

Fractured Relationship

Have you ever had a sharp disagreement with another person? Another believer? Don't feel bad if you answered "yes". Even the great apostle Paul and Barnabas (the son of encouragement) did. The Scripture says, "And there arose such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and departed being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord". (Acts 15:39,40)

There is no way to whitewash this dispute. It was not just a mild difference of opinion. This was a serious argument. Emotions erupted. Sharp words were exchanged and possibly unkind accusations were hurled. Sadly to say, it ripped the fabric of their relationship and each went their separate ways.

Why did it happen? Why does it happen to us – even with those we love, trust and respect? One reason is pride. Pride leads us to believe that our opinions are right and others' are wrong. If our opinions are rejected, we may think somehow it is a reflection of our self-worth as persons. So we fight with every weapon at our disposal to win the argument and protect our ego.

Another reason is inadequate information. We may be too quick to judge others. We form opinions on the basis of a few isolated experiences, or believe someone else's assessment of them, and then we jump to conclusions. Once our judgement is formed, we tend to view almost everything else they say and do in that light. That can lead to repeated misunderstandings. We refuse to believe that people can grow and change.

But one of the most common reasons for contention among believers is our lack of **communication**, especially failure to share our feelings. It is easier to accuse, reprimand, or condemn others for what they have done, to argue over trivialities or insist on our way, than it is to admit honestly our feelings of hurt, insecurity, inferiority, anxiety, fear, selfishness or jealousy. We don't want to look bad, so we cover up those feelings.

What's God's solution? First, talk! Openly, honestly, talk! "I felt hurt when you did that. But I want things to be right between us. Can we talk about it?" "I felt put down when you said that. Would you explain what you meant?" When we refuse to talk, hard feelings begin to grow and explosions are sure to come. Secondly, allow for differences of opinion. God did not make us all from the same mold. We have different backgrounds and we think differently about things. On clear Biblical issues, we cannot compromise. But most issues are not matters of right or wrong. And thirdly, be willing to forgive. We are all human. We are going to let our old sin natures and psychological hang-ups get the best of us at times. We are going to say the wrong things in the wrong way. We need to be patient and understanding with each other, and willing to forgive. We all do foolish things once in a while (some of us with greater frequency!) We want people to forgive us when we do, so we will need to extend the same grace to them.

While there is no evidence that Paul and Barnabas ever resumed the kind of close relationship they once had, the bitterness was washed away and they

came to respect one another deeply again. Paul later spoke kindly and admiringly of Barnabas (1 Cor. 9:6). I am confident that there has been a grand reunion in heaven.

Let's not wait until then. Let's learn to be open and honest with each other about our feelings right now. Let's talk more freely about them, to accept and love one another even when we differ, to avoid judging other people's motives, to be tolerant of one another's different opinions, and forgive one another quickly when we do hurtful things. God bless you!