

Title: **"Stop Making Crooked the Straight Paths of the Lord"**
Text: **Acts 13:4-12**
Date: **February 9, 2025**

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Big Idea

In our text we come across a man standing in opposition to Jesus and the gospel. And from him we learn a bit about our own opposition and resistance. We see why we do it, how we do it, and where it all ends up.

1. Motives (why do we do it?)

It seems to me that wherever you find such opposition and resistance to God, there are always at least two terrible roots spreading and sprawling in the soil beneath. The one we might call *pleasure*. And the other *power*.

With a little reflection, you can easily see, I think, why the two often tangle up together. Pleasure is the *act* of indulging in what I want when I want it. And power is the *ability* I have to do so. You can't have one without the other. If I want pleasure, I have to have power. And if I have power, no doubt I'm going to use it to go after pleasure.

2. Tactics (how do we do it?)

The Holy Spirit fills Paul and he rebukes Elymas. And we get a sense of the tactics he was employing in what comes out at the very end there: "[W]ill you not stop *making crooked the straight paths* of the Lord?" (v. 10). He's trying to take what's truly straight and make it look crooked.

So far as I can tell, there are two basic lines of approach to this. On the one hand, you might try to attack and distort the *truth* of Christianity. On the other hand, you might try to attack and distort the *goodness* of Christianity.

Line of Approach #1: Distort the Truth of It

Though Christianity is true, you make it look false, foolish, even stupid. It's truly straight in an intellectual sense, but you make it look crooked.

Modern Example: "Christianity is closed off to science."

Line of Approach #2: Distort the Goodness of It

Though Christianity is good, you make it look bad, unappealing, even unkind. It's truly straight in an existential, experiential, ethical sense, but you make it look crooked.

Modern Example: "Christians are against LGBTQ people."

3. Results (where does it lead?)

At the end comes a great inversion, a profound unmasking. Suddenly, with a swift move of the Holy Spirit, what Elymas was calling crooked is now shown to be straight and what he was calling straight is now shown to be crooked. The magician's tricks are exposed. He who claimed to see the future now can't even see the back of his own hand. The punishment fits the crime.

And, what's more, whatever effort Elymas expended trying to oppose and resist the cause of Christ, it was all in vain—as he only ended up furthering that cause in the end. What was his goal in all this? To stop the proconsul from coming to faith (v. 8). And yet how does the story end? Look at v. 12: "Then the proconsul *believed*, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord."

This is how it always works. You can't stop the purposes of God from advancing. You can only choose whether you will align with them or not.



Reflection Questions

- In what ways have you been opposing or resisting God in your life lately? Why? What's underneath that do you think?
- Can you think of other modern examples where the opponents of Christianity are trying to make crooked the straight paths of the Lord? Where are you most susceptible to falling into such things yourself would you say?
- Have you personally experienced the futility of resisting Jesus? Has there ever been a time where you resisted him only to find he wasn't trying to rob you (as you feared), but help you?

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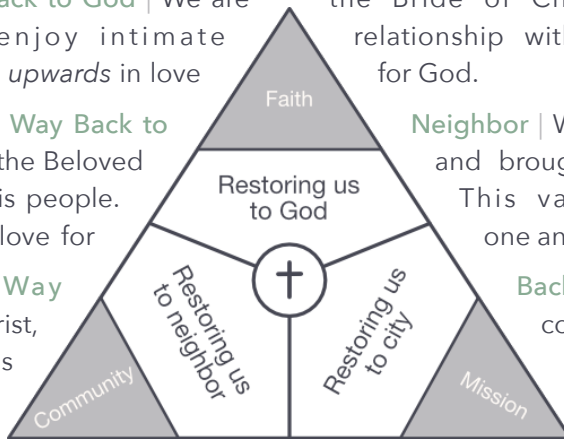
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When approaching the Christian faith and life, it can be confusing to know where to even begin. Come find us at the Next Steps Table after the service—it would be our joy to help you along in the journey! And if you're a visitor, we have a special gift bag for you. Don't miss it!



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We are so glad you've joined us today!

Announcement Spotlight

All Church Campout - Save the Date!

We are excited to announce that we will again be hosting our All Church Campout at Mount Madonna County Park! This year, it will take place over the weekend of **June 20-22**. Mark your calendars. We have a huge group campsite all to ourselves and lots of options in the park for having fun together. Whether you love to camp or you'd rather still sleep in your own bed, we have something for everyone. More info to come as the day gets closer!

For more information, please contact us at info@mercyhillchurch.org.

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