

1 TIMOTHY 1:18-20

A SHIPWRECKED FAITH

“This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”¹

Reading various translations, one could conclude that Paul is concerned that one’s personal faith may be wrecked.² While it is possible that one can distort personal trust in God, it is doubtful that this is the Apostle’s intent when he wrote Timothy. What is not evident in our English tongue is the Apostle’s use of the definite article when he wrote of disaster resulting from rejecting the character traits of which he spoke. I am cautious to state that just because the definite article is used does not of itself mean that Paul has in view the entire body of doctrine that defines the Faith. By using this literary device, Paul may mean us to understand the definite article as having a possessive sense. Either of these two understandings would indicate that these two men suffered personal shipwreck of their faith or the application of the Faith.

Nevertheless, it seems apparent to me that Paul is using these two men as a warning that some individuals may so distort the Faith that it causes them, and those who look to them, to suffer shipwreck. That, also, is evident from even a casual consideration of history. A growing number of translations indicate that the translators understand this to be the Apostle’s intent.³

I am prepared to argue that Paul has in view the body of essential Christian doctrine. It is not so much that Hymenaeus and Alexander caused the Faith to be shipwrecked, but rather that they suffered shipwreck when they attempted to distort that Faith. To be certain, it is possible to mislead the unwary, causing them to stumble through distorting the truths of God. However, an individual who would distort truth will himself (or herself) be shipwrecked on the very truth he (or she) is twisting and perverting.

The message today examines Paul’s warning concerning two individuals who were even then running aground on the Faith of the True and Living God. Together, we will examine how they arrived at that position and what the consequences were for these two men. Understanding what they did and what resulted from their actions will serve as a warning to us to hold fast to the truth once for all delivered to the saints.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version** © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² E.g. **New International Version** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1984); **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, TN 2005); **New American Standard Version** (Lockman Foundation, La Habra, CA 1986); **New American Standard Version, 1995 Update** (Lockman Foundation, La Habra, CA 1995); Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005); **International Standard Version** (ISV Foundation, Yorba Linda, CA 2011); The Holy Bible: **Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2009); Tremper Longman III, Mark L. Strauss and Daniel Taylor, Contributing Scholars, **The Expanded Bible: New Testament** (Thomas Nelson, Nashville; Dallas; Mexico City; Rio de Janeiro; Beijing: 2009); **GOD’S WORD Translation** (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI 1995); The Holy Bible: **The Good News Translation, 2nd ed.** (American Bible Society, New York, NY 1992)

³ E.g. **New International Version** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011); **American Standard Version** (Logos Research Systems, Inc., Oak Harbor, WA 1995); **The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN 1989); **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2006)

SOME THINGS SHOULD NEVER BE REJECTED — “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith.”

Hymenaeus and Alexander were charged as being heretical because they had rejected “faith and a good conscience!” The reference likely points Timothy (and us) back to something Paul wrote earlier in this letter. In **1 TIMOTHY 1:5**, Paul has written, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” Rejecting “faith and a good conscience” had injured these two men, and it harmed the church. Refresh your memories by considering what it means for one to possess “faith and a good conscience.”

Studying that earlier verse, we discovered that the combination of a pure heart, a good conscience and sincere faith resulted in love. The Apostle stated that love was the goal of his command to foster these attributes.⁴ He indicated that heresy and concomitant personal evil marked the lives of false teachers; he contrasted their lives to the presentation of sound doctrine and the godly life that indelibly marks the man of God. “Faith and a good conscience” will be a continuing theme in this particular letter. For instance, later in this letter, the Apostle will insist that deacons “must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” [**1 TIMOTHY 3:9**].

Therefore, we are assured that rejecting these aspects of Christian life leads to disaster. What is important for Christians to note is that faith and a good conscience, to say nothing of a pure heart, will ensure that believers will be forced to fight. Paul speaks of waging the good warfare; and that concept requires us to think about Christian warfare.

