

CONVERSION STUDIES

CONVERSION OF SERGIUS PAULUS

Example nine of thirteen

The beginning of Paul's first preaching tour among the Gentiles is recorded in Acts 13. The tour began from Antioch. The first area of labor was Cyprus, the old home of Barnabas, the companion of Paul. We are especially interested in the work at Paphos. Sergius Paulus called unto him Barnabas and Paul, and sought to hear their message. Paul was opposed by Elymas, a sorcerer. Let's consider first the message delivered.

There are several terms used to describe what Paul preached. The proconsul sought to hear "the word of God" (Acts 13:7). The gospel did not originate in man. Men, guided by the Holy Spirit, spoke as God directed them, "when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God" (I Thess. 2:13). The word is also identified as "the faith." Elymas sought to turn the proconsul "from the faith" (Acts 13:8). Elymas was not trying merely to turn the proconsul from believing, but from "the faith." When the article "the" is attached to "faith" it refers to what is believed, the contents of belief (Jude 3). "The faith" is singular (Eph. 4:5). As it is synonymous with "the word of God," our faith must be limited to what God says. Paul asked Elymas, "Wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10). No one questions that God's ways are right. His ways are revealed in the one faith which is the word of God and is right. God's ways are always right even though they may not agree with us. In any conflict between God's ways and man's ways, God's ways are right. The conclusion of the story says the proconsul was astonished at the "teaching of the Lord" (Acts 13:12). The word "teaching" is also translated "doctrine." Our doctrine or teaching must be that of the Lord. "Teaching" is singular for God has only one doctrine. It is "the faith." Men have many.

The account of the work in Cyprus shows the two ways men react to the gospel. They oppose it or they accept it. Some feel that they are indifferent, but this is really

opposition. Elymas opposed the gospel and sought to turn Sergius Paulus from the faith (Acts 13:8). Elymas not only rejected it, but sought to turn his master away. This is the case with many people today. They are not satisfied to reject the truth, they hope to get others to oppose it also. There are many opponents to Christ such as worldliness, doubt, atheism, and sectarianism. Perhaps the biggest blinder to faith is the fascination with material things.

Paul identified Elymas for what he was. He said, "O full of all guile and all villany, thou son of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10). Working for the devil is to become a child of the devil. Seeing his prize slipping away, Elymas perverts the truth. "Wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" We must be sure that we or our religious teacher is not acting similarly (II Pet. 3:16). This was no time for gentle methods or mild words. Paul acted sternly. "And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season" (Acts 13:11). There is nothing else like this ever recorded in Acts. Elymas was defeated by the apostle. All false doctrines will be defeated when brought in contact with apostolic doctrine. Only truth will save. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Sergius Paulus reacted differently to the gospel. He is described as a "man of understanding" (Acts 13:7). Perhaps meaning one of strong common sense. If so, why did he have someone like Elymas around. This was a common practice then just as rulers today have advisers. People of good understanding today are often misled by religious charlatans. Sergius Paulus is revealed as being open, hospitable, and eager to learn so he sent for Paul. He wanted to hear what Paul had to say. We should always be willing and desirous of investigating our beliefs. Truth has nothing to fear from an honest investigation.

Sergius Paulus gave up his error and accepted the truth. This shows his understanding. It takes courage, but all will admit that it is the only sensible thing to do. He was "astonished," but not at the miracle, but at the teaching of the Lord. He "believed" (Acts 13: 12). God's testimony was astonishing, but he believed it. Was Sergius Paulus baptized? There is no mention of it. There is no record of the eunuch repenting in Acts 8, but we know he did. The record leaves the idea he was saved, and to be saved he must have repented although Luke does not mention it specifically. Luke's statement that Sergius Paulus "believed" is similar to "And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house..." (Acts 18:8). No mention is made of his being baptized, but we know he was (I Cor. 1:14). The proconsul was baptized, and added to the body of Christ.

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