



World Christian Fellowship

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Galatians

Lesson 12 Weakness of great leader

Galatians 2:11-14, ¹¹ Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; ¹² for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

Right from my young age, even before I have become a Christian, I had great interest in reading autobiography of well-known people of all walks of life. After I have become a Christian I have read quite a few missionaries life. We can learn from others life what to do and what not to do.

Learning from others life is much more easier and less costlier rather than making the mistakes and learning from our own lives.

Even in my working life I have learnt this valuable lesson how to run or not to run the business from my own and others life.

Hebrews 13:7, *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.*

Hebrews 6:12, *that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

Bible teach us,
Leaders teach us,
Experience teach us and
Other lives teach us and inspire us.

The Christian missionary movement through the centuries has been perpetuated by missionary biography.

If you have not read the autobiography of Bro. Augustine Jebakumar, 'No one else' then I would suggest you get a copy and read it.

Proverbs 13:20, *He who walks with wise men will be wise,*

If Jesus can captivate a person by His Spirit, wisdom, power and love, then it is not surprising that those who have walked closest to him and have a large portion of his spirit will also captivate us.

Barnabas

That is the power and value of Christian biography, and that is the value of studying a man like Barnabas, *"a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and faith."*

Acts 11:24, *For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.*

In **Acts 4:36**, Barnabas' real name was Joseph and the apostles called him "Barnabas" because it means "son of encouragement."

Who is a great Christian leader?

There are many. But I would like to give one definition which will summarise all to an extent.

One who shape others toward the image of Christ is a Christian leader.

Acts 11:22-24, *Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. ²³ When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. ²⁴ For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.*

There was a need in the church in Antioch. The church saw in Barnabas the necessary gifts. They sent him. He willingly went. Barnabas willingness to go anywhere God directed, and his acceptance to take the direction and guidance from the church.

Also, he had eyes to look beyond the imperfections of a church. The church in Antioch that had just been planted and see the grace of God.

Not everyone can see the tokens of God's grace in the lives of the saints, especially the newer saints, but Barnabas could.

Acts 9:26, *And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.*

A biblical leader-maker takes risks to support hopeful leaders.

Is there anyone who will take a risk for Saul?

Is there anyone who can see in him the making of a great leader?

One man came forward to take that risk.

One man stuck his neck out when everyone else was afraid to give Saul a chance to prove himself! That is none another than Barnabas

Barnabas' ministry in Antioch had been so successful and the church had grown.

His thinking should have been:

- ✓ I am now a respected leader.
- ✓ I have earned a good reputation for my work.
- ✓ It is now time to consolidate my gains.
- ✓ It is time to establish myself as a prominent preacher in this part of Syria.

However, Barnabas,

Instead of gloating over his own success, who leaves town to look for an associate!

An associate that he knows well, who is a more dynamic leader and a better preacher than he was, namely, Saul.

Acts 11:25–26, *Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. ²⁶And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

So, Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, when he had found him, and he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a large company of people.

With this strategic investment in Saul's life and career, Barnabas secured forever his secondary status in church history.

Peter and Barnabas

Galatians 2:11–14.

Peter had come down to Antioch from Jerusalem and was enjoying his Christian freedom by eating with the Gentile Christians. But then some of the stricter party in the Jerusalem church came who did not approve of this kind of freedom.

The response of Peter and the other Jews and even Barnabas was utterly unacceptable to Paul.

The behaviour of Peter and Barnabas amounted to a new commandment to the Gentiles that they must virtually become Jews to be a true Christian.

What was at stake?

The truth of the Gospel V14.

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

There are actions that contradict the truth of the gospel that cannot be tolerated.

Paul knew that when the truth goes, and the gospel goes. When the gospel goes, the souls of men perish.

This was Paul's great strength. He never forgot that truth issues are ultimately people issues.

Barnabas' Weakness

Peter and Barnabas were wrong.

Their actions were out of step with the truth of the gospel.