We live in a day in which many professing Christians argue that the believer in Jesus should never have conflict. It is perhaps the prevailing view of many churches that Christians should be docile, compliant, hail-fellow-well-met. In this view, Christians should never speak against any practise; they should be genial and non-judgmental about any action, however reprehensible it may be. In short, the message from many pulpits is that the Christian is to be “nice.” “Nice” is one of those innocuous terms that means pretty much whatever the speaker wants it to mean, though generally it means that they refuse to take a stand on much of anything.

I do not wish to be seen as arguing that Christians are to be deliberately offensive. Writing the Corinthian Christians, Paul cautioned, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved” [**1 CORINTHIANS 10:31-33**]. In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “We do not give anyone an occasion for taking an offense in anything, so that no fault may be found with our ministry” [**2 CORINTHIANS 6:3, NET BIBLE**].

You may recall an occasion when those who collected the Temple Tax confronted Peter, asking whether Jesus paid the tax. Jesus, knowing what had happened, used the occasion to provide instruction. “What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?” And when he said, ‘From others,’ Jesus said to him, ‘Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself’” [**MATTHEW 17:25-27**].

⁴ Michael J. Stark, “The Aim of Our Charge,” <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/1%20timothy%201.05%20the%20aim%20of%20our%20charge.pdf>, 17 February 2013

Did you catch Jesus' justification for paying the tax? He was not speaking of avoiding giving deliberate offence to fellow believers; He spoke of doing all that was possible to avoid giving offence even to those who extracted an unjust tax! To be certain, believers have received the command to "Be at peace among yourselves" [**1 THESSALONIANS 5:13**]. However, beyond that command lies an even more comprehensive command that weighs upon all who are believers. "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" [**ROMANS 12:18**]. This verse is not crafted with weasel words; it acknowledges that it is not always possible to live peaceably with others; there are individuals who are obstreperous, cantankerous, quarrelsome, unruly or just plain mean. Such people make living in peace extremely difficult; some individuals that fall into this particular category will need to be confronted and held accountable for their actions.

Having established that we who follow the Master are responsible to seek peace with all people, it is equally vital to note that we must be prepared to engage in warfare on occasion. I do not want to leave an impression that we are to be warlike—we are specifically enjoined against engaging in war as this world fights. Listen once more to what must surely be familiar passages. "Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" [**2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5**].

Here is another well-known portion of the Word that addresses the manner in which Christians are to fight. "Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 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 firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" [**EPHESIANS 6:10-18**].

Here are some other passages that speak of the Christian obligation to resist evil. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" [**JAMES 4:7**]. Again, listen to Peter. "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" [**1 PETER 5:6-10**].

Other passages specifically address the requirement that elders must resist wickedness, implying a general duty that is imposed on all congregants. The opening salvo of Jude's brief missive begins, "Dear friends, I've dropped everything to write you about this life of salvation that we have in common. I have to write insisting—begging!—that you fight with everything you have in you for this faith entrusted to us as a gift to guard and cherish" [**JUDE 3, THE MESSAGE**]. Did you get that? Christians are to "fight with everything [they] have for this Faith!"

Paul will encourage Timothy, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” [1 TIMOTHY 6:12]. As he neared the end of his own life, Paul would testify, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” [2 TIMOTHY 4:7]. I have previously stated, and I must state once again, this Christian life is not a battle—it is a campaign! We are not running a sprint; we are running a marathon! When you enter into this Christian life, you will be challenged for the duration. If you want no trouble, don’t say anything, don’t do anything, don’t be anything. However, you have received the apostolic warning, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” [2 TIMOTHY 3:12].

It may assist to clarify the issue of when fighting is necessary through reminding you of several Scripture passages. We must not fight fellow believers over issues of no eternal consequence. Paul cautioned Titus, “Avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, quarrels and fights about the law, because they are useless and empty” [TITUS 3:9, NET BIBLE]. Some matters are vital to the Faith. Those teachings that impinge on Christ as Master over life, on the salvation He offers to all who believe, on the authority of His Word, on the conduct of the faithful are each sufficiently important that we cannot cede ground on them. Matters of preference in music styles, worship styles, hair styles and teachings that are so outlandish as to strain credulity are not worthy of wasting energy. Of course, this requires the believer to balance the Christian life, distinguishing between what is essential and what is merely preferential.

