

“PEACE ON EARTH?”
(Even the Apostles Fight!)
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INTRODUCTION

The events in Newtown, CT remind us ever so vividly that we are very far from having peace on Earth. Then what did the angels mean when they sang before the shepherds:

“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Actually we would do better to render the last words: “Peace to men with whom He is well-pleased” (NASB) [Literally: “Men of His good pleasure”].

*There will never be peace on Earth until men’s hearts are right with God, and until men submit their wills unto God’s will. **Fact of the matter: there will never be “peace on Earth until the Prince of Peace returns to reign over this Earth.***

We can understand that there is not peace among the unrighteous and wicked. But we are “jarred” a little when we see even apostles quarreling as we do in Acts 15:36-41. Please notice that this quarrel was 1) Over preaching the Gospel of Christ; 2) that Even good men sometimes have strong disagreements and have good reasons for those disagreements; 3) that these disagreements sometimes lead to separation and different movements; but 4) God can and does often providentially overrule in these matters and turn the division into His own glory and the spread of the Gospel more widely; but 5) such truths should never encourage us to arbitrarily or carelessly bring about further divisiveness—we ought always strive for peace among the brethren and especially within our local church; and 6) when there is a matter of principle at stake, we may be forced to separate even from our brothers—at least for a time.

LET US SEEK THE WILL OF THE LORD IN OUR CHURCH MINISTRY.

We will look at these principles one by one:

I. DIVISION SOMETIMES ARISES EVEN OVER GOOD MATTERS--HOW AND WITH WHOM TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

Paul wanted to return and carefully visit the new disciples in Galatia and elsewhere.

1. He wished to care for them **all**—in every city where they had preached the word of the Lord
2. He wanted to see “how they have”—how they are doing.

II. EVEN GOOD MEN HAVE REASON AT TIMES TO DISAGREE (37-38)

- A. Barnabas was desiring—it was his will, to take along with them John Mark again.
- B. Paul strongly insisted that they should not be taking him along—too much was at stake—it was too risky and would be even more difficult and longer than the first journey “Paul considered him worthy not to take along.”
 - 1. He had deserted them in Pamphylia. (the word for “apostasy”)
 - 2. He had not gone with them to the work.

III. SUCH DISAGREEMENTS SOMETIMES LEAD TO SEPARATION (39-41)

- A. This was “sharp disagreement”—a paroxysm!
- B. They separated from one another.
- C. Barnabas took Mark and sailed away to Cyprus.
 - This was Barnabas’ home area.
 - Mark was salvageable. (As we see later—I Pet. 5:12-13; Col. 4:10; II Tim. 4:11)
 - Barnabas may have stayed there for the rest of his ministry.
- D. Paul chose Silas [Silvanus] and went through Syria and Cilicia.
- E. This separation must have torn at the hearts of Paul and Barnabas:
 - Paul owed everything to Barnabas—he introduced him to the Jerusalem apostles (ch 9) and brought him to Antioch to minister there (chapter 11).
 - Barnabas had the privilege of working with the best missionary and preacher of the gospel who had ever lived; what an honor.
 - This separation was great loss for them both.

IV. GOD CAN AND DOES PROVIDENTIALLY OVERRULE FOR HIS GLORY (40-41)

- A. Barnabas and Mark had effective ministry in Cyprus
- B. Paul and Silas had very effective ministry returning through the previous churches and then striking out into new regions.
- C. Paul and Silas were “strengthening the churches.”
- D. The Church of Antioch “committed Paul and Silas to the grace of the Lord”—cf. 14:26 with 13:3.
- E. **There were now two missionary teams instead of only one.**
 Silas was a good pick for Paul:
 - He was from the Jerusalem church and one of the delegates who could help spread the decree of the Council about Gentile liberty.
 - He was Jewish but also had Roman citizenship (see chapter 16) which would put them in good stead later.
 - He was less Paul’s equal and would be a better fit than Barnabas.

- He was a prophet (13:1) and could exhort Jews and Gentiles—as had been evidenced in Antioch.
- He was proficient in the Greek (I Pet. 5:12)

Does God know what He is doing or not?

However, we must remember: *such truths should never encourage us to arbitrarily or carelessly bring about further divisiveness—we ought to always strive for peace among the brethren and especially within our local church—See Phil. 4:2-3; 2:2; Rom. 12:16, etc.*

Moreover, *when there is a matter of principle at stake, we may be forced to separate even from our brothers—at least for a time. It is not necessarily the end of the world when such divisions occur. IN FACT, I SUBMIT TO YOU THAT IN SOME SENSE, CHRISTIANITY IS MUCH RICHER TODAY BECAUSE OF SOME OF THES DIVISIONS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE, AND IN MANY CASES, CHRISTIANITY HAS SPREAD MORE WIDELY BECAUSE OF THE ORIGIN OF DIFFERENT GROUPS.*

CONCLUSION

“Peace on Earth”? Not yet, not now!

But, do not despair; God is sovereign and works through even unfortunate and sometimes even nasty or wicked situations.

In this instance, Paul and Barnabas still loved and respected each other and continued to do so later—see I Cor. 9:6. [Note even Gal. 2:13—even Barnabas, showing how much respect Paul had for him even in a time of weakness for Barnabas prior to this incident.]

We can disagree with our brothers sometimes, and not even be able to work together with them, and yet have great love and affection towards them.

The main point is, **LET US SEEK THE WILL OF THE LORD IN OUR CHURCH MINISTRY**—do not strike out on our own!

It could lead to the kind of quarrel that we see here. God obviously wanted two different missionary teams to go out—as actually eventuated.

We must serve God in God’s way.