



Wisdom's Toolbox – Part 1

Managing Conflict

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You come to church on a Sunday, you sing songs about the kindness of God, the love of Christ, about the peace, mercy and grace of God's Spirit. And then you look at the title of the message in your bulletin that it's going to be about conflict. I would understand, if you think about personal conflict, that you would immediately just expect that this sermon is going to be about, you know, Christians getting along with each other, being nice, being kind, being forgiving, being gracious, being patient, you know, meeting in the middle, finding a place of compromise. That's the kind of sermon, I mean, I would expect hearing all this stuff about God and his love and his mercy and his kindness and his grace.

But God's wisdom sometimes is surprising. It's surprising because it's not a single-faceted reality. It's a multifaceted reality. And depending on the real-life situation that you're in, sometimes the right and godly and biblical thing may not be what you expect. Now, there's no doubt when it comes to personal conflict that you're having, there is a time, I think of Proverbs 19:11, that you could overlook an offense. I mean, that's the glory of a person of a king to say, hey, it's okay, I can forgive. Or First Corinthians 6 says why not rather be defrauded, you know, be wronged then, you know, do engage in the quibbling and the arguing or in that passage, you going to court against each other.

Now I get it. There's a time to drop it and there's time to compromise. But the passage that we're in today in Acts Chapter 15, the bottom of this chapter, we see Paul about to go on his second missionary journey, as we call it, and he gets into a sharp disagreement with Barnabas. And it leaves most of us saying, well, something went terribly wrong here. And they'd spent over a decade together as companions, as colleagues, as fellow missionaries. I mean, in many ways, Barnabas was the one who took Paul along and in many ways made him what he was humanly speaking. He introduced him to the apostles. I mean, this was like a partnership that when you see it in this passage break up, you think this is a terrible thing. You got to find out what's wrong. I mean, it'd be good for us to get into that situation and give them some biblical wisdom about, you know, being nice and forgiving and meeting in the middle and compromising.

But I want to suggest to you that in this passage we see wisdom, though it'll take a little doing for us to understand, mostly in this sermon by exclusion. Let's exclude things that this is not. And I warn you ahead of time. We've got to think about this and what it's not. I think we'll come to the place of recognizing God was doing something not only providentially good, but in the time, in the moment, in space and time, this was a good thing. And to do that, of course, you got to read the passage with me. So go there at the bottom of Chapter 15. Acts Chapter 15, as we get back into our series. We're going to start here in verse 36 and pick up where we left off. And where we left off was in a place called Antioch within Syria.

Now, remember that's different than the city in Antioch or Antioch in the region of Pisidia. That was really one of the key cities there in Galatia. We studied that on the first missionary



journey, but this is the home base of operations. This is where they were first called Christians, this is where we see they fled from the persecution down in Israel and Jerusalem. And this has been a base of operations for the Church. I added a little map there on your worksheet if you found that or digitally downloaded it. You've got that little map and it's there not just for us getting oriented to where we've been, but it really is going to be a key to solving this whole problem when we get down to the third point in our message.

But remember that this particular time was a time of strength for the Church. Paul had been left for dead in Lystra. A lot of things had gone on to make their way back to the Church and to kind of have another season of strengthening of the Church and all the teachers in the Church, the preachers in the Church. Paul and Barnabas were clearly a part of that. We pick up the dialog here in verse 36 when Paul makes a suggestion here. Acts Chapter 15 verse 36, through the end of the chapter. "And after some days," reading from the English Standard Version, "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.'"

That makes sense. You got a culture that is hostile to Christianity. You've got people who are just being reached with the gospel, they were new converts, we're assembling them together or they're trying to find their way. We don't have a written Bible even that we've left them. All they have is the Old Testament Scriptures and New Testament verbal truth taught to them. And I mean, we want to make sure that they're walking in the truth, that they're right in terms of their doctrine. Let's go back and check in on these new churches and these new converts.

Here comes the dispute. Verse 37. "Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark." John Mark we'll call him. He's called both depending on the passage. "But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and not gone with them to the work." You might remember the first missionary journey they went from Syrian Antioch to the coast there of the Mediterranean, hopped on a ship and went to Cyprus, the island of Cyprus. And they went across the island in the really the crescendo of that ministry on that island was converting the Roman governor of the island, Sergius Paulus. He gets won to Christ on that island, and that was huge. And then they took a boat and went up to the mainland, up what is now modern-day Turkey into a region called Pamphylia. And at that point, in Acts Chapter 13 verse 13, John Mark splits. There's not any commentary then on why he just departs and goes home.

From there they go up, take the elevated hike up to where they were headed, which was ultimately in Antioch of Pisidia, which we assume was because as, we learn historically, Sergius Paulus had some property there and probably had family there and maybe was commissioned by this big wheel on the island of Cyprus to take the message up there. So Paul goes and he has a hard reception there with the Jewish people. You might remember that's when he officially declares we're returning to the Gentiles. They go on to Lystra, he gets stoned and left for dead. I mean, there was a lot of persecution that took place, but in the middle of all that, John Mark takes off and he goes home. John Mark, you might remember, is the cousin of Barnabas. We discussed that back in Chapter 13. That, by the way, is evident in



Paul's letter that he writes later in Colossians Chapter 4, where he describes John Mark as Barnabas' cousin.

That's something that is never seen in a good light. This is clearly not a good thing that John Mark bailed out. But Barnabas thought, let's take him. Paul thought, no, let's not take. Now here's how it's described in verse 39. "There arose a sharp disagreement." This wasn't just "I think we should," "I think we shouldn't," but we'll figure it out tomorrow. This was this is a major disagreement, a "sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark," John Mark "with him and sailed away to Cyprus." That's how they started the missionary journey the first time. Now they're going in that direction. "Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord." Right? We'll get more on that in a minute. "And he," Paul with Silas and Luke and several others, "went through Syria," that's where Antioch was, "and Cilicia," and they were "strengthening the churches."