Earlier in this same dispatch to Titus, Paul had enjoined the younger missionary, “Remind [the believers] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to slander no one, to avoid fighting, and to be kind, always showing gentleness to all people. For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another” [TITUS 3:1-3, HCSB].

Having cited these portions of the Word, it behooves me to make the sad observation that many churches are more noted for their lack of gracious character than for their love of Christ. Too many Christians are noted for what they are against. When people hear the name of this congregation, they should think of those things for which we stand. And when they think of what we hold dear, they should think of our love for one another because of our love for the Saviour. We must avoid the common error of expressing love for one another that grows out of a faux love of avoiding holding one another responsible for life and conduct.

This, then, is the point to take home—the conscientious Christian must wage a lifelong war against surrender of those aspects that lead to love. The surrender of the Faith and the surrender of a good conscience must never be considered. For should such occur, it can only result in disaster, both for the individual and for those who look to the one who surrenders these necessary qualities of a godly life. There is someone looking to each of us, modelling his or her life after the manner in which we conduct ourselves in this world. We are obligated to caution each individual considering this holy Faith to weigh carefully what his or her expectations are. Christ promises us His presence; He does not promise to keep us from all hardship and conflict. Those who promise otherwise are ignorant at best and deliberately deceptive at worst.

CONSEQUENCES OF REJECTING FAITH AND A GOOD CONSCIENCE — “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

Hymenaeus and Alexander are not identified here, though they were known to Timothy; otherwise Paul would have identified these two individuals. The name “Hymenaeus” does appear in Paul’s second letter to Timothy. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity’” [2 TIMOTHY 2:15-19].

If this is the same Hymenaeus, we know that he was teaching that the resurrection had already taken place. Obviously, such teaching means that the individual has swerved from the Faith. They are not looking for “the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” [TITUS 2:13]. This individual, together with someone named Philetus, were guilty of “upsetting the faith of some.” Moreover, the actions of, to say nothing of the teaching of this Hymenaeus is associated with iniquity. Thus, Hymenaeus had made shipwreck of his faith. Hymenaeus was running aground on the Faith of Christ the Lord.

Again, we can’t identify Alexander with precision. There are at least one, and possibly two, individuals named Alexander spoken of elsewhere in the Bible. A Jew named Alexander attempted to distance Jews from Paul by addressing the mob that raged after Paul had ministered in Ephesus. Let’s read the account as Doctor Luke presented it. “There arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, ‘Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.’

“When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’ So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel. But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’” [ACTS 19:23-34]!

Since this individual was mentioned in Ephesus, and since Timothy was shepherding the congregation of the Ephesians when this letter was written, this may well have been the same man. The name Alexander occurs again in a negative sense in Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy. “Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message” [2 TIMOTHY 4:14, 15]. Whether this is the same man named in the account found in Acts, and whether it is the same individual named in our text, cannot be affirmed with certainty. However, it is possible that each of these references is to the same person.

If the same man named in each of these texts, it would indicate that he had not only drifted doctrinally, perhaps being influenced negatively by Hymenaeus, but he had personally set himself in opposition to Paul's ministry through attacking his character. We could deduce that this man personally opposed the preaching of the Apostle and possibly endeavoured to slander him. Paul says that someone named Alexander was responsible for personal harm. This aligns with what I have observed over the years of my service to the Lord. Whenever an individual opposes the message of Christ, he or she will attack the messenger. Such people will slander and endeavour to destroy the character of Christ's messenger. The messenger is vulnerable; he cannot retaliate in kind. When he is maligned and defamed, the man of God can hand those who assail his character over to Christ, entrusting judgement into His hands.

