

“Living For Christ In A Confused and Confusing World”

A Study of Paul’s Letters to Timothy

Sermon #3

“Avoiding A Spiritual Shipwreck”

1 Timothy 1:18-20

The closing section of the first chapter of the letter to Timothy concerns those who “suffer shipwreck.” I will venture to say that most of the ships that you can name this evening are notable because they sank. Most of us have heard of the RMS Titanic which sank in 1912 with 1,523 of her passengers. If you watch the Discovery Channel or the History Channel you may be able to name those which sank because of calamity like Titanic and the Edmond Fitzgerald; or Treasure ships like the Conception & Atocha; or victims of war like the Maine & Lusitania. The shipwreck Paul is referring to however, is not a physical shipwreck but a spiritual one.

Paul’s son in the faith, Timothy, was called to be a faithful soldier of Jesus Christ and to fight the good fight of faith. In this section of the letter Paul reminds him of what it means to be a soldier of Christ.

The normal Christian life is not short struggle after which we are pensioned out into a life of ease. We are always going to meet difficulties and enemies. The moment you become a Christian, you entered a lifelong battle. In Ephesians 6:12 Paul reminds us that we are engaged in a very real spiritual battle, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” This spiritual conflict is on the highest level conflict between God and Satan. It is also fought on the angelic level between Satan’s demons and God’s holy angels (Jude 1:9). And on the human level every day when we get up we need to remind ourselves we are at war, whether we like or not, whether we acknowledge it or not.

In fact we are fighting a war on several fronts; attacks of the enemy (temptations and snares), the hostility and animosity of the World (John 15:18) and internal struggles with our own flesh. Paul is giving instruction to Timothy that he is in the middle of a great battle in Ephesus and he must never forget it!

“This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, (19) having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, (20) of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

It is a calamity for any Christian or any congregation to assume that they can take doctrine for granted. We are all under a constant barrage from the media, the intellectuals of our day and from false theologians to abandon the great truths of the Gospel.

In verse nineteen Paul speaks of those who “having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck.” Paul says they have shipwrecked their faith by rejection of

Truth. The word translated “rejected” (*apotheo*) means “to push something or someone away” and implies a violent or deliberate rejection. The reason that the two men named in this passage suffered ship-wreck was because they “rejected” or “put away” the faith. This move away from the truth is never made in an instant. No one wakes up one morning and says, “*I think I will throw away testimony today. I think I will get out of the will of God.*” As with great ships tragedy can come when ships are allowed to drift or when they are overloaded or when they lose momentum and start to flounder. Other things like torn sails or the loss of the rudder can also contribute to the demise of an otherwise great ship.

Everyone in this room could think of a person or persons who once walked with the Lord and have now made shipwreck of their spiritual walk. It happens!! Several years ago, we saw the highly publicized falls of Jim Baker and Jimmy Swaggart. But spiritual shipwrecks are happening every day. What we need to realize is that this is not something that can only happen to someone else, it can happen to you and me.

Verse nineteen actually explains why we have all witnessed people we regarded as outstanding Christian leaders who suddenly fallen. It was because they did not hold the truth they had taught in their conscience; that is they did not obey the truths they had taught! In verse twenty, two men are cited as examples, “Hymenaeus and Alexander,” both of whom are evidently well known to the church at Ephesus. We however, do not know very much about these individuals other than what we find in the second letter to Timothy. Of Hymenaeus we read in 2 Timothy 2:17-18, “And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, (18) who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they over-throw the faith of some.” In the case of Hymenaeus it would appear that he rejected the true teaching of the faith and embraced false doctrine.

In the second letter to Timothy Paul speaks of Alexander the Coppersmith, who he says has done him great harm. In 2 Tim 4:14-15 he writes, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. (15) You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.” For Alexander, it seems that he developed a critical spirit and began to work against the things of the Lord.

In this letter Paul gives Timothy *Five Steps to Avoid Spiritual Shipwreck*.