So they part ways. Now, immediately, you know, us feeling nice, emotional, in touch kind of 21st century Bible students, we all go, "Ah, that's sad." That's not only sad. We think, "Oh, that's bad. That shouldn't have happened." But I just want to challenge that this morning. And to do that, it's going to take some work. So I want to start by saying the kind of conflict that's going on in this particular case is not bad. As a matter of fact, I think it's part of what we need to settle for in the Christian life, because there are kinds of relational difficulties we need to say this is part and parcel of the Christian life. And then there's some relational conflict in the Christian life that we need to say we need to get rid of it, we need to fix it. And to fix it is not to do what happened here.

And so I want to start by thinking in two categories, but let me preview where we're going by having you write down the first point. And that is that I'm saying that what's going on here in Acts 15, and I'll try to prove this, is the right kind of conflict that we should be settled for. And I say settle for a sharp disagreement is a word that feels uncomfortable. It is an uncomfortable word, and it actually implies some pain. It's painful, painful for Paul and Barnabas to split and go two different ways. But that's going to be part of the Christian life. It's going to be a righteous part of the Christian life, and you ought to settle for it. So number one on your outline, "Settle for the Right Kind of Conflict."

Now, I know that doesn't define anything in homiletics class. I would never let that fly as a point because it should be clear, like, what kind of conflict is the right kind of conflict? Well, it's too complicated to put in a point, but let me try to talk about it. If you're note takers and I wish that you would be, here are some things that you ought to note. Let's start with big categories. Relational conflicts that we don't want in a Christian life. And we don't want the kind of relational conflicts among Christians where one party is doing something righteous and the other party is doing something sinful and that's why there's conflict. Okay? Let's start with what you should control, which is your behavior, and think through that. Right?

There are some pains relationally in the Christian life. There are some strains in the Christian life with other Christians. There's some even separation with other people from the Christian



life that's just wrong and it shouldn't happen. And it shouldn't happen because there's a problem of sin and that sin should be addressed and corrected. Are you following me so far? Now let me meddle a little bit. I know the sermon is not about this, but it is a matter of kind of itemizing some exclusions so we can get to the point of what we're talking about here.

So let's start with this. I made a list. I just went through Proverbs and I wasn't exhaustive, but I started thinking, where do I see in the book of Proverbs, as we read through it in our Daily Bible Reading right now, conflict with other people based on sin that I should be able to fix and should fix. I should repent of and fix. It's kind of like having pain in my foot because when I'm moving, you know, the dresser, I set the dresser down on my foot. That's the kind of pain where I shouldn't say, "Ah, man, it's kind of hard to be living in the 21st century with furniture in the house." No, I mean, I should move the dresser off my foot because it's wrong for me to have it on my foot and I can fix that and I should fix that. Okay?

Let me give you some proverbs. All these will be in Proverbs, I'll give you some things to write down if you want to. We're digging deep, but here we go. Proverbs 21:9 and 25:24. Proverbs 21:9 and 25:24. That's just one example about a woman who's got a strained relationship with her husband. Matter of fact she doesn't see him very much and he's not there very often. And here's how it describes her though. She's a "quarrelsome wife," okay? So she has relational problems. And the problem is because she's an argumentative woman. Right? So there's an example right there of saying now you come in and you're wanting some counsel and you want to fix this relationship. And it's like, I just want this, I want this, I want a closer, better relationship. Let's say it's a Christian husband and a Christian wife. Well, here's an example of saying, okay, well, here's the problem. The problem is you. You are a quarrelsome, temperamental, argumentative person. So let's work on that and then the relationship will improve. So you got relational problems sometimes it's that. One example.

Proverbs is an equal opportunity offender. So let's go to the men for a second. Proverbs 15:18 and 22:24. Proverbs 15:18 and 22:24. The Proverbs here talk about a person's relationship, a man's relationship with other people. And it says, here's the problem, that even a smart person would avoid someone who has a temper problem, an anger problem, and, like "make no friendship with a man given to wrath." Right? That's the second passage there, verse 24. So I know this, even just in the natural working things, the basic proverb, it's principle, common grace, people sometimes don't want to be friends with that guy. You know, I don't want to be in that guy's small group. I don't want to be around that guy, whatever, because he's a hothead. He's angry. He's got a short fuse. His temper is always angry. His face gets red. The veins on his forehead are popping out all the time. He's not pleasant to be around.

You can say I got problems in my relationship, and I'm going to say, okay, you've just set the dresser down on your foot. You need to move your foot and then the pain will start to go away and maybe your relationships will improve. Are you following this so far? It's a category that should fix interpersonal relationships because you're fixing something in yourself.



13:20. I'll give you another proverb. 13:20. And this covers a lot of things. It talks about the fact and you know this verse, you probably taught it to your kids. "The companion of fools suffers harm." Now, what is that? That's an instruction for you not to hang out with foolish people. You may have relational strain. You may have a relational problem. You may have relational conflict with a personal disagreement because really what you're doing, you're acting foolishly, whatever it might be. It might be your perspective, it might be your finances, it may be just the way you act or the way you talk. But there's foolishness and the wise person's obviously going to withdraw because that's not good. "The companion of fool suffers harm." Right? "He who walks with wise will be wise." I mean, you've got relational issues because you are a fool in some area of your life.

19:29. How about this one, the scoffer? I guarantee you, if someone is a scoffer, they are critical, they make fun of people. They, you know, do what it says in the proverbs. They throw firebrands arrows and darts and then they say, I'm just joking. The scoffer doesn't have great relationships. Matter of fact they have a lot of strained and collapsed and fractured relationships because they are scoffers by wrong, sinful traits. That needs to be fixed, that needs to be repented of.

