

Changes In The Team

Acts 13:4-13.

Sunday morning, October 24, 2010.

I. A change in name, and position.

Upon arriving in Cyprus, and bringing the gospel to his own kinfolks, relations change between Barnabas and Saul and John Mark in the city of Paphos, the capital of Cyprus. This change is brought out by Luke in the encounter with Sergius Paulus, the governor of Cyprus, and Elymas the sorcerer.

Up to that time Luke had spoken of “Barnabas and Saul” and in listing the five teaching elders of the church in Antioch he had listed Barnabas first. The use of the Greek language (as well as Hebrew), and the customs of the day, dictated that you put the most important person or subject matter at the beginning of a sentence. Barnabas then was clearly the leader in both the church in Antioch and within the missionary team up to that time.

From this time on Luke will mention Paul first. “Paul and his party...” Vs. 13 “Paul and Barnabas...” Vs 43 and 46.

Application:

Times of change and transition can be difficult. They often bring carnal attitudes and inclinations to the surface of our lives where they clearly can be seen, but also dealt with. This is perhaps why the Lord allows them to surface, so we may deal with them.

Times of change can also be times when we grow in grace; times when we are stretched in our ability to follow the Lord, and times in which we discover new graces.

Both of these dynamics, the good and the bad, seem to have been at work within our missionary team.

Saul becomes Paul

Saul was his Hebrew name. Perhaps he was named after Israel’s first king. This name means “Asked” or “Requested.” It is related to Samuel which means “Asked or requested of the Lord” This name made him a part of the Jewish people and it gave him standing in the community of his own countrymen. Saul however was called to be the apostle of the Gentiles Galatians 2:7, 8 and Acts 22:17-21. Therefore it would be helpful for him to have a Greek or Latin sounding name.

To the Jews Saul would still be Saul, but to the gentiles he would be known as Paul or Paulus in Latin. Both names would remain in use as Luke indicates in Vs. 9. “Saul, who is also called Paul.”

Paul means “Little one,” perhaps a reference to his physical stature which seems to have been unimpressive, as were his gifts in public speaking. 2 Cor.10:1,10.

Application:

Saul, the name associated with royalty, had to become the lowly little one in order to be useful to the Lord. The power and effectiveness of the message had to be of the Lord and not of Paul. So it is still in the lives of God’s servants.

Embracing this truth is not always easy; nature wants to be big and important. For those who embrace this truth it opens up new graces to them and a whole new way of life.

II. John Mark leaves them.

The trio sailed north to the mainland of Asia Minor, to Perga, where John Mark left them to return to Jerusalem. Paul was now clearly the leader of the team Vs. 13. We do not know the reason for John Mark's leaving. We do know that Paul sharply opposed his doing so and was angered by it. Barnabas was more understanding and accepting of his decision. Acts 16:36-41.

Some things ought to be noted:

- A. Paul saw John Mark's decision as a turning back and an abandoning of the work. Barnabas did not. Acts 16:36-41.
- B. John Mark did not abandon the Christian faith and service. He continued as a productive part of the church in Jerusalem.
- C. Paul, years later, softened his stance regarding John Mark admitting that he was profitable for the ministry, and asking for him personally. 2 Timothy 4:11.
- D. A team of three people does not work well. Two will tend to hit it off, and the third one feels discouraged as a useless appendage. The Lord sent His disciples out two by two, and the apostles would do the same in Acts 16. Paul and Silas, and Barnabas and John Mark.
- E. Did Paul's taking over the leadership position from Barnabas change the inter personal dynamics of the team? No doubt, but we do not know how.

Application:

We get a glimpse here of the mixture of grace and frail fallen humanity that is at work in even the best of God's servants. Man, in himself, is not much. Carnal attitudes and inclinations may well have come to the surface here in the lives of John Mark and Paul. Owning those humbles us, and therefore softens us, and makes us more useful to the Lord's work. The Lord always multiplies grace to the humble.

III. Barnabas takes second place.

Paul, who counted himself as the least of the apostles and even the least of all the saints, is taken by the Holy Spirit, and made the leader of the missionary efforts to the gentiles. And Barnabas, Sr. pastor of the church in Antioch, is put in second place as his assistant.

This must have been difficult on some level for Barnabas, yet here again, embracing the path of humility and grace, Barnabas was stretched and he grew as a person. This took real grace for both of them. In Paul to resist the temptation for pride to surface in taking over the leadership position; or did it surface on some level and offend John Mark causing him to leave? We can not say.

Barnabas needed grace to willingly take second place. In that he followed in the footsteps of the likes of John the Baptist, who said of the Lord Jesus: "He who, coming after me, is preferred before me (ranks higher than me)." John 1:27.

Application:

On some level we will always have to deal with the pride of our fallen natures which causes us to become puffed up or hurt. Embracing the way of humility and grace brings the pain of stretching, but also new life by way of more grace and usefulness to the Lord.