

# 1 Timothy 3:1-13 - Dangerous Leaders

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Date: 05 October 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] No, mate. Everyone's gone quiet now.

You've walked to the front. On the back of last week.!

Grab your Bibles. 1 Timothy 3. And we, as you know, we've been going through Paul's letter to his friend Timothy, who is passing a church in Ephesus.

And what we've been reading is that the church is dangerous. It is either dangerous in the wrong way or dangerous in the right way. It becomes dangerous in the wrong way when the gospel is distorted or we take our eyes off of God's mission and purpose for the church.

And we become a pleasant church rather than a powerful church. That's the wrong kind of dangerous. The right kind of dangerous is a church that is dangerous to the kingdom of darkness.

[ 1 : 16 ] A church that pushes back against sin and lies and false gospels. A church that actually makes hell nervous when we gather. So, what's striking about chapter 3 is that on the face of it, it shouldn't belong here.

Like, you read about dangerous church and you read about the gospel and you're kind of like, surely this is an excursion.

This is a tangent at best. What is Paul doing? Well, I want to suggest that where Paul is now talking in chapter 3, he's going to talk about leadership.

And he places this teaching on leadership right in the middle of two extraordinary truths. And I think if we miss the wider context for this section, we get lost in some of the detail that we don't need to get lost in.

And next week, just so you know, we're coming back to chapter 3 and we're looking at it again. And we're looking at it again with a specific viewpoint. But this morning, I want to focus on the reason for leadership and the dangers to leadership.

[ 2 : 42 ] And so, look at these two extraordinary truths. We'll just go over them really quickly. We discussed one last week. The first is in chapter 2, verse 4. Where Paul says that God desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

And so last week, if you remember, we saw how this is the very heartbeat of God. That God desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

And so he says that Jesus came and gave himself a ransom for all. Which implies that those who are the all were at some point held hostage because a ransom has been offered.

And so this is God's mission in sending Jesus to save those from the power and grip of darkness. And he says that he will save all who come to him through this one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

[ 4 : 03 ] There's not a different way. Right? That's the only way that you can be saved. And then in verse 7, if you follow the track with me with Paul's kind of train of thought, he says, for this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle.

And he says that a teacher of the Gentiles. So God's mission to save all and Paul's part in God's mission is right there in those verses. So let's just grasp that for a second.

Second, God's mission includes, at this point, Paul. Paul has been called to that mission. And so then right after this section that we'll look at in chapter 3 on church leadership, Paul writes about the victory that Jesus has won.

So scroll all the way down to verse, or just cast your minds. I don't know why I said scroll. You know what I mean. Go down to verse 16 in chapter 3.

And Paul says, Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. And you might say, this is the mystery of religion. Right? So first century mystery religion.

[ 5 : 23 ] And we'll try and unpack that a little bit next week. So he says, For indeed we confess, for great indeed we confess, is the mystery of godliness. And this is what is so great indeed.

That he, talking about Jesus, was manifest in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among nations, believed on in the world, and taken up in glory.

Right? Right? So Paul is now describing this cosmic victory of Jesus. Right? Now let me just unpack that, because I think it's really important that we just slow down just a little bit and look at these six things.

So six lines. Look at the flow. Six lines. Almost like poetry. All about Jesus. Right? So first he says, He was manifest in the flesh. So technically, theologically, we call that the incarnation.

God himself shows up. Jesus, eternal Son of God, takes on flesh. If you get lost in the word incarnation, swap it out for Christmas.

[ 6 : 35 ] Because that's what we celebrate. Right? At Christmas, we're celebrating the incarnation. But he doesn't begin at Bethlehem. That's not where the incarnation started.

Like, he doesn't begin there. He is eternal. And this is where the mystery of godliness starts, with God stepping into reality. So here's the tremendous thing, and not to try and get off on a tangent at all, but here's the tremendous thing.

Christianity doesn't call us to reach some level of attainment before God accepts us. Right? He says, I know that you can't. I'm coming to you.

That's great, isn't it? The second thing Paul says, that he was vindicated by the Spirit. That word vindicated just means proven true. Which means Jesus is who he says he is.

And the Holy Spirit, the third person of God, had testified to that. Right? So Jesus himself says this in Luke chapter 4. He says this of himself.

[ 7 : 46 ] He says, And by doing, like, if you read the Gospels, which I'm sure you have.

If you read the Gospels, by doing all of the miracles that Jesus did, he was proven to be who he said he was. And then thirdly, he was seen by angels.

