

Series: Acts

Lesson: #42

Title: **Astonishing Doctrine**

Scripture: Acts 13: 4-13

Date: 10-30-08

Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Princeton, New Jersey

First, this work which God has given into my hands as your pastor is God's work. This work he has given into your hands as his witnesses is God's work. God will soon discover this to us through enemies which he has foreordained that we face. We will face some who appear so full of light that if it were possible they would deceive even the elect of God. Yet God will expose them to be enemies of the righteousness of God and he will conquer them before us. There will likely be times when some within will depart from us and break our hearts. But God will use those things to reveal to me as your pastor, and to you his witnesses, that there is absolutely no sufficiency in us for this work. He is not depending upon the strength of men and teaches us not to depend upon men, not even those who profess to trust him. Our strength is the grace of our God alone.

Secondly, by God's grace and power we have but one responsibility from this church and in every place where you and I go on a daily basis—it is to preach the word of God. That is simply another way of saying, to bear a true witness of what we know to be so about sinful man and about our all powerful God and Savior.

Thirdly, through the simple declaration of the truth, we will behold God's grace as he exposes and conquerors our enemies which are far too cunning and powerful for us to expose and overcome and 2) with the same gospel he creates life and faith in the hearts of his people. This gospel is a savor of death unto a more hardened, blinded, inescapable death to some, and a savor of life unto everlasting, eternal, life with Christ our All to others. Because God sends this word forth and by his power he accomplishes these two things wherever he sends his word.

Title: Astonishing Doctrine

This title is taken from our text in verse **12: Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.** Doctrine is teaching. All teaching is taught by the Lord in the heart he has created. No man is saved unless God teaches us in the heart. The Lord Jesus Christ said, John 6: 44: **No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. 45: It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.**

Proposal: Our God teaches all his people in this world, through his Son, through his word, through his mighty dealings with his people, 1) that we are ungodly vile sinners while God is holy and saves in a holy manner 2) God saves so powerfully that though he uses a believer, salvation can not be attributed to anyone but him, 3) and one of the most amazing things is, this doctrine was there before our eyes in his word all along and we never saw it until he opened our eyes. What an astonishing doctrine!

Divisions: As we will see in this text, an enemy of God will be blinded, a vessel of God's mercy will be saved, and a minister of God will disappoint Paul and Barnabas, but the ones who are being taught are Paul and Barnabas. This is their first missionary journey. God will have them to know three things, and God will have us as his witnesses in this place in this day to know these three things:

1. This is God's work. We are not sufficient to accomplish it and he will receive all the glory for accomplishing it.
2. This is our one responsibility, simply to declare—be witnesses—of the absolute sovereignty of God in saving totally helpless sinners through Christ Jesus our Lord apart from any help by sinners.
3. God will conquer his enemies and ours as well as save his people from their sins one way--through the simple declaration of his Son.

I. FIRST, THE LORD'S TEACHING IS ASTONISHING TO THE HEART OF A SAINT BECAUSE HE REVEALS THAT THIS WORK IS ALL HIS WORK.

It is important to remember as we study the book of Acts that Luke writes this in the "past tense." This is the astonishing doctrine the Lord revealed *in* the heart of the apostle Paul. This is the amazing grace which the Lord revealed *in* the heart of Barnabas. This is the amazing, astonishing doctrine that the Lord revealed *in* the heart of Luke who penned these words by the Holy Spirit. Though men are sent forth to preach, the work is all to the praise of the glory of the triune God.

Acts 13: 4: So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

A. Here is what Paul and Barnabas learned, what Luke knew, and what we need to understand, God accomplishes his work in this world by the Holy Ghost.

1. This word "forth" is important. It means everywhere they went was **by the Holy Ghost**.
 - They headed out 15-25 miles west to the seaport of Selucia **by the Holy Ghost**.
 - From there they sailed to Cyprus **by the Holy Ghost**.

Notice: Historians say that Barnabas was from Cyprus so they probably thought that's where they should go, that it influenced their decision and so on. This is God's word—God who knows the hearts of men, who knows the end from the beginning, who could have Luke record all the details that are important for us to know. This is what God would have us to know—they were sent forth **by the Holy Ghost**.

Acts 13: 5: And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to *their* minister.

- They were sent forth to Salamis **by the Holy Ghost.**
- They were sent forth and given power to preach the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews **by the Holy Ghost.**

Note: They had also John Mark to minister. I want to save a comment on this until the end. This one phrase sums up the whole message of what is recorded here. I will show you when we get to the end.

