

Frustration

(Acts Session 25—October 3, 2026)

I almost considered entitling this message, “*The Gospel According to Kenny Rogers*”. ‘*You got to know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em...*’ Well, that song was supposed to be about Kenny getting some sage advice from an old gambler.

Well, this chapter gives us some insights along the same lines, minus the gambling. In particular, **Acts 15** is the record of a couple of serious conflicts. Conflicts between individuals and conflicts that were occurring in the church as a whole. Now here’s the thing—differences of opinion are unavoidable in life. But we need to learn how to handle them wisely. I think there is something here we can all benefit from in that regard.

In **Acts chapter 15**, Luke informs us that a few men from Judea had come up to Antioch and were teaching the church a false doctrine.

Acts 15:1-2

1 And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

Now this is a major function of leadership in the church. To protect the congregation against false teaching.

Evidently, what these guys were teaching had flown in under the radar back at the church in Jerusalem, and had been granted the status of having *some* merit.

Paul and Barnabas recognized that allowing this teaching to stand would render the doctrine of salvation through Christ alone meaningless. They had to get this thing ironed out.

Acts 15:4-6

4 And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.

5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.”

6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.

Alright, so this brings a little clarity to the situation. It was the Pharisees—that very rigidly legalistic branch of Judaism—that were behind this line of thinking.

Timing is so important. I believe very deeply in “*Divine Coincidences*”. Thank God for all of those little “accidents” where He arranges the timing of events as His way of unveiling His direction in our lives.

And thank God for Simon Peter. A lot is said about Peter’s inconsistency, and I understand why that is. We can identify with the struggles he had.

But on this particular occasion, he lives up fully the nickname that Jesus gave him: “*The Rock*”. He brings great clarity to bear on the situation at hand.

Acts 15:7-11

7 And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up *and* said to them: “Men *and* brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

8 So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He* did to us,

9 and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

10 Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

First notice what he said in **verse 9**:

Acts 15:9

...and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Their hearts were made pure in God's eyes. How? By faith. No altar call. No prayer on their part. Nothing but an inward response to the voice of the Spirit to their hearts.

And then he says something very insightful in the next verse.

Acts 15:10

Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

He recognized that things would not stop there. This was just the beginning. If they allowed the Pharisees to get what they were demanding regarding the rite of circumcision, it would open the door to relying on the law for salvation all over again.

He says, ***"...a yoke on the neck...which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"***

That's how he was characterizing following God by means of the law. And I think he has in mind the legalistic approach that the Pharisees were so found of. It would kill souls, not save them.

You hear a lot about Sharia law in the news these days. The law of Islam. I believe the spirit behind that patently false teaching is the same spirit that Peter is recognizing here in Acts 15.

It has always been the case: The nature of a legalistic approach to God, centered in the egos of the men who end up being in charge. It is always a yoke. A yoke which symbolizes bondage. Enslavement. It is a religion that is

hard, harsh, and cruel. Religious yokes are a deadly thing.

No wonder Paul wrote what he did to the Galatians. He set things in perspective with crystal clarity.

Galatians 5:1-6

- 1** Standfast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.
- 2** Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.
- 3** And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.
- 4** You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt* to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.
- 5** For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.
- 6** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

Don't get me wrong here. I'm not advocating easy-believism. There is a law we are accountable to. The law of love. That is a description of behavior we are committed to as Christians.

But we're talking about salvation here. You don't perform any acts of any sort to get saved. You simply trust and believe in Jesus, in such a way that you embrace Him for who He is...Lord and Savior. Faith. Saving faith. That's what Paul and Barnabas were contending for. And that is what Peter was reminding them of here.

And then right on the heels of Simon Peter's eloquent reminder, James the half-brother of Jesus steps up to the microphone.

James is recognized as the official leader of the church in Jerusalem, so he has everyone's attention.

Acts 15:19-21

19 Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God,

20 but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood.

21 For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

He gives the Gentiles a pass on the law of Moses. He says not to worry about all of that stuff. Your faith in Christ is enough to save you. You are saved by faith in Jesus, plus nothing.

And then he follows up with a few basic rules to keep. Rules that seem to be geared towards avoiding certain aspects of pagan worship practices, along with a couple of rules to avoid unnecessarily offending Jews who lived amongst them.

From **verse 20**—they are to “...**abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.**”

And then it's back to Antioch for Paul and Barnabas. And when they arrived, they gathered the church together to read the pronouncement from James and the Jerusalem Council.

Needless to say, I would imagine all the men in the congregation were greatly. There were probably a whole lot of hallelujahs and amens when that announcement was made.

And after this, Paul and Barnabas settle in for an extended period of teaching in the church at Antioch.

Acts 15:35

Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

And then another conflict comes up. This one doesn't get handled nearly as well as the previous conflict.

Acts 15:36-41

36 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.

41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

I noticed two interesting parallel phrases.

- “**Barnabas was determined.**”
- and, “**Paul insisted.**”

Barnabas had his mind made up from the beginning. “**We're taking John Mark along with us.**” And Paul reacted by pushing back against the idea. “**No way.**”

Keep in mind, these men had been partners for about 4 years. And what an amazing ministry they had experienced along the way.

Does it make sense to bring this very successful partnership to an end over something so comparatively trivial? They could have tried to work it out.

Maybe Paul could have given Mark a chance to prove himself, with the understanding that this was the last chance. Mark probably would have relished the opportunity to redeem himself in this matter.

Or Barnabas could have lightened up and agreed not to take him along this time around. And then if John Mark responded humbly to that decision, he could be given the chance to come along on the next trip.

Either of those two alternatives makes more sense than what ended up happening.

