

The Deadliest People On Earth

By Jason Hilburn

If a person were asked, "Who are the most dangerous people on earth?", perhaps he would say, "terrorists." Another person might say, "serial killers." When we think of dangerous people, it is natural for these types of people to come to mind. Since September 11, 2001 our country has become much more aware of the realities and horrors of terrorism. The news media often bring people to our attention who commit horrible crimes such as murder. Surely murder is one of the worst crimes that one human being can commit against another. However, as horrible as murder is, there are people who do more harm than merely taking physical lives – there are people who lead others to eternal Hell! A murderer could take the life of a faithful Christian, only to result in the Christian going on to eternal bliss. However, a false teacher does not merely take one's life; he effectively takes one's eternal soul! The effects of false teaching are infinitely more devastating and far reaching than murder! That must be why Paul spoke so strongly against those who brought a perverted gospel to the churches of Galatia: *"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed"* (Galatians 1:8-9). These erring brethren of Galatia still believed in Christ, but after their conversion they were misled into a perverted version of the Gospel, and they had fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4). Because false teachers are so deadly, we should become familiar with some of their traits, so they will not take advantage of us: *"Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices"* (2 Corinthians 2:11).

False teachers appear to be the best people on earth – Early in the ministry of Jesus, He began warning His followers of false teachers who would look like followers of God: *"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves"* (Matthew 7:15). Notice what Jesus said about false prophets in Luke's Gospel account: *"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets"* (Luke 6:26). Paul also warned us about the innocent looking disguises of Satan and his ministers: *"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works"* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). False teachers do not wear t-shirts with the words "I AM A FALSE TEACHER" on them. If they did, they would not be effective. Like Satan, they use subtlety (Genesis 3:1). For the sake of those being led astray, false teachers need to be exposed. However, if one were to publicly say that Joel Osteen is a false teacher, it would probably be difficult to continue speaking over the listeners gasping for air and murmuring about the comment. The truth is that people like Joel Osteen and Billy Graham are those "angels of light" who are spreading Satan's false doctrines! For example, millions of people are being told to pray the "sinner's prayer" to be saved, and they are being deceived into

thinking they are saved when they are still lost! False teaching is horrible! Although members of the church of Christ love these men, we hate what they are doing: *"Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way"* (Psalm 119:104); *"Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way"* (Psalm 119:128). If these men would repent, obey the truth, and begin teaching the truth, faithful Christians would be behind them one hundred percent, but as it stands now, *"they are the enemies of the cross of Christ"* (Philippians 3:18).

False teachers influence great numbers of people - According to Wikipedia.org, some 76 million people in the U.S.A. profess to be Catholics, who consider the pope to be "God on earth." One may wonder how many people have filled stadiums to hear Billy Graham preach a diluted, perverted gospel. Authors like Rick Warren and Max Lucado have no doubt made great fortunes on all the books they have sold. False teachers often make use of the television to broadcast their "We'll make you feel good if you will just send us your money" programs to thousands upon thousands. So many refuse to believe that a certain preacher or religious group is in the wrong, simply because they have large numbers of followers. The truth is that God's people have always been in the minority (Matthew 7:13, 14), and truth should be our criteria for religion rather than numbers!

False teachers speak smooth things that people want to hear - Many false teachers are nothing more than motivational speakers who will throw in a Scripture or two for "that religious effect." If they did not use any Scriptures at all, they would be much easier to detect. By throwing in a few Scriptures into their "feel good" speech they make some people believe they are sound preachers of righteousness. We need to remember that even the devil used Scripture, although in a twisted way (Matthew 4:6). The time of which Paul wrote is here and now: *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables"* (2 Timothy 4:3, 4); *"For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ"* (Galatians 1:10).

False teachers condone what God condemns - Notice this warning from Isaiah: *"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"* (Isaiah 5:20). Most false teachers are able to attract large crowds of followers because they refuse to take a firm stand against sin. They preach a message of "love and tolerance," when the Biblical message of love says nothing about tolerating sin. Sin should be addressed (albeit in a loving way), but addressed nonetheless! Paul told Timothy how godly preaching was to be done, and it often involves reproof and rebuking: *"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine"* (2 Timothy 4:2). Not only do false teachers tolerate sin, but they actually teach that certain sinful things are acceptable in the sight of God, such as religious division (denominationalism), man-made religious names, man-made plans of salvation, man-made ways of worship, etc.

False teachers try to make faithful Christians look like the "bad guys" - False teachers take advantage of our "politically correct" culture, in which it is not socially

acceptable to point out false teachers, even if millions are being led astray by them. When faithful brethren expose false teachers as the Bible exemplifies and commands, faithful brethren are often accused of being hateful and intolerant. However, this is nothing new – Satan has always tried to make good appear to be evil. In the Garden of Eden, Satan tried to make God look like He was the evil one: *“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”* (Genesis 3:4, 5). Ahab tried to make Elijah out to be the troublemaker: *“And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim”* (1 Kings 18:17, 18). Jesus commands us to *“judge righteous judgment,”* and He said that false prophets can be identified *“by their fruits”* (John 7:24; Matthew 7:15-20). Please notice that Jesus commended the church at Ephesus for putting false teachers to the test and discovering they were liars: *“I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars”* (Revelation 2:2). In that same text, Jesus went on to name the specific names of an individual and a group who were posing threats to souls with their false teaching (*“Jezebel,”* and *“the Nicolaitans,”* Revelation 2:6, 15, 20). Paul exposed false teachers like *“Hymenaeus and Philetus”* by name (2 Timothy 2:17, 18). When will people realize that the enemies are not those who point out false teachers, but rather the enemies are the false teachers themselves? If we love people, we will warn them, just as Jesus and Paul did.

False teachers are the deadliest people on earth. If there is good news in all of this, perhaps it is the fact that false teachers, like Satan, are limited in their power. Although they have a powerful influence in this world, they cannot override our free will. We must search the Scriptures, then *“buy the truth, and sell it not”* (Acts 17:11; Proverbs 23:23). Let us do as John commanded: *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world”* (1 John 4:1).

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