Acts 13: 6: And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name *was* Barjesus:

- Barnabas and Paul went through the whole island of Cyprus—170 miles from Salamis all the way to Paphos and there they found “a certain sorcerer”—**by the Holy Ghost.**

GET THE FIRST POINT: THE WORK WHICH YOU AND I ARE GIVEN IS GOD’S WORK, ENTRUSTED TO HIS SON TO WHOM ALL POWER IS GIVEN, WHO WORKS THIS IN HIS PEOPLE BY THE HOLY GHOST. WE CAN NO MORE GLORY IN THIS WORK THAN WE CAN GLORY IN OUR ELECTION, OUR JUSTIFICATION, OUR SANTIFICATION, OUR RESURRECTION, OR OUR FINAL ENTRANCE INTO GLORY.

II. THE RESPONSIBILITY GIVEN TO US AS BELIEVERS IS TO SIMPLY PREACH (OR WITNESS) THE WORD OF GOD.

Acts 13: 5: And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews...

A. This word “preached” is important.

1. Paul and Barnabas did not present a doctrine as if it were a concept or a system to be accepted or rejected by the opinions of men. They “declared.” They “proclaimed.” They “preached.” They did not debate. They did not throw out ideas for folks to bounce back and forth and come to some compromising agreement upon. Neither do I.

God’s messengers do not depend upon the people to whom they preach to convince them or to give credibility to what they preach. They simply declare, proclaim, set forth what they know by the revelation of God himself and they do so, convinced by God and taught by God. The Spirit of Christ is in his preachers and this is what they said of Christ: **John 7: 45: Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees;** (officers who had weapons and permission from civic power to arrest him) **and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? 46: The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.**

- His first word was that God saves by sovereign election, those in whom his Spirit dwells declare God saves certain lepers, certain widows and passes by whom he will.

- He declared that no man can come to me except my father which is in heaven draw him. He told Nicodemus that a man must be born again or he can not see the Christ the King and the kingdom of heaven.
- He declared that he came to do his father's will—to magnify the measure of holiness the law demand by his faithful obedience (a man must be born of incorruptible Seed, not of the flesh. A man must obey in thought, word and deed, saying, "That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." By he who could not die because he knew no sin, being made sin and dying, we are made to behold the justice of the law which says, "The soul that sinneth it shall die.")
- And by dying he spoke as never a man spoke because he died, the just in the place of the unjust, that he might declare God just and justifier of all who are brought to trust in Jesus. Paul and Barnabas spoke by the Spirit of Christ even as they were sent forth by the Holy Spirit, and they left man no room to glory save in the cross of Christ Jesus the Lord.

III. Paul and Barnabas were made to see, and by God's grace his saints are made to see, that God conquers his enemies and ours, as well as save his people from their sins one way--through the simple declaration of his Son.

Acts 13: 6: And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus:

A. The enemy of the believer is far too subtle and powerful for us but not for our God.

1. A sorcerer: A "magus" is the title given to this man: this was a title given to those considered by the people, not simply as a magician, but as being a wise man: this was a title given to teachers, to priests, to astrologers, to seers, to interpreters of dreams, and to physicians (which some say this man was.) He was regarded by the people, even by Sergius Paulus as a man who could work miracles in medicine.

2. Truth is he was a false prophet

The people considered him wise in matters pertaining to God's word and eternal salvation because he presented himself as such--a spokesman for holy God.

3. He Was A Jew: a natural descendant of Abraham, of Judea. This man was known in the synagogue as a native Jew.

4. His Name Even Sounded Reverent--Bar jesus: means "son of the savior." Verse 8 tells us that his name by interpretation was Elymas which means "wise man."

Acts 13: 7: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

A. Which was with the deputy of the country

1. To Paul and Barnabas Elymas and Sergius Paulus were both alike by all natural appearances.

B. Sergius Paulus

1. Sergius Paulus was a Gentile—a Roman-governor over the country of Cyprus—that is what this office of deputy means. He was a man of authority with great power and influence.

2. Sergius Paulus was a prudent man--very intelligent, wise, learned man. Elymas was with the governor because the governor was just the kind of fellow that false prophets love to join themselves with. Sergius Paulus gave Elymas credibility before the people, not to mention money.

3. When it says that Sergius Paulus **called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God**, the word means two things:

- One, he had a liberal, curious mind. He was intrigued and challenged by new doctrine. As we find in: **Acts 17:19: And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? 20: For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. 21: (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)**
- Secondly: by God's grace, in his heart of hearts, he was yet seeking the truth of God; he had not come to an understanding that gave him the peace that God gives his saints and he was yet seeking: **Hosea 14: 9: Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.**

But the point is this: from the description of Sergius being a wise and learned man, we can safely conclude that this Elymas was no dummy. He was not a man regarded as some fanatic--some obvious huckster with a pitch fork and a forked tail. He was one who appeared to be speaking for God, using God's word--the law and the prophets—a man whose works appeared impressive to the carnal eye of religion, a man considered by all the people, even the governor, as a wise and Godly man.

