



LESSON ONE

Introduction and Faith and a Good Conscience Needed for the Keeping of the Faith

Scripture Reading:

1 TIMOTHY 1:1-20

- 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,
- 1:2 To Timothy, genuine child in faith: Grace, mercy, peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
- 1:3 Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things
- 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith.
- 1:5 But the end of the charge is love out of a pure heart and out of a good conscience and out of unfeigned faith;
- 1:6 From which things some, having misaimed, have turned aside to vain talking,
- 1:7 Desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither the things that they say, nor concerning what they confidently affirm.
- 1:8 But we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully
- 1:9 And knows this, that the law is not enacted for a righteous man but for the lawless and unruly, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and those who strike their mothers, for murderers,
- 1:10 For fornicators, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever other thing that is opposed to the healthy teaching,
- 1:11 According to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I was entrusted.
- 1:12 I give thanks to Him who empowers me, Christ Jesus our Lord, that He has counted me faithful, appointing me to the ministry,
- 1:13 Who formerly was a blasphemer and a persecutor and an insulting person; but I was shown mercy because, being ignorant, I acted in unbelief.
- 1:14 And the grace of our Lord superabounded with faith and love in Christ Jesus.
- 1:15 Faithful is the word and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost.
- 1:16 But because of this I was shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display all His long-suffering for a pattern to those who are to believe on Him unto eternal life.
- 1:17 Now to the King of the ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.
- 1:18 This charge I commit to you, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you might war the good warfare,
- 1:19 Holding faith and a good conscience, concerning which some, thrusting these away, have become shipwrecked regarding the faith;
- 1:20 Of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may be disciplined not to blaspheme.

QUESTIONS:

SECTION 1:

1. Who is Timothy and what does his name mean?
2. What does it mean to teach differently?
3. What matters give rise to vain talking and cause people to misaim from the goal of the charge of love?
4. What does the “healthy teaching” imply? Contrast this with differing teachings.

SECTION 2:

1. What was the centre and focus of the apostle’s ministry?
2. Explain the term “God’s economy which is in faith”
3. Explain the term “gospel of the glory of blessed God”.
4. What can we see from verses 13-17?

SECTION 3:

1. What charge was Paul referring to in verse 18?
2. Explain the term “war the good warfare”.
3. What was the source of the churches’ decline and degradation?
4. What was the focus of the apostle’s ministry?

SECTION 4:

1. How can we war the good warfare?
2. What is the relationship between faith and a good conscience?
3. What is the safeguard to our Christian life and faith?
4. What does the word “shipwrecked” in verse 19 imply?

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First Timothy unveils to us God's dispensation concerning the church...If we get into the depths of this book, we shall see that it can be summarized as a book which speaks of God's dispensation, His New Testament economy, concerning the church.

In 1:4 Paul uses the marvelous term "God's economy"...God's economy is revealed in four expressions found in 1 Timothy 3: Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifested in the flesh; the church is the house of the living God; the church is the pillar and base of the truth. God's dispensation is related to the great mystery of godliness, to the manifestation of God in the flesh, and to the church as both the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth. When God's economy is put together with these four matters, we see that 1 Timothy does in fact reveal God's economy concerning the church.

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II. INTRODUCTION

A. Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus

Paul opens 1 Timothy with the words, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, according to the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope." It was according to the command of God and of Christ that Paul became an apostle. In his earlier Epistles, he told us that he was an apostle through the will of God (1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1). The command of God is a definite expression, a further direction, of the will of God. God our Savior (1 Tim. 1:1; 4:10; Titus 2:13) and our Savior God (1 Tim. 2:3; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4) are titles particularly ascribed to God in these three books, which take God's salvation as a strong base for the teachings concerning God's New Testament economy (1:15-16; 2:4-6; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; 2:10; 3:15; Titus 2:14; 3:5-7). It was according to the command of such a saving God, a Savior God, not according to the command of the law-giving God, a demanding God, that Paul became an apostle.

In 1:1 Paul speaks of "Christ Jesus our hope." Christ Jesus is not only God's Anointed (Christ) to be our Savior (Jesus) that we may be saved to gain the eternal life of God, but also our hope to bring us into the full blessing and enjoyment of this eternal life. The hope of eternal life revealed in Titus 1:2 as the base and condition of Paul's apostleship, and the blessed hope revealed in Titus 2:13, which is the appearing we are waiting for of

the glory of the great God and our Savior, are all wrapped up with the Person of God's Messiah, our Savior. Hence, He Himself is our hope, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). It was according to the command not only of our Savior God, but also of the One Who has saved us with eternal life and will bring us into the glory of this life, that Paul became an apostle. His command is of the eternal life and is to be fulfilled by the eternal life, in contrast to the command of the law-giving God, which was of letters and which was to be fulfilled by human effort, without the supply of eternal life.

