

How to Deal With Vandals

by Denis Lyle

The church is under attack, and we must stand firm in our faith, exercising authoritative and affectionate ministry, while avoiding compromise and irreverence.

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:23, Psalm 105:15, Psalm 111:10, John 3:36, John 15:19, 1 Corinthians 4:2, Galatians 6:7, Ephesians 4:15, 2 Timothy 3:12, Revelation 17:1

Topics: "Persecution", "Faithful Ministry"

Description

Denis Lyle preaches on how to deal with vandals, drawing parallels between the church under attack in Revelation and a modern-day church facing hostility. He discusses the story of Elisha facing opposition in Bethel, highlighting the vigorous hostility, vital ministry, and vocal antipathy he encountered. Lyle emphasizes the need for Christians to stand firm in the face of persecution, maintain a faithful ministry that balances grace and judgment, and uphold reverence for God and His servants.

Transcript

Reading: Revelation 17:1-18/ 2 kings 2 v 23-25 HOW TO DEAL WITH VANDALS A line has been drawn in the sand. Sides have been taken and war has been declared. Hell is officially in session. And the church is under attack. With mounting hostility, the Kingdom of Satan is engaging in a full-scale war against the church of Jesus Christ. Illus.: Witness for example the scene at Hamilton Square Baptist Church in San Francisco. As church members gathered for their evening service on September 19th 1993, they knew it would be an eventful service.

They just didn't know HOW eventful. The guest preacher for the evening was Lou Sheldon an outspoken opponent of pro-homosexual legislation in California. As chairman of the Traditional Values Coalition, Sheldon had played a key role in overturning a 1989 partners ordinance in San Francisco. As he came to speak the church turned into a battleground. Two pro-homosexual newspapers had publicized Sheldon's visit, leading to a barrage of phone calls to the church office all week. Militant homo-sexual activists promised to show up in force and threatened to disrupt the service.

And disrupt they did. The service became a war zone. A 100 rioters stormed the church ground. Angry protestors denied worshippers entrance into church. Rioters vandalised church property. Vile obscenities were yelled. When the service began angry gays pounded on the doors outside, the sanctuary, taunting worshippers to come outside and join them in their sexual orgies. Sounds a bit like Sodom and Gormorrah. But My, this is America today. The most powerful nation in the World!

Yet the Lord Jesus warned it would be this way. Before His own crucifixion, the Saviour told us: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you..." (Jn 15:19) No mistaking it... the WORLD will hate us. Paul echoed the same truth: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come... yea and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution". (2 Tim 3:12) Do you know something The greatest blessing that could ever happen to the cause of Christ might be for the church in Ulster to be persecuted!

Someone has said, "The problem with Christians these days is noone wants to kill them anymore". Illus.: The pioneer missionary C.T.Studd said, "Be extravagant for God or for the devil, but for God's sake don't be tepid." Are you tepid or are you on fire Now what has all this to do with Elisha coming to Bethel Just this here was a man of God facing OPPOSITION! Now of course this passage is a stumbling block to some! It offends their sensibilities to see men of God setting she-bears onto little boys just for having a joke at their expense Was Elisha an odd ball Was he just over-sensitive about his hair-loss problem Well lets look at the passage a little more closely and notice here 3 pictures!

Picture number one is that of: (1) VIGOROUS HOSTILITY The word "and", in (2:23) suggests a relation between what we find here and that which immediately precedes. You see this incident follows immediately after the miracle of Jordan and the miracle of Jericho. It shows that advance is usually followed by counter-attack: step forward and you risk being slapped back! Elisha had been used of God at Jordan and Jericho and now he encounters the hostility of the enemy. My, are you enjoying a period of blessing and fruitfulness Then beware, the devil will be on your footsteps.

For Elisha there was (1) Now notice: (a) THE PLACE OF IT: "Bethel". (2:23) Now Bethels initial history had been a nice one. At this spot Abraham had built an altar unto the Lord. (Gen 12:8) At this place Jacob received the vision of a ladder and angels going up and down: there he had been given the great promise that God would keep him. (Gen 28:20) Bethel, meant "the house of God", but now it had come to be called Bethaven, "the house of vanity and iniquity". (Hosea 10:5) For Bethel together with Dan in the far north was one of the two places where Jeroboam had replaced the pure worship of Jehovah by a pagan way of worship! (1 Kings 12:29-30) Bethel was the stronghold of Baal-worship and False Religion. (Amos 3:14 4:4 5:4) Bethel was one of the places where the Word of God which clearly forbids things like this... was no longer taken seriously. (Exod 20:4) It was a place where the people claimed a certain freedom.

