

=CONVERSIONS

Lesson 9

The Conversion of Sergius Paulus

AIM: to teach my pupils the story behind the conversion of Sergius Paulus, the deputy in Cyprus

INTRODUCTION: Paul, Barnabas and John Mark had left on the first missionary journey. They were sent out by the church at Antioch. The church held a special meeting, laid hands on their new missionaries, and saw them depart for Cyprus. Cyprus is an island in the Mediterranean Sea and is not far from Palestine. Upon arriving at their first mission point, they preached the Gospel in synagogues. Paul had been a famous Jewish leader; hence, he would go to the synagogue to visit. He would be asked to speak a word, and then to the amazement of all, he would tell them that Jesus was the Messiah and preach salvation to them. This they did throughout the island until they came to the city of Paphos, where the conversion of Sergius Paulus took place. The lesson for today revolves around his conversion, as told in Acts 13:1-13.

I. THE SINNER.

1. He was from Paphos. Paphos was the headquarters of the worship of Venus. It was a “little Athens” with Grecian worship. It was a place of vice and sin.
2. A sorcerer whose name was Bar-jesus also lived in Paphos. “Bar-jesus” means “son of Jesus.” Later he is to come into the story very actively. The word “sorcerer” is the same word “magi” that was used of the wise men who came bringing gifts to Jesus. Another word would be “scientists.” It seems that this particular sorcerer also dealt with fortune telling.
3. His name was Sergius Paulus. See Acts 13:7a. He was the deputy or a “proconsul.” In other words, he was the “big boy” of the country. Verse 7 says that he was a “prudent man.” The word “prudent” means “intelligent.”
4. He called for Barnabas and Saul. Read Acts 13:7b. Obviously, word got out concerning the men of God. Nothing will do the job for God quite like this. Good publicity certainly helps the man of God win more folks to Christ. What God is doing, we ought to tell. It would be a good idea for all of us to tell what God is doing here at First Baptist Church.
5. He was a man of influence. Because of his influence, his conversion would mean the conversion of many others. Each of us has a degree of influence; therefore, what we do will affect the lives of others.
6. He wanted to hear the Word of God. In Acts 13:7c, notice the words, “desired to hear the word of God.” Because of the good publicity that Barnabas and Saul had received, the curiosity of Sergius Paulus was stirred. Many are hungry for the Gospel. Many people would like to hear the Word of God. There is nothing quite so overrated as is the “hardness” of sinners. The honest truth is that many would love to hear the story of Christ if someone would tell them. Who would have thought that this hard, important, leading man, this proconsul would have a desire to hear the Word of God! No doubt people would have said, “He wouldn’t be interested. He’s too busy. He’s too intelligent.” We discount far too many people, thinking they are “hard” and would be difficult to win. This is not so in many cases.

II. THE OPPOSITION. Elymas, the sorcerer, caused a problem and tried to thwart the work of God and the salvation of Sergius Paulus.

1. Satan fights soul winning. The Devil doesn’t fight a church that just believes the Bible or simply defends the faith; he aims his biggest opposition against the soul-winning church!
2. Religious people give the most opposition to soul winning. Elymas was not a heathen; he simply was a false prophet. This is the biggest source of opposition when a soul-winning church is fought. It is sad, but true, that the greatest enemies of the Gospel are not the out-and-out sinners, but the religious people.
3. Nothing should hinder soul winning. Anything that hinders should be defeated. This is why people should behave when the message is being preached. It is not that misbehavior offends the Preacher; it is that people cannot hear, and they need to hear. People’s attention can be diverted from hearing

the Gospel. No doubt thousands will be in Hell because they could not hear the message because of unruly, misbehaving people.

4. Paul struck Elymas blind. Read Acts 13:10, 11. People often think that the Pastor is harsh because he speaks strongly toward hinderers. Notice the words that Saul spoke to the person hindering soul winning: “O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” It is interesting that Elymas was called a “child of the devil,” since his name means “son of Jesus.” In other words, he was a hypocrite.
5. It was here that Saul’s name was changed to “Paul.” This is very interesting. When an officer in battle won his first major victory, his name was changed. Paul, a soldier of Jesus Christ, was on his first missionary journey. He had been called Saul, but now that he has won his first major victory, his name is changed to Paul.

III. SALVATION.

1. Notice that he was saved simply by believing. Read Acts 13:12.
2. He believed because he saw. Not only did he hear the truth, but he saw the power of God in the life of the preacher and soul winner. People need to see in our lives things that make them want to turn to Christ. Hearing is important. Seeing is also important!
3. He paid attention to what Paul taught. Acts 13:12 says that he was “astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.” The word “doctrine” could be like our word, “teaching,” and the word, “astonished,” means “alerted.” Not only did Paul preach the truth, but he preached it in such a way that would gain the attention of this important man. Hence, he was converted. We should have an urgency and a sincerity about the proclaiming of the Gospel so that people will pay attention to our teaching and receive the Saviour.

CONCLUSION: It is interesting that God led the missionaries to win the important man first. This means, no doubt, that many others were turned to Christ. God often does this. Each of us has a scope of influence. When we reach another for Christ, we open a new door which opens new doors that open even more new doors, for each person has his own world, his own area of influence. How vital it is to keep reaching people so we can reach into new areas!