Why had Barnabas been swept away in this error?

Why did a few men coming from Jerusalem cause Peter and Barnabas to conform to their expectations rather than stand up for the principle of gospel liberty?

Here is the weakness of a great man.

1. Great Saints can fall away

Let us look at one incident that took place when both Paul and Barnabas was ministering at Lystra.

Acts 14:8-18,

V11, Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"

The gods have come down

V12, And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.

They have been given names of their god.

V13, Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

They have been given honour and even were offered sacrifice to them.

What your response be?

It's a wonderful thing when the people recognise the call and gifting upon your life.

V14-15, *But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out ¹⁵and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them*

Paul himself had given a warning loud and clear that he and Barnabas must not be idolized. Paul cries out with a warning that should be stamped over the biography of every man except Jesus.

Men, why are you doing this?

We also are men, of like nature with you.

Paul confessed that he was a sinner and that he had not yet arrived at perfection.

Philippians 3:12, *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*

1 Timothy 1:15, *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*

But here Barnabas played along with Peter.

Great saints lose it, whether Barnabas, or Paul. We praise God and are thankful that the Bible is so honest in portraying the failure of even the best saints.

2. Making the right decision... always in line with God.

In our everyday lives we need to make lot of decisions, Physically, and Spiritually. The ministry is also made up of many judgment calls.

There are circumstances in our life when decision that should be made when no specific rule of Scripture refers explicitly to yours.

Acts 15:36,

First let us look at the Background.

John Mark

Acts 12:25, *And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.*

We learn that Barnabas and Saul brought a young man named John Mark back to Antioch with them from Jerusalem.

Mark's mother's name was Mary, and she had a house in Jerusalem. The one where the disciples were praying when Peter escaped from prison (Acts 12:12).

Mark had been part of things in Jerusalem in the years just after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Colossians 4:10, says that Mark and Barnabas are cousins.

Acts 13:2, *As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

The Holy Spirit appoints Barnabas and Saul to be missionaries from Antioch.

Acts 13:5, *And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant.*

Barnabas and Saul decide to take John Mark along as an assistant.

But something happened after the team left Cyprus and headed on into Pamphylia.

It must have been very serious, but Luke only mentions it in one sentence.

Acts 13:13, *"Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem."*

Paul and Barnabas finish their missionary Journey and had a very successful trip.

Two or three years later the Jerusalem council has settled the issue of Gentile circumcision.

After this Paul and Barnabas are back in Antioch teaching and preaching.

Paul is convinced that the time is right for a return to that first missionary field to strengthen the saints.

Acts 15:36-40, *Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing."³⁷ Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.³⁸ But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.³⁹ Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus;⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.*

Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia.

A sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas and they separated from each other.

Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. This shows the church was on the side of Paul. (Acts 15:40)

The Disagreement

This is the foremost instance of Barnabas patience with the failures of others. He wants to give John Mark another chance and he wants to do it now.

Paul disagrees.

The disagreement is so deep that it cannot be resolved. These two gifted and called missionaries, whose friendship goes back at least 15 years, and who owe each other so much, part company.

Neither will yield.

Which one of them was right?

Well, Luke is remarkably objective here. He does not seem to take sides. Perhaps one little clue shows that the church inclined to the side of Paul.

The impression we get from this is that two good men could not agree and a terrible fall out in their partnership happened.

There is no passage in Scripture that says, "When a young missionary has forsaken the work on his first journey, you shall give him a second chance after 18 months of penitent and faithful service." And also, there is no biblical text says not to help him.

Scripture does say that, "Encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all."

We have principles which say that leaders in the church should be above reproach, and well-tested.

- ✓ One principle stresses the glory of God's mercy.
- ✓ Another principle stresses the glory of God's calling.

- One principle emphasises the abundance of God.
- The other principle emphasises the holiness of God.

Some of our decisions are governed by explicit biblical commands but most of our decisions in life are an effort to apply biblical principles.