It was a place where they wanted to worship God in their own way. It was a place that somewhat loosened the discipline of Gods Word. It was a place where the words "tolerance", and "broadmindedness", were much in vogue. They wanted to be free to do their own thing! Is this not the popular cry in most religious circles today "Get with it, loosen up. Don't be so black and white in terms of Christian doctrine: in terms of Christian morals: in terms of Christian associations: in terms of Christian standards: Christian worship".

My, is it not a cause for concern that so many churches in our land which once stood for the fundamentals have now given way to popular opinion (a) (b) THE PEOPLE OF IT: The AV.. refers to them as "little children". (2:23) The word used in the Hebrew often means "young men". The same word is used of Isaac on Mount Moriah when he was a young man, at least 20 years of age. (Gen 22:12) It is used of Joseph when he was 17 years of age: of Solomon when he was 20 years of age and of Jeremiah when he was 19 years of age!

Now this gives this incident a new significance. My, the stroke of judgment did'nt fall on thoughtless little children, but on adults who were fully responsible for their actions. In any rough city like Bethel, or

Glasgow, Manchester or Liverpool, Belfast or Dublin a gang of youths can be a frightening and very threatening force to encounter. My, here were the teenage vandals of Bethel who organised this hostile demonstration to bring discredit upon the servant of the Lord and so render ineffective his mission to Bethel!

Do you recall what the Saviour said "In the world ye shall have tribulation". (Jn 16:33) It may not be a hostile demonstration, but in that office are you the object of scorn and sarcasm Do you come in for verbal abuse and derision Is your Saviour and your Bible ridiculed Are you being reviled for His name sake (a) (b) (c) **THE PURPOSE OF IT:** Why did these young men mock the man of God Was this simply a case of "boys will be boys" Was this a few lads having a little harmless fun Was this simply youthful spirits going a little too far NO!

This was a deliberate pursuit, a hounding of God's prophet designed both to insult and intimidate him. My, it seems fairly obvious that these young men knew that Elisha was about to visit Bethel: they also knew that Elisha's God had shown Himself to be the God of Power and so the forces of darkness set themselves in array against the God of heaven and against His representative! They made it clear that they had no time for the Prophet of God or for the God of the Prophet! Why is that we don't suffer much for His sake Is it because we avoid suffering by compromise Our moral standards sometimes are no higher than the worlds: the world see's nothing in us to hate.

We seldom rebuke sin and vice. We're careful not to offend. We love the praise of man more than the praise of God. What would happen if we raised our standards and rebuked sin What would happen if godliness was revealed in our lives We would suffer. There would be an outcry. We would be considered odd! My, if we are not provoking hostility from the world perhaps its time we asked the question, "How close is my walk with God" Picture number (1) **VIGOROUS HOSTILITY:** (2) **VITAL MINISTRY** On this occasion it was a ministry of judgment for we read "And he turned back and LOOKED on them". (2:24) Did that look contain an appeal to their better nature Was it a silent attempt to bring them back to their right mind The arm of judgment was raised.

At Jericho the curse had been lifted: at Bethel it was made to fall. And across the gulf of the centuries, there comes the warning voice, "Be not deceived: God is not mocked". (Gal 6:7) We're told "He cursed them in the name of the Lord". That is he pronounced a sentence of judgment upon them! Now the ministry that Elisha exercised here was: (a) **SO DIFFERENT:** From the character of his ministry as a whole. It almost seems out of place for Elisha to have revealed so severe a spirit.

Elisha who was so gentle and compassionate in his character: Elisha who was so gracious and helpful in his actions! Elisha whose ministry had brought healing and comfort now becomes an instrument of judgment in the hands of God! My, does this incident not serve to remind us that the gospel has two sides to it There is the side of GRACE but there is also the side of JUDGMENT! To some the gospel is the savour of life unto life: to others we are the savour of death unto death. (2 Cor 2:16) And these two sides of the gospel the side of GRACE and the side of JUDGMENT must receive their appropriate emphasis.

