

The Deadly Danger of Wandering – James 5:19

This message in one sentence: Straying from the truth is deadly dangerous; wanderers MUST be rescued by love that risks and strains.

James 5: 19 *My brothers, if any among you strays from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his life from death and cover a multitude of sins.*

The words, "If any of you," must refer to a professed Christian. The erring one had been named by the name of Jesus, and for a while had followed the truth; but in an evil hour he had been betrayed into doctrinal error, and had erred from the truth. It was not merely that he fell into a mistake upon some lesser matter, which might be compared to the fringe of the gospel, but he erred in some vital doctrine, he departed from the faith in its fundamentals. There are some truths which must be believed; they are essential to salvation, and if not heartily accepted, the soul will be ruined. This man had ... turned aside from the truth on an essential point. Now, in those days, the saints did not say, as the sham saints do now, "We must be largely loving, and leave this brother to his own opinion; he sees truth from a different standpoint, and has a rather different way of putting it, but his opinions are as good as our own, and we must not say that he is in error." That is at present the fashionable way of trifling with divine truth, and making things pleasant all round. Thus the gospel is debased, and "another gospel" propagated. - Charles Spurgeon, 1873.

I was initially going to approach this message from a theological place...is it possible to "lose your salvation?" But instead, I believe it would be far more faithful to the text to not have a theology class, but to instead sound a sober warning.

One that most treatments of this passage don't sound quite loud enough:

But this raises an important question: Are Christians in danger of spiritual and eternal death—of not being saved from their sins? This is where we realize something extremely significant about eternal security. Eternal security is the doctrine, or the truth, that a Christian's salvation is secure for all of eternity. What the whole of the New Testament teaches is that eternal security is always a certainty. When you trust in Christ as Savior and Lord to cover over your sins and make you right before God, you are adopted into His family, and you are His child forever.... But the question is, How does God keep us in His family? ...The answer James gives to the church is, "Through you." Eternal security is accomplished through community. How does God preserve His people? The answer is, in part, through His people. The church is one of the God-ordained means God uses to keep us faithful. God is sovereign, and He does the preserving, but He does it through the church looking out for, caring for, and loving one another to keep one another from sin. This is yet another reason we ought to be involved in the lives of others in the church. - David Platt, James commentary.

Are we in danger of spiritual death? We can't be, because the Bible promises eternal security...I'm not satisfied with that answer...it is not what the passage says. Notice: He doesn't answer the question!!

I was going to a theological place...But I'm not going to approach the passage in quite that way. Instead, I want to affirm the truth and the warning of James 5:19-20. If the Word of God is true, and it is...then the fact of the matter is that wandering away from the truth is DEADLY. Are we talking about spiritual death, or physical death? The Word there is Thanatos - it means death. (Avengers) At BEST, we are dealing with a warning of physical death...which is a lot less terrifying than spiritual death. Physical death is momentary and fleeting for those in Christ.

Let's refocus on the passage: **James 5: 19 *My brothers, if any among you strays from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his life from death and cover a multitude of sins.***

What is truth, and what does it mean to wander from the truth?

Some Research: Some you've heard before.

Over 60 percent of churchgoing kids abandon the faith in their twenties.

Of the biggest survey of homeschoolers I saw, a little over 20 percent of them did, which seems much better. However, worldview changed a great deal. For instance, of 3700 survey respondents who were over 18, and had been homeschooled at least 7 years in a Christian environment, only 200 viewed homosexuality as positive during their homeschool years. 8 times that number - roughly 1600 people viewed homosexuality as positive or very positive as adults. The number who viewed homosexuality as very positive increased by more than 15 times - from 62 to 957.

What happens in college and young adulthood is that people get exposed to doubts and doubters and arguments that they've never seen before.

If you do not know WHY the Bible is authoritative and WHY it is reliable, then you will pick and choose doctrines. You will become a Bible editor. Many of us already do this.

3 Meditations on truth and straying from it: As we read, ask: How does God feel about truth? How important is truth?

1. Malachi 1:14-2:9 *I am a great King," says Yahweh of Hosts, "and My name will be feared among the nations.*

2 *"Therefore, this decree is for you priests: 2 If you don't listen, and if you don't take it to heart to honor My name," says Yahweh of Hosts, "I will send a curse among you, and I will curse*

your blessings. In fact, I have already begun to curse them because you are not taking it to heart.

3 "Look, I am going to rebuke your descendants, and I will spread animal waste over your faces, the waste from your festival sacrifices, and you will be taken away with it. (NIV and ESV says "DUNG") 4 God is the smearer of dung...WHY? Then you will know that I sent you this decree so My covenant with Levi may continue," says the Lord of Hosts. 5 "My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave these to him; it called for reverence, and he revered Me and stood in awe of My name. 6 True instruction was in his mouth, and nothing wrong was found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and fairness and turned many from sin. 7 For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, because he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.

8 "You, on the other hand, have turned from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have violated the covenant of Levi," says the Lord of Hosts. 9 "So I in turn have made you despised and humiliated before all the people because you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in your instruction." NLT: For you have not obeyed me but have shown favoritism in the way you carry out my instructions. PICKING AND CHOOSING

2. Romans 1:18-28 18 For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, 19 since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse. 21 For though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or show gratitude. Instead, their thinking became nonsense, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. 24 Therefore God delivered them over in the cravings of their hearts to sexual impurity, so that their bodies were degraded among themselves. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served something created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.

26 This is why God delivered them over to degrading passions. For even their females exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 The males in the same way also left natural relations with females and were inflamed in their lust for one another. Males committed shameless acts with males and received in their own persons the appropriate penalty of their error.

3. 2nd Thessalonians 2:1-11, 2 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him: We ask you, brothers, 2 not to be easily upset in mind or troubled, either by a spirit or by a message or by a letter as if from us, alleging that the Day of the Lord has come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way. For that day will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction. 4 He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he sits in God's sanctuary, publicizing that he himself is God.

5 Don't you remember that when I was still with you I told you about this? 6 And you know what currently restrains him, so that he will be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but the one now restraining will do so until he is out of the way, 8 and then the

lawless one will be revealed. The Lord Jesus will destroy him with the breath of His mouth and will bring him to nothing with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is based on Satan's working, with all kinds of false miracles, signs, and wonders,10 and with every unrighteous deception among those who are perishing. They perish because they did not accept the love of the truth in order to be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a strong delusion so that they will believe what is false, 12 so that all will be condemned—those who did not believe the truth but enjoyed unrighteousness. 13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

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- 1. You CAN stray from the truth. We ALL know people that are RIGHT NOW straying from the truth. They are in deadly peril.***
- 2. If we turn sinners from their errors, we will be saving their lives AND covering multitudes of sins.***

How do we rescue? How do we turn back? I believe a parallel passage in 1 Peter 4:8 contains the answer:

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, maintain an intense love for each other, since love covers a multitude of sins.

An ***Agape Ektenay*** - A love that is unceasing - that STRETCHES out, and doesn't stop reaching out. (Reading Hardy Boys to Phoebe and Cassidy - Joe reaching out to Frank, and pulling him up)