

How We Short-Circuit the Power of God

We can't have New Testament power if we don't walk in New Testament love

The New Testament church was characterized by exciting miracles and supernatural anointing, but it was not immune to division. The earliest churches suffered splits—not only because of doctrine but also because of bitter personal disputes.

Even the apostle Paul, who modeled Christian affection and implored his followers to preserve the bond of love, had an unfortunate disagreement with his close colleague, Barnabas, early in their ministry partnership.

The exact nature of their argument is a mystery. We only know that Paul did not want to take John Mark, Barnabas' cousin, on his second missionary journey because the young disciple had deserted the team in Pamphylia. Acts 15:39 says: "And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed to Cyprus. (NASB)"

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We can only speculate about what happened. We know that Mark was Peter's spiritual son (1 Pet. 5:13), and it is possible that Mark took sides with Peter in his awkward controversy with Paul over the practice of Jewish traditions. Whatever the case, Paul went one way from Antioch and Barnabas went another. For at least a season, an effective ministry team was fragmented.

When we piece the entire story together, however, we discover

that Paul and Mark eventually reconciled. In the letter to Philemon, Mark is mentioned as part of Paul's team (v. 24). In Colossians 4:10, Paul says of Mark: "If he comes to you, welcome him." And in Paul's last epistle, he tells Timothy: "Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service" (2 Tim. 4:11).

To say that Mark was "useful" was an understatement. After all, it was Mark who, years after he disappointed Paul with his bad behavior, wrote the gospel that bears his name. Most scholars believe Mark based his account on Peter's firsthand experiences with Jesus.

The story of Paul and Mark is a dramatic picture of forgiveness, redemption and second chances. An ugly conflict was resolved. A bitter dispute was reconciled. And a young man's ministry was restored after he made an embarrassing mistake.

This is the way New Testament Christianity is supposed to work. Jesus constantly taught on the primacy of forgiveness, and the early apostles urged their disciples to keep short accounts.

Paul, especially, asked his followers to soak their lives in love. He told the Colossians: "Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against all these put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (Col. 3:12-14).

That is the New Testament's gold standard, but what we practice today falls short. Too often, pastors who parted ways years ago still don't speak to each other. The necessity of forgiveness is rarely preached. Many Christians nurse grudges for years; others collect offenses like packrats. Many people are wounded in one church and then move to another—carrying their resentment and bitterness with them.

What we don't realize is that unresolved conflict can short-circuit the power of God in our lives, and it makes the church weak and irrelevant. Many of us have prayed that the Holy Spirit would unleash a fresh wave of revival in our midst. But perhaps we need to ask these simple questions first:

- Am I carrying any personal resentment in my heart toward anyone?
- Am I still carrying around baggage from previous conflicts?
- Have I judged a person because of their mistakes, and determined in my heart that they can never change? If they are willing to repent, am I willing to release them?
- Has my love for people—especially other Christians—become cold, artificial and hypocritical, rather than warm and affectionate?

If we want New Testament power, we must also pursue New Testament love. We cannot expect to reconcile sinners to God if we have not practiced reconciliation with each other.

J. Lee Grady is contributing editor of *Charisma*. You can find him on Twitter at *leegrady*. His latest book is *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale*. (Chosen Books).