

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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The Proper Reaction to Those who Oppose the Gospel (Part 4) Acts 13:6-12

We left off last month considering The Display of the Root of the Problem. Acts 13:8 says, “*Elymas...withstood them.*” The verse does not explain how this withstanding took place, but we considered that it could have been verbal. It could have been an attack of discouragement by saying that they were wasting their time. It also could have been a verbal attack by denying the truth of what Paul was preaching. Elymas could have said, “These two men are not telling the truth.” He then could have begun to further espouse his own religion. That is what many missionaries face when they go into countries that are dominated by other religions. They are faced with attacks about the truth of the Bible. Someone may ask, “What does a missionary do when faced with that kind of opposition?” He must keep preaching the Word. It will not be easy, and one may face physical assault, but when the veracity of the Bible is denied, the only response is to preach it more. It will not do any good to argue about it; just preach it.

Another form of withstanding that Elymas may have practiced was a private audience with Sergius Paulus. The Bible does not give any detailed information about the relationship between Elymas and Sergius Paulus. Scripture simply introduces the account and says that Elymas “*was with*” Sergius Paulus. It may have been a casual acquaintance, it could have been a business relationship, or it may have been a religious connection. Because of what Elymas was, I would tend to think that Elymas was a religious advisor to Sergius Paulus. But the nature of their relationship does not really matter. Getting back to our thought for now, Elymas could have privately told Sergius Paulus not to listen to Paul any more. Perhaps he

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suggested that Paul and Barnabas were only trying to take Sergius’ money. I do not know exactly what Elymas said, but his only desire was to hinder the Gospel.

Why would Elymas do such a thing? Personally, I think that he was afraid of losing his influence with Sergius Paulus. He had gotten this inside position with Sergius, and he was determined to keep it at any price. Perhaps it gave him connections with other people. Perhaps it gave him a sense of pride knowing that he was associated with the governor of the island. When he saw that Sergius was interested in what Paul was saying, he saw that his connection, his influence, could end. The only thing that he could think about was stopping Paul in any way possible.

The real reason that Elymas withstood Paul may have been that he was completely devoted to Satan. We will consider this more when we look at Paul’s reaction, but Elymas was a sorcerer. His involvement in sorcery may have opened him up to demon possession. His opposition may have been because the demons in him openly wanted to oppose the preaching of the Gospel. Elymas may have completely sold himself to being the devil’s instrument. He heard the same message that Sergius heard, but he did not want to hear any more. He wanted to stop it, and did not want Sergius to hear it.

This last thought is what most of us do not want to hear. We want to give everyone the benefit of the doubt and say that they do not really know what they are doing. We try to make excuses for them. We say that they really mean well. Perhaps it is time that we began realizing that many people are completely sold out to the devil. Scripture warns and reminds us many times that we are in a spiritual warfare. That is not just talking about demons and angels fighting one another. Sometimes people are filled with demons. At that point, it comes into the physical world as well. We who are God’s children can be, and should be, filled with the Spirit. But there many who are devoted to the cause of Satan who are filled with demons.

That is why they oppose the Gospel so much. Many will be surprised at what I am about to say, but I believe it to be true. Many involved in false religions are filled with demons. It may be Roman Catholicism, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventism, Hinduism, Islam, or any other false religion. All of these religions are contrary to the Bible and deny true Biblical salvation. They are works of Satan. Those who follow them are really following the devil.

Many think that the only way a demon possessed person acts is like the maniac of Gadara. Some do act like that. But others are like what Paul described in II Corinthians 11:13-15—*“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”* Here is Bible evidence to back up what I have said. Many of those who are preaching a false religion are demon possessed. They oppose the Gospel because they are on Satan's side. Be careful what you listen to. The devil and his demons are very deceitful. They look and sound so good. But if it is contrary to the Bible, it is not of God, it is of the devil. That is why Elymas really opposed Paul. He was on Satan's side. He hated the truth. There many like Elymas around today.

Now notice the last aspect of the Root of the Problem. We come to The Desire of Elymas. We considered the description, the deception, and the display of the problem. We have seen what he was like and what he did, but why did he do it? The last part of Acts 13:8 says, *“Seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.”* You may argue the point if you want, but Elymas knew what he was doing. He heard what Paul was saying, and he did not like. He did not like hearing that Jesus had saved Paul on the Damascus road. He did not like hearing that Jesus had risen from the dead. He did not like hearing that Jesus alone is the Way of salvation. He did not like hearing that Jesus can save sinners. He did not want Sergius Paulus

to listen to it either. He was determined to do whatever he could to keep Sergius from hearing anything else about Jesus. He did not want Sergius to become a believer.

The word seeking means “to plot against life; to go about; to endeavor; to aim at.” Whatever Elymas' goal in life had been up to this point, it changed when Paul came to town. He may have seemed like a good person and appeared to be everyone's friend, but Paul changed that. Now Elymas wanted nothing else but to stop Paul. It is interesting how the Gospel changes people. Some hear the Gospel, believe it, and are no longer the same. They are saved, live a different life, and desire to get the Gospel to others. Sadly, many hear the Gospel, do not believe it, and try to stop the preaching of it. You can read stories of witch doctors in foreign countries who tried everything they could to stop missionaries from coming into their tribes. In other countries, Catholic priests and Muslim leaders try to stop the true Gospel of Jesus Christ from being preached. They are just like Elymas.

In our own country, there are those seeking to turn others away. Many years ago preachers were opposed. Robert Sheffey, on more than one occasion, was beaten and left on the side of the road by moonshiners who got mad because he preached against drinking and preached the Gospel to drunkards who got saved and no longer bought moonshine. Bob Jones Sr., Monroe Parker, J. Harold Smith, and others had their lives threatened by men who hated the Gospel that they preached. Mormons strongly oppose missionaries carrying the true Gospel into areas that are heavily Mormon. There are many seeking to turn others away today.

But notice something else about Elymas' desire. The phrase to turn away means “to distort; to misinterpret; to corrupt; to turn from the right path.” Elymas was trying to damn the soul of Sergius Paulus. He did want him to get saved. He did not want Sergius to accept what Paul was saying. He wanted Sergius to keep listening to him and following his sorcery. His desire was to corrupt what Paul

was saying so that Sergius would not believe. He added to what Paul was saying or he took away from what Paul was saying. Elymas did not care how he led Sergius; he just wanted to make sure that Sergius did not listen to Paul anymore. He would use whatever means he could to destroy Sergius' confidence in Paul.

How serious was this opposition to the Gospel? Was Paul upset that someone would do what Elymas tried to do? Should we get upset when false preachers and teachers are opposing the Gospel either by making personal attacks against us or by preaching a false Gospel?

The answer to the first question is that this was as serious as you can get. This was more important than life or death. This was eternity in Heaven or Hell. There is nothing more serious than what was going on here. This was not some small disagreement. This was an attack on the Gospel. A response must be given.

Did it matter to Paul? YES! We will spend the next several issues looking at Paul's reaction. Should it matter to us? YES! If we love Jesus and love the Gospel, our reaction should be the same as Paul's. It can be no less. We must learn and practice the proper reaction to those who oppose the Gospel.