26:20. The gossip. Right? The gossip, it just always is, you know, sharing stuff. They're not trustworthy. The English Standard Version calls it "the whisper." They're trying to be very literal with the word. But the point of whispering is they're telling secrets. They're sharing stuff they shouldn't share. Maybe it's under the guise of prayer requests or whatever. But that's the person no one wants to draw near to that person or they can have conflicts with that person. And that's going to happen because maybe there's this silly blindness in your own mind to not knowing that you're a gossip, but people see you as a gossip. You got relational problems.

I think of First Peter Chapter 4 verse 15 is making a contrast between a kind of relational conflict that is right and accepted and that we need to settle for and the kind we shouldn't. And it says things like you're "a thief or an evildoer or a meddler." Right? And that just covers so many things. But it's kind of wrapping up the proverbs in a way, and saying there are a lot of things that you could be doing that are causing your relational problems. That's a kind of relational problem you shouldn't settle for. It should keep you up at night and you should say, "God, I want to fix things."

Let me give you one more that may not be a direct correlation in your mind. And it's kind of like Hosea 8, "you sow to the wind. You reap the whirlwind," or Galatians, right? You talk about sowing and reaping, sowing to the flesh, reaping from the flesh corruption. The principle of sowing and reaping let me put it all under the banner of Hebrews 12. Discipline. If I am being disciplined by God, sometimes he's looking at my life in some area that he wants to get my attention in. And he's doing something. We see this even in the book of Deuteronomy. He's doing something elsewhere in my life to make me fall to my knees and say, "God, search me, try me, see if there's any wicked way in me."

And one of the things he does, that gets our attention real fast, is relational problems. Right? With people at work, with people in the church. Those relational problems are the discipline of



God in our life. And it could be that. And again, we've set the dresser on our foot and God is saying, move your foot. Right? Let's pick this up and move your foot and it won't hurt anymore. We'll fix it. You may have lingering pain, but God is going to heal that because you've got to fix something in your own life. It could be directly related to why people are having problems with you. It might be indirectly related that God has a problem with you and he's getting your attention through relationships. Okay.

Back in your mind to First Peter Chapter 4. I said verse 15 is the statement about don't have relational problems. He's talking about trouble with people because you're a "meddler or a thief or an evildoer." The next verse, verse 16, says, "But if you're having trouble," Mike Fabarez paraphrase, "If you're having trouble with people because you are a Christian, well then glory in that, glory in that name and glorify God in that. You ought to be okay with that. It's like Jesus. Jesus didn't have sin in his life that the Father was disciplining him for in his relationship, nor was he sinning against people and putting the dresser down on his own foot. And yet, if I ask you, did Jesus have relational problems with people? You'd say, absolutely. He had all kinds of relational problems.

Herod was coming after him, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the teachers of the law, the scribes. Right? He had relational problems because he was being persecuted because he was a Christian. So you could have relational problems, you could have disagreements with people and they're being disagreeable with you because you are a Christian. Well, that kind of takes us out of the realm, I hope, of Christian relationships. But you've got problems. It may be causing you to cry tears at night. I got relational problems, lots of relational problems and all I'm saying it could be in the category that we have to settle for and that's persecution, that's getting harassed, that's being reviled or excluded because of Christ. Jesus talked about that. The Bible talks about that. "If the world hated me, they're going to hate you." Okay?

Subset of that, let's talk about this now. There is a kind of relational problem that Jesus had not with his enemies, but with his disciples. Would you agree with that? You can think of times that he and his disciples kind of went sideways with each other. And, you know it wasn't because of Jesus' sin, Jesus was without sin. So I just want you to think that through. There were a lot of conflicts that happened. And Jesus sometimes addresses those with his disciples in very stark terms. Like when he says to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." And at that point you're thinking, okay, Jesus is right, Peter is wrong. And there's a conflict.

But you'll find if you look carefully, there are more opportunities for you to look at Jesus' life and see that people who were committed to the same things Jesus was committed to, his disciples, though they were finite and they were human and mortal. I understand that Jesus is the Son of God. But if you look at what Jesus does so often is accommodates people who are doing the right thing and wanting the right thing but he and that person had different ideas about this. And Jesus sometimes even in accommodating that person, shows me that he's not saying, "I'm right and you're wrong," because he's doing what the person wants.

Thomas is a good example in my mind, at least, the first one I thought of. Thomas wants to see the resurrected Christ. He wasn't there when Jesus appeared to the other apostles. And



so when the apostles told him he wasn't going to believe it. And I know we all tossed Thomas under the bus. And I know that just because you call him doubting Thomas. Well, you tell him that to his face when you get there. I'm thinking to myself, I'm not sure I'm ready to say that, because when Jesus encounters him, he accommodates him. I am going to do what you've asked. And now he does say, "Blessed are those who believe, even though they haven't seen the resurrected Christ." Right? I get that. He had a purpose for that but and yet he recognizes, you know what, there's something valid and noble about you wanting to have this confidence that all these other guys have because you've seen the proof. You put your hands in my wounds. I get that.

And so there are so many other examples, whether it's Jairus' daughter and the woman with the flow of blood and all the conflict. If you look at people who wanted the good thing and Jesus accommodating himself to them, the Syrophenician woman, there are lots of examples. Listen, I don't have the time to be exhaustive or even get into the details of this. But I think we've got an example in the passage that we're studying that can parallel Christ having problems with disciples that had the right heart and the right intent because they were all both going down a pathway of righteousness. And of course, Christ did it perfectly and his disciples did it imperfectly. But I know this, that there are plenty of examples that I can find, including I think this one where they wanted the right thing.

Look at the passage, verse 36. Right? They wanted to go back and they wanted to visit the churches they set up. They wanted to see how they were doing. That's a very pastoral, godly thing to do. And the next verse you see in verse 37 implies that Barnabas said, "Yeah, that's a good idea." It was not a dispute about doing good. It's like they describe Christ earlier in the book of Acts, "he went about doing good." Barnabas is right now going about this thing, wanting to do good, and Paul is wanting to do good. And what we're wanting next is if there's a conflict, to try and blame this on someone. And my premise of this sermon is, I don't think we should blame either one of these people. And I'm going to prove that to you, I hope, in the next point.