Both men, even Sergius Paulus, with all his prudence—with all his wisdom—could not figure out God—these men were with each other. They were alike—lost before God, though they both thought themselves wise.

Nor by carnal wisdom could Paul and Barnabas discern which of these men knew the Lord. **The Lord said, Matthew 7: 15: Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.** Paul is in the beginning of his ministry here. But when he wrote to the Corinthian church he had encountered Elymas, and others just like him, and this is how he described them and their methods: **2 Corinthian 11: 13:**

For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. 14: And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 15: 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. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24: 24.)

Remember the point we are considering: Through the simple declaration of the gospel of Christ, God exposes the enemies of righteousness and teaches his elect how amazing his grace is.

So being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, Paul and Barnabas did what they were sent forth to do; they declared the word of God before both these men:

Acts 13: 8: But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

As soon as Elymas saw that his “sugar-daddy” was paying close attention to the gospel of Christ, Elymas knew he would no longer have the preeminence if the governor submitted himself to Christ. This false prophet knew that Paul and Barnabas were preaching the truth. He did not believe it but he knew it. Satan knows the truth of God better than most, he does not bow to God but he knows that God is supreme.

Therefore he withstood Paul and Barnabas. If the governor believed the message which Paul and Barnabas preached it would endanger his life of ease. So Elymas would do everything in his power to save his life—his reputation, his power, his source of money--in this world. The word “**turn away**” means he sought a way to go against the saving purpose and power of God.

Sergius Paulus had two things against him: a mind tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and a false prophet who was dead-set that he would not hear the truth of God. We in ourselves are that false prophet. Unwittingly, by opposing the truth, by making men appear wise in their own eyes, the devil makes Christ’s victory in saving God’s elect all the more glorious.

Note: Now we begin to see what Paul and Barnabas learned once again, that God is all powerful to save his people from all our enemies, from all our sins, from all our so-called intellectualism through the declaration of the singular message of Christ and him crucified. It is by the word of God, the message of God’s righteousness revealed by the fidelity of his Son, that the enemies of Christ are exposed as they object and reveal their hearts.

As we see by these two lost men—Elymas and Sergius Paulus--it is not the title or banner a man goes by that marks the voice of a thief to the believer. There are a thousand various titles men use to label the same lie— the lie of man being god, of man’s works, of man’s

will, of the ability of the flesh, of man's pride, the lie which bolsters man's covetousness for the glory which belongs to God alone. It is not a title, but what a man submits to concerning the Lord which is the discerner of a man's heart. The overall tenor of a man's gospel reveals the overall motive of a man's heart.

- The Lord Jesus said, **the hour is coming when the dead**—in the graves—shall **hear his voice and come forth**. Does he not have power to speak and his sheep come forth in spiritual life?
- The Lord Jesus said, **My sheep hear my voice and follow me. A stranger will they not follow.**
- He said to some, **“Why do ye not understand my speech? Because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.”**
- John 10:14: **I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine.**

Those whom Christ has called in power are given spiritual discernment to differentiate between his voice and the voice of a stranger; they submit to Christ, to the gospel that puts man in the dust, they rejoice that man is not his justifier, his sanctifier, his wisdom, our his redemption, but those who hate God in their heart manifest it when this gospel is preached.

V9: Then Saul, (who also *is called Paul*,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, 10: And said, 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?

A. This is what happens through the preaching of the gospel.

1. It is true that Paul was given power by the Holy Ghost to literally make this man blind.
2. But God does this to the hearers of the gospel whenever Christ is preached. This is a literal example of what happens spiritually when the gospel is preached.

B. Paul filled with the Holy Ghost.

1. Through the word the eye of God—represented here by the eye of the preacher—pierces to the heart of those who are his enemies.
2. The verdict is sent forth to the heart by God--**full of all subtilty and mischief**
3. Child of the devil—he went by the name Bar-jesus “son of the savior” but the word comes to his heart as Bar-satan—son of the devil--the accuser of the brethren—you who use God's word to point out the faults of men, who use the law to accuse God's sheep of unlawfulness—the Pharisee's **watched the Lord to see if he would break the Sabbath.**

- They said, **“He eats with publicans and sinners.”**
- They sought how they might **entangle him in his words.**
- They accused his disciples of not washing their hands before they ate.