I tend to believe that Hymenaeus and Alexander named in our text are the same individuals of whom Paul warned Timothy in his second missive. Whether they are the same individuals or not, we are given enough information in our text to speak with some authority of the consequences of rejecting the Faith and a good conscience. Every choice an individual makes in life has ramifications—some positive, some negative. We either honour God, or we pursue our own perverted desires in life. Here is the tragedy of that statement—those who pursue their own fallen desires are often convinced that they are making the best possible choice. Often, people who are focused on obtaining their own desires will argue—vociferously so—that they are doing God's holy will even as they pursue their own desires.

Let me illustrate that by pointing to some instances that should be recognised among contemporary churches. The postmodernist movement has left many Christians without a foundation on which to build the Faith. Pluralism—the idea that all religions have good in them and that there are many paths to God—has become increasingly prominent among the churches. Ascribing a univocal meaning to an artistic creation or literary work is rejected today; it is thought narrow to restrict one's view of what is in mind. That same mindset has crept into the Faith. At a Bible study, a student will often hear the leader ask, "What does this verse mean to you?" May I say very kindly that it makes absolutely no difference what a verse or portion of the Word means to you or what it may mean to me; what matters is what the author intended to communicate! To even entertain that your thoughts have validity, regardless how idiosyncratic your interpretation may be, is to hear in a fresh way the serpent's hiss, "Did God actually say?" Even to consider varying ideas of what a passage means is to embrace postmodernism.

I know from hard experience that whenever the preacher declares, "God has spoken," or states, "The Word of God says," he will be thought narrow-minded and woefully out of touch with modern sensibilities; nevertheless, God has given us this Word that we might know His mind and know His will. The false prophets exposed in the pages of the Old Covenant and the false teachers whom Timothy was confronting to the postmodern preachers that reject biblical truth all alike are offended by the preacher who declares "Thus saith the Lord!"

We are watching a new threat that is insinuating itself into the churches of our Lord. The movement known as the Emerging Church has insinuated itself into the fabric of church life in a few short years. High priests of the movement include such well-known individuals as Rob Bell, Tony Campolo and Brian McLaren. The movement contends that it seeks to reanalyse the Bible, it searches for a flexible approach to theology that will encourage acceptance of individual differences in belief and morality while seeking creative approaches to worship. Perhaps these goals are commendable; but when attempting to implement them, the emerging church movement is prepared to jettison historic Christianity as inadequate to address the condition of modern man. It rejects man's fallen nature while embracing whatever makes him feel good.

The movement has existed long enough that a growing number of the prime movers are beginning to run aground on the Faith once for all delivered to the saints. Already, we witness the distortion of biblical teaching and growing disappointment of those who led these strange, new (though oddly ancient) movements. As they continue to twist the Scriptures to meet their own fanciful ideals, proponents discover they have neither personal peace with God nor power to transform the lives of adherents. They appear to grow increasingly frustrated, running aground on the Faith. How could this be otherwise when professing Christians are more focused on feelings than on truth, exalt experience over reason, embrace spirituality rather than the Faith and focus on subjectivity rather than objectivity?

I note as well the tendency among the faithful to drift into either of two dreadful extremes. Often, a congregation emphasises mercy at the expense of holiness; others emphasise law at the expense of grace. Too often, we who give ourselves to leading the assembly allow the instruction provided to suffer from a lack of balance. Should the leadership of the congregation (whether that leadership is appointed or informal) avoid confronting sinful teaching or sinful behaviour (for the latter will follow the former as surely as smoke rises upward from the fire), the body will be increasingly weakened. Sin will grow within the assembly until the life of the faithful is enervated and vitality flees from the congregation. Juxtaposed to this terminal malady is one that ensures the identical outcome, though the cause of the sickness arises from a different quarter. Should the leaders of the congregation seek purity through imposing harsh strictures on the people, failing to take into account the universal need for mercy, the congregation will atrophy and die as love dies through hardening of the attitudes.