What does wisdom dictate in a choice like this?

Barnabas seemed to focus on the need and potential of Mark. Paul seemed to focus on the demands and potential of the larger cause of the gospel and the honour of the mission.

Most of our life and ministry is made up of those kinds of decisions! The application of biblical principles to situations not explicitly dealt with in the Bible.

God uses all kinds of people and all kinds circumstances.

3. Relationship over Truth

Barnabas, the son of encouragement was vulnerable to minimizing the importance of truth for the sake of relationship. This we see all over the churches today.

Their very strength that their inclination to stand up for his people, this very strength can lead to weakness.

Exactly this is what took place here in Antioch in our scripture portion of Galatians 2:10-14.

Why did Paul not get sucked into the hypocrisy?

Whereas Barnabas was older and more experienced Christian gave into this hypocrisy.

Maybe it was because Paul did not feel the same emotional empathy with the Jews who came from Jerusalem?

Paul's orientation to the ministry was only gospel-centred. Emotions and opinions of other people did not have any value to him.

Galatians 1:8, & 10, *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.*

For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

What Paul did that day made the Gospel pure even after 20 centuries?

Whereas Barnabas, with all his warmth and patience with people, was sucked into an error that compromised the truth of the gospel.

Every strength is vulnerable to its corresponding weakness.

4. Don't gloat over your past

Past experiences and past usefulness are no guarantee of future obedience.

Acts 11:24, *For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.*

Barnabas was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and faith. And God used him mightily in the church.

But it is certain that in Antioch, in Galatians 2, he was NOT full of the Holy Spirit. He feared men and acted hypocritically compromised the truth of the Gospel.

Therefore, we should learn that none of us should rest on his laurels. None of us should gloat over our experiences and achievements of the past.

Rather we should say with Jesus,

- ✓ let us watch and pray that we not fall into temptation,
- ✓ let us put on the whole Armor of God and do all to stand in the day of testing, and
- ✓ let us hide the Word of God in our heart that we might not sin against him.

The Christian life is

- ✓ a race to be run and finished,
- ✓ a fight to be fought and won, and
- ✓ a faith to be kept to the end.

There is no place for coasting or drifting.

1 Corinthians 9:26-27, *Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

Philippians 3:13-14, *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

5. Have confidence in God will triumph

The cause of God will triumph through all the weaknesses and failures of his people.

Three Evidences from the Life of Paul and Barnabas

a) The brokenness healed.

1 Corinthians 9:6, *Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?*

sometime after separating from Barnabas, Paul refers to Barnabas as a fellow worker who shares his life and labour. The breach has been healed.

b) John Mark made useful

2 Timothy 4:11, *Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.*

Was it Paul's tough rebuke that made him useful?

or Barnabas' tender patience that saved Mark for the cause of the gospel?

Or could it have been both?

In any case, the Lord brought victory out of contention, and Mark not only became useful to Paul but also served as Peter's interpreter and wrote our second gospel, the gospel according to Mark.

c) Both were useful in their own ways

God triumphs even through the failures of his people. When the contention was not solved, neither missionary quit the ministry. Instead they chose new partners and went on with the ministry of the gospel, and out of one faltering missionary journey there emerged two.

Conclusion

God has done this again and again in history. Out of the ashes of failure HE fans a few sparks into a new fire that burns for his glory.

The defeats of God's people are always temporary. The ark of the covenant may be captured by the Philistine armies. But Dagon will fall on his face before the rays of dawn and tumours will ruin the triumphs of the enemies of God (**1 Samuel 5**).

The defeats of God's people are always temporary. The cause of God will triumph through all the weaknesses and failures of his people.

Barnabas alone, of all the disciples in Jerusalem, was willing to set aside Paul's history of persecution and give him a new chance to prove himself as a Christian convert. And in doing that, God used Barnabas to give the church the greatest missionary and theologian it has ever had, namely, the apostle Paul.

