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# **Shipwrecked Saints**

**# 1217-A**

**Series: I Timothy**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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# Shipwrecked Saints

It simply could *never happen*. Hundreds gathered in the small church that Sunday morning filled with grief. Many were virtually in a state of shock. The place is Belfast, Ireland, where the Titanic had so skillfully and so pridefully been constructed. The date is the Sunday following the ship's maiden voyage, which had, of course, been its last. The families of sixteen of the craft's skilled mechanics, all of whom had gone down with the ship, were included in the throng that packed the church that day.

To those grief-stricken men and women this was the day that never should have been; for this was the ship that, to man, was unsinkable. I would imagine, that as the visiting American preacher announced the title of his message, a holy hush must have fallen across that weeping congregation. His title was *The Unsinkable Ship*. But much to the amazement of those grief-stricken Irish mourners, he did not speak about the Titanic. His message was about *another unsinkable ship*—a tiny frail fishing boat, which was being tossed and beaten upon the waters of the Sea of Galilee. This one *was* unsinkable; because there was asleep on a pillow in the after-part of the vessel, the Master of land and sea...His name was Jesus.

What a comfort to know that it isn't the size of the ship or the value of its cargo that guarantees its safety through life's waters. It is the credentials of the Captain that assures its safety. For, in reality, there is nothing in life of less value than a ship which leaves the harbor with fanfare and festivities, with high hopes and elevated expectations; with pomp and circumstance and promoted promises, but never reaches its destination. Somewhere along the way the contrary winds begin to blow, and the ferocious waves of life begin to beat against it, and suddenly down into the frantic waters it goes, taking cargo and crew to a watery grave, burying with it all of those dreams and all of those promises.

Shipwrecked! What a devastating word. It means no longer afloat. No longer usable. No longer seaworthy. Either it's destined to be in one of life's museums of *also-rans* as a monument to failure, or it's destined to be buried at sea somewhere and quickly forgotten. But it's no longer of any real value, and its once great

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expectations are buried with it, shipwrecked.

But there is something worse that a sailing vessel that unexpectedly sinks to the depths of the sea—it is a shipwrecked life. It is one that began with great promise, with untold expectations, which began to sail the seas of life as though *nothing could ever cause it to sink into the mire of defeat*. And then one day you read or hear that what you had assumed to be an unsinkable life had run aground. All those dreams, all those hopes, all those promises, for the moment, seem wasted. For some unknown reason that life is shipwrecked.

Not a pleasant topic, to be sure. But then, the Scripture is not a compilation of pleasant topics; it is a God’s-eye view of the real world as seen through the eyes of eternity. That means it needs to explore both the joys and the pitfalls of sailing life’s seas. And that we will do today as we continue our look at the Apostle Paul’s loving, but honest epistle to his young son in the faith, a man named Timothy.

Our title and our outline for today’s lesson is Shipwrecked Saints.

- 1- The Instruction (verse 18)
- 2- The Campaign (verse 18)
- 3- The Danger (verse 19)
- 4- The Examples (verse 20)
- 5- The Consequences (verse 20)

### THE INSTRUCTION

In our last look at this epistle, Paul had written a word of warning to his young interim pastor that included both a negative and positive word of caution. The negative word was “there are men in the flock, *certain men who are teaching other doctrines than those that we taught you* (contrary doctrines); *tell them to stop it.*” In other words, Paul was assigning Timothy the unpopular task of confronting some of the key leaders in the church to tell them they were out of line by teaching myths and contentious doctrines that took men back under the law or gave them an unnatural kind of freedom to do what Scripture forbids. Both extremes existed. They were to be stopped immediately.

The positive side of his counsel, however, was that *the reason for this command was to teach men what happened when real*

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*sound doctrine was taught.* It would lead to men and women who were filled with the love of God, which issued forth from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a sincere or guileless faith. Then Paul proceeded to share his personal testimony. If ever anyone deserved to die without the approval of God, it was Paul. His credentials were, that apart from divine intervention, he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man. But God intervened, and Paul's key phrase was, "But I was shown mercy." And so were we.