Now, most of us would be like, okay, I can get the incarnation bit. Right? I can even get the vindicated by the Spirit bit. But seen by angels doesn't flow with a Gospel story that we would expect it to flow with.

Right? We would expect him to say he was then crucified. But he doesn't. He said he was seen by angels. And that's fascinating because Paul isn't saying.

He's not just noting that some heavenly beings caught a glimpse of Jesus. Right? Angels in the Bible aren't just, I was going to say, aren't just.

- [ 8 : 58 ] They're not at all. They're not choir members in white robes. Playing harp, sitting on a cloud, chomping on marshmallows. That's not an angel.
- That's a Renaissance version of an angel, but it's not the Bible version of an angel. The Bible version of an angel is one who sits on a divine council. They watch and they bear witness and they participate in God's governance of the world.
- And Paul's point is that when Jesus died, angels saw him. This hidden realm, this hidden spiritual realm that on occasion breaks into our world or in our reality, but is for the most part hidden.
- Paul's point is, is that when Jesus died, angels saw him. He might go, well, how was that? Like, how did that happen?
- Well, Paul writes the same thing to the church at Ephesus. And he says there to the church at Ephesus, he says, therefore, it says, when he, talking about Jesus, ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men.
- [ 10 : 12 ] In saying he ascended, what does it mean? But that he also descended into the lowest regions of the earth. He who descended is the one who ascended above all of the heavens that he might fill all things.
- Here's the point. When Jesus died, he went into those, that spiritual realm for all angels to see him. The death and resurrection wasn't only observed by people on earth.
- They were seen and celebrated in the unseen realm. Paul writes to the church of Colossae and he says, and he gives a description of what Jesus did.
- It says there in Colossians chapter 2, he says that he disarmed the rulers and the authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him. That's not talking about Caesar. It's not talking about, you know, the people who are in the first century parliament.
- He's talking about those who are sitting on the divine councils. This was a cosmic announcement. The enemy is defeated.
- [ 11 : 17 ] The rightful king has triumphed. And heaven itself acknowledges his authority. In other words, the gospel, the good news story that Jesus Christ has come isn't just a human story.
- It's a cosmic story. It reverberates in heaven as well as on earth. Then he says, fourthly, Paul says that Jesus was proclaimed among the nations.
- So the gospel, the good news, the message didn't stay in Jerusalem. It didn't remain a sect of the Jews. It didn't stay in one culture, in one ethnicity, in one language.
- The gospel is global. Remember back in chapter 2, we read it just a minute ago. Paul says to pray for all people. Not just Westerners.
- Pray for all people. Because God desires that all people be saved. So Jesus gave his life a ransom. Paid the price for all people.
- [ 12 : 27 ] And from Paul in verse 7, the gospel message starts to go to where? All people. Because it's good news for all people everywhere.
- And then fifthly, Paul says that he was believed on in the world so that there is fruit. That's what he's saying. Like there's a proof that the gospel can change people's lives. People from every background, every tribe, every nation have trusted in him.
- Listen, the gospel is effective. That's what he's saying. It saves and it transforms. And then finally it says that he was taken up into glory. That's the ascension.
- Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. Enthroned as King. Reigning over heaven and earth. So God's mission. And Paul's part in God's mission.

It's almost like a bookend. That's at one end. And then at the other end is God's victory in Jesus as the visible manifestation of the mission at the other end.

[ 13 : 31 ] And then right in the middle, wedged between the heartbeat of God to save sinners and the triumph of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, are instructions about church leadership.

And we should all go, why? It doesn't make sense, does it? You get these two incredibly enormous truths. And all of a sudden, Paul goes, oh, let's talk about leaders.

And the question should be why. And I think the answer is because simply that the church, if the church is going to be the vehicle through which God's mission is made known to the world, it needs leaders who help God's people to do it.

Like it is the church's responsibility. It is the church's role. To go out into all the world and make disciples.

And Paul is saying, like, as an extension of Paul's mission, as an extension of God's mission, the church has a mission.

[ 14 : 52 ] But we're not very good at organizing ourselves, are we? I'm glad Joe said no. Because, like, you only have to be around church announcements for a couple of weeks.

And we know that we don't do it so great, do we? In terms of organization. And I'm the worst. And so Paul says, look, if the church is going to be the vehicle through which God's mission is made known to the world, if God's mission continues, and it's the church's responsibility to take forward God's mission, then it's going to need some leaders to help the people do that.

