These brothers are tight. Well over a decade of friendship and ministry.

They had served in church leadership together. They went through the fire of missions together.

But this issue became bigger for them than staying as a team.

It happens – it happens **a lot**.

When I was at seminary there were two men who were very close. One was about 15 years older and he had discipled the younger man.

Their plan was always to plant a church together and after seminary. And they did plant a church together and it grew and seemed incredibly healthy.

But, a couple of years later I was told these two men had fallen out over something pretty mundane and the church had split.

I struggled at that. Must be wrong, I could not have pictured them ever falling out over anything.

Second, the actual issue that led to the split.

Do we take Mark along or not?

Of all the issues that could cause a fall out – this would not be high on my list?

You might think this is a decision that godly men can work through without it becoming a split.

The point is godly men and woman can fall out over very ordinary issues.

Don't be shocked at how the molehill can turn into a mountain very quickly.

Be disappointed, but do not be surprised when church leadership, friends, families, anyone – divides – or if it is you who divides.

I have been intimately or peripherally involved in about six leadership splits in Brisbane.

All of them surprised me.

Men who were tight – really tight – best of friends – aligned in ministry philosophy and practice.

And in every case the root cause of the split was over areas that really should never have led to such devastating consequences.

It happens.

So, what should you do when division and disagreement come?

The principles I want to share now are **not** found in these six verses – but they are in the Bible.

What should happen between:

There arose a sharp **disagreement** **AND** they **separated**.

What should a godly Christian do when a disagreement forms?

First:



Pray for guidance

James 1:5:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Whenever you are making a decision – large or small – we should Pray. Ask the Lord to guide you and give you wisdom.

But if it becomes a contentious decision, then pray harder and if possible pray together.

You will be amazed how often this simple act of praying together breaks down barriers and leads to a mutually acceptable way forward.

Second:



Disagreement happens even among the godliest
36-39a

Pray for guidance
Review your biases

Review your biases

None of thing we are biased. We are.

We are fallen sinners – there are so many reasons we disagree. But one is our biases.

Jesus tells us to remove the log from our own eye first.

Few of us think we are biased.

Truth is every last one of us are biased.

Jeremiah 17:9:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Proverbs 14:12:

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

We all have fallen hearts and minds. What does this mean?

Our personalities, preconceptions and prejudices cause us to take the same situation, the same facts, the same principles and end up with very different conclusions.

I cannot stress this too much. In every dispute I have been involved with – those involved see things very differently and are staggered that others don't see it the same way they do.

Consider two Christians who read the same Bible passages.

End times. Same Scriptures but some of us read them as saying the world will get better – others – the world will get worse.

Baptism. Clearly infants were baptised. No possible way infants were ever got wet.

And our bias is further confirmed when we attach Scripture passages to our view.

I suspect most of you have been in an argument where someone presents a view and then quotes Scripture to back up their view expecting that to settle the matter.

It might involve tattoos, Christmas, flat earth – and you are stunned – you tell them – ahhh – that verse doesn't mean what you think it means – and they are indignant – it literally says what I am saying – and things can get rather heated rather quickly.

As well, our personal experiences, our way of viewing the world, the way we are put together all affect the conclusions we come to.

Ask an American Christian about guns – they are clearly a God-given right to protect us in a fallen world.

Most Australians are raised to most see things differently – what could go wrong having loaded guns everywhere?

We are fallen.

Strange views sound plausible. We struggle to trust.

I have been directly told many times that the Elders are obviously covering something up – there is more to this matter – things just don't add up.

I sit on those meetings, I know nothing is being covered up. But here is the thing – the more you say that isn't happening – the more that denial becomes evidence there is actually a cover up.

My point is this – even the godliest of us have things in our makeup that predispose the way we evaluate things.

Paul and Barnabas – godly as they were – as intelligent as they were – they were knitted together by God with very different *personalities* and they had very different *life experiences*.

When you read the Bible you can see that we are dealing with men put together differently.

Barnabas

He was a very generous man who grew up in a wealthy family. We first meet him in Acts 4 where he is selling property to give to the church.

Acts 11 describes him this way – a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

He is so positive and inspiring the apostles say – hey Joseph – we are going to rename you – *Barnabas – son of encouragement.*

He sees the best in people.

