

To Rid The Disease

[The following is a literary illustration with an extended metaphor known as an analogy or parable. As in all cases with such a method of illustration, the metaphor will break down at some point, since there is not an exact correspondence between the source (vehicle) and the target (tenor). It does, however, get the point across.]

The setting is a hospital. Dr. Christian has found out that Mr. Patient has a deadly disease. Happily, however, the disease is one in which there is a cure. Dr. Christian is standing beside the bed of Mr. Patient.

Dr. Christian: Mr. Patient, I have some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that you have a disease that, if gone untreated, will kill you in a week. But there's really good news! The good news is th...

Mr. Patient (interrupting): I know what you're telling me, doctor, and I don't accept it. I do not have a deadly disease. In fact, I resent your judgment of my body. You have no right to make such a judgment. I know my body is fine, because I feel fine. You are being very unloving by telling me that I have a deadly disease.

Dr. Christian: But Mr. Patient, you do have this disease! And if you don't do something about it, you will die in a week! It is a dreadful disease. It is deadly. I have good news, though, and it's not that I saved a load of money on my car insurance. It's really good news for you! There is a c...

Mr. Patient (interrupting): What kind of hateful person are you anyway? You say words like "dreadful" and "deadly" like you enjoy using them to describe me. Is that how you get your jollies? Do you think you're better than I am?

Dr. Christian: No, no, that's not it at all! Your disease has a cure! A complete cure! That's what I've been trying to tell you! There is medicine that will totally cure you!

Mr. Patient: I know what you're insinuating here, so don't beat around the bush. You're insinuating that if I don't take this medicine, I'm going to die, right? Is that what you're saying?

Dr. Christian: Yes, if you don't take the medicine, you will die within a week, no doubt about it. But the medicine is right here, so let me go g...

Mr. Patient (interrupting): Don't go anywhere, doctor. You are so arrogant. You claim to know that I have this disease, and you claim to know that there is a cure. Do you think you have perfect knowledge? Do you think you're the only one with this knowledge? If not, why hasn't my regular doctor told me this? I want my regular doctor for a second opinion.

Dr. Christian: But your regular doctor doesn't know ...

Mr. Patient (interrupting): There you go again. Nobody knows but you, right? You sound like a

gnostic cult leader. Is that what you are, Dr. Christian? A gnostic cult leader?

Dr. Christian: I was just trying to ...

Mr. Patient (interrupting): What, trying to show how much more knowledgeable you are than everybody else? Go get me my regular doctor.

Dr. Christian: I won't do that, Mr. Patient. Your regular doctor doesn't ...

Mr. Patient (interrupting): Nurse! Nurse! I want my regular doctor in here right now!

Mr. Nurse: I hear you, Mr. Patient. It's okay. We'll get your regular doctor in here right away. I'll stay here with you so Dr. Christian doesn't say any more mean things to you. I do know how mean Dr. Christian can be. (*Calls Dr. Light*)

Dr. Light (entering room): Well, hello there, Mr. Patient! Good to see you again! What seems to be the problem?

Mr. Patient: Dr. Christian here is telling me that I have a deadly disease and that if I don't take his "cure," I'm going to die in ten days!

Dr. Light: Is that what you told him, Dr. Christian?

Dr. Christian: I certainly did, Dr. Light. That's what doctors are supposed to do. I told him his disease and told him the remedy.

Dr. Light: Is that really necessary, Dr. Christian? "I told him the disease and told him the remedy." Please. It's like you have some kind of "special revelation" from God that no one else has, like some kind of gnostic cult leader. I don't see any disease in this man.

Dr. Christian: You don't even know what to look for, Dr. Light. How can you tell that he doesn't have this disease if you don't even know how to detect it?

Dr. Light: Ah, so condescending, Dr. Christian. Try not to sound so arrogant. Some of us just see things differently than you do.

Dr. Christian: But all the test results are so clear! It's not just my opinion, Dr. Light! There has never been a clearer case! There is no doubt that this man has this disease! It says so right in the Diagnostic Manual!

Mr. Patient: See how unloving Dr. Christian is, Dr. Light? That's why I never wanted to go to him. He has the reputation of telling other people this, too. The reason I went to you is because I know you would tell me that everything is okay.

Dr. Light: Yes, everything is okay, my friend. You do not have this so-called “dreadful disease” that Dr. Christian is saying you have. He thinks he has the only correct interpretation of the Diagnostic Manual. Everything is just fine. You look absolutely fine. And you feel fine, too, right?

Mr. Patient: I’ve never felt better!

Dr. Light: And my motto is: “You are how you feel.” Since you’ve never felt better, then you have never been better! There’s nothing wrong with you! Go home and enjoy life.

Mr. Patient: Thank you, Dr. Light! And Dr. Christian, I never want to hear from you again. You have worried me for nothing.

Dr. Christian: But Mr. Patient, please, you need to understand ...