B. To Timothy, Genuine Child in Faith

In verse 2 Paul continues his word of introduction: "To Timothy, genuine child in faith: grace, mercy, peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." In Greek the name Timothy is timotheos, composed of time, meaning honor, and theos, meaning God. Thus, it means to honor God. Timothy became a genuine child of Paul, not by natural birth, but in faith, that is, in the sphere and element of faith; not naturally, but spiritually.

III. GOD'S ECONOMY VERSUS DIFFERING TEACHINGS

A. Differing Teachings

In verse 3 Paul says, "Even as I urged you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach differently." Paul's word about "going into Macedonia" must refer to his travels after his liberation from the first imprisonment in Rome. Probably he wrote this Epistle from Macedonia, which is made up of what is today northern Greece and southern Bulgaria.

In verse 3 Paul refers to "certain ones." These were dissenting ones, as mentioned in verse 6 and in Galatians 1:7; 2:12. To teach differently was to teach myths, unending genealogies (v. 4), and the law (vv. 7-8), all of which were vain talking (v. 6) and differed from the apostles' teaching centered upon Christ and the church.

1. Myths

In verse 4 Paul continues, "Nor to occupy themselves with myths and unending genealogies, which give occasion for questionings rather than God's dispensation which is in faith." The Greek word rendered "myths" in this verse is muthos. The same word is translated tales in 4:7 and fables in 2 Timothy 4:4. It refers to words, speeches, and

conversations concerning such things as rumors, reports, stories (true or false), and fictions. It might include Jewish stories of miracles and rabbinical fabrications. They were the profane and old-womanish tales (4:7) and Jewish myths (Titus 1:14). The Jewish myths may have been the seed of Gnostic mythologies.

2. Unending Genealogies

The “unending genealogies” mentioned in this verse probably refer to Old Testament genealogies adorned with fables (Titus 3:9).

3. Giving Occasion for Questions

The myths and unending genealogies give occasion for questionings and vain talking rather than God’s dispensation.

4. Vain Talking

The myths and the unending genealogies give rise to vain talking and cause people to misaim from the goal of the charge of love. In verses 5 and 6 Paul says, “But the goal of the charge is love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and unfeigned faith; from which things some, having misaimed, have turned aside to vain talking.” The charge in verse 5 refers to the charge mentioned in verse 3. The differing teachings of the dissenting ones in verse 3 caused envy and discord among the believers. Such envy and discord were contrary to love, the goal of the apostle’s charge. To carry out the apostle’s charge, love, which is out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith, is needed.

A pure heart is a single heart without mixture, seeking the Lord only and taking the Lord as the unique goal. A good conscience is a conscience without offense (Acts 24:16). Unfeigned faith, connected with faith in verse 4, is faith without pretense or hypocrisy, that purifies the heart (Acts 15:9) and works through love (Gal. 5:6). In order to deal with the differing teachings when the trend of the church is toward decline, all these attributes are required. They are necessary if we are to have a pure, true, and genuine love.

5. The Law

In verse 7 Paul refers to law teachers: “Desiring to be law teachers, understanding neither what they are saying, nor concerning what they confidently affirm.” Law teachers, teaching people what to do and what not to do, are different from the minister of Christ (4:6), who ministers His

riches to others. According to this verse, those who desire to be law teachers confidently affirm certain things. The Greek for confidently can also be rendered strongly or emphatically. The same word is used in Titus 3:8.

According to verses 8 through 10, the law is good if used lawfully. Paul says that the “law is not enacted for a righteous man, but for the lawless and unruly, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for smiters of fathers and smiters of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and if there be any other thing opposed to healthy teaching.”

The words “healthy teaching” imply the matter of life. Anything that is healthy refers to the health of life. The sound teaching of the apostles, which is according to the gospel of the glory of God, ministers healthy teaching as the supply of life to people, either nourishing them or healing them. In contrast, the differing teachings of the dissenting ones in verse 3 sow the seeds of death and poison into others. Any teaching that distracts people from the center and goal of God’s New Testament economy is not healthy.

