

Elymas the Sorcerer.

Acts 13:6-12.

Sunday morning, October 17, 2010.

I. Off to Paphos.

- A. The fruit of Barnabas and Saul's ministry in Salamis seems to have been scarce. Luke makes no reference to any, and Luke is very much in the habit of recording the results of the preaching of the gospel, as he will do now in Paphos.
- B. Barnabas and Saul make the approx. 100 mile journey along the southern shore of Cyprus to Paphos.
- C. Paphos was the Island's capital, and it was the seat of the Roman government. Cyprus was part of the Roman Empire properly speaking. It was a province; not an occupied territory. As such it had a proconsul, not a procurator as were Pilate, Festus and Felix who administered a region of the occupied territories.
- D. In Paphos they meet two people (among others) worthy to note, and Luke records Barnabas and Saul's encounter with them. They were the governor or proconsul who's name was Sergius Paulus; an intelligent man and a seeker after truth, and a Jew named Bar Jesus (Son of Jesus; not the Lord), an imposter also known as Elymas or "wise one" which is the meaning of his name.

II. Sergius Paulus, the seeker after truth.

Our text says that Sergius Paulus was "an intelligent man," and that "he sought to hear the word of God."

- A. Being an intelligent man he had the capacity to reason, and the capacity to learn and to understand many things, and even the ability to do so quickly.
- B. So what was a man of Sergius Paulus' capacity doing with a man like Elymas? Our text says that Elymas was with the proconsul. Vs. 7.
- C. All learning and reasoning takes place in a framework of certain basic assumptions:
 - 1. Man on his own is sufficient to grasp the nature of reality and to make sense of life and the universe by his own intellectual capacity.
 - 2. Man needs a reference point outside himself (God and God's revelation) in order to grasp the nature of reality and to make sense of life and the universe, and for anything at all to have meaning.
- D. Both of these are faith commitments. Man is a believer before he does anything else. Either a believer in his own autonomy and sufficiency or a believer in God (some kind of god.)
God's revelation, the Bible, teaches us that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, leading to wisdom and understanding" Prov. 1:7.
- E. The faith commitment of man's own sufficiency leads man to commit certain intellectual sins of which there are two and they often come together:
 - 1. Man is being arbitrary. He believes in certain concepts but he has no reason or explanation for them.
 - 2. Man is self contradictory. He believes in mutually exclusive faith commitments at the same time.

Example:

Man says that time and space, matter and chance are the “ultimate realities” of the universe. Everything is just a cosmic accident; a roll of the cosmic dice.

Yet the same man lives as though there is purpose; there is right and wrong on some level; there is truth on some level. He says he cares, he loves; he believes that various things should be certain way, or need to be changed etc. Why, given the nature of the universe? The universe (ultimate reality) doesn't care.

- F. The intellectual sins associated with the faith commitment of man's own sufficiency leave man frustrated, and his conscience uneasy. He knows on some level that he is “suppressing the truth in unrighteousness.” Romans 1:18.
- G. Sergius Paulus was an intellectually honest man. He knew that he needed an intellectual reference point outside himself to make sense of anything at all. The trouble was that Sergius Paulus did not know the God who has spoken, and who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. This made Sergius Paulus vulnerable.
- H. In this environment along came Elymas; the “wise one,” and in so many words he said to Sergius Paulus: “I will be your reference point; I will be your wise one; I will be God to you.”

III. Elymas, the enemy of all righteousness.

- A. It is in the above environment that Barnabas and Saul come along pressing the claim that God has revealed ultimate reality in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ, in whom both “the fullness of the Godhead,” and “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” exist.
Furthermore that God has furnished proof of this in raising His son from the dead.
- B. Elymas rightfully perceived that the message of the apostles directly threatened his good fortunes at the right hand of the governor, and that it exposed him as an imposter.
As such he opposes the message of the apostles and seeks to turn the governor away from faith in Christ. All to maintain his own pre-eminence.
- C. It is in this context that Paul speaks those piercing words summarizing the character of Elymas:
 - O full of all deceit and fraud,
 - You son of the devil,
 - You enemy of all righteousness.So much for the thought that Christians are supposed to be “nice people,” and Paul said all that being “filled with the Holy spirit.” Vs. 9.
- D. The adulterer and fornicator is the enemy of chastity and purity; the drunkard is the enemy of sobriety, but he who keeps men from Christ is “the enemy of all righteousness.”
- E. The governor was astonished at the truth as it is centered in Christ; the doctrine of Christ, and the force with which it was brought home to him.
- F. The judgment of blindness on Elymas was temporary in nature. It was designed to bring him to repentance. Whether it ever did so we do not know, but we should not be blind to the mercy of the Lord to Elymas in this judgment, as we should not be blind to the mercy of the Lord in His dealings with us.
The Lord's table calls us to examine ourselves in this light. 1 Cor. 11:30-32.