

K.E.Y. Bible Study

Description: K.E.Y. Bible Study introduces the essential biblical narratives, concepts, and themes, and teaches the student how to apply the message of the Bible to daily living. Each teaching session is self-contained, which allows participants to join in the study at any time during the five years.

Purpose: To teach the most significant events, passages, and doctrines of the Bible in a manner and using methods which encourages and empowers the student to:
Keep the faith that we have received
Be Equipped to serve the Body of Christ
Become Yoked, or connect, with others for the purpose of ministry

God Prefers Unity but Can Use Peaceful Division **January 20, 2016** **Acts 15:36-16:5**

General Background

Last week our focus was on the first portion of Acts 15 that covered a corporate dispute in the early church. This passage today discloses a personal dispute and how it was handled. Paul and Barnabas were two major characters in the early missionary efforts of the church who had previously conducted a very successful first missionary journey through Asia Minor. They also attended the council that convened in Jerusalem concerning the issue of Gentile converts and whether the Gentiles were to be subject to Law of Moses.

Now, Paul and Barnabas are considering embarking on a second missionary journey. However, there was a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas concerning including John Mark on this journey. Silas, a new partner, joined Paul; Barnabas went on a separate journey with John Mark. The workers changed, but the work continued. God can and does often work through our differences and divisions. Unity is preferred, but God can use peaceful division to expand His kingdom.

What Happened

Acts 15:36 ***Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."***

It had been about four years since Paul and Barnabas had visited the region of Asia Minor (A.D. 45-48). Now (A.D. 49) Paul was anxious to see how the churches and believers there were getting along and to encourage them in the faith.

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Acts 15:37-39 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, 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. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus.

John Mark was a near relative of Barnabas (Col 4:10). He had turned back on the first missionary journey (see Acts 13:13), and Paul was hesitant to include someone who had proved to be unreliable. Barnabas was the “son of encouragement” and he wanted to give the young man another chance. The phrase “wanted to take” has the idea of continually insisting. The phrase “did not think it wise” also carries the idea of holding on to this opinion tenaciously. They loved and respected each other (Acts 9:27, 11:25-26) and had a firm resolve to the principle of missions, but both had firmly held preferences as to how to carry out the mission.

The result was: they agreed to go separate ways: Paul to the mainland, Barnabas to Cyprus.

1. Each man was just as determined as the other to do this work. The mission/principle
2. They had a difference of opinion on how this was to be done. The method/preference

Although this statement is a bit dangerous if taken to extreme, there is a famous statement of the church that goes... “in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.”

Acts 15:40- 41 but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Silas had a leading role in the early church (Acts 15:22,27,32). He assisted Paul in writing the Thessalonian epistles and also assisted Peter in writing his first epistle, (1 Peter 5:12). He was also a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37).

After a public service of commissioning, Paul and Silas began an overland journey to build up the churches.

Acts 16:1-3 He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium

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spoke well of him. Paul 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.

Since they were coming by land from the east, they came first to Derbe and then to Lystra rather than the other way around on the first missionary journey (Acts 14:6-20).

Paul enlisted Timothy as a coworker in Lystra. Timothy had seen Paul at work (2 Tim 3:10-11) and he became a valuable person to Paul (Phil 2:19-23).

With the Jerusalem Council's decision as part of their message to the churches, why did Paul circumcise Timothy? In another seemingly similar case, Paul did not allow Titus to be circumcised lest the Judaizers of Galatia think their cause was right (Gal. 2:1-5). With Timothy having a Greek father and a Jewish mother, this would be an issue to some. Paul wanted to put an end to this controversy. By having Timothy circumcised, it showed the acceptance of Timothy's heritage and that, in Christ, Timothy was a walking example that the walls of separation between Jew and Greek had come down.

Acts 16:4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.

Notice the plural "they." Timothy and Silas are a part of sharing this message.

Acts 16:5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

The word "faith" does not mean in their subjective feelings, but rather the objective fact of the Gospel message. Security in the truth of "the faith" leads to confident proclamation of the faith that results in the growth of the church.

What Does It Mean and How Can I Apply It?

Principle # 1: If you do have a disagreement with someone, do so with respect, not with rancor. Focus on the disagreement not the person. Disagree agreeably if possible.

Principle # 2: In Christ our ultimate goal should be eventual reconciliation and the restoration of friendship. Unity in the body does not always mean uniformity.

Principle # 3: In all things, our rules should be, hold your principles (mission) firmly yet your preferences (method) on how to carry this out graciously, knowing that God may lead someone else to carry out the mission differently than he has led you.

Principle # 4: The unity of the Body of Christ and the advancement of the Gospel is worth whatever personal sacrifice we must make.

The Rest of the Story (Col. 4:10, 1 Cor. 9:6; Philemon 24, 2 Tim. 4:11)