In Acts 9 the disciples in Jerusalem wanted nothing to do with Paul – they were suspicious that the leopard had not changed his spots. They did not want to welcome this man who had been killing them and persecuting them.

But Barnabas saw the potential in Paul and vouched for him.

In Acts 11 when the church in Antioch needed more leadership he thought of Paul.

Paul was out of sight and out of mind in Tarsus but Barnabas thought the best of him and integrated him into the leadership at Antioch.

Barnabas is an optimist with a comfortable upbringing who sees the best in people. He was sure that Mark was worth the effort – worth the risk.

Paul

He is a very different character.

A Pharisee who trained under Gamaliel.

You read his epistles and he sees the world as very black and white – right and wrong.

He sees the reality of spiritual warfare.

He sees the fallen nature of men and women.

He seems more naturally suspicious of people and their character – and usually with good reason – many close to him end up letting him down.

He had been shunned by the church and had to spend time in Tarsus growing and proving himself.

And Paul had seen Barnabas' trusting nature cause problems when the Judaisers came to Antioch and he was led astray for a time.

Paul is a realist who had already been let down and had tough experiences. Mark had failed once, he needs to prove himself before it is wise to take a risk with him on the mission field.

Whether we realise it or not there are also other factors that can bias us.

One is our allegiance to family, tribe, nation, history, tradition are strong.

Ten *long* days ago – we of the Maroon tribe watched the clearly biased Ashley Klein viciously, unjustly and with prejudice send off the great Kalyn Ponga. Almost certainly it was an NRL conspiracy because Queensland were threatening to run away with the series and affect ratings. Clearly Klein should never be allowed to ref again – not even 5-year-old girls.

But, if you happen to be unfortunate enough to be born across the border – part of the Blue tribe – what you witnessed was clearly vicious contact to the head – it nearly decapitated your Blues hero – there should never have been a moment's hesitation – Ponga was rightly sent off but there must be a conspiracy to preserve the series because he should have been banned for 10 weeks – minimum.

We all saw the same thing – But you and I know NSW are biased and saw it wrong.

Family and tribal bias is strong.

Go one Saturday and watch kids play sport. Some of those kids are – shall we say – athletically challenged, clearly struggling – but should the coach ever sub them off – their clearly unbiased dad explodes – how can you take our team's star player off – how much are these other dad's paying you?

In Colossians we find out that Mark was Barnabas' cousin. Ahhh – **he is family**.

How much did that play into this? Probably a fair amount.

You see family through a more favourable lens.

And Paul may have been suspicious that Barnabas was not seeing things clearly. He may not have insisted Mark come if he weren't his cousin.

I say it again.

Our personalities, preconceptions and prejudices cause us to take the same situation, the same facts, the same principles and end up with very different conclusions.

When you read these verses – **who do think was right?**

Team Bernie	Team Paul	Team Just Stop It
• Mark has character • Everyone makes mistakes • Everyone deserves a second chance • Look how Mark turned out	• Mark needs to grow • Learn from your mistakes first • Then we will give you a second chance • Look how Mark turned out	• You two need to get your act together • Find a way to sort this out • You are embarrassing yourselves and threatening the mission

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I *know* some of you would have been **Team Bernie**.

You are optimists who want to give everyone a second chance.

Yes giving people a second chance has blown up in your face at times – but you still think it is worth it.

And we know the ending to this story. Just look how Mark turned out when he was given another chance – he wrote a Gospel and was a faithful member of the team.

I *know* others of you would lean to **Team Paul**.

You are realists. Giving people a second chance without testing rarely works out. It is unwise.

Mark has a track record.

In the Gospel of Mark chapter 14 verses 50 to 52 we have this weird story about the crowd fleeing and leaving Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane. Among them is a young man who ends up running away naked.

Most think this is Mark himself. He fled and left Jesus.

If so, Mark has a history of bailing out.

And it is not as if he is still a boy. He is now about 35 years old. He has been in the church for twenty years. He is old enough to know better. Let him earn this opportunity first.

He doesn't get a do-over just because he is family.