To be certain, I have observed elders who injured an assembly through failure to provide pasturage, or refreshing draughts or through driving the flock too vigorously—it is easy for a preacher to ride a favourite hobbyhorse, failing in the process to lend balance to the flock. More frequently, however, I have watched lay leaders—elders who had never received divine appointment, if you will—impose their will on the flock for their own purposes; such individuals bring great harm to the church. They oppose God’s appointed elders, promote wickedness through their actions and bring disgrace upon the cause of the Master. I have lived long enough to watch many of these self-appointed leaders run aground upon the Faith. Their own lives are shipwrecked and they have no lasting impact on the cause of Christ. What is more tragic still is the harm they bring to others.

To be certain, many of those who are harmed willingly followed the disastrous leadership of these false leaders—they received their just reward. However, there are always casualties among the feeble and those who are viewing the Faith from a distance. We grieve over such injuries, praying that the Master will show mercy and grace to such injured people.

It is impossible to tell if Hymenaeus and Alexander bore the title of elder or whether they functioned informally as elders of the congregation. Though I could not prove the case, I suspect the latter on the basis of observation of this present church milieu. Many who bear the title of pastor are hired to preach whatever they are instructed to do; such individuals can hardly be called elders—they are hirelings at best. Those who hired these individuals and who control the pulpit are the elders within the congregation. Such shadow powers within this modern era are far more likely to be those acting as did Hymenaeus and Alexander. To my horror, I have actually had such individuals confide to me that they did not want to bear the title “elder.” One man told me that he wanted to stay in the shadows and direct the work of the congregation. I rebuked him, pointing out that all that lurks in the shadows are cockroaches and wiggly worms.

HANDED OVER TO SATAN — “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

What did Paul mean when he said Hymenaeus and Alexander had been handed over to Satan? This is obviously a much stronger position than what is outlined in the Second Thessalonian Letter. There, we read, “If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” [2 THESSALONIANS 3:14, 15]. Paul’s language in the text comes much closer to what is written in the First Corinthian Letter. “When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” [1 CORINTHIANS 5:4, 5].

It is a tragic truth that churches today have neglected a powerful truth. When someone is handed over to Satan, it means they have not been fully under his power to that point. The Word of God informs us that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” [1 JOHN 5:19]. You will recall that when Jesus was tempted, Satan offered, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will” [LUKE 4:6]. You no doubt had noticed that Jesus did not rebuke the devil for what he offered; Jesus knew that the wicked one was “the ruler of this world” [see JOHN 14:30]. We are also aware that Christ Jesus our Saviour “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” [GALATIANS 1:4]. We also know that unbelievers, and we ourselves when we were lost, walked “following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” [EPHESIANS 2:2].

Let’s apply this information to the situation now under scrutiny. Those who are within the sphere of influence of the assembly, even when they are not members, are under the umbrella of protection that is provided by the church. Even though some who attend the services may not be believers, they receive a measure of protection because of their association with the community of redeemed people. This is a neglected truth—unbelievers receive protection from association with the redeemed. Israel’s history testifies to this truth. When Israel fled Egypt, accompanying the people were non-Jews identified as a “mixed multitude” [EXODUS 12:38]; though living with Israel, these individuals were not redeemed. This mixed multitude would also be described as “the rabble” [e.g. NUMBERS 11:4]. Those associated with Israel received God’s protection just as did His people. They ate manna, their shoes did not wear out and they drank water from the rock, just as did the people of Israel.

In ROMANS 9:6, Paul states that “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.” Those Jews who were not redeemed received a share of the inheritance within the Promised Land and were given the same protection that others received within the land. In the same way, the benefits that came from the sacrificial system and from the priesthood were theirs.

The same is true of those associated with church life, even when they are not redeemed. Unbelievers are blessed because of their association with God’s people. Paul has written, “The unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:14]. Even those who do not believe are beneficiaries of God’s blessing on His own people.

