

Two Blinded Men!

Joe Slater

Whenever and wherever the gospel is preached and people are believing and obeying it, Satan will use sinful people to oppose it. Great multitudes in Jerusalem became disciples of Jesus; Satan used Saul of Tarsus to lead unbelieving Jews in persecuting the believers. Ironically, Saul himself became a Christian and experienced the same type of opposition he had formerly inflicted upon others.

Saul (i.e. Paul) encountered one opponent of the gospel who resembled him in many respects. On his first missionary journey, Paul spoke the word of the Lord to Sergius Paulus, the governor of the island of Cyprus. One of the governor's advisors, Elymas, argued against Paul and tried to discourage the governor from obeying the gospel. In response, Paul sternly rebuked Elymas and struck him blind (Acts 13:6-11).

Like Paul, Elymas was a Jew. By contrast, however, Paul (Saul) had sincerely tried to be faithful to God, while Elymas was a sorcerer. Had the Mosaic Law been enforced, Elymas would have been stoned to death!

Both Saul and Elymas stoutly opposed the gospel. Saul sincerely believed he was serving God by so doing. Elymas, though, was simply protecting his income. After all, why would a Christian governor want a sorcerer as one of his advisors?

Both Saul and Elymas were struck blind. The Lord Himself struck Saul blind on the Damascus Road. Ironically, Paul himself struck Elymas blind – of course it was by the power of the Lord. Saul's blindness was caused by "something like scales" over his eyes (Acts 9:18). In Elymas' case, a dark mist fell upon him (13:12).

Both men needed someone to lead them around due to their temporary blindness.

Saul reacted to his blindness by humbling himself before the Lord and learning and obeying the gospel. He faithfully proclaimed salvation in Christ for decades, eventually giving his very life for Jesus' sake. Regrettably, we have no indication that Elymas the sorcerer ever repented.

Why don't more people strenuously oppose the gospel today? To our shame, we are not militantly proclaiming it as we should. While God is not giving people today the ability to strike opponents blind, we can overcome opposition to the gospel simply by continuing to proclaim it. God's word is powerful as it produces faith in the hearts of those willing to hear it.

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Free-Diving Into Eternity

"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

Off the coast of Greece, since the days of Plato, free divers have been plunging to depths of 50-100 meters with no breathing apparatus at all to harvest sea sponges. Others do this kind of diving for sport.

But it is extremely dangerous.

In 2013, Nicholas Mevoli died after performing a dive. He resurfaced, signaled "OK," then lost consciousness, and died. In 2015, Russian free-diver, Natalia Molchanova, who held 41 world records and earned 23 gold medals, plunged into the Mediterranean darkness off the coast of Spain for a recreational dive,

and failed to resurface. After a few days, rescue efforts ceased.

Free-divers must learn not only the physical techniques of free-diving, but also how to switch off their primal instincts. They do this through rigorous physical and mental training. They learn to silence their primal responses when breathing slows and oxygen levels decrease. However, this switch off, while necessary for the task, can also be the reason for failure. Learning to ignore one's fears can and does result in serious injury, or even fatality.

This is true of our spiritual selves. We are spiritual beings. Some overcome spiritual fear by ignoring or denying that they are spiritual beings at all. Though it be ignored, the soul of man is quite real (see: 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12; James 2:26).

The spiritual self can, like the diver's primal instinct, be switched off through sheer will power. The conscience can become numb (1 Timothy 4:2).

When Jesus said, "Fear not," he meant for us to find peace and hope for our soul through obeying his gospel (Romans 1:16). He did not intend for us to switch off our soul in hopes that it would go away.

Unfortunately, many are free-diving, having shut off the spiritual intuition with which they were endowed by their Creator. They are sinking. The longer they stay submerged, the less likely it is they will resurface.

--Rick Kelley (Prestonburg, KY) via *Forthright.net*

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If you want to see how popular the church is, attend on Sunday morning.

If you want to see how popular the preacher is, attend on Sunday evening.

If you want to see how popular God is, attend on Wednesday evening.