And we know the ending to this story. Mark only turned out well because he was forced to mature first.

Then there are those of you on **Team Just Stop It**.

I am so disappointed in you both. Someone needs to pound some sense into your heads. You really need to compromise – *right now*. You are affecting the ministry, people are talking – you are better than this.

Okay – who is right – Barnabas – Paul – neither – both?

If you know our personalities on the pastoral team you can see our biases:

Team CRAIG	Team RHOI	Team HAN
• Mark has character • Everyone makes mistakes • Everyone deserves a second chance • Look how Mark turned out	• Mark needs to grow • Learn from your mistakes first • Then we will give you a second chance • Look how Mark turned out	• You two need to get your act together • Find a way to sort this out • You are embarrassing yourselves and threatening the mission

But, what is fascinating and crucial is that Luke seems to deliberately avoid giving his opinion or the opinion of the Lord. I suspect he leaned to Team Paul but he doesn't comment.

He simply tells us there is a disagreement and focusses on what happened afterwards.

He wants us to learn to disagree well rather than declaring a verdict.

Understand your biases – remove the log in your eye – it might alter your perspective.

Third:



Disagreement happens even among the godliest
36-39a

Pray for guidance
Review your biases
Present your reasoning

Present your reasoning

Isaiah 1:18:

Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD.

Israel did not like the fact God was judging them – so the Lord says – fine lets reason together.

In other places, God invites men like Job and Habakkuk to state their case if they have a problem.

This does not mean exaggerating, belittling, twisting, raising your voice.

As honestly, and as objectively, as clearly as you can lay out your thinking.

I truly believe this is the best decision because ...

Knowing their character, I assume Paul and Barnabas laid out their thinking and the reasons that led them to that.

Then we come to a crucial one:



Listen to them

Circle this one.

Proverbs 18:13:

If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

Proverbs 18:17:

The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.

I honestly believe many if not most disputes would find a way forward if we really listened to the other side.

Good point – I hadn't thought of that. I can see your perspective.

But all too often, we are happy to passionately and vigorously lay out our case. And having done so we are certain that it is obvious to all that my view is so right any objective person just has to side with me.

The other side speaks – but it is white noise – we don't actually listen – our mind is already made up.

I want to suggest – if you can't accurately summarise the other person's argument in a way that they would say – yes that is my reasoning – you haven't actually heard them – you have **not** listened.

I have sat in marriage counselling, Elder splits, member fights – and heard – I am completely right or at least 95% right – from **both** sides.

I have asked them to summarise the argument of the other and seen eye rolling – leading to what is the point – see what I have to deal with? But they can't articulate the other person's viewpoint – or it isn't even close.

Listen to the other side. Hear their argument – understand it – even if you disagree with it.

Let me share my heart here. I have been involved in countless marital, church and personal conflicts.

I can barely think of one where the issues were all one sided.