But let's just start with that conflict that we should settle for and conflict that we shouldn't. And I'm going to try to build the case that the Barnabas-Paul conflict here is a part of the cost of doing business as a Christian. That we're going to have this kind of conflict and we shouldn't fret about it. We shouldn't sit there and cry about it. We shouldn't sit there and say, I don't know what I'm going to do with this. I got this conflict and it won't go away. Right? There's a conflict that won't go away with the world. And I hope that doesn't keep you up at night. I know as a Christian, I got non-Christians who are doing the wrong thing having conflict. Well, I don't think I can have another Christian doing the good thing, the right thing, and I'm doing the right thing and have conflict. That doesn't seem right.

All right, let's look at verse 37 and verse 38, Acts Chapter 15. That's all kind of preliminary and I hope exclusionary, excluding what we're not talking about. Let's try and get down to what we are talking about. "Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark." John 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 I guess we could add the first



phrase here, verse 39, "and there arose a sharp disagreement." So, this is a conflict over who we should take. And what I'm going to say is we've got to understand some concepts here. And part of this, again, is exclusionary. But let me try and hone in to what this is exactly.

To do that let me give you three words. Let's define them, and then they'll all come into play in this second point. Number one, the word "wisdom." Number two, the word "jurisdiction." And number three, the word "stewardship." Let me try to make sense of these. First, let's define them. What is wisdom? Well, we can see it right in this passage. "Paul thought it was best." A godly person wanting to do a godly thing, which in this case is to go and serve these early churches and these new Christians. He thought this was the best way to go about it. He thinks, well, it's not choosing that guy to go with me, it's choosing that guy instead. Great. Doing what is best is the expression of wisdom. This whole series is going to be on that. Paul's expression of God's wisdom throughout his first missionary journey, at least the first half of it.

So what I want to do is to think about the fact that when it comes to this passage, we're talking about wisdom. And what Barnabas is thinking, he thinks is wisdom. And what Paul is thinking, he thinks is wisdom. Because it's not a question between should we go and bomb the churches that we just planted or should we serve them. They both want to serve them. They're trying to figure out not decisions between good and bad. They're trying to figure out the decisions between better and best. Right? To get there would be good. To go by yourself would be no good. We need a team. Let's choose this team. No, I think it would be best choose this team. No, I think we best to choose this team. That's wisdom.

Jurisdiction. Jurisdiction. It's just such a good word. "Juris" is from Latin and means "law." "Diction," "Dico" is the word "to speak." To put those together, jurisdiction is that someone has the authority or the right or the position to speak the rules, to speak what should be done, the law. And jurisdiction we would say someone has jurisdiction over this thing or this situation or in our case, this relationship. And I say our case, not the passage's case, but the case that I want to first think about. This is exclusionary. This is not what's happening with Paul and Barnabas. This is what's happening in many situations where you're thinking, okay, I get what you're saying. Two people, Christians want to do the right thing and they think this is best and then the guy over here thinks this is best. But we have to add this layer, jurisdiction. If there is an issue of jurisdiction that is valid, then this whole thing is in a whole different category.

Jurisdiction. If you are a Christian and you work for a Bible publisher, let's just throw this one out, and you got a guy there at the office and he works for the Bible publisher too, and you're all about getting the word of God out to more and more people. And you put out a lot of Bibles, but you're sitting there in a meeting and you're talking about putting out that New Testament edition. And so you are very, very adamant about the best size. And the best size for a pocket bible is no bigger than four-and-a-quarter-inches tall. That's it. And we don't want any bigger than that. Right? And there's another guy in the meeting and he says, nope, nope, we're going to go at least five inches on this and our pocket Bible is going to be five inches. That feels good in the hand and it's not too small. Okay. You both are trying to do the right thing. Good thing.



But one of you thinks this is the best way and the other guy thinks this is the best way. And here's what's going to throw this just completely out the window as having any applicability to this passage. The guy you're disagreeing with is the boss. Okay. Well, here's the deal. If you think a four and a quarter inch pocket Bible is the right size and the best size or the wisest decision, and he thinks five-and-a-half inches is the best size, here's the deal. Share your heart, share your mind, share your idea, make your best pitch. But at the end of the day, he has jurisdiction by virtue of his position. And as Colossians 3 says if you're in a subservient position in your 9 to 5 Monday through Friday you're supposed to submit to and defer to the one who has jurisdiction.

Like after church, you've got a 12-year-old and he says, "We're going to go to Cane's and we're going to get sweet tea and I'm going to have chicken fingers and extra sauce. Mom and dad, that's what I think. That's the wisest thing to do after church. Man, I worked up an appetite at church." And you say, "Well, that's sorry, kid, because I put something in the crock pot. We're going to go home. We're going to have that there." "No, let me make my case." And you'd make your case. You're not sitting there as a parent in the car, in the van, having this kind of equal footing conversation. You basically are saying, "Hey, kid, God made you small for a reason, right? I have jurisdiction over your life." Juris-law, diction-I'm speaking it. And what I'm saying goes because I have jurisdiction here, right?

I mean, if there's any group of people who are going to disagree about decisions it should be the Christian citizenry, Christians in a country and the people who are making decision about how to spend our tax money. Now I don't want to get political. But, you know, here we go. They disagree with me. What they think is wise, I do not think is wise. Okay? But Romans 13 says, here's the deal, they have jurisdiction. So you've got to give your revenue, you got to give your taxes, you've got to do it. You've got to submit for the sake of the Lord because God has given them jurisdiction over you. Okay? I'm stuck with that jurisdiction.

