

More Dangerous Than You Think

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Date: 16 April 2023

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[0 : 00] Well, there are many things in our world which are very dangerous, but which don't seem to be. Let me give you some examples.

This plant, it's called the gimpy plant. And no surprise, it comes from Australia. And it looks normal enough, doesn't it? It looks like a normal plant.

You might, if you're particularly hungry, you might even want to take a nibble. Well, but did you know that this plant, the gimpy plant, is responsible for putting many people in hospital? Because it is, you can't really see it in the picture, but it is covered in tiny spikes that deliver a neurotoxin to anyone who touches it.

Only in Australia. But not actually, because what about this? This is the cayenne loris. Isn't that cute? Doesn't that look cute? Don't you just want to cuddle it?

I mean, you might be hiking through Borneo, where it's found. And you might see it in the tree, and you might want to give it a hug, because it's asking for it, right?

[1 : 06] But one touch could be your last. Because the cayenne loris has a toxic bite that gives you an anivalactic shock and could lead to death, as it has for many people.

What about this? What about the cone snail? You might be snorkeling or diving or walking around some rock pools, and you see this snail. How harmful could a snail be? Well, this one has a sting that gives instant paralysis.

And many people, especially those snorkeling and diving who have touched it, have died from it.

Finally, the blue-ringed octopus. Beautiful, isn't it?

It's a very pretty creature. But this is considered one of the most deadly animals in the sea, more deadly than a great white shark. And you know why this blue-ringed octopus is particularly dangerous?

It's because its sting is so subtle that most people don't even know they've been stung by it until it's too late.

[2 : 09] And that's why the blue-ringed octopus, I think, is a perfect illustration for the topic of this morning's sermon, which is false teachings. You see, just as there are animals and plants in the world that are very dangerous but don't look that way, there are teachings, things that you hear, ideas that people transmit from various sources, teachings that are actually very dangerous for your soul.

They seem okay, but they are actually deadly, and more so because for many of them, we don't even notice anything wrong with them when we hear these teachings.

That is the reason that Paul wrote this letter to the young minister, Timothy, in Ephesus, where it was a city in ancient, well, what is today Turkey, and it was a big cosmopolitan city, and there were lots of people, lots of ideas, lots of opinions floating around, both inside and outside the church, lots of influences, right?

There were influences back in Ephesus just as much as there are on YouTube today. And therefore, Paul wrote this letter to Timothy because it was vital that this young minister, Timothy, knew how to guard himself against these very dangerous teachings that were going around and how to guard his church that he was entrusted, how to guard the church and the people who were in the church from the damaging effects of these teachings.

And that's really what this letter is about. And it starts here, you'll see in 1 Timothy 1, with Paul, who writes it to Timothy, explaining why, this is what's happening in these first 11 verses, Paul is explaining why these seemingly harmless teachings are actually so dangerous and how to spot them.

[4 : 11] And that's what we're going to look at this morning, why they're actually so dangerous and how we can spot them. So firstly, I want to look at, I want to consider the danger of different teachings.

The danger of different teachings. Have a look at verse 3, right? As I urged you, when I went, this is Paul writing to Timothy, as I urged you when I went to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrine.

What's interesting about what he says there is that the word false doctrines, it's quite strong in most English translations, but you know the original word merely means different.

Just different. Different doctrines. That's what he's saying. Command these people not to teach things that are different. Because that's all they were.

They were just different. It was just a different take. They didn't seem that bad. They weren't obviously ungodly. Just a different angle or a different take to what Paul and the apostles taught about Jesus.

[5 : 21] These people came along and they said, Ah, but have you considered this? This is my new teaching. And they did it to get lots of likes and hits and subscriptions, of course. Well, that would be today's version. But they were coming at it from a different angle.

And it was fresh. It was interesting. But it was different. And that is what Paul is saying to Timothy you must guard against. Because it seemed okay.

It even sounded biblical. But that was actually the first reason it was so dangerous, these teachings. It was because they were from the Bible. Those are the most dangerous types, actually.