All that the devils children do is watch one another, that they might accuse men to another. The devil does this to bring others down to a lower level that he that he might appear exalted above them.

That is the opposite of how God and his people operate. God sets forth his Son who brings sinners down in the flesh and brings them up to God in spirit. The believer treats his brethren like Noah's two sons who walked backward with a blanket, who would not look upon their father's nakedness, but covered him so that he was not exposed to the ungodly world. Ham is an example of a child of the devil. **Genesis 9: 22: And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. 23: And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. 24: And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. 25: And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. 26: And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. 27: God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.**

4. He worked feverishly and would not cease perverting the right ways of the Lord.

Acts 13: 11: And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

What Paul did to this man, was literally performed within this false prophet by the Lord. But if we compare what happened to this man to what the Lord did in Isaiah's day we see that this is an example of what happens when the gospel is a savor of death unto men and therefore God makes it unto death by blinding them.

When the gospel is preached—though the preacher has no idea it is happening—to those who hate God and the gospel of Christ the message comes forth as if the eye of God, the eye of God's messenger, is set upon them. The God of this world hath blinded their eyes. They have hardened their hearts and stiffened their necks against God. Therefore, as **John 12: 39, 40: [God] hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and be healed by God.**

They go about, not seeking God, but seeking some man to lead them about like this blind man did. The blind leading the blind.

Acts 13: 12: Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

A. By God's grace there is another result when this gospel is preached.

Two separate results occurred when Paul preached the gospel of Christ. One man was blinded for a season—just as sinners who reject God are hardened by God for the season of life on this earth and one man believed, astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

B. Then the deputy when he saw what was done...

1. What a word of God's sovereign grace! A man once blind in sin...it says of him...**When he saw.**

The blind man whom the Lord Jesus gave sight, when questioned in the synagogue said, **one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.**

2. He saw two men—Paul and Barnabas—men like him who did nothing more than preach that Christ is all and that sinners must cast their souls upon him or perish.
3. He saw himself exactly like Elymas—a sorcerer, a false prophet, prudent but ignorant in his self-ascribed wisdom.
4. He saw that the distinguishing grace of God passed by Elymas, left him in his blindness, and yet gave him sight.
5. He saw by experiencing in the heart the power of sovereign grace which causes a man to abhor his flesh and all the religious experiences, professions and works of his flesh. He renounced them as dung when God's sovereign hand turned him. Until then a man will not let go of those things because he loves his flesh preeminently and those things are the product of his sinful flesh.
6. He saw all this when he saw Christ Jesus—sovereign in power, the sovereign Savior, the one in whom he was washed and made perfect, complete, accepted of God, who taught him through the Holy Spirit, in the new heart created in righteousness and true holiness and he **believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.**

BUT IN ALL THIS, PAUL AND BARNABAS ARE TAUGHT ONCE AGAIN AS YOU AND I ARE TAUGHT:

1. They were not sufficient to perform this work. The power is God's and not the preachers. This is God's work.
2. They were taught to simply declare Christ and him crucified.
3. They were taught that God will make his word a savor of death unto death to some and a savor of life unto life to other.

And I said there was one last thing to remind them not to look to the flesh, not to trust themselves, but God alone. After all this wonderful work, after all this joy they had in God, they were reminded to look to God alone, by one of their own leaving the work which he was entrusted with:

Acts 13: 13: Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.

- Paul seems to have understood the lesson more quickly than Barnabas. Later Barnabas is insistent upon John Mark going, so much so that it separates the two. Paul would call for Mark later. But they were being taught, behold your God, all flesh is grass.

Application:

1. This work is God's work—let us submit to him. We all think we know what that means, some think they have done it, find out what it means to submit, to cast all your care on him, to subject ourselves to his word, to his ways, to our brethren. We can not force our hand and yet submit to him. It can not be done.

2. Our responsibility is to set forth the gospel of man's absolute inability and God's absolute sovereignty to save absolutely helpless sinners, to make them holy in Christ, to call them, keep them and bring them home. Make sure this is the God you trust and if you trust him then give yourself to tell sinners how you are grass and God reigns in your heart.

3. God will conquer our enemies and save his people. Make sure you are not attempting to have your own way, make sure that you are not placing too much importance on your ability or on man. Meditate upon the astonishing, amazing grace of God continually.

What I am telling you is: trust God and stop looking to your own way. Believe God. Turn from your flesh. Behold your God--holy, holy, holy--as you do you will behold that in your flesh, you are undone and all flesh is unclean.

If God teaches us he will make this doctrine astonishing to us, and we will do these things. This is how Barnabas and Saul were made to be servants of God and to truly serve Christ our Lord. Amen.

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