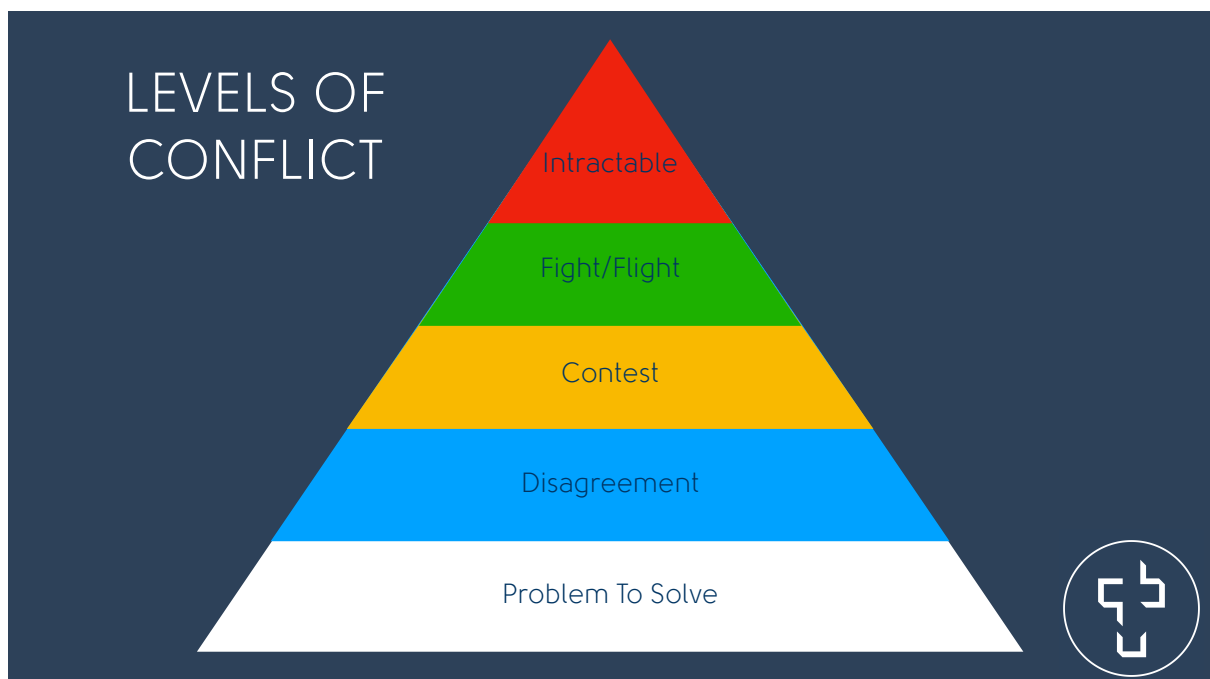
In plenty, one side did have more of a point – but in almost all there were problems on **both** sides.

Even when someone has done something clearly wrong – there were often factors that contributed to this – and the response by the other side often left a lot to be desired.

But, our fallen nature, our biases, having friends confirm how right we are and wrong they are – all lead to us thinking we are almost completely in the right and so the starting point to a way forward has to be for them to agree with me.

They need to repent. If they don't there is clearly no point talking any further.

It is right at this point that any argument, any conflict, any disagreement is in danger of spiralling out of control.



Speed Leas from *The Center For Congregational Health* has identified *five* escalating levels of conflict.

- **Level 1 – a problem to solve.**

There is an issue that arises that needs a solution.

But, if there is a difference of opinion on how to handle the problem – it moves to:

- **Level 2 – a disagreement.**

No mutually acceptable decision is reached.

It becomes:

- **Level 3 – a contest.**

Someone has to prevail.

Things quickly become intensely personal.

From here things can escalate rapidly to:

- **Level 4 – fight or flight.**

The discussion shifts from winning the argument to the necessity of ending the pain.

It becomes clear – either we get rid of the person(s) or we leave.

If both sides stay in the fight it becomes:

- **Level 5 – an intractable situation.**

The conflict drags out.

Eventually one side prevails – though in truth both sides have lost.

Leas' study shows that if the disagreement reaches **level 3** it becomes **personal**.

At that point the conflict will rarely be settled without outside help from a trusted, experienced counsel.

Which leads us to five:



Disagreement happens even among the godliest
36-39a

Pray for guidance
Review your biases
Present your reasoning
Listen to them
Seek godly counsel

Seek godly counsel

Proverbs is literally filled with verses imploring us to seek godly counsel when we have a decision to make.

Proverbs 12:15:

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 19:20:

Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.

But, here is what we often do – we go to friends or family who will be sympathetic to you and think that is objective wise counsel.

We give them our curated version of events – and they tell us – man you are absolutely in the right – I have no idea what they are thinking – it reinforces your view and tells you – don't budge an inch.

Of course, the one you are in dispute with has done the same thing.

Sides and factions have formed and no one can work out why other side is so dogmatic and fixed.

What is wrong with them?

OK – what **should** you do?

Here is my plea – godly counsel – means picking someone you both trust enough to hear hard truths from.

Godly counsel will almost always have something to say to you that you don't want to hear – and you need to decide you will follow their advice even if you don't like it at all.

Otherwise, you are wasting your time and theirs.

Unfortunately, almost always – good counsel will find problems on both sides – or say there is merit to both arguments – and the suggested way forward will not be what either party really wanted.

So, here are the most chilling words an Elder can hear.

Hi Han, we are having a dispute and we would like your input.