Teachings that are from the Bible. So, as we read and Paul describes them, according to verse 4 and 7, these particular teachings that were happening in Ephesus, which are just examples of the kind of false teachings you can get, were about genealogies and about the law from the Old Testament.

So, they were from the Bible. They were from, they were teaching, these false teachers were teaching from the Bible. You would go to them and they would be holding a Bible in their hands, or the equivalent. And so, you would think, okay, okay, good.

[6 : 28] This is Bible teaching. This is what I want, right, as a Christian. They were teaching from Scripture, and that's why Christians were listening to them. Surely, if it's from the Bible, it must be okay, right?

It must, surely, if a teacher has got a Bible in his hand, and he's teaching from the Bible, it must in some way be edifying to me. I'm on safe ground, right?

Well, Paul's saying, no, actually not. But that is often what Christians think, as we're flipping channels, and we get to a channel where a preacher is preaching from the Bible.

We think, oh, good, good, Bible teaching. This is what I want, edifying. Well, actually, Paul's saying, no, it might not be edifying. Or when we get something shared on WhatsApp, and it's got a nice picture of a dove on it, and a Bible verse, and a teaching that comes with it, we think, oh, this must be good for me, right?

Maybe not. See, the first danger of these teachings is that they were from the Bible. And yet we know, don't we, that the most dangerous deceptions are actually those that are closest to the truth.

[7 : 36] Those that are from the Bible. Those are the most dangerous, because like the blue-ringed octopus, we don't notice that they've stung us. And that is why Timothy, who is the church's main teacher in Ephesus, needs to, even though it would be uncomfortable for him, even though he's young, and he doesn't have a lot of influence, Paul says, you must step into him, and you must confront these.

You must command. Yes, you must command. You mustn't just sweep it under the carpet. You mustn't just let sleeping dogs lie. You must step in and confront this dangerous teaching, because the people in your church won't be able to spot it by themselves, necessarily.

And it might come from well-respected people, people who have been in Ephesus for a long time, who are well-respected by the community. Maybe they have a lot of degrees.

Maybe they've been to all kinds of colleges, and they've got a lot of letters behind their name. Maybe they're very convincing, and they're really good speakers. Maybe they're much better speakers than Timothy.

Maybe they're much better looking, and they draw a crowd much better, but they're actually, Paul is saying to him, very dangerous. And then Paul goes on to explain just why.

[8 : 58] Why these teachings are so dangerous. And this is really the core of what he's saying in these first few verses. The main reason why these different teachings are really so bad, and that is because, according to verse 5, they undermine the very purpose of the gospel, which is to produce love.

Have a look at verse 5. This is very important. This is kind of the key verse in this section. Now, the goal of our command is love. That comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Paul is saying to Timothy, yes, it's going to be difficult for you to go and confront these people. Nobody likes upsets. But you have to. You have to command them. And the reason for this command, the reason you need to be strong on this, Timothy, is love.

Is to produce love. That comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. The things that only the true gospel can produce.

But this is such an important verse, and I want you to concentrate on it. And whatever you're thinking about now, I want you now to think about what I'm saying. Verse 5 is so important.

Because it's telling us that the gospel is not given to us to give us information in our brain.

[10 : 22] To make us cleverer. To make us no more. Or even to give us just assurance for life after death, like some heavenly insurance policy. Paul is saying the main outcome of the gospel message is to transform us now.

To change us. If you've come into right relationship with God, through Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross, and if you've received forgiveness for your sins, and your heart has been purified, your conscience has been cleansed, and you genuinely believe the gospel, you know why?

It's all so that you can learn to love properly. That is what the end goal of the gospel in your life is meant to be. To make you a person who loves with God's love.

I mean, we've been seeing this, haven't we, in John's letters that we've been reading in our daily devotions. Have you realized how often that same message comes up? Let me read to you to remind you of what you've read.

I hope you've been reading the daily devotions. If you haven't, I promise you, you've been missing out. The daily devotions are key, a key part of your spiritual health. And listen to some of the things that we've covered.