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B. God’s Economy

God’s household administration *is* to dispense Himself in Christ into His chosen people, that He may have a house, a household, to express Himself, which household is the church, the Body of Christ (1 Tim. 3:15). The apostle’s ministry was centered upon this economy of God (Col. 1:25; 1 Cor. 9:17), whereas the differing teachings of the dissenting ones were used by God’s enemy to distract His people from this.

1. God’s Household Economy

God’s economy is His household economy. According to the Bible, God does not first want to have a kingdom. Rather, He first wants a house, a family. Once He has a family, His family will spontaneously become His kingdom. If He is not able to secure a family, a household, a house, He will not be able to have a kingdom. Thus, God’s dispensation is first a matter of His household economy, or family economy.

2. God's Household Administration

Second, God's economy is His household administration to dispense Himself in Christ into His chosen people that He might have a house, a household, the church, the Body of Christ, to express Himself.

3. The Focus of the Apostle Paul's Ministry

God's economy was the focus of the Apostle Paul's ministry (Col. 1:25; 1 Cor. 9:17).

4. In Faith

In verse 4 Paul tells us that God's economy is in faith. The dispensing of God into us is altogether by faith. The dispensation of God is a matter in faith, that is, in the sphere and element of faith, in God through Christ. Faith may be in contrast to questionings. God's economy to dispense Himself into His chosen people is not in the natural realm, nor in the work of law, but in the spiritual sphere of the new creation through regeneration by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:23-26). By faith we are born of God to be His sons, partaking of His life and nature to express Him. By faith we are put into Christ to become the members of His Body, sharing all that He is for His expression. This is God's dispensation according to His New Testament economy, carried out in faith.

We need to be deeply impressed with the meaning of faith in the New Testament...Faith is firstly God being the Word spoken to us. We have God and then God as the Word spoken. Through the Word of God and by the Spirit of God we are infused with God in Christ. As a result, something rises up within us. This is faith. Faith then works in us to bring us into an organic union with the Triune God. Through this organic union, God is continually transfused and infused into us. As a result, we have the divine life and the divine nature to become God's sons, members of Christ, and parts of the new man. As a totality we become the house of God, the Body of Christ, and the new man. This is God's economy in faith.

5. According to the Gospel of the Glory of the Blessed God

God's economy is "according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God" (v. 11). Have you heard this expression before? Many have heard of the gospel of grace, the gospel of forgiveness, the gospel of justification, and the gospel of

regeneration, but not the gospel of glory. This gospel not only brings good news concerning forgiveness of sins and justification by faith; the gospel of glory is the gospel of God's economy. Glory is God expressed. Thus, the gospel of glory is the gospel of the expressed God; it is a gospel which expresses God's glory.

The "gospel of the glory of the blessed God" is an excellent expression. It refers to God's economy mentioned in verse 4. The gospel with which Paul was entrusted is the effulgence of the glory of the blessed God. This gospel, by dispensing God's life and nature in Christ into His chosen people, shines forth His glory, in which He is blessed among His people. This is the commission and ministry the apostle received of the Lord (v. 12). This should be commonly taught and preached in a local church.

In verse 12 Paul says, "I give thanks to Him Who empowers me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He has counted me faithful, appointing me to the ministry." The Lord not only appointed the apostle to the ministry and commissioned him with the dispensation of God outwardly, but also empowered him inwardly to carry out His ministry and fulfill His commission. This is altogether a matter of life in the Spirit.

6. A Pattern under God's Economy

In 1:13-17 we see a pattern under God's economy.

a. The Foremost Sinner

Paul says that he was a foremost sinner (vv. 15-16). He was a blasphemer of God, a persecutor of man, and an insulting, destructive person with respect to the church. In verse 13 he says of himself, "Who formerly was a blasphemer and a persecutor and an insulting destructive person; but I obtained mercy because being ignorant I acted in unbelief." A blasphemer is one who blasphemes God, and a persecutor is one who persecutes man. Saul of Tarsus, a strict Pharisee (Acts 22:3; Phil. 3:4-5), could never have blasphemed God. But he had spoken evil of the Lord Jesus. Now he confesses that this was blaspheming. This indicates that he believed in the deity of Christ.

Saul of Tarsus persecuted the church in an insulting, destructive way (Acts 22:4; Gal. 1:13, 23), just as the insulting Jews persecuted the Lord Jesus.