By this stage, usually both sides are fixed, they are sure they are right – and are certain someone as impartial as Han and the Elders will clearly side with them. That is what they mean by input – telling them they are wrong.

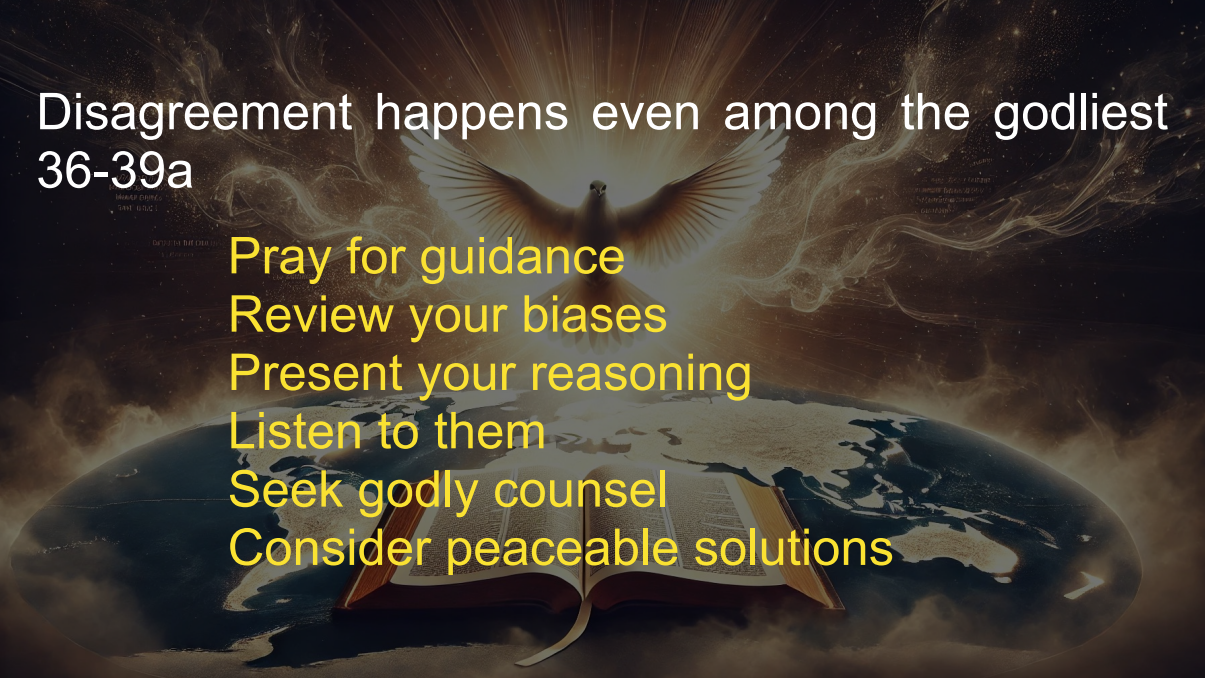
Most of the time neither side likes your advice – because you didn't fully side with them. I mean their best friend and their mum heard their side of the story and said they were 100% in the right – what is wrong with the Elders?

You see it in their faces – both sides **hate** what you are saying.

Often, both sides dismiss your counsel – walk away – say some really bad things about you, the church and often God.

If the point of going to someone independent is for affirmation you are right not true godly counsel – you are wasting everyone's time and will likely end up with more fractured relationships.

What do you do next?



Disagreement happens even among the godliest
36-39a

Pray for guidance
Review your biases
Present your reasoning
Listen to them
Seek godly counsel
Consider peaceable solutions

Consider peaceable solutions

Romans 14:19:

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Conflict leads to *pain*.

We should at least consider if there is a mutually acceptable solution that can lessen the pain.

It is not what you want – but might be what you can live with.

Maybe they give Mark a trial of a month on the mission and then review how it is going.

Maybe they get him to do outreach in Antioch and if he is doing well there he can join the team in a couple of months.

Honestly, in many cases – not all – some form of compromise – something no one really likes – will save everyone a lot of pain.

However, we need to realise – at times there is no decision all can easily accept.

And some people are those who tend to always be the one to give ground to find peace.

