

Stranger Danger

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[0 : 00] 1 Timothy chapter 3, or chapter 1, excuse me, verses 3 through 11.

! So that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

The aim of our charge is love, that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

Now we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? The slogan, Stranger Danger, originated in the early 1960s through a campaign to keep children safe.

[1 : 55] The idea was to inform children that anyone they did not know could possibly be dangerous and should not be trusted.

I remember as a kid being warned by my parents and other adults not to get into cars with strangers who were offering things like free puppies or free candy.

That's a good thing. We need to continue to teach our kids to watch out for those who would do them harm. But I think we live in a society that has increasingly grown suspicious of people who we don't know and who offer things to us that seem too good to be true.

And I'm not saying that that's a bad thing either. However, I've seen how people in the church often do the opposite. I've seen Christians enticed to send money to plant a seed in some prosperity preacher's ministry.

I've seen Christians trust in teachers who claim to have broken some kind of hidden secret Bible code, knowing the exact time and location of Jesus' second return.

[3 : 10] I've seen Christians lured into thinking that they aren't saved enough, and so they need to adhere to a set of traditions or rules to be saved and to stay saved.

I've seen Christians accept the teaching of people who twist Scripture to try to make it say what it doesn't really say so that they can feel that whatever sin that the Bible says is a sin is something that can be accepted and that the Bible no longer condemns.

I think Christians are more on guard against strangers who pose a physical threat to them than strangers who pose a spiritual threat to them. Such was the case for the church in Ephesus that Timothy was pastoring and Paul is writing to.

As I mentioned last week, the Apostle Paul states his purpose for writing this letter in chapter 3, verses 14 through 15. There he tells Timothy, In this letter, Paul reiterates that God commands members of his church to order and to conduct themselves in ways that glorify him.

And a major aspect of keeping order and encouraging the conduct that glorifies God in his house is Christians who uphold the truth of God's word.

[4 : 48] Christians who guard the truth and don't exchange the truth of God for lies. God desires for his church, his household to be built on his word.

The church that fulfills God's purposes for it is both a church that is unwavering in its commitment to God's word and its willingness to confront strange teachers and their strange teachings which

contradict the word of God.

And so the main idea this morning that we see from our text is that the church must guard against false teachers who contradict God's word. The church must guard against false teachers who contradict God's word.

In Matthew chapter 7, verses 15 through 16, Jesus, preaching the Sermon on the Mount, said, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Later in Matthew chapter 24, verses 23 through 25, Jesus spoke about the future, the last days, and he warns people again about falling prey to false teachers who will seek to lead them astray.

[6 : 09] There he says, If anyone says to you, look, here is the Christ, or there he is, do not believe it, for false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

See, I have told you beforehand. Jesus issued warnings about the present and the future reality of false teachers, and he urges his people to be on guard against them.

If you've read the Bible, you know that God's people have always been assaulted by strange teachings and strange teachers who contradict God's word, often twisting it in ways to make it say what it doesn't say to lead God's people astray.

The scribes and the Pharisees in Jesus' day were the chief perpetrators of doing this. Matthew 23 records a series of woes that Jesus pronounced on them for their hypocrisy because they did not practice what they preached.

They were blind guides, he said, who were leading the blind into a pit, and they were doing it for selfish profit.

[7 : 32] In John 8, 44, Jesus reveals the source of their deceit. He says to them, Satan is the ultimate false teacher.

From the beginning, he has sought to deceive God's people into exchanging his truth, God's truth, for the lies that he tells.

He seeks destruction. He seeks disorder. He seeks to corrupt God's church by infiltrating it with his emissaries to distract the church from its purpose and distort the truth that God has entrusted them with.

As he did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he continues to assault God's word with the question, did God actually say in the lie that disobeying God will produce your best life now, that you will not surely die, that you will be free to define your own truth, to be your own God?

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness after Jesus had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights, he twisted God's word in an effort to tempt God's son to sin.

[9 : 01] And Jesus deflected each one of those lies by quoting God's word in the right context, with the right interpretation, and in doing so, he demonstrated how we are to guard against false teachers who contradict God's word.

In our text today, Paul urges Timothy to guard against strange teachers who teach strange things which contradict God's word and ultimately serve Satan's purpose to lead people astray from the truth.