Paul also says that he was ignorant and acted in unbelief. To be ignorant means to be in darkness, and unbelief comes from blindness. Saul of Tarsus was in darkness and acted in blindness when he opposed God's New Testament economy.

b. Having Obtained Mercy

In verse 13 Paul testifies that he obtained mercy. Saul, a blasphemer and persecutor, first obtained mercy and then received grace (v. 14). Mercy reaches farther to the unworthy one than grace. Because Paul was a blasphemer of God and a persecutor of man, God's mercy reached him first rather than the Lord's grace.

c. Favored with the Lord's Grace

Verse 14 continues, "And the grace of our Lord superabounded with faith and love in Christ Jesus." The Lord's grace, following God's mercy, visited Saul of Tarsus and not only abounded, but superabounded in him with faith and love in Christ. Faith and love are the product of the Lord's grace. Mercy and grace come to us from the Lord; faith and love return to the Lord from us. This is a spiritual traffic between the Lord and us. Faith is for us to receive the Lord (John 1:12), and love is for us to enjoy the Lord whom we have received (John 14:21, 23; 21:15-17).

d. Saved by Christ Jesus

In verse 15 Paul declares, "Faithful is the word and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." Christ came into the world to be our Savior by incarnation (John 1:14). He was God incarnated that He may save us through His death and resurrection in His human body. This should be constantly announced as the gospel, the glad tidings, in a local church.

e. Believing on Christ unto Eternal Life

In verse 16 Paul speaks of believing on Christ unto eternal life. The uncreated life of God is the ultimate gift and topmost blessing given by God to those who believe on Christ.

f. To Display All the Longsuffering of Christ and to Be a Pattern to All the Believers

In verse 16 Paul says, "But because of this I obtained mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display all His longsuffering for a pattern to them who are about to believe on Him unto eternal life." Saul of Tarsus as the foremost

among sinners became a pattern to sinners, who can be visited by God's mercy and saved by the Lord's grace.

7. Honor and Glory to the King of the Ages

In verse 17 Paul says, "Now to the King of the ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory unto the ages of the ages, Amen!" This word needs to be understood in relation to the decline of the church. When Paul was in prison, the churches began to decline, and the situation was very disappointing. Many were discouraged. Even some of Paul's co-workers left him. But he had a strong faith with an absolute assurance that the very God in whom he believed, the One who had entrusted him with the gospel of glory, is the King of the ages. He never changes. No earthly king can be called the King of the ages. Caesar was a temporary ruler, but how different is our God! The God whom Paul served truly is the King of the ages. This means that He is King of eternity. He never changes; He always remains the same.

Everything except God is corruptible. The church may decline, deteriorate, and become degraded, but God is incorruptible. Paul also says that God is invisible. God is powerful, everlasting, incorruptible, and also invisible. We cannot see Him. Certain terms ascribed to God in this verse are used only in this book. With Paul, we need to use these words to praise God. I would encourage someone to write a suitable melody for the singing of this verse. In a living, released way, we need to declare, "Now to the King of the ages, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory unto the ages of the ages, Amen!"

-----[SECTION 3] -----

In this section we shall consider 1:18-20, verses which indicate that faith and a good conscience are needed for the keeping of the faith.

I. A CHARGE COMMITTED BY THE APOLSTE TO HIS CHILD TIMOTHY

In 1:18 Paul says, "This charge I commit to you, child Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that in them you might war the good warfare." To what charge is Paul referring here? In answering this question we must observe the principle that in understanding a sentence, a phrase, or even a word of the Bible, we need to consider the context, not only of the paragraph in which the verse is found, but

sometimes of the entire book or even of the whole Bible. With this principle as our basis, we need to consider Paul's use of the word charge in verse 18 in the context of the chapter as a whole. The charge here covers the main points presented in the previous seventeen verses. On the positive side, the main point of these verses is God's economy; on the negative side, it is the differing teachings. Hence, the charge given by the apostle to his spiritual son concerns the economy of God positively and the differing teachings negatively.

A. According to the Prophecies Previously Made concerning Timothy

In verse 18 Paul says that he committed the charge to Timothy "according to the prophecies previously made" concerning him. It may be that some prophetic intimations were made concerning Timothy when he was admitted into the ministry (Acts 16:1-3). Perhaps the elders in the church which recommended Timothy to Paul laid hands on him. At that time prophecies might have been spoken concerning him.

B. To War the Good Warfare

Speaking of these prophecies, Paul tells Timothy, "In them you might war the good warfare." To war the good warfare is to war against the differing teachings of the dissenters and to carry out God's economy (v. 4) according to the apostle's ministry concerning the gospel of grace and eternal life for the glory of the blessed God (vv. 11-16).