That also doesn't always work well.

A real solution should usually involve both giving some ground.

Finally:



Disagreement happens even among the godliest 36-39a

Pray for guidance
Review your biases
Present your reasoning
Listen to them
Seek godly counsel
Consider peaceable solutions
Make a decision

Make a decision

Proverbs 16:9:

The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.

Ultimately you have to make a decision.

- I am wrong we will do it your way.
- We both should choose to accept godly counsel and find a peaceful path.
- We will have to agree to disagree.

But the one decision you must not make is to just continue fighting and spiralling. It benefits no one and causes great pain for all – yet that does seem to be the most common response.

Often you can find a path that leads to peace.

But in some cases the opinions held are strong and no agreement can be reached.

You don't keep fighting – you separate.

That is the decision Paul and Barnabas reached.

I can't prove it – but I am fairly certain that they would have involved their fellow Elders and leaders in the church at Antioch.

I think their Elders would have pointed out the merits of both positions and implored them to see if either side was willing to give some ground for the sake of unity.

But, it seems both remained adamant.

I suspect the Elders then advised them – in this situation we think the best course of action is to separate your ministries – at least for a time.

Brothers and sisters – in this life you will have divisions – even with godly men and women you thought you would never fall out with.

My appeal to you is to work through the steps. Don't let your heart harden. Don't become so fixed in your position that you become a stumbling stone to a way forward.

See if there is a way to peace together.

If not – you divide but do so peaceably.

I also want to point out that there is one unique partnership – created by God that is not supposed to end in separation if you disagree – marriage – what God has joined let no man separate.

That is the partnership you go above and beyond to preserve – if at all possible.

There is a lot more pain before you separate.

But – in ministry and life division happens.

Stop and remember.

This is a fallen world. We are fallen and our relationships are messed up – and it hurts – a lot.

But, Jesus came to heal our relationship with Him but also to provide a way of healing with each other.

Even if we can't get on the same page now – we will be united in glory.

So, the death of Christ includes paying for our sins against each other – our pride and impatience and self-righteousness – and Jesus urges us to seek the way of peace – blessed are the peacemakers.

However, despite everything – sometimes we can't find a way forward.

We need to separate.

But, if we have to separate – do it well. Do it in a way that will glorify Christ – not dishonour Him and taint our mission.

That seems to be Luke's focus as we read on.



Disagreement happens even among the godliest
36-39a

Disagree well and if necessary separate well with
a goal of reconciliation 39b-42

Disagree well and if necessary separate well with a goal of reconciliation 39b-42

Verse 39:

So they **separated** from each other.

I am fairly sure they disagreed well which mean when they decided separating was needed they did it well.

Understand that sometimes staying together just isn't right. Romans 12:18:

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

It is **not** always possible to continue in peace. Sometimes a little distance is the circuit breaker needed.

When you read these verses and in particular the rest of the New Testament, I want to suggest that yes – the disagreement was sharp – but I believe likely the separation was anything but sharp.

I think they disagreed strongly – but well – so they parted ways well.

These are godly men. They had godly elders.

They were committed to the ministry.

In the sovereignty of God, separation can be done well and lead to good ministry.

William Farel was in the midst of a thriving ministry in Geneva when a twenty-seven-year-old guy named John Calvin – passed through. Farel realised his talent and convinced him to stay and join the ministry.

Two powerhouses. But they were very different and right from the start they clashed – repeatedly.

After a couple of years, and so much wasted ministry – they talked through the events and decided the truth is that they brought out the worst in each other. Their chemistry was terrible.

Calvin wrote to Farel and said:

We are forbidden to colleague together.

That is his way of saying – Mate – we see things very differently – our ministries would be better served by some separation.

They separated and they **both** went on to have great ministries.

Verses 39-41:

Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus – his homeland – and they had a fruitful ministry there.

We never hear of Barnabas or Mark again in Acts.

Paul takes Silas heads back to the churches in Syria and Cilicia strengthening them – the beginning of a new very fruitful ministry.

They could not agree over John Mark – but in the sovereignty of God the church ended up with **two** mission teams instead of one.

Importantly, that was **not** the end of this matter.