As we've seen from Scripture already, Jesus warned against the present and the future reality of false teachers who excel at being deceptive.

And so Christian, God has saved you by his grace. He has made you a part of his church. He has entrusted you with the truth.

In church, Jesus has given us the highest calling that there is to be his representatives in this world, to be a shining city on a hill, to be salt and to be light, to make disciples and disciple disciples as the Holy Spirit works through us to save sinners and shape them into the image of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 25] And so we must be on our guard against false teachers and their teachings which Satan uses to disrupt, discourage, and deceive us and others.

If you're an unbeliever here this morning, I want you to understand that God has brought you here to hear the truth. He has ordained this day for you to hear this sermon, to hear his word, to hear his gospel, that you will exchange the lies that you've believed in for the truth that he reveals.

And again, we are glad that you are here today, that the Lord has brought you to us. And we hope that today is the day of salvation for you.

The church must be on guard against false teachers who contradict God's word. And in this passage, the Apostle Paul encourages the church to be suspicious of strange teachers and teachings that put the church in danger of being deceived.

And so he gives us two warnings for the church to be on guard against. The first warning comes from verses 3 through 7. The church must guard, be on guard against strange doctrines.

[11:44] The church must be on guard against strange doctrines. In verse 3, again, Paul says to Timothy, Paul was with Timothy in Ephesus for a time before he left for Macedonia, leaving Timothy to pastor the church.

But while Paul was with Timothy in Ephesus, it appears that he had already begun confronting and expelling false teachers from the church, of whom were Hymenaeus and Alexander, men that he mentions later in chapter 1, verse 20.

These men may have been the ringleaders who spread whatever false teachings were going around the church, but apparently certain persons remained who, though they were few in number, had a wide influence.

Unlike other false teachers who caused problems for the churches in Corinth and in Galatia, these men were not outsiders.

They were probably elders in the church. And here's why I think that was the case. First, here in verse 3 and later in verse 7, Paul notes that they presumed to be teachers, a role reserved for elders.

[13:13] Second, Hymenaeus and Alexander were disciplined by Paul, not by the church, which seems to indicate that they were likely in positions of leadership, assuming an authority that other church members were hesitant to challenge.

Third, Paul provides great detail about the qualifications of an elder in chapter 3, implying, perhaps, that unqualified men were serving in that role.

And then in chapter 5, verses 19 through 22, Paul explains the process that the church would need to go through to remove elders who are not fit and do not meet the qualifications that he's laid out in chapter 3.

What is certain is that these men were teaching different doctrines. The Greek word translated as different in the ESV is translated as strange in the New American Standard.

In the Greek language, originally, strange or different doctrine is a compound word made up of heteros, which means of a different kind, and didaskaline, which means to teach.

[14:31] So this was a different kind of strange teaching that contradicted the inspired revelation the apostles had received from the Holy Spirit. The word doctrine simply means instruction.

Biblical doctrine refers to the instruction that God has given through the scriptures that God inspired. They form the basis of all that we believe about God, all that we believe about humanity, sin, salvation, and living the Christian life.

In 2 Timothy 3, 16 through 17, Paul says, All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Christians are to be cautious of what they believe and what they teach. If what they believe or teach doesn't match scripture, then they are woefully off base, which was the case for the false teachers teaching strange things in the church at Ephesus.

As Paul states in verse 4, not to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculation rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

[15:58] Now, it isn't clear what exactly these myths were or how exactly the false teachers were using genealogies, but in whatever form they took, it is clear that they were contrary to the truth.

They weren't inspired by the Holy Spirit, but were inspired by demons, which Paul points out in chapter 4, verse 1 of 1 Timothy.

There he says, Now, the Spirit expressly says that in later times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.

What's really sad is that Paul had already given this warning to the elders in the church in Ephesus. In Acts chapter 20, verses 28 through 30, he brings them all together and he says, Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

[17:17] This warning went unheeded, and the result was teaching that promoted speculations rather than concrete, biblical truth.

If a sermon that you're listening to leaves you with more questions than answers, if a sermon leads you to question God more than to trust God, your Holy Spirit radar should be sounding the alarm bells in your mind.