So this sermon and this scenario is not an equation to apply just because you think you've got better wisdom than someone who's got jurisdiction in whatever it is we're talking about. And stop getting frustrated over that. Share it. Right? Be persuasive. Make your case. But then at the end of the day know I don't have jurisdiction. Same in the church, by the way. I even put up the thing about the construction next door. Some might say, "I don't think we should have done that with that building." Right? Well, let your wisdom be known. That's great. But at the end of the day Romans Chapter 13 says that the leaders of the church, you've got to submit to their jurisdiction. And that's what you do. You don't say, "I'm leaving." You don't quit your Bible printing company because the boss has a different view of what's best. You continue. Right? You continue, defer. And you know this, whether it's the leaders of the church, the leaders of the country, or the leaders of the company or the leaders in your family, God is going to hold them accountable for their decisions. But I defer. Okay?

There's no deference going on here. Why? Because jurisdiction is not part of the equation. It's another word that is a part of the equation and it's the word stewardship. Okay, let's think that through. As a matter of fact, let me combine this. I'll make the point, then I'll define it and then



we'll talk about it. Number two, we need to "Seek the Best within Your Stewardship." Jurisdiction is about authority. Stewardship is about accountability. Not to each other but to God. Seek the best within your stewardship. I'll say that again, jurisdiction is about authority. Right? When it comes to stewardship, it's about accountability.

What's a steward? Think it through again. Biblically stewardship, not just biblically, linguistically, logically, stewardship is someone else giving me property or giving me something, having someone else's property under my purview, my direction. I'm making decisions, but I'm remembering that I don't own it. Here's the thing about your life. You don't own it. God owns your life. God owns your body. You've been purchased with a price to quote First Corinthians. Glorify God with your body. Why? Because you're a steward of your body. You're a steward not only of your body, you're a steward of everything you have, the possessions that you have. You're a steward of that.

Let me give you one more. First Peter Chapter 4. God has given you gifts and endowments. Things that you can do. To put it in words of First Corinthians Chapter 12, "the manifestation of the Spirit" has been given to you in a unique way, as opposed to the person you're sitting next to. You have different endowments that God has given you, and you're called to be a good steward of it. That's what it says. Be a good steward of the varied grace of God, the varied grace of God, the varied grace of God. You have a manifestation of the grace of God by giving you aptitudes and abilities and giftedness that the person next to you does not have. And he has some or she has some that you don't have. And you have to make decisions about what is best. That's called wisdom when jurisdiction is not on the table. And I don't think there's any jurisdiction on the table here.

These two, it's not like one is the pastor and the other is the congregant, or one is the master and the other is the servant, or one is the governor and the other is the citizen. These are just two Christians going about doing a good thing, the right thing, and they're trying to be wise. That is employing what's best, not just what's good, but what's best. And they're doing it and coming to different conclusions. And here's my case, because it's all about the rubric or the lens of stewardship.

Illustration. Dad wants his kids, his teenage boys, to be productive, have a summer where they start to learn to lean on themselves financially. And so he says, "Listen, I'm going to entrust you with some things and I want you guys, you guys are really close, you've been in Little League together, school together. You're best friends. I'm going to give you these things and I want you this summer to go and start to make some money, start to save some money, start to give some money to the Lord. But I'm going to give you some tools to do it. And here's the thing, right? He owns a, you know, a used car lot, let's just say. And he says to the one boy, "I'm going to give you this purple Prius that's not selling." Surprise, surprise. And... Sorry, Prius drivers. "I'm going to give it to son number one. Now, go figure out how to use this Prius to make some money this summer." Okay?

So immediately his mind starts working, "I could deliver pizzas. I could be an Uber driver." And he's just going. Right? To the other son he goes, "Listen, I got an old tow truck I'm trying



to sell and no one's buying it. I'm going to give you this tow truck. So you got a tow truck and you got a Prius. Now, both of you, I want you to go and make money this summer and go and do it. I've given you these things. Now go make the most of it. Okay? The one guy who's wanting to start his, you know, Lyft route or his Uber route says to the other, "Hey, we've done everything together. Let's together start working on an Uber business. Right? Get the app downloaded. Let's do it." And so because he wants to work with his brother, he goes, "Oh, okay."

And then it's like no one can get into the cab of his rig and like he's got to, you know, just one seat available. And so he tries to spend the summer being an Uber driver or delivering pizzas. It just makes no sense. He's got this giant, you know, eight-cylinder engine under the hood. He's got this giant thing hanging off the back that can tow cars around. But to try and be on the same team with his brother, he's going to take the stewardship that God has given him and not maximize it. And what I'm saying would be wisest is for you to take your tow truck and do what seems most obvious you should do with that kind of equipment. Go tow some cars and make some money. And you? You got a Prius. Great. Can't tow anything with that, clearly. Sorry. I'm sorry. (audience laughing) I have nothing against your Prius. My daughter's got a Prius. It's parked in my driveway. And she gets 50 miles to the gallon. So she's got the last laugh on the fact that I used to laugh at Priuses. Priusi? Whatever.

Are you're starting to catch this illustration now? Right? Here's what I'm trying to say. Paul and Barnabas, guess what? Different endowments, different equipment, different stewardship, different wisdom. The wisdom for both of them was different. Let me build the case. Barnabas. He had a nickname when he was introduced to us early in the book. What was it? Son of what? Son of a gun? No. Son of what? Encouragement. Right? And it's defined by "Parakletos," right? Parakaleo is the word to "call in next to and support." Right? That's the idea. Encouragement. It's like a knee brace. I've said it so many times. It's like a stake that helps a tree grow up. It comes in alongside and it firms them up. And it's a great depiction of him because he was that kind of person.

He was that kind of person. Not only is he generous when we first meet him giving money to support the church, but then the key pivotal thing that he does is when Saul of Tarsus, who becomes Paul the Apostle, gets saved, everyone doesn't trust him. And no one likes him. No one wants to let him even come to the church services, even the apostles, the leaders of the church didn't want to because he was the one persecuting the Church. And Barnabas goes and puts his arm around Paul, just like a parakletos would do. An encourager, a supporter. He's a great discipler of people. He comes alongside of Saul of Tarsus and he disciplines him into the graces of the Church. And he becomes that guy. Right?