[11 : 36] In 1 John 4 verse 8, for example, the one who does not love does not know God.

Because God is love. That's the core of His character.

Not the world's kind of love, but this divine love that God has enabled His people who through the gospel have been saved. He's enabled us to replicate this divine love on earth.

1 John 4 verse 12, No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God remains in us and His love is made complete in us.

So you see what John is saying, and it's not just John. Paul is saying the same thing. The goal of this command is love. Jesus is saying the same thing when He says, A new command I give to you that you love one another.

This is how the whole world will know you are my disciples. If you love one another, it's a consistent teaching that God has done what He's done and Jesus came and died and rose again so that you can learn to love properly.

[12 : 37] That's why we've changed the growth groups this year into the new format we have because it's coming together around the Bible as Christians is not just about getting the text right, but it's about learning to love properly.

That's the point. That is God's goal for humans right from the beginning to replicate His character on earth and the whole point of sending Jesus was to make us able to love like Him.

He poured out that love on us, that divine sacrificial love on us in the cross to save us from our sins so that we can not only benefit from it, but love like that and replicate and represent God to the rest of the world.

And Paul is saying to Timothy, the problem with this false teaching, this errant teaching, even if it looks like it's from the Bible, even if it looks okay, is that it doesn't produce people who love.

And that is why it's wrong. It may be interesting. It may be convincing. It may give people a deeper knowledge of Scripture.

[13 : 56] But it doesn't make them love. And so it misses the whole point. That is why these teachings are so dangerous. And I mean, you and I, we get exposed to all kinds of information, don't we?

They're not there to be challenged and to learn how to love better. That is not the reason that they're there. They're there because they want to teach. They're there because they want to be right. They're there because they want to be heard.

[19 : 25] But they don't go there because they want to learn and be challenged and they want to love better. And in the end those kind of people just create fruitless discussions which don't result in anything useful.

Second way you can spot dangerous teachings is teachers who focus on themselves or teachers who focus on self-advancement.

Look at verse 7. Again Paul's describing these false teachers. He says they want to be teachers of the law. And just that.

They want something. They want to be something. That's the problem. Any teacher who's there because he or she wants to be something is there for the wrong reason.

that's what drives them to teach. It's their own status. Their own importance. Not to produce love or to produce to extend God's kingdom but to produce followers and to grow their own kingdom.

[20 : 39] Self-advancement. But fortunately these kind of teachers are quite easy to spot especially today. They have billboards with their face on it.

That's one easy way to spot a dodgy teaching is when the whole church is advertised with the teachers standing there with wonderful clothes and shiny white teeth and a lovely photograph on a billboard and normally the ministry is named after them.

It's so and so ministries. You know if we ever change St. Mark's to Nick Lowe ministries go to another church please. Okay? Because that's not what it's about.

Stay away from those kind of teachers they're not really doing it for you. Third way you can spot false teachings is their teaching this is very important their teaching that goes beyond the gospel.

The gospel isn't enough and there's so many different forms of this. In fact we were warned about this weren't we? This last week in 2 John in our daily devotions.

[21 : 53] That's why it's so important to read these because we get warned about the things that are dangerous for us. 2 John verse 9 was something we read this week in daily devotions.

It said anyone who does not remain in Christ's teaching but goes beyond it does not have God. And the same thing was going on in Ephesus here. Paul warns Timothy.

Look from verse 7. They want to be teachers of the law although they don't understand what they are saying or what they are insisting on but we know that the law is good provided one uses it legitimately.

Okay so you need to understand what was going on here. The background into which Paul was writing is that these teachers in Ephesus were coming there and they were teaching from the Bible. They were teaching from the Old Testament but what they were saying was that this Old Testament law is the way to become a better more righteous person.

So you follow this Old Testament law and it's a secret way to become uber righteous. In other words they're saying yes the gospel of Jesus is important but it's not enough.

[23 : 04] You need the gospel but you also need our teaching. That's the problem. They're saying it's the gospel plus something more.