I remember as a teenager listening to a sermon in the church I went to growing up preached by a man who used to be the pastor, but who had come back to visit.

This man was the man who dedicated me as a baby. He later married Danny and I, and I heard a lot about him, but this was the first time that I had ever got to hear him preach.

And I don't remember the text he used for the sermon that he preached, but I remember that he was preaching about the necessity of God's word being the filter for all that we believe.

[18:26] And to continually ask ourselves as we evaluate whomever it is that we are listening to or reading to evaluate them with the question, does it match?

And he keeps saying that. Does it match? Does it match? Does what they're saying, does what they're preaching, does it match what God's word says? And if it doesn't match, then you must stop listening to it.

And that has stuck with me to this day. And that's what Paul is calling Christians to do, especially as it concerns those who claim to have received the stewardship from God to teach and to preach his word.

If what they are saying does not match God's word, they are teaching strange doctrines. John Stott points out something about the speculations these false teachers promoted that I think is important for us to understand.

He said, they were certainly speculators. They treated the law, which were the Old Testament scriptures, as a happy hunting ground for their speculations. They wanted to go deeper into the scriptures.

[19:30] They wanted to go beyond the simple exegesis of Paul, and by giving people and events allegorical meaning, simple stories would reveal fantastic truths. They did not set out to abandon the gospel doctrine that salvation is by faith alone, but in fact, their progressive assertions smothered the gospel.

We've seen how speculations about biblical things can distract Christians and the church from its purpose. In recent years, I've seen books in Christian bookstores about blood moons, Bible codes, and predictions about the exact day and time Jesus will return.

Does anybody remember a man named Harold Camping? Harold Camping. He was the founder and president of Family Radio Network, and he claimed that Jesus would return on May 21st, 1988. When that didn't happen, he speculated that Jesus would return on May 21st, 1994. When that didn't happen, he redid his math and he said, for sure this time, Jesus would come back on May 21st, 2011.

His followers emptied out their banking accounts. They said goodbye to their family and to their friends. Some of them, I'm sure, quit their jobs. They believed this man that Jesus was coming back on May 21st, 2011.

[21:12] Imagine their disappointment on May 22nd, 2011. They should have known better. All of them should have known better.

Jesus did say that no one will know the exact time or hour of his return. All this to say that Christians need to be on guard against speculations like that, that obscure and smother out the gospel that God has called us to proclaim and that hinder our spiritual growth and development. In verse 5, Paul contrasts the goal of the true minister and teacher of the gospel with false teachers. He says, the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

In Matthew 22, 37 through 40, a lawyer asked Jesus, what is the greatest commandment in the law? And Jesus replied, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the great in first commandment and a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

[22 : 39] Love for God fuels love for others. John Piper said, love is the overflow of joy in God which gladly meets the needs of others.

True teachers of God's word love God and their love for God causes them to love the people of God.

They want God to use their sermon, their teaching to cause the people of God to love God more. A mark of a good teacher is that they aren't in it for themselves.

They want Jesus to be the star. They want Jesus to receive the glory. They want people to grow in their love for Jesus and in their desire to be more like Jesus.

Do the people whom you listen to instruct you in ways that make you focus more on Jesus or on yourself? Do they make you want to be more like Jesus and less like yourself?

[23 : 44] Does what they say match what you read in the Bible? Does their teaching issue from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith? Does their doctrine, their teaching of God's word promote a desire within you to have a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith?

If not, then you need to stop listening to them. And if they are promoting speculations and myths or other things within our church, you need to let our elders know even if it is one of our elders who is doing that, that we hope that that will never be the case.

the church must be on guard against doctrine that is strange, being taught by strange teachers, because those who teach such things really don't know what they're talking about.

As Paul says in verses 6 through 7, certain persons by swerving from these have wandered away into feigned discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

False teachers are good at being deceptive. And I think, honestly, many of them actually believe the lies they proclaim. The prosperity gospel has worked out really well for many prosperity teachers, though their prosperity has come through the agony and the misery of God's people.

[25 : 12] Jesus, on the other hand, left the glories of heaven behind to agonize himself on the cross so that by faith in him we would prosper. Not materially in earthly treasures that pass away, but in spiritual treasure that has eternal value.