What does he want to do in this situation? Take a guy who clearly failed. And I don't think there's any way to look at it, any other way to look at it than John Mark failed. You bailed out in Pamphylia. Here's the deal. He's not coming back. Let's think now, historically. He's not coming back to Paul and Barnabas going, "Hey, I want to go with you so I can bail out again halfway through." Right? There's no possible way John Mark's thinking that. John Mark's going, "I'll do it this time. I know that you need a guy to rely on the whole trip. I will be there



the whole trip." Paul's going, "No." Right? Barnabas is going, "Yeah." Not only that, he's his cousin, right? It's like he's a relative of his, "because I know this guy. I know him. And I can put my arm around this guy, and I can establish this guy to be what he was stumbling earlier not to be. I can get him there. So he's going to be fine. I will take him as my project under my arm. He's going to make it."

Paul, what is his equipment? Well, do you remember when they went and tried to sacrifice to him, they thought he was a god along with Barnabas, Paul and Barnabas. And they called Paul, remember that, Hermes. And then they had explained why, because Hermes was the main speaker, and so Paul was the main preacher. And so he was given the name Hermes because whenever there was an opportunity to stand up in a synagogue and to teach, they gave the microphone to Paul. Why? Because, man, if anyone was made to be on a big stage and to teach, it was the Apostle Paul. And that was his giftedness. That was his gift set. And he continued to do that. If you want anyone arguing the truth of the gospel at Mars Hill or what we call the Areopagus in Acts 17, you're going to want Paul to be that guy.

And what he needs is a lot of people who can support him because it's not like he's the guy who puts his arm around John Mark and goes, "Hey, let me restore you and disciple you." It's like, "I'm here to maximize the giftedness that I have to preach the gospel in large groups. I need an assistant to come and not be along halfway. I can't just doubt his thinking. I just can't get into the psychosis and the brain work of John Mark. Just give me someone else like Silas. Silas will do it. I believe he's got what it takes." He's got a gift set that for him the best thing is not to have that impinged upon in any way by something that he doesn't have full confidence in. So he makes a staffing decision that really matches his gift set as opposed to Barnabas. His gift set, his thought of accountability before God is completely different as it relates to his giftedness.

The decisions you make that will be wise because they're the best, because you make decisions between better and best, are different than the decisions I'm going to make between better and best, because you and I have a different variation of the giftedness of God, whatever it might be. The life circumstance, the family size, or the temperament or the personality or the gifts, whatever it is, we're different. So what wisdom looks like is going to be different even if we've paired together on a paper route last summer. Now we got cars and different equipment. We may think what is best and both be right. Right? We may both be right in saying, "no, this doesn't make sense to me, even though it makes sense to you" and him saying, "it doesn't make sense to me. This makes sense to me. That doesn't make sense." Okay.

Here's how I think and I'm confident this is right. I'm confident as I can be without interviewing both Barnabas and Paul and John Mark and Silas. I watch both of these things play out successfully in the Scriptures. I mean, you don't even get out of the first paragraph of Chapter 16. Do you have your Bible there? Look at verse 5 of Chapter 16. This is now Luke, who's going to travel with Paul and Paul is with Silas, and he comes to Lystra and Derbe and he finds Timothy. And he's going, he's building a team and he's out there making a difference.



And it says in verse 5, "So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increase in numbers daily."

Now, in Chapters 16 through 18 we get all the details of Paul's journey because Luke, the writer of the book, went with them. And I can go through that and go, oh, man, that was a totally successful trip. You did what you were going to do. You stood up and you preach the word of God in big situations. And these guys, guys like Timothy, young guys, came alongside and took care of stuff you didn't have to take care of. And you had a platform and you did it in Asia Minor.

Barnabas, I know he did what he was setting out to do. He put his arm around John Mark. He said, I can restore this guy. I can make a guy who's doubting himself and everyone else is doubting him, just like everyone was doubting you, Paul. I'm going to take this guy and I'm going to rebuild him and he's going to succeed, and he does. By the time Paul writes in Colossians 4 about John Mark, he says super nice things about him, and that's cool. But by the time we get to the last book that Paul writes as he writes to Timothy, he says this about John Mark, I got no one left here in prison in Rome under house arrest. "I only have Luke who is here with me. You know, I really need a guy I can depend on. Send me John Mark." I mean, that's an amazing thing. What does that mean? That means that Barnabas succeeded in what he set out to do. And I'm saying one had a Prius for an Uber, you know, job, and the other had a tow truck. And they both succeeded.

And here's the thing. So we're crying about them parting ways. Stop it. Stop it. Don't cry about that. Instead, look at this as a constructive solution to the problem. Number three, let's look at it, jot it down first. "Solve Your Disagreements Constructively." I want to prove to you this is constructive. Let's read it and then look at the map. Acts Chapter 15 verse 39. "And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated." They thought that was constructive. You reach for the Kleenex because that seems sad to you. "They separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and they sailed away to Cyprus."

OK, look at your map. Do you remember, and I wish I had more room for more maps. But do you remember the first missionary journey? I told you in the opening of this as I was discussing the first missionary journey, that's how they started. They went from Antioch of Syria. They went down to the Mediterranean coast. They got on a boat and they went to Cyprus and they went across that island, ending up there in the Roman seat of authority, and they won Sergius Paulus. Well, that's exactly where Barnabas goes back to. He does what they said they needed to do. He went and started to do the work.

"And Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord." I think both of them were. I think that's what my preaching is going to try to do today. I commend them both. "And he went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches." Guess what? That's the tail end of the missionary journey that Paul did. Here's what I'm saying. Here's why it's constructive. If we're going to set out to try and minister to the churches that we set up, let's divide and conquer. That's what he does. We're going to split this in half. You go there. I'll go here. We'll get it done. Here's what I'm suggesting to you.