This was not – fine – we separate – see you in the new heavens where Jesus will tell you that you are wrong.

Too often separation means we both think we are right – and nothing can be done in this life.

The fact that these men could not agree about this matter most certainly did **not** mean they would not work together for the kingdom in other ventures.

About 3-4 years later, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.

And in it we have this verse. 1 Corinthians 9:6:

Is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?

This suggests to many that by then the team was back together.

Or Paul could mean Barnabas on Crete and me here in Corinth we both have a right to expect support.

The point is that at the very least there seems to be no antagonism towards Barnabas.

And the reconciliation with Mark is even clearer.

In Colossians 4:10 he writes:

Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas.

Philemon 23–24:

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

Paul is in Rome writing to the church in Colossae. Mark is called a fellow worker.

2 Timothy 4:11:

Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

Paul is in prison and longs for Mark to come – he is useful to the ministry.

They disagreed well – so the path to reconciliation and working closely together was clear.

Here is my plea.

Conflict will come.

When it does, do all you can to not let your disagreements become a contest, a fight or intractable.

Disagree well.

Don't let it get personal and ugly – then the path to repentance and reconciliation becomes so hard it rarely happens.

Then relationships, friendships, ministries can end up destroyed.

Don't let the name of Christ be sullied.

If necessary – separate well.

Find a way to keep ministering.

But what if you already have those conflicts that have marred relationships?

What if you are already hurt and scarred?

Quite likely every person in this room is carrying some relationships that have been damaged by conflict:

- A spouse.
- A parent.
- A child.
- A friend.
- A church member.
- Maybe someone sitting in this room.

Acts 15 reminds us that disagreement and hurt does not have to be the end of the story.

Paul and Barnabas disagreed – sharply.

Paul and Mark were not on the same page.

Yet by God's grace reconciliation came.

Keep the door open to reconciliation.

If you have done the wrong thing – ask forgiveness.

If they come and ask for forgiveness – grant it.

The same Lord who reconciled sinners to Himself through the cross is able to reconcile sinners to one another *even after deep hurt*.

What if you see things so differently that one or often both sides don't think they have done anything needing forgiveness?

Then you can't reconcile – but you **can** choose to do what it takes to live at peace.

Brothers and sisters, learning to disagree well, separate well, live in peace, forgive one another and work towards reconciling are tremendously hard life lessons – but ones every mature Christian and church needs to have in their kitbag.

We won't do it perfectly here.

But in glory we will have the mind of Christ – no divisions.

The hurts will be healed.

But for now, choose to disagree well rather than poorly.

Separate if that is what is necessary – but do it well.

And keep the door to reconciliation and working together open.

Keep ministering for Christ and trust that despite our struggles He will build His church.

Do this and our lives and ministry will glorify the Lord who bought us.

Disagreeing Well

Acts 15:36-41 (June 7, 2026)

Main Point: Disagreement happens. Navigate it well and the mission continues. Navigate it poorly and the mission crumbles.

Please Read: Acts 15:36-41

What did I learn/take away from the message?

What convicted me in the message?

What will I do in light of the message?

General Questions:

1. Are you surprised this passage is here? Why is it here?
2. How does conflict derail ministry?
3. Have you seen minor disagreements spiral into major splits in churches? Why does this happen even among believers?
4. What was the core issue that caused the split in this passage?
5. How did such godly men and close friends end up dividing over this issue?
6. Why do you think they couldn't work out a mutually acceptable way forward?
7. Why is it important to work through these steps:
 - Pray for guidance
 - Review your biases
 - Present your reasoning
 - Listen carefully
 - Seek godly counsel
 - Consider peaceable solutions
 - Make a decision
8. Are there any of these steps that seem to be where the process derails in your experience?
9. Why is listening to the other side so hard?
10. Why is it hard to seek true counsel not mere affirmation?

11. When should you decide to separate rather than keep disagreeing?
12. How do you separate well?
13. Why is it important to keep the door open to reconciliation?
14. If you can't reconcile – how can you still live at peace (Rom 12:18)?

Application Questions:

1. How can you stop your heart hardening through this process?
2. Is there anyone you need to go to and ask forgiveness?
3. What did you learn for the next time you face conflict?