C. In the Prophecies

Paul charged Timothy to war the good warfare in the prophecies. This means in the sphere, support, and confirmation of the prophecies.

At this point we need to see something concerning the grouping and the timing of Paul's Epistles. Although Philemon is grouped with 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, it was actually written earlier, during Paul's first imprisonment. Paul was imprisoned the first time because of the Jews, not because of persecution carried out by the Roman Empire. We know from Acts that Paul appealed to Caesar and this caused him to be sent to Rome, where he was imprisoned. During his first imprisonment, Paul wrote four books: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Thus, according to the time it was written, Philemon should be grouped with Colossians, Philippians, and Ephesians; however, in content it should be

grouped, not with these Epistles, but with 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. Philemon was written not long before Paul's release from prison. In the book of Philippians he expressed his expectation that soon he would be released and visit the churches. Not long afterward, Paul's expectation was fulfilled. Having been released, he traveled to Ephesus, where Timothy was, and from Ephesus he went into Macedonia. From Macedonia Paul wrote the first Epistle to Timothy. Then from Macedonia he went to Nicopolis, where he wrote the Epistle to Titus. First Timothy and Titus, therefore, were written after Paul's release from his first imprisonment. After approximately a year, Caesar Nero suddenly began to persecute Christians. At that time, Paul was accused of being the outstanding leader among the Christians. He was arrested and imprisoned again, this time due to Nero's persecution. From prison, he wrote the second Epistle to Timothy. In chapter four he indicates to his dear child Timothy that he was ready to depart, to be martyred, to be poured out as a drink offering.

During Paul's first imprisonment, the churches were tested. This test showed that decline and degradation had set in. This decline was altogether due to differing teachings, teachings that were different from the ministry. This was the reason Paul charged Timothy to war a good warfare.

Throughout the centuries, the degradation and decline of the church has had one source: teachings which differ from the ministry of the apostles. In Acts 2:42 we see that at the beginning of the church life, the believers continued in the teachings of the apostles. These teachings were the ministry. What the apostles taught and preached was nothing other than Christ and the church. They preached a Christ who had been incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended in order that, as resurrection life, He might be imparted into His believers to produce the church. This is the focal point of the teaching of the apostles, and it is crucial for us to see it. No doubt, in the Bible there are teachings concerning many things. However, the focus of the ministry of the apostles was the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, ascended, and glorified Christ to be our Savior, our life, and everything to us so that we may become His Body, the church. This is the vital focus of the New Testament revelation, and this is God's economy.

We need to contact the Word and receive God by the Spirit through the Word. Then we shall have faith. By coming to the Word, we are infused with God, and spontaneously faith operates within us to bring us into an organic union with God. The more we enjoy God's infusion, the more we become one with Him. However, this vital matter has been lost for centuries. Knowing the importance of this, Paul charged Timothy to fight a good fight, to war a good warfare.

On the one hand, Timothy was to war against the differing teachings of the dissenters. On the other hand, he was to carry out God's economy according to the apostle's ministry. If we wish to carry out God's economy, we must do it not according to the teachings of traditional Christianity nor according to systematic theology, but according to the apostle's ministry.

Furthermore, God's economy concerns the gospel of grace and eternal life. These are two basic elements in the gospel. This gospel is for the glory of the blessed God; it is for the expression, the manifestation, of the blessed God.

When Paul was in prison the first time, dissenters rose up to teach differently. These differing teachings were the seed of the church's decline. Paul realized the situation even while he was in prison. We know this by the contents of books such as Colossians and Philippians. Especially in Colossians we see that certain isms—Judaism, Gnosticism, asceticism—had crept into the church life. These differing teachings caused dissension and decline. Thus, Paul charged his faithful co-worker to fight the good fight against the differing teachings and fight for God's economy.

Today we also must be on the alert for differing teachings. Throughout the centuries, the church has been poisoned and corrupted by such teachings. If we are not on guard, differing teachings may also cause damage to the Lord's recovery. All true apostles teach and preach the same thing, even the one thing—God's New Testament economy. The focus of our preaching and teaching is Christ and the church. To teach and preach God's economy concerning Christ and the church is to war a good warfare.

-----[SECTION 4] -----

II. HOLDING FAITH AND A GOOD CONSCIENCE

In verse 19 Paul continues, "Holding faith and a good conscience, which some thrusting away have become shipwrecked regarding the faith." This verse tells us how to war the good warfare. In order to war a good warfare, we must hold faith and a good conscience.