And this is why he says then in verse 1, that this is a trustworthy saying. This is chapter 3, verse 1. He says, this is a trustworthy saying. If anyone aspires to be the office of an overseer, he desires a noble task.

That word overseer is the Greek word episkopoi, which simply refers to a position of responsibility. So this isn't necessarily speaking about what we might call elders.

It's talking about those with a position of responsibility that would include elders and pastors. And we'll talk about that next week. But that's not the key phrase, actually. The key phrase is he desires a noble task.

[ 16 : 12 ] And it's noble because this is the stewardship of God's mission. Who's responsible for God's mission moving forward? The church.

Who's responsible for stewarding that, organizing it, imagining it, and managing it? Church leaders. Church leaders. You see, the church exists not for its own mission, but rather to participate in God's mission.

And the church is tasked with taking Jesus to the world in both message and manner. And it's the responsibility of leaders to help the church step into God's mission.

That means pointing people to the gospel. It means equipping people to serve. It means creating a culture where Jesus shapes everything we do. And when leaders get this right, the church stops just existing for itself.

And starts existing for a greater purpose, which is God's mission. And so leadership is that sense of stewarding or the stewardship of God's mission.

[ 17 : 25 ] It's not about advancing their own vision or their own platform or their own preferences. It's about faithfully helping the church to reach the lost, disciple believers, and glorify Christ in the world.

And every decision that a leader makes, from budgeting to programming to teaching and mentoring, should be filtered through the lens of advancing God's mission. And that's why it's sandwiched between these two extraordinary truths.

But listen, Paul isn't blind to the problems of this.

Paul isn't painting a picture of perfect leaders who are going to lead a perfect mission and have perfect results.

What he shows us in the text and in the rest of these 12, 13 verses is that there are three dangers in this kind of leadership.

[ 18 : 31 ] In this gospel-centered leadership, there are dangers. And the first danger that he highlights without even highlighting it, and I'll tell you what I mean by a minute, is priority danger.

That's the wrong kind of dangerous. Right? But faithful leaders can make us dangerous in the right way. Paul knows, listen, Paul knows that sooner or later, Timothy, the guy he's writing to, is going to have to get help.

Sooner or later. He's the pastor of this church in Ephesus. The church in Ephesus is a hub of church and mission activity in that region.

We know later on that the apostle John ends up in Ephesus. And so we know that, you know, the church had continued. But sooner or later, Timothy is going to have to get some help.

And so he writes these verses to Timothy to help him look out for other men who are going to help the church step into God's mission. He's saying, Timothy, you're not going to be able to do that on your own.

[ 19 : 46 ] And so, who are you going to look for? What's your priority? And so this is Timothy's priority. Because he can't do everything that needs to be done.

And so he has a goal to make others leaders. Leaders who will be able to help the church then step into mission.

And look, we see this in the Old Testament. Do you remember in Exodus chapter 18? We actually see it twice in Numbers 11 as well. But Exodus 18 is a striking one where Moses, Aaron, and Hur are there.

And three men tasked with leading the children of Israel. Just a small task. And the responsibility becomes overwhelming.

And it's Moses' uncle, isn't it? Or father-in-law, who sees Moses. And he is working from morning until night.

[ 20 : 54 ] And he's neglecting some of the other responsibilities that he has. Why? Because people are coming to him. They're coming to him in the morning. They're coming to him mid-morning. They're coming in at lunchtime.

And he's like, I haven't had a lunch break. And people are coming in mid-afternoon, evening, night. And people are coming day after day after day. And his father-in-law says, that's just not right.

Either God's mission is going to suffer or you're going to die early. And so he says, Moses, this is what you should do. You should get judges.

You should get the elders to take care of all kind of the menial stuff. All this is the normal stuff. The running, the day-to-day operational kind of stuff in our language. Get them to do that so you can focus on other things, your priorities.

It's easy to get distracted by programs and initiatives and budgets or even good ideas.

[ 21 : 56 ] And suddenly the mission of God, the one thing that matters eternally, gets pushed to the side. So leadership isn't just about keeping things running.

It's about keeping the church aligned with the mission that God has given us. It exists to carry forward God's mission. And again, we see this in the New Testament as well.

You remember there in, not least in this letter, but in the next letter, Paul writes to Timothy again in 2 Timothy.

And he says this, he says, What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Like at some point, Timothy, you've got to pass this on.