In their case it's the gospel plus these genealogies and laws which are important ways that you become super righteous. But Paul then goes on and says to Timothy and that's why he's saying this to him that was actually never the law's purpose.

The law good as it is was given to us not to make us righteous but to show us that we're sinners and that's a very big difference. The law's purpose is to expose sin to make it undeniable so that we are driven to Christ as our savior.

The law is to convict us not to cure us. The law was never meant to be a cure. It was meant to show us the symptoms of our problem which is sin and rebellion against God so that we are driven to Christ and we realize he is the only way by his blood that we can be justified.

But these false teachings are saying no you need more. You need more than the gospel to be a true Christian. And you know what you see it it's not just in Ephesus 2000 years ago you see it today in various forms.

[24 : 26] When you hear a message along the lines of you can only be a true Christian if you also do these other things. whether it's Roman Catholicism and the works that you need to do to be justified or whether it's on the other side of the spectrum Pentecostalism and receiving a second

blessing or being slain in the spirit or speaking in tongues or whatever it is that will make you a true Christian.

They're all saying the same thing. They're all saying you need something more. And that is a sign of false teaching when the gospel is not enough. When Jesus is not enough. And then the final sign which is the flip side actually of these false teachers who were misusing the law and not using the law for its intended purpose is not actually calling sin sin.

And there's a lot of those teachings around as well. Not calling out sin. Downplaying sin. And that is very popular isn't it?

In today's world. A kind of a brand of Christianity that doesn't make you feel bad. That makes you feel good. That makes you feel strengthened. That makes you walk out there with a smile on your face.

But it never makes you challenged. It never makes you feel repentant. It never makes you feel bad. Especially in a culture where people can get so easily offended.

[25 : 56] like today. It's very easy. Very easy for churches to become places that tell people what they want to hear. It's very easy to draw a crowd.

We could double, we could triple the attendance of St. Mark's if we changed, if we tweaked our teaching to make it not offend anyone. To make it encouraging, just encouraging. To tell people what they want to hear, but never to warn of the sins that society condones. Because then everybody will be happy, you will draw a crowd, there will be no problems.

But it will be false, and it will be dangerous. And because none of these false teachings, none of these things that you hear elsewhere, that are characterized by these things that Paul is talking about, none of them can produce in your life, what only the true gospel can give.

Which is not a denial of sin, but it's a true cleansing of your sin. A pure heart, a good conscience where you know where you stand with God, and you know that Christ is your Lord, and He's done it all for you, and you have God's love.

[27 : 19] And God has called you to love like Him, and a sincere faith in the truth of the gospel, nothing less and nothing more. That's what the gospel can give you, but nothing else can.

And so as we start this letter that we're going to look at for the next couple of months, take seriously this warning that Paul starts with, this warning of false teachings, because the moment you walk out that door, they're going to be out there, they're going to demand, they're going to vie for your attention.

people, realize that they are more dangerous than they seem. And so be on the lookout for them. Be careful what you listen to.

You decide what you listen to. You decide what goes into your head, not the YouTube algorithms. Be careful what you choose to listen to so that it doesn't pull you away from the true gospel, because it can.

it's dangerous, even if you don't notice it. It can pull you away from the true gospel, and so be careful what you listen to so that it doesn't, and that it doesn't prevent you from becoming the person that only the true gospel can make you.

[28 : 36] A person who loves, a person who shows the world what God is really like. Well, let's pray that as we work through this letter over the next few weeks, God will do that in us.

Yes, Lord, we thank you for the Apostle Paul and the Apostles and the prophets through whom you have revealed truth, and through whom you have spoken to us this morning.

We thank you for this warning that there are dangerous teachings out there, and they seem okay. And so we pray, Lord, that you would help us to be on the lookout.

Help us to spot the warning signs that you give us in Scripture so that we never drift from the true gospel, the gospel that transforms us, the gospel that makes us like you, and the gospel that gives us a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

Help us to walk in that truth and not be distracted by the lies around us. In Jesus' name, amen.