They did not have any hints that about this outcome. You're projecting your bad solutions onto this good solution if you're going to cry about them separating.

Here's why I say that. Because here's the natural tendency of people who disagree and go two different directions. We usually say, "See, they were dumb and I'm smart, they were foolish, I'm wise, I'm right, they're wrong." You'd agree with me that happens, right? And we say that because they didn't think the way I think. And you know what that's all about? Ego. That's about ego centrality. That's about you thinking that you have a corner on all wisdom. No. If you're making the wisdom decision, what is best in light of your stewardship knowing you're going to have to answer to God and not say, "Well, yeah, I did an Uber job with a tow truck." Right? You're going to have to recognize that sometimes when you make that decision, that decision is not saying that the other guy's decision is foolish.

Not only that, even if it's not said that way, there is this kind of pecking order in your mind. Right? You could see that Barnabas could say, "Well, listen, if you're out there preaching to people, masses of people, well, they're just people. And I'm telling you, you don't even care enough about this person." It's like the guy with the Prius saying, "I'm hauling around people. You're just pulling around big pieces of, you know, rubber and metal and plastic. And I mean, I'm really dealing with the important stuff here." But that's not the point. We don't diminish the other. And let me make a reference here to First Corinthians Chapter 12, "because I'm not an eye I am not a part of the body?" No. Wrong. He says you can't just say that. As a matter of fact, you need to take every part of the body and say every one of them is important because God has arranged them each according to how he wanted them to be.

So whether you are a missionary, whether you're an architect, whether you're a mother, or whether you are a pastor, all of these are arranged the way that God intends it, and it doesn't mean that one is dismissible. As a matter of fact, it says the part sometimes you'll never see on the big platforms, we really hold them in higher regard. I mean, he used the illustration of our body parts. But what's the point? You cannot handle this in a non-constructive way, which is our flesh, which wants to say, "I'm right, he's wrong. I'm smart, he's dumb. I'm more important in my ministry, more important are my wisdom and my decisions really shows that I'm taking the high road and the smart road, and that person doesn't even know what they're talking about. And it's not going to bear as much fruit as me." Stop with all that.

Constructive solutions are like this, right? What do we want to accomplish? We want to accomplish the strengthening of the church. So let's do that. You want to also disciple a guy who's stumbled and failed in the last trip. Go do that. Get it done. And I think both these guys with mutual respect is the reason that down the road they can both sit there and interact with each other, not only with respect, but with praise. I mean, Paul has nothing bad to say about Barnabas, right? I mean, only when there was a doctrinal issue as he writes Galatians. Right? We can look at that later. But the reality is, when it comes to him being a godly man full of good works and full of the Spirit, as Luke described him, no one's going to take that back. And the point is that Barnabas is not going to sit there and besmirch Paul. Matter of fact, we're assuming John Mark ends up coming to assist Paul in Rome when he's in prison.



A constructive solution is trying to find what is fruitful and what is best. That wisdom has to be based on things like function and fit and fruitfulness. Just to illustrate here a little bit. Function, right? What is the function that God wants me to engage in? Tow truck? Prius? What is it? And then what is the fit? Right? In this case, that's what it was. The fit, it was like is Silas the right teammate here? Is John Mark the right teammate here? Am I willing to say no to Barnabas being a teammate for the sake of not having him? I mean, those are, that's a fit issue of where I'm functioning in my accountability before God, my stewardship.

And then fruitfulness of course. Do you think this wasn't fruitful? How fruitful was this? Huge. Paul had no one else to reach out for who was better than John Mark at the end of all this. Man, Barnabas was successful. What about Paul? Dividing and conquering. Do you know what happens here? Of course, God and his providence was working this all out when he had done the circuit of the churches that he'd been to before he gets the Macedonian call. What's that? He's going to go even further west. He's going to go into Greece. He's going to Corinth. He's going to go all the way into Macedonia to preach the gospel. The gospel goes out even further. Why? Because he didn't start the way he did before. And he didn't have this long, you know, voyage on the sea to get to Cyprus and deal with all the churches they set up there.

This was a massively fruitful thing. And you can look back and say, well, they made a mistake and it's really sad that these comrades went two different directions, but God made the best of it. You know, it was lemons and he made lemonade. I don't think that's what's happening here. I think it's God with two guys who saw themselves as stewards. They understood themselves well, and I think it starts with that too. We've got to be able to know the thing that God has entrusted to us, even in that discussion about gifts in the book of Romans. Right? "We ought to think so as to have sound judgment. Don't think more of yourself than you ought." And sometimes we do that and that's why we besmirch the other, that's why we criticize the other, that's why we think they're not as important as we are. Stop with the real life. It has nothing to do with that.

But it'll be uncomfortable. Do you think it was uncomfortable to pull into Antioch of Pisidia and say, "Hey, I'm back." and then they go, "Where's Barnabas?" "Oh, yeah, it's kind of painful to talk about. That's sad, he's not with me." Or for Barnabas to show up in the Roman seat of authority in Cyprus and Sergius Paulus go, "Where's Paul?" "Well, yeah, he's not here." I mean, that may feel bad on the surface, but I hope as servants of Christ what means more to us is the function of our giftedness, the fit of our ministry and the fruitfulness that God has laid out before us. That's the kind of thing that makes a huge difference. And should make us deal with the discomfort of disagreements or conflicts in a way that's okay. It's why I use the word "settle." To settle for that. It's going to happen. It's okay.