We also see at the very beginning of the church in Acts chapter 6, thousands of people are coming to know the Lord. That's great, isn't it?

[ 22 : 57 ] Like by the thousand. And the apostles are like, I don't know, I'm just too busy. And they didn't have the wisdom to sit down and say, let's draw up a plan.

Maybe it was just too quick. And some of the widows, do you remember? Some of the widows started to complain. Like we're not being looked after. And so what did they do? They went to find other men who could fulfill that role.

So in Acts chapter 6 and 2 Timothy chapter 2, and here Paul writing, he's saying, look, for you to ensure that the mission of God continues, you have to raise up leaders so that it can.

And look, you know, for us as a church, you know, six months ago, four guys in our church started a journey exploring what that looks like to be an elder of the church. Right?

Simply why? So that the mission can continue. Otherwise, the mission continues, and God's mission always continues, let me say that.

[ 24 : 14 ] But it continues elsewhere, and we cease to be part of it. We must not let the good things, and Moses were doing good things.

Timothy's doing good things. The apostles in Acts 6 were doing good things. But we must not let those good things we do become more important than the gospel. And leadership has a stewardship to prevent the mission stalling here.

See, Paul is telling Timothy that the mission of God is too important to leave it in the hands of chance. The leaders that Timothy is appointing and raising up will exist to enable God's mission to reach the world.

It's not the leader's job to necessarily go out on mission. It's the leader's job to raise up those who are going to go out on mission. But look, here's another danger, and it's highlighted in the next four verses, verse 2.

Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, which simply means that when an accusation is brought against them, it doesn't stick. The husband of one wife or a one-woman man is literally what it says.

[ 25 : 22 ] Here's the danger.

The danger here is not priority danger, but ambition danger. That too is the wrong kind of dangerous. Ambition danger.

And so Paul writes a list of what traits faithful leaders should have. The ones that Timothy is on the lookout for, he gives them a description. Before one becomes a leader, they should already demonstrate that they aren't bringing into leadership competing ambitions.

And so we need to stress that church leadership is not about hierarchy and status and control. Again, it's about stewardship. The only status in the kingdom is the status of servant.

And that's what Paul is saying. And look, that would have been as culturally revolutionary in the first century to the first readers as maybe it is today.

[ 26 : 40 ] Like in a world where leaders are domineering and autocratic. The call is for Timothy to appoint leaders who are pointing to Christ rather than themselves.

Listen to what he writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 4. He says, this is how one should regard us. He's talking about himself as an apostle. He says, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. Like in the Greco-Roman world, leadership often meant prestige, power, and control.

It was a label. It was a title. It was a badge. But Paul is reorientating Timothy to a countercultural gospel ethic.

One that Jesus also talked about in Matthew 20. Jesus, in Matthew 20, says that he called to them and says, you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord are over them.

[ 27 : 46 ] And they're great ones, exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. Whoever should be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be your slave.

And even, and notice this, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Which means leadership is not a throne, it's a cross.

And so in the same way that Jesus says of himself, that he came not to be served, but to serve, leaders are to follow in that footstep.

Those footsteps, if it is gospel-centered mission. There is a danger that actually leadership becomes about, not just different priorities, but about different ambitions.

The third danger is highlighted in verse 6. And it's spiritual danger. That too is the wrong kind of dangerous.

[ 28 : 59 ] Verse 6, it says that he must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into the snare of the devil. Much could be said about appointing a recent convert, but the danger isn't there.

The danger isn't like they won't be good enough. They won't be competent enough. That's not the danger. The danger is what can happen to them. And not just them, but how quickly it can affect them.

That's where the danger lays. And look, the danger appears twice. Did you notice? In verse 6, Paul mentions that the owner of condemnation is the devil.

Like, for those of you who struggle with condemnation, listen, the owner of that condemnation is the devil. Right? And verse 7, he mentions that the owner of the snare is the devil.

[ 30 : 09 ] Like, the common denominator, the devil. And all he's saying is, look, the recent convert just doesn't have either the spiritual resilience or the wisdom to be able to resist the condemnation of the devil.

Or look out for the snare of the devil. And look, this fact that Paul mentions the devil twice to do with leadership tells me something I absolutely know to be true.

As one of the dangers to leadership is spiritual danger. Casualties of spiritual warfare. I have a whole address book littered with friends who used to be in church leadership who are no longer in church leadership.

Why? Because of spiritual warfare. And Paul says, if the devil doesn't try and get you from the outside through snares to trap you, he will work in your thought life to bring condemnation.