A. Faith, Our Believing Act

The word faith in the expression "holding faith" refers to our believing act; hence, it denotes subjective faith. As we have indicated, this faith rises up in us when we come to the Word and are infused with God through the Word and by the Spirit. The subjective faith moves within us to bring about an organic union between us and the Triune God. In this union we receive the divine life and nature to become God's many sons and the many members of the Body of Christ, the new man, to be the corporate expression of the Triune God for eternity. We must war the good warfare by this kind of faith, not by trying to keep the law.

B. A Good Conscience

Along with faith, we also need a good conscience, a conscience without offense (Acts 24:16). A good conscience is a safeguard of Christian faith and life. Faith and a good conscience go together. Whenever there is an offense in our conscience, there will be a leakage, and our faith will leak away. A good conscience accompanying faith is needed for warring the good warfare against the dissenting teachings in a troubled local church.

C. Shipwrecked

It is difficult to say whether the relative pronoun "which" in verse 19 refers just to conscience or to both faith and conscience. It may refer to both, since subjective faith is closely related to the conscience. As we have pointed out, if we do not have a good conscience, we cannot have living faith. Likewise, if we do not have a living faith, we cannot have a good conscience. Faith and a good conscience can be compared to a married couple: faith is like a husband, and conscience is like a wife. Since subjective faith and a good conscience go together, I prefer to regard the relative pronoun here as having both faith and conscience as the antecedent. Faith comes from our

contact with God and brings us into the organic union with God; conscience is the organ touched by God after we contact Him by faith.

By thrusting away faith and a good conscience, some “have become shipwrecked regarding the faith.” This shows us the seriousness of thrusting away a good conscience. To keep faith and a good conscience is a safeguard for our Christian faith and life. The word shipwrecked implies that the Christian life and the church life are like a ship sailing on a stormy sea, needing to be safeguarded by faith and a good conscience.

Those who thrust away faith and a good conscience become shipwrecked regarding the faith. In this verse Paul speaks both of subjective faith, our act of believing, and of objective faith, those things in which we believe. In speaking of those who are shipwrecked regarding the faith, Paul has in mind the objective faith, the contents of the complete gospel according to God’s New Testament economy.

In verse 20 Paul goes on to name two of those who have become shipwrecked regarding the faith: “Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may be disciplined not to blaspheme.” Hymenaeus was a heretical teacher (2 Tim. 2:17), and Alexander was an opposer, an attacker, of the apostle (2 Tim. 4:14-15).

It is worthy of note that here Paul mentions names. Being more careful or “spiritual” or “heavenly” than Paul, we may not be willing to mention names under any circumstances. God took the lead to mention the name of His enemy—Satan. God has never said, “My people, I have an enemy. But because I am so merciful, patient, and all-embracing, I don’t want to expose him or mention his name, in hope that one day he will repent.” As God has singled out the name of His enemy, Paul mentioned the names of Hymenaeus and Alexander.

Furthermore, Paul does not tell us in verse 20 that he has been praying for Hymenaeus and Alexander. He does not charge Timothy, “Timothy, learn of me to pray for those who injure you as I have been praying for Hymenaeus and Alexander.” On the contrary, in 2 Timothy 4:14 Paul says, “Alexander the coppersmith did many evil things to me; the Lord will repay him according to his works.”

Paul tells Timothy that he has delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan “that they may be disciplined not to blaspheme.” How utterly different this is from saying that he committed them to the Lord’s gracious hand that they may receive His mercy. Paul expected Satan to work for him to discipline Hymenaeus and Alexander.

First Timothy 1:20 is a most unusual verse dealing with a negative matter. Two people are named not by a backslidden brother but by the leading apostle. Furthermore, they are delivered not to God, nor to the church, nor to a spiritual person, but to Satan.

Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan “that they may be disciplined not to blaspheme.” Paul does not say “punished”; rather, he speaks of being disciplined. Discipline is somewhat different from punishment. When parents deal with their children, they may tell them that they are punishing them. However, that is not actually punishment; it is loving discipline. The discipline in verse 20 may refer to the destruction of the physical body (see 1 Cor. 5:5).

Through the carrying out of a certain discipline Hymenaeus and Alexander would learn not to blaspheme God, slander God’s economy, nor damage the apostle’s ministry. To deliver persons like Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan is to exercise the authority that the Lord has given to the apostle and the church (Matt. 16:19; 18:18) for the administration of the church against Satan’s evil plot.