First, Follow the Word - “this charge I commit to you” (v. 18a)

The word translated “charge” is a military term (*paragelian*) referring to a superior issuing commands to a subordinate. The first step in walking with God as we should lies in our willingness to obey his revealed will as it is written in the Word of God. James states our duty clearly in James 1:22-25, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; (24) for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. (25) But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

Second, Fulfill Your Potential - “according to the prophecies previously made concerning you.” (v. 18b)

Later in the letter in 4:14 Paul states, “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.” The elders of the church had gathered around Timothy and laid hands on him, and at that time certain prophetic statements were made concerning his ministry. What was said we do not know evidently we not suppose to know, this was a personal word to Timothy. Now Paul reminds Timothy of those prophetic words so that he would not lose heart. The duty of Timothy, as well as our own, is to fulfill our God-given potential.

Third, Fight A Good Spiritual Battle - “that by them you may wage a good (fight) warfare.” (v.18c)

This fight of faith is called by Paul the “good fight.” It is a good fight not because it is pleasant because it is worthy. We have a good cause. We have the greatest general. We even have the best armor, but it is up to use to use it.

Fighting the good fight is all about be prepared, in Ephesians 6:10-18 Paul warns, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. (11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (12) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (13) Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (14) Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, (15) and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; (16) above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. (17) And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; (18) praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit....”

Fourth, Defend the Faith - “having (holding) the faith” (v. 19a)

Timothy is called to defend the revealed truth of God against those who deny it or distort it.

- His faith affected His life.

Paul's main concern is that Timothy's faith might cease to control his life. Timothy's faith, like our own, had begun when he had given intellectual assent to the truth of the Gospel and he had accepted Christ's control over his life. Once saved, every true Christian should find that their faith, affects their decisions making, their priorities and preferences, even their sense of humor.

- His faith gave Him Peace.

Philippians 4:7 "and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

- His faith motivated His Work.

For Timothy his faith was not something to just study and reflect on. He saw his faith as something to proclaim, a debt he owed to tell everyone he could about his Lord and Savior.

Keeping the faith means holding fast to the revealed truth of God's word. Timothy is further instructed to

Guard the Word (6:20)

Nourish himself with the Word (4:6)

Preach the Word (4:13, 2 Tim 4:2)

Fifth, Be Faithful. "having... a good conscience" (v. 19b)

Ray Stedman has some very instructive things to say about the conscience. He writes, "I find a great deal of misunderstanding, even among Christians, on what the conscience is. Many feel that the conscience is given to us to teach us the difference between right and wrong. But nothing could be further from the truth. No, the conscience is given to us, rather, to resist any deviation from the truth, from the right and the wrong that we know. If you think it is given to us to indicate what is wrong or what is right, you will begin to rely upon your feelings to determine right and wrong. That is where many go astray -- many young Christians, especially. They think their conscience is their feelings; and if they feel something is right then they do it...."

The conscience is given to us so that when we know what is right and what is wrong, it insists that we do the right and avoid the wrong. But it is the Word of God that teaches us what is right and what is wrong. Revelation, the Word of God, is what tells us what is right and what is wrong. Conscience is given to us to help us know when we are beginning to fail, or fall away from that right path.

In other words, a good conscience is a synonym for an obedient heart which wants to do what God says is right." [Ray Stedman. Wage the Good Warfare. 1 Tim 1:18-20. - www.pbc.org/library]

Paul is urging Timothy to be conscientious at all times, no matter what his *flesh* may tempt him to do, no matter what his friends say, no matter the power of the enemy, hold on to a good conscience.

Our final consideration will be where in the final portion of verse twenty Paul says, "whom I "delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." What does this phrase "delivered to Satan" mean? The Believer's Bible Commentary has as good a explanation as I have read on the subject. It says, "Some scholars see these words as a simple reference to the act of excommunication. They understand them to mean that Paul had put these two men out of the local church and this action was designed to bring them to repentance and to a restoration of fellowship with the Lord and His people. The difficulty with this view is that excommunication was a function of the local church and not an apostle. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul did not excommunicate the incestuous man but counseled the Corinthians to do so.

The other major interpretation of this passage is that "*delivering to Satan*" was a power grant to the Apostles which is no longer in evidence today because there are no apostles. According to this view, the apostles had the authority to turn a sinning person over to Satan for infliction of physical suffering or even in extreme cases of death as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). The discipline here was obviously for corrective purposes – "that they may learn not to blaspheme." It was not a question of damnation but of chastisement." [William McDonald. Believer's Bible Commentary. Old and New Testament. (1 Tim 1:20) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995)]