Both are intended to do what? Bring down the leader? Yes. Scatter the sheep? Yes. To stop God's mission? Yes. Yes. That's the purpose.

[ 31 : 31 ] Look, church leadership, it ain't a hobby. Like, I know that.

It's not a hobby. It's not a career booster. It's stepping onto the front lines of a battle where the enemy is real.

And that's why it feels heavy. And that's why it feels costly. Because it is costly. It costs time. It costs energy. It costs sleep. I don't know how many times I am awake at 2, 3 o'clock in the morning for no apparent reason but for heaviness.

It costs comfort. It costs comfort. It costs privacy. It even costs relationship.

It's not glamorous. It's heavy. It's messy. And sometimes, quite often, it hurts. It's heavy. And we should be remembering and mindful that leaders aren't perfect and they're not superheroes.

[ 32 : 44 ] They're soldiers. They bleed. They struggle. They face the same challenges of life that you do. And many times, because they are leaders, they become the target for the enemy.

And many times, because they are connected to the leader, the leader's family become a target for the enemy. And we'll do well to remember the next time we want to tear down faithful leaders, every time they limp, we should praise God that they are still standing.

Because if the enemy can take out the shepherd, the sheep scatters and God's mission is thwarted. Leadership is war.

And those who carry that weight for the sake of the gospel need our prayers and our encouragement. And so as we close, look, here's where this all lands.

Our God has not left us guessing about church mission. Or leadership of it. And he's not left us powerless either.

[ 33 : 53 ] He's not saying, well, I'm just going to, you know, here's my mission. And here's Paul. Do it like Paul. And oh, by the way, I've got victory. But you're not going to realize it just quite yet.

And in the meantime, you just kind of have to muddle through. Paul hasn't said that. God hasn't. God's not saying that. He's not left us guessing. He's not left us powerless. He has given us Christ.

Who shows us what true leadership looks like. Humble incarnation. Being with people. Sacrificial service.

Resurrection power. And ascended authority. That's how he closes in verse 16. And look, he's given us his spirit too. Who strengthens us to endure.

Who strengthens us to lead or follow with character and courage.

[ 34 : 54 ] And he has given us his mission. And he has given us his mission. Which is a glorious mission. That every tribe and tongue and nation would hear the good news of salvation in Jesus.

And the really, really great news is that in Revelation, at the end of times, what do we see? We see people from every tribe, every nation, every country, every time around God's throne worshipping.

Listen, God's mission works. Right? Right? And that's why we can't be distracted by competing priorities.

We can't bow to competing ambition. And we can't be naive about spiritual opposition. Instead, we lift our eyes to Christ. Christ who is head of the church.

Not overseers. Not elders. Not pastors. Jesus is head of the church. And remember that leadership is never about thrones and titles. It's about pointing to Christ.



[ 36 : 00 ] And so let's be a church that adores God in the way that we live. In the way that we lead. And the way that we love. Let's take God's mission. Steward it well.

But don't protect it like it needs protecting. Send it out. Let it do its work. Let it be dangerous in all the right ways. Dangerous to sin.

Dangerous to darkness. Let us be utterly devoted to the glory of our God. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of Jesus, our Savior, our Shepherd, our King.

Thank you that in Him we see the true pattern of leadership. Thank you that we see in Him humble incarnation. You came to save us.

Sacrificial service. You came to serve us. Triumphant resurrection. And glorious ascension.

[ 37 : 05 ] Father, every step of this story tells us that you are faithful. And that your mission will not fail. And we confess, Lord, that we are so easily distracted.

Our priorities drift. Our ambitions get tangled with pride. And the warfare around us wears us down. Forgive us and cover us again in the grace of Jesus.

Lift our eyes to Him. Lord, we want to be good soldiers of you. Following you. Following you. Waging a good war.

Help us, we pray. Father, would you raise up leaders in this church who serve with gospel-shaped hearts. Leaders whose character is formed by your spirit.

Whose posture is humility. Whose posture is humility. And whose joy is seeing your kingdom come. Protect us from the dangers that would divide us or derail us. Make us a people who are known for Jesus.

[ 38 : 08 ] Dangerous to sin and darkness. But gentle and life-giving to the world around us. And until the day Jesus returns and every knee bows. Keep us faithful. Keep us humble.

Keep us amazed by your grace. We pray this in the matchless name of Jesus. Amen. Amen.