Both Paul and Barnabas had a point to make in their respective positions.

Paul had a good reason for resisting the idea of letting John Mark come along for the ride.

Verse 38 says that John Mark “...**had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.**”

In all likelihood, John Mark’s desertion had taken quite a toll on Paul, putting him under additional strain when his endurance was already stretched to the limit.

Paul wasn’t willing to squander the time and energy required to nurse along someone who was only half-committed to the task.

I should also point out John Mark—**also referred to as just plain Mark** in **verse 39** and elsewhere in the Bible—he was Barnabas’ cousin. So there was some family loyalty at work here.

It would have been helpful if Luke—who wrote the book of Acts—gave us his own assessment here. He says nothing in that regard, so we’ll have to look elsewhere to get some help.

There is this much: a couple of interesting post scripts that might be factored in to help us come to a conclusion in our own minds.

Near the end of his life, Paul writes a letter to Timothy. His knows his time on earth was growing short at that point. Most likely it was just a matter of months before he was executed.

Which makes everything in **2 Timothy** especially weighty. And Paul makes a special note of Barnabas’ cousin Mark in this letter. Listen to what he says:

2 Timothy 4:11

Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.

Whatever his failings might have been in the past, Mark had obviously regained the trust of this great Apostle. Paul wanted Mark at his side during his final days.

But Paul was done with Mark here in **Acts 15**. But Jesus wasn’t done with Mark, and that should be an encouragement to all of us.

But that being said, what are we supposed to make of Barnabas’ decision to quit working with Paul? It looks to me like Barnabas allowed this disagreement to blind him to his original marching orders from the Lord.

Paul does refer to Barnabas later on in some of his letters. But he never does so in a contemporary sense. From this point on in the New Testament, Barnabas is only mentioned in relation to events that occur prior to **Acts chapter 15**.

And so in **verse 39**, we read the last words recorded in Scripture regarding Barnabas’ direction in life.

“And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus...”

He wasn’t headed back out to the mission field like Paul was. He was sailing for Cyprus. Cyprus is where Barnabas was from. In other words, Barnabas was headed for home. And that is the last we hear of him or his ministry.

This is an extraordinary thing, especially in view of an amazing fact about Barnabas that few people are even aware of.

We read it back in **chapter 14**.

Acts 14:14

“But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out...”

Barnabas was called an Apostle. Not one of the twelve Apostles of Christ. But an apostle of the church. We discussed this in a previous message.

The word “**Apostle**” simply means “**sent**”. And it is a fact that Barnabas was sent like few other people have ever been sent.

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.’”

So the question I’m left asking is this—what in the world is Barnabas doing going home? Going home, and from all we can determine, staying there. He was called to go with Paul and evangelize the Gentiles.

I’m sure part of it had to do with his discouragement over this recent turn of events. How could he not be discouraged? Anyone would.

But he was Barnabas. That was the name given to him by the Apostles, and for good reason. It meant, “**son of encouragement**.” Barnabas was a master at encouraging others. Couldn’t he have encouraged himself?

Now obviously, there is some conjecture on my part here. It could be that Barnabas did go back out on the mission field again, continuing to spread the gospel far and wide in the Gentile world. It could be. But if that is the case, there is no hint of it in Scripture.

In fact, the only credible history recorded about Barnabas outside of the Bible is a tradition that says he was martyred for his faith in the year 61. Barnabas was killed for the sake of the gospel. But it happened on Cyprus. He was killed at

home. Not out there, in the wider world, in the pursuit of his calling.

Understand something. The devil will use whatever he can to interfere with your mission in life, whatever it might be. And frustration is one of his most effective tools. Satan has sidelined countless Christians through frustration.

Now I’ll leave it to you to decide how to process this information for yourself. I have my own opinion. But I know this much—Barnabas was a good man. No, he was a great man.

Which is why I am uncomfortable with the conclusion I have arrived at in this study. After all, who am I to second-guess the choices of a great man like Barnabas?

Barnabas was right about Mark. And it seems to me that he was right about Paul being wrong about Mark.

But when Paul dug his heels in and refused to reconsider his position, I think Barnabas reacted in the wrong way. He set sail for Cyprus in a moment of frustration.

And perhaps that is the take-away for us this morning. Has life thrown you a curve lately? Are you frustrated because someone has been unreasonable?

Do you feel like walking away from what God wants to do through you, simply because someone else has been too stubborn to take your opinion seriously?

Don’t allow frustration to lead you into making unwise decisions. Simply because of stubbornness on the part of someone else.

It’s not an easy thing to do, maintaining forward movement when you are not taken seriously. In this situation, Paul didn’t recognize John Mark’s potential, and he just wrote him off. Barnabas saw things differently, and history seems to side

with his view of things. After all, John Mark is the author of the Gospel of Mark.

The best response to frustration is to remain consistent in your commitment to God's leading.

It's so easy to get sidetracked. Stay on the path. People may be unreasonable. And people may be stubborn.

But their attitude is no reason to walk away from the Lord's leading. Sometimes you will be called upon to endure people's bad attitudes for the sake of the call.

Your priority is to always stay on the path that Jesus called you to, no matter what.

Frustrations are inevitable. Don't let them divert you. Stay on the path, so that your calling will develop in the way God intends.

Frustration never justifies abandonment of the mission.

So based on the example before us this morning, this week might be a good time to think some things over.

It would be good to reflect just a bit, and ask a question: ***"Are there frustrations in my life that I'm using to justify some carelessness in my walk with Jesus?"***

Frustration can be mitigated by means of divine inspiration. The next time you are frustrated, make sure you look to the Lord instead of looking for an exit. He will encourage your heart. And you will grow in your effectiveness for Him.