With that said, and this feels like a counseling session, not a sermon. Let me give one caveat to all of this. And it's a protection for some of you saying, "Well, if it's about that, I'm just going to think about my accountability before God. I'm just going to think about nothing else. How can I be as fruitful as I can? I'm going to maximize my fruitfulness." And you are going to let your wisdom trump and win the day because you've heard this sermon and you don't take into consideration other things that I hope that every Christian would take. And that is that no



constructive solution will be a constructive solution if it ever violates a commandment of God. Okay? There are certain things that are just non-negotiables in the Christian life and you can't ignore them and you have to deal with those. There are others like the inconvenience of having to explain where Barnabas is. That's okay. I can deal with that disappointment.

It's like when my stomach is growling for lunch, but I got to go do a pastoral call and I'm 4 hours behind lunch and I get a headache. I don't feel good. But I'm like I'm maximizing fruitfulness. I'm doing what God's called me to do. It's okay. I can say no to lunch today. Okay. As opposed to I've got this pool, old house, but an old pool. And that's when they're older, deep pools. And so, like, we had some people over and the kids' families, they throw all the pool toys in the pool, you know, the swim toys they go search for. And at the end of the night, of course, I got to go put the vacuum back in the pool. And Carlynn says, "Well, you know, we got to get all that stuff out of the bottom pool." So I go jump in the pool and go swim down there to pick up all the toys off the bottom of the pool.

Now, when I'm down there, I'm going to say I'm going to maximize my effectiveness and my fruitfulness right now. So I pick up one, I pick up two, and I say, my lungs are going, "man, you got to... You need air right now." I'm going to say, "No, I'm going to maximize my effectiveness." And so I'm going to get all 20 of those toys off the bottom of my pool. Well, that's not how it works. I come up for air. Right? I just have to more often than I used to, but I come up for air and then I go back down. Why? Because there are some rules I can't break. Right? I can say no to lunch and even dinner and even tomorrow's breakfast, but I can't say no to breathing today.

And when it comes to the rules of God, you may say maximal effectiveness is me dumping my wife and kids and going on the mission field. Sorry. You can't do that. In First Corinthians Chapter 7, Paul says I'm maximally effective in the ministry, and one of the things makes it even more effective than I would have been is that I have no interest in romance and so I didn't get married. I have a gift from God to be focused on a singular devotion to the ministry and the people of God without romance and family and kids and all that. Others, Peter didn't have that. And he says, "Well, that's going to affect your effectiveness, but it's going to make you faithful to celebrate the gift of marriage and family and that's fine." One man has one gift and one man has another, he says in First Corinthians 7.

So you don't sit here and say these things, these principles, and apply them in a vacuum. Here's another one. Your word. Your word is supposed to be gold, right? You say, I'm committed to this. Some people come, they say I'm going to work here and I give my boss or this church a year's commitment. I'm going to commit to being here. And then halfway through you think, "Well, I could be more effective in that church, and I'm just going to leave." Well you can't. You gave your word. "Let your 'yes' be yes." You shouldn't even have to have an oath or sign a contract because you make the commitment and you're supposed to hold to it. You're supposed to be a truthful person who can be relied upon. That kind of thing. All of those things, even the thing that John Mark should have said, those are things that should govern the concerns I have about maximally affecting my fruitfulness and whatever function or fit that God has put me in.



So those are other things I think that need to be considered. At the end of the day, if it's a sin issue, we should be able to pull out the Bible and make a clear exhortation either to the offending party on the other side or ourselves, and get the pain to go away by taking the furniture off our foot. But in a lot of cases, the case of accountability before God called stewardship and it's about us saying what is best, not between good and bad, but better and best. And those decisions sometimes bring us into conflict that we are going to settle for in the Christian life. But it's not anger, it's not name-calling, it's not holding grudges, it's not bitterness, it's not demeaning people. It's us really recognizing as it says in Romans 14:4 that it's not my place to judge another man's servant.

And then at the end of time, guess who was effective before God? Barnabas. Guess who was effective before God? Paul. Right? At the end it says, and I love that verse, it says, "He stands or falls before his master and his master is able to make him stand." And he did. And so I don't fault either one of these guys for going two separate directions. And that's my take on this text. And I think it is a hard text and we'll find out. So you stand in line and talk to Paul. Find out if my historical assessment of this isn't right. But even if he says, "Nah, that's not how it went down," I hope the principles that I'm talking about, give him the sermon on your mp3 or whatever, and see if he ever gets around to listening to it. And if he does, I think he's going to say, "Yeah, but those principles are true." There's a caveat for you. (audience laughs)

All right. Let's pray. Let's pray. I'll let you go. God, thanks for our time in the word. Thanks for your word that it's so challenging for us, even in passages where we want desperately so much more information. It's great that these are real people in time and space and history, and we'll get a chance to sit down and talk to them one day I hope. I hope there's a line that we can get to the front of at some point. But God, please, as we think about our conflicts, I do know these principles are true. Some conflicts that we have to live with and others that we don't, and some of the conflicts that we live with, the disagreements, really, we need to trust that you are going to make them effective and fruitful as we continue to make decisions between better and best.

So God help us to do that. It's an issue of jurisdiction. I pray we would never apply these principles in those cases because of course, we've got to respect situations you put us in and under authority. But God, when we're just talking about our brother in Christ or our sister in Christ, I pray we could work through all of these things finding peace when we should and when we can, compromise when we should and when we can. But God, sometimes we need to think about our accountability of the Bema Seat judgment in saying, I got to do this and I got to stick to this because I know I'm going to answer to my Lord, to my master, to my King.

So help us to think of that often, God, think about the ramifications, not be "peace at any price" people and not be people that are unreasonable who can't look at James Chapter 3 and say here's the wisdom that's from above. It's reasonable, it's open to reason, it's merciful, it's peaceable. And all of those things I think are super important for us to recognize. Thank you so much that Paul and Barnabas both demonstrated that. We can see that in the rest of the New Testament. No envy, no jealousy, no strife, no discord. As James Chapter 3 says, a



lot of people say it's wise, but it ends in that. And he says that's not wisdom at all. So help us to recognize wisdom in our own lives and to apply it faithfully.

In Jesus name. Amen.