He said in John 8, 31 through 32, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Free from what? Sin and its eternal consequences, Satan and his efforts to deceive through strange teachers who promote strange doctrines. In Christ, we are free from death because we know that through Christ's death and resurrection, we have eternal lives.

So, we must be on guard against those who would deceive, against those who would obscure this precious truth that God has given to us.

because strange teachers teaching strange things enslaved the people that God has set free. So, now let's turn our attention to the next part.

[26 : 26] The church must be on guard against strange gospels. Here's the second warning. The church must be on guard against strange doctrines. Now Paul talks about how we must be on guard against strange gospels because strange doctrine produced strange gospels.

In the beginning of verse 8, Paul says, now we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully. It seems that in addition to the strange doctrines which promoted worthless speculations, the false teachers were using the law, the Old Testament scriptures, in the same way that the Pharisees did. Teaching that salvation is by works. All the religions of the world, despite their many differences, fall into either one of two categories.

There is the religion of divine accomplishment, that God in Jesus Christ accomplished salvation apart from any kind of human effort. That is the Christian gospel.

That is the true gospel. Jesus lived sinlessly. He died sacrificially. He rose victoriously. Sinners are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, his son.

[27 : 43] The other category which all other religions of the world fall into is salvation by human achievement. That people can earn their salvation by good deeds, participation in religious ceremonies, and observing certain rituals.

The false teachers in Ephesus were teaching a strange gospel implying that salvation is achieved by keeping the law. But the Bible says the law wasn't given by God so that people could earn their

salvation.

He gave it so that people would see their sin and their need for salvation. In Galatians 2, 16, or Romans 3, 20, Paul says, for by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight. Since through the law comes knowledge of sin. In Galatians 2, 16, he says, yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.

So we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law because by works of the law no one will be justified.

[28 : 58] The false teachers in Ephesus promoted the same false teachings as the Pharisees which Jesus consistently criticized. But while Jesus was critical of the way they misused and misinterpreted the law, he wasn't critical of the law itself because he is the law giver.

In Matthew 5, 17, he says, do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. The law was not evil.

It served as a mirror to reveal the condition of a person's heart. Paul talks about that in Romans 7, 7, what then shall we say that the law is sin by no means?

Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin for I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had said you shall not covet. The law reveals God's righteous standard and our inability to meet it.

The law reveals our sin. The gospel reveals Jesus as the one, the only one who can save us from our sins.

[30 : 09] That is how the law is used lawfully. It reveals our sin, our inability to meet God's righteous, perfect standard, and our desperate need of salvation.

In verses 9 through 10, Paul illustrates the type of people for whom the law was made. There again, he says, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their mother and fathers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.

Each one of these sins that Paul lists is a violation of the Ten Commandments. And here he again is showing that the law operates like a diagnosis. It reveals what's wrong with us.

But a diagnosis is not a cure. The gospel is the cure. Any teaching that tells people that they can be saved apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ is a strange gospel.

It's a false gospel. Any teaching or preaching from Scripture that diagnoses people's sins but does not point them to Jesus Christ as the solution, as the cure for their sins is a strange gospel.

[31 : 39] It's a false gospel. Conversely, any gospel that ignores the law and sin is a false gospel. It is a strange gospel. People need to know why they need Jesus.

There are many instances where Jesus used the law to reveal a person's sin, to diagnose their malady in order to point himself to himself as the cure.

In John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well and there he uses the well and a cup of water to illustrate the woman's need for living water that will quench her eternal thirst.

And she asks, he asks her for some and then she asks him for this living water. And then Jesus does something after her request that the woman doesn't see coming.

he steers the conversation in a really uncomfortable direction. He asks the woman, go and call your husband.

[32 : 48] And she tells Jesus, I have no husband. That was true, but it wasn't the whole truth. Jesus knew the whole truth.

And he said to her, you are right in saying I have no husband, for you have had five husbands. And the one you now have that you're living with is not your husband.

What you said is true. Oof. Oof. She's a sinner. Here. Jesus knows it.

And he's ensured that she knows that he knows that he knows it. But that's not where the story ends.

It ends with Jesus revealing himself to this woman as the cure, this sinful woman and all sinful people.