Mr. Patient (interrupting): No more. I don’t want to hear it. Nurse, get him out of here.

Mr. Nurse: You need to leave, Dr. Christian.

Dr. Christian: I am leaving under protest.

Dr. Light: (*Chuckle*) Yes, that’s what he always does. I’ll write the discharge approval papers.

(*The next day, Dr. Christian is talking to Dr. Strangelove.*)

Dr. Strangelove: I heard you got into another confrontation yesterday.

Dr. Christian: Yes, but it was over a life-and-death issue. Mr. Patient has a deadly disease, and there is a cure, but he doesn’t want to hear that he has the disease. And Dr. Light, who doesn’t even know how to detect the disease, doesn’t even believe Mr. Patient has the disease. It’s incredible.

Dr. Strangelove: You just seek out confrontations, don’t you? You just thrive on them, don’t you?

Dr. Christian: What are you talking about? I didn’t seek this out! I was telling a patient that he had a disease and that there is a cure!

Dr. Strangelove: There, you see? You had a confrontation right there. You told the patient he had a disease.

Dr. Christian: That’s a confrontation? Well, if you want to say that I confronted him with the fact that he had a disease, I guess you could call it a confrontation, although I didn’t do it out of any kind of unkindness. I did it so he would see his condition and seek the remedy.

Dr. Strangelove: There’s where you went wrong. You are never to tell people about their

condition.

Dr. Christian: What?

Dr. Strangelove: It just leads to negativity. It makes them feel bad. It makes them feel judged. It really is an unloving thing to do.

Dr. Christian: Now you're sounding like Dr. Light!

Dr. Strangelove: No, I disagree very strongly with Dr. Light. I do believe that Mr. Patient has the deadly disease. But I will not tell Mr. Patient that. That would be a mean and unloving thing for me to do.

Dr. Christian: I can't believe what I'm hearing! It is mean and unloving to tell Mr. Patient the truth about his condition?

Dr. Strangelove: You always couch things in such black-and-white terms such as "truth." Yes, it is true that he has this condition. But what is the thing that makes him feel the best? What is the thing that will make him like you?

Dr. Christian: So that's how you make your life-and-death decisions? Whether or not the patient likes you? Whether or not the patient is happy, even if he has a deadly disease?

Dr. Strangelove: Of course. It is his own happiness that I'm concerned about. If he is happy, then I know I have done the loving thing. If he is angry, then I have done the hateful thing.

Dr. Christian: It's loving not to tell him he has a disease so he will die in a week? That sounds like hatred to me!

Dr. Strangelove: Ah, Dr. Christian, that's where we differ. This man has a week to live. It would be hatred to make him unhappy during this final week of his life. The loving thing to do is to tell him that everything is fine and that he has no disease.

Dr. Christian: What kind of doctor are you, anyway? You would lie to a patient so he could be happy for a week before he dies, yet there is a cure out there so he doesn't even have to die in a week! I'm just dumbfounded!

Dr. Strangelove: Just call it a difference in approach. Do you wonder why we never get any return patients?

Dr. Christian: They're all dead!

Dr. Strangelove: But they were happy when they died.

Dr. Christian: You can't be a doctor. Doctors are here to save lives, not to give people peace without letting them know their disease and the cure!

Dr. Strangelove: But that's so harsh and judgmental. You need to give love a try.

Dr. Christian: You have no idea what love is. I can't stand it here.

Dr. Strangelove: Well, people like you have never lasted here. You're the kind of person who we would call part of the "lunatic fringe." You people are so zealous to save lives that you don't see that you are causing much pain and anguish in the process. I really feel sorry for you.

Dr. Christian: I have to go! I have to get out of here!

(Dr. Christian runs out of the hospital, only to encounter a bunch of picketers outside the door of the hospital. They carry signs saying, "Dr. Christian is a cultist!" and "Dr. Christian is full of anger and hate!" and "Dr. Christian thinks he knows it all!")

Dr. Christian: People, I am not what you think I am! I have told people their disease and told them about the cure! I want to see people cured!

Crowd: Hey hey, ho ho, Dr. Christian has got to go!

Dr. Christian: Won't you listen? I'm not here to be mean to anyone! But people need to know about their diseases! People are dying out there because they do not believe they have deadly diseases!

Crowd: We love Dr. Strangelove! We love Dr. Light! Dr. Christian is a gnostic! He thinks he's always right!

Dr. Christian: Is there any reasoning with you people? Can you tell me anything I have done wrong? Can you give any specifics?

Crowd: Dr. Christian, Dr. Christian, all you do is insult! Dr. Christian, Dr. Christian, Go back to your cult!

(Dr. Christian walks through the crowd of protestors who spit on him and hurl insults at him and even make derogatory remarks about his family. But he remembers his mission, which is to save lives. And he resolves to keep on trying to save lives no matter what people say.)

by Marc D. Carpenter
www.outsidethecamp.org