Repent or perish is a formula which sums up the alternatives of the word of the gospel! "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life", that is the one side: "And he that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him", that is the other side. (Jn 3:36) My, are you here this... without Christ Do you realise that the gospel has two sides to it The one side says, trust Christ and you'll enter heaven: the other side says, miss Christ and you'll enter hell!

So the ministry that Elisha exercised here (a) (b) SO DEMANDING: Especially to such a gracious and gentle character like Elisha! But then the Word says: "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful". (1 Cor 4:2) We live in days when to a large extent the tone of the pulpit is too apologetic. So many are afraid of giving an offence that teaching has become toothless! My, the ministry: the preaching that we need today must be AUTHORITATIVE and AFFECTIONATE! My Lord taught as having authority and not as the scribes.

All we need to do is assert our delegated authority as preachers and preach the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. But make sure you "speak the truth in love". (Eph 4:15) Some preach the truth and don't have love. Some preach love and don't have the truth. Get the mixture right! Truth will keep you from turning to sugar and love will keep you from turning to vinegar. The Lord Jesus drove the money-changers from the Temple, but He wept over Jerusalem with a broken heart. Illus: Moody said, "When you preach on Hell, you may at least have a tear in your eye".

My, I don't want to finish my course or ministry hard or embittered. Do you I've seen some examples and its a snare of the devil and a poor advertisement for the Gospel! Here, then was the VITAL MINISTRY of Elisha on this occasion. A ministry that was (a) and (b) but there is a third picture here! (1) (2) (3) VOCAL ANTIPATHY Look at the antipathy these young adults had towards the servant of God and towards the God of the servant! They mocked Elisha and said unto him, "Go up thou bald head: go up thou bald head". (2:23) What was, (a) THE REASON FOR THIS ANTIPATHY: Well, "Bethel", the house of God had become " Bethaven", the house of vanity!

Do you know what happened The parents of Bethel cast aside God's Word and began to worship idols! The mockery of these young adults did not just fall out of the sky. They had learned it from their parents. At home, their parents had talked about that difficult man, Elisha: at home they had been told not to take God's Word too seriously! The result Their children despised holy things! Sounds familiar doesn't it My, have we ruined our childrens love and loyalty for holy things How By the way we have talked about the pastor: elders: deacons: the church Why is that so many of our children have a strong dislike for the things of God Is it because we crucified the servants of God: and the people of God in their very presence Look at: (b) THE RESULT OF THIS ANTIPATHY: " Go up thou bald head". (2:23) They DENIED GOD'S WORD: "Go up", was proably a reference to Elijah's unusual departure.

They were mocking, "Let's see that chariot for ourselves, go on, beam him up, send the heavenly taxi service... sing low, sweet chariot... coming for to take him home". Then they DERIDED GOD'S SERVANT, "Thou bald head". Whether Elisha's baldness was shaved or natural or whether this was a reference comparing Elisha to a leper and outcast we can't say for sure. All I can say is, be very careful what you say to balding men in future! (Lev 13:43 21:5) But look at this young people!

They had no respect for Elisha's position: they had no regard for Elisha's character! IRREVERENCE! Is this us Have we become so accustomed to the "things of God," that we no longer reverence God: respect His Word: and recognise His people Look at: (c) THE RETRIBUTION ON THIS ANTIPATHY: " And there came forth two she bears... "(2:24) Do you know something You may as well head-butt a brick wall as butt in on God's prophets... try to stop them and God will stop you. That's why God says: " Touch mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." (Ps 105:15) Maybe you're saying.

"Well this was alright under law, but this judgment would not happen under grace". NO! What about Ananias and Sapphira God struck that pair dead for pretending a full dedication which they had not made.

We read "And great fear came upon all the church". (Acts 5:11) Here was a church so operating in the power of the Holy Spirit that sin was an exception rather than a rule! Liars could not stand this church in Jerusalem. A church that had a holy awe and respect for God. Is this us Do we fear God Have we become so busy becoming HAPPY that we have forgotten to be HOLY Have we gone in for FUN but lost FEAR The Bible says: " The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". (Ps 111:10)

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/denis-lyle/how-to-deal-with-vandals/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net