[33 : 48] He pointed out her sin. She violated the Ten Commandments repeatedly, yet he offers her his forgiveness, his grace, his love, his salvation.

Friend, Christian, God's law and God's grace aren't in conflict with one another. They serve as the diagnosis and the cure.

This is sound doctrine. The Greek word translated as sound is the same word or the word that we get, our English word, hygiene. It refers to that which is healthy.

The gospel of Jesus Christ diagnoses the need and provides the cure that we will be healthy. It is the teaching and preaching that produces life, growth, health, and holiness.

It incites worship in the heart of the one whom God has saved as it does for Paul in verse 11. Look at what he says in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God he's worshipping with which I have been entrusted.

[34 : 55] Jesus was born under the law, Galatians 4.4, and he became the final sacrifice to bring the law to fulfillment, establishing the new covenant in his blood.

Everyone who comes to God through him is saved and is declared righteous by him. Salvation results in transformation. We obey God not so that we will be saved but because he has saved us. This is a truth we must never forget. This is a truth that the church has been entrusted with and a truth that we must diligently guard. Now, maybe you don't know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

You've heard me list all those sins that Paul mentions in those verses and you hear those things and maybe you think in your heart and you know that's me.

Friend, that's me too. That's, that's all of us. That's who we were. And as we'll go on to see in the next set of verses, Paul says of himself, that's not only me, I'm the worst of all sinners.

[36 : 08] I'm the worst offender. He says, chapter 1, verse 15, this saying is trustworthy and deserving and full acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost.

I am the worst. There is a danger in the church in thinking either that people are too sinful to be saved or that morality being good is the way to be saved.

those are strange gospels. To keep from falling for these false teachings, we need to preach the gospel regularly to ourselves.

What do I mean by that? Look at 1 Corinthians 6, 9 through 11 with me. Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived, neither sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God and such were some of you.

[37 : 15] That's the law. The law revealed you to be a sinner. Now here's the gospel. But you, Paul says, were washed, were sanctified, were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Yes, we are sinners. Yes, I am a sinner. But in Jesus, I have a Savior who has completely and who has totally changed me.

If you've trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you've received mercy, you've received pardon by His grace. He's atoned for your sins and on the day that you will see Him, He will say to you, despite all of it, well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master.

Do you think that you'll hear Jesus say that to you? If you believe the gospel, you should. You should. What a great and wonderful Lord it is that we know and serve and who has saved us.

If He's saved you, He has called you to proclaim this truth, live by this truth, guard His gospel, which He's entrusted to you, which He's entrusted to the church.

[38 : 40] And so how should we adjust our lives based on what we've heard? I think it's to know and trust God's Word. Knowing and trusting. Not just knowing, but knowing and trusting.

I think the way that I organize my sermon, the main idea is the know part. This is what you need to know and the adjustment part is this is what you need to trust in.

This is what you must now do, not because you need to be saved, but because you are saved. This is how the Lord wants you to take the knowledge that He's given you and trust in it by doing something with it.

Trusting is making the adjustment. And the better you know and the better you trust God's Word, the better you will be on guard against strange doctrines and strange gospels.

You won't be deceived. You'll be able to detect the counterfeits because you know the truth and you trust in the truth. Let's pray. Lord God, we thank You for Your Word and its reminders of things that we in Your church so often forget.

[39 : 56] God, often we are less suspicious of those whom we should be suspicious of in Your house. God, I pray that You would help us to see and understand how important it is that we be on guard against those who Satan sends into Your house, into our homes, into our lives to try to deceive us and discourage us and create disorder in our lives.

Lord, I pray that we, even more so than we are now, would be committed to know Your Word. We would be committed to trust in Your Word. Lord, that we would be courageous to speak the truth in love and that we would take the false teachers to task for the things that they are doing, for the lies that they are spreading.

Lord, that we would be a place that takes Your Word seriously and that guards it with all that we've got because we know that the truth that You've given us is a truth that brings life. It's the only truth, Lord, that there is.

You are the only Savior that there is by which people can be saved. And so God, help us to be committed to this truth and to guard it and to take it to the world that others would know the hope that comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

God, we pray that You would help us to do this thing and we trust that You will. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

[41 : 29] Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.