There is shelter and protection provided through association with God's people in assembly. Unbelievers living within a nation that honours God are better off than those within a nation that is ungodly. Outsiders who associate themselves with the community of faith benefit from God's grace and goodness to His own people. Those who live in the world, who have no association with the people of God, lie under the devil's sway; outsiders are under Satan's rule. What is tragic about this situation is that these individuals are seldom aware of the frightful conditions under which they exist. Therefore, when someone who has enjoyed the benefits of the Faith are handed over to Satan, that one is excluded from the insulation and protection afforded by the believing community. The assembly may take this action corporately, as was the case for the Corinthian congregation [see **1 CORINTHIANS 5:3-5**], and it is consistent with the instruction Jesus provided in **MATTHEW 18:15-20**.

What is interesting about the text today is that Paul was responsible for handing these two individuals over to Satan. Delivering Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan was not through congregation action—it was Paul's own action. Perhaps this is permissible because he was an Apostle, and such acts were limited to an Apostle. However, I suggest to you that part of the responsibility imposed on overseers is protection of the flock. Accordingly, there are times when it is necessary for the elder to hand over to Satan some individual. Though that action may not have congregation authority, the elder will be compelled to act for the welfare of the people. What seems to be the usual case is that such action takes place when false leadership has ensconced itself within the assembly and the people will not act. Under such conditions, the elder must act decisively, even to the point of dissociating himself from the congregation. At such times, he will grieve because he knows the danger to the people because they are handed over to the wicked one. God's protection has been withdrawn; and though the name over the door still indicates that a church meets there, it no longer has legitimacy and shall experience the loss of shelter and protection it has enjoyed previously. Under such conditions, it is only a matter of time until the congregation dies and the properties are sold. Verification of this truth may be witnessed by looking at church buildings that now stand empty, which have signs indicating that they are for sale, or which are even now struggling to find enough people to keep the doors open.

It is important to note Paul's purpose in such decisive and seemingly harsh actions. Paul acted as he did for the welfare of the Ephesian congregation; he sought to protect them from the dangers of the errant teachers. He also acted as he did for the benefit of Hymenaeus and Alexander, though it is doubtful that they would have believed that the Apostle had their welfare in view. Look at the final statement of our text. "By rejecting [faith and a good conscience], some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme" [**1 TIMOTHY 1:19, 20**]. Paul's purpose for these two men was that they might learn not to blaspheme. To blaspheme is to slander God. Misrepresenting divine truth, just as speaking evil of God, is blasphemy. Even believers can be guilty of blasphemy. What is vital to our study today is to note that those who are handed over to Satan will learn the consequences of their acts.

Paul did indeed have the welfare of these two men in view when he handed them over to Satan. Hymenaeus and Alexander were acting similar to another group that had opposed the message of faith during Paul's first missionary journey. "The next Sabbath almost the whole city [of Antioch in Pisidia] gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him" [**ACTS 13:44, 45**].

The Apostle's response in this instance was to turn from them, effectively turning them over to Satan's reign. "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles" [ACTS 13:46].

Some who listen today share in the benefits of association with this assembly. Some of you are believers who share in this holy Faith. You know the Lord and you enjoy His mercies. You enjoy benefits that devolve from association with this assembly. However, you have made no commitment to obedience. Perhaps you hold back because you will not receive baptism as taught in the Word; you imagine that accepting such would betray a heritage. However, you are disobedient to what is taught in the Word; and you are sacrificing rich benefits that accrue to those who obey the Master's call. Others delay open affiliation with the congregation through transfer of a church letter or through statement of Christian experience. Perhaps you imagine that you can justify such action; however, you really have no answer you can give to the Master. I urge you to obey the call of God, bringing yourself and your family into the fellowship of the assembly. We receive all who obey the Master's instruction to follow Him in baptism and all who accept the Spirit's appointment to unite with the congregation that He chooses.

For others, though you are not believers, you enjoy benefits here. You must not presume against the Faith, for the benefits you now enjoy are not unlimited. You are still under judgement because you have not believed; and you know that when life ends for you, you must stand before the Great White Throne at the end of days. My plea to you is to believe that God is gracious, receiving the life that He offers in Jesus His Son. Do so now, while you have opportunity. Whatever your situation, our call is for you to obey the Master, even this day. Amen.