Spiritual Malware[1]
04-03-17AM

Have you ever gotten a computer virus? Today we use the term "malware" to describe such an infection. Such infections disrupt computer operations and slow computers down, even causing them to quit working altogether. They may steal information that is stored on a computer, or deceive users into providing information that causes them a financial loss. Why do people create such programs? For some, it is the personal financial gain of thievery. For others, it is pure maliciousness.

There are lessons we learn from getting malware in our computer. First, before you start, don't be in places you should not be. Most malware is accessed through inappropriate or questionable websites. Second, don't believe an offer that is too good to be true. Many infections come from clicking on "free" offers, etc. When you have an infection, get out and shut down as soon as possible. Sometimes this prevents an infection from getting established. Finally, it may be that you need to use software tools or even reformat the hard drive to restore operations.

 In 2 Peter 2 we are warned of the dangers of false teachers. False Teacher is not an expression used often in the bible (in fact, only here). But in other places similar warnings are made, including the parallel text of Jude, 1 John 2 (antichrists), and 1 Timothy 4. These warnings have these things in common: people who were once Christians will teach false doctrines, and their motivation is personal (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life); they will teach others that we can participate in sensual behavior, and will cost many their souls.

False teachers sound a lot like malware. At best, engaging with them will slow down your spiritual growth. They will cause disruption to the church (Jude 12). They can ultimately steal your salvation (Colossians 2:18). Their motivations is what makes them distinct; they act for either personal gain or simply malevolent desires. If they are not checked, God may "reformat the hard drive" (Revelation 2:14).

If false teachers are like malware, then the solutions to their behavior are the same. To keep our system of salvation safe, we need to avoid going places we do not belong. If we know that someone does not teach the truth, we need to avoid supporting them (Ephesians 5:11, 2 John 9-11). We need to be aware when someone offers us something too good to be true; an excuse to live in sin, a means to avoid repentance, an opportunity to lapse on our obligations. When Paul and Barnabas returned to the congregations they had helped to establish in Act 14:22, they admonished them that it would be through tribulation we enter the kingdom; in other words, there are no spiritual shortcuts.

Like malware, when we realize we have engaged with a false teacher, we need to get out as soon as possible. It might be tempting to stay and try to change things, but the bible repeatedly tells us to flee from sin (1 Cor. 10:14, 1 Tim. 6:11). Joseph did not try to persuade Potipher's wife that she was in error, he ran away. As well, when we have engaged with false teaching, it may be necessary to do a spiritual "virus check" on ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5) and ascertain if we have been infected. There is only one spiritual virus checker that can cleanse the system of bugs, and that is the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15, 21).

---

[1] Original thoughts by Eric Reynolds, South Fayetteville church of Christ