Now we proceed to a trio of verses at the end of chapter one that seem to hold a rich theological treasure.

Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight,

holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.

Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

(I Timothy 1:18-20 NIV)

Paul's next words of wisdom to Timothy, then, are words of instruction, followed by words of warning. The instruction is found in verse 18:

Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you.

Once again, Paul begins this parenthetical insertion of warning into the letter by addressing young Tim personally and lovingly. It is "Timothy, my son, my offspring in the faith, one whose spiritual life issued forth from mine, I am not giving you this word of instruction lightly. Don't you remember the time when God laid His hand on you and made it clear that you were to be a standard-bearer of the Gospel?" In all likelihood, Paul is referring to the incident mentioned in I Timothy 4. It reads:

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

(I Timothy 4:14 NIV)

At some point in young Tim's brief ministry, there had been an ordination service of some sort, and apparently the elders of the church had laid hands on him, and a message had been delivered commissioning this young man to a position of leadership in the things of the Kingdom, and in the work of that

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church. Now Paul refers back to that moment, as if to say, “Tim, I’m not just making this up. It’s not my idea, it’s God’s. You were called, and you responded, and here we are. Now let’s watch God work. Don’t argue that you aren’t capable. God gifted you when He called you. Now go to it.” And to what was he called? The verse continues:

so that by following them you may fight the good fight,  
holding on to faith and a good conscience.

### THE CAMPAIGN

That’s what Timothy had been called to; he had been called to a life of warfare. He was to “put on the whole armor of God” (as Paul would later explain) and prepare for battle. Tim hadn’t been invited to head up the social committee when they laid hands on him in that impressive ordination service. He had been called to take up his arms and spend the rest of his life on planet earth in the midst of a conflict, the outcome of which was a matter of life and death. He was to *fight the good fight*.

Here is perhaps Paul’s favorite analogy: that the Christian life can best be characterized as enlistment in a fighting brigade which calls for intensive training followed by frontline combat. The outcome of the conflict would never be in doubt, but the intensity of the fray should never be minimized. We would not be wrestling against *flesh and blood*. It wouldn’t be a physical conflict. There might be some physical pain and some physical consequences. There were with Job. But that was only *the visible battlefield*. The real battle would be spiritual, and it would take place in the heavenlies. God and Satan would be fighting over us; and our choices, minute-by-minute, would be the moves made on the chessboard of life that would highlight the strategy.

The word *fight* here is indicative, not of an individual skirmish that would be fought and be over, but was a word more likened to a *campaign*, a constant, *ongoing, all-out war* that would be characterized by many little battles. The campaign or the war would continue until the enemy hoisted the flag of defeat and fell at the feet of the victor. In the spiritual real that glorious day when the foe is vanquished and falls at the feet of our victorious God is yet to come.

Paul now gives two basic laws that must be followed if the battle is to be won. *The first involves holding on to faith.* The definite article precedes the word *faith* indicating it is not

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Timothy's faith he is to hold on to, but *the faith*, which is Timothy's quiet confidence in the Living Word as His very life. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen." It is the resting of the human spirit on the Word of the Holy Spirit *regardless of how things appear*. It is a refusal to listen to the voice of the stranger when he appears in the garden of your life and whispers, "Hath God said?" It is a constant response *based only on the veracity of God's Word*, which simply responds, "It is written." This faith "comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God". So the issue has to do with keeping on the armor of God by staying in the Word of God and resting in the work of God.

A gradual drifting from that level of confidence in the finished work of Christ will lead to a shipwrecked life. A heart that is not steadfast in its confidence in the Word will yearn needlessly for other anchors. Men and women who refuse to relinquish their time in God's Word and refuse to relinquish the claim of that Word upon their lives are the only ones who will stand when the battle is over.

And it is a battle. Remember that. Paul was reminding Timothy here that staying in God's Word and resting in God's strength will be a constant struggle. It won't *just happen* anymore than *generals just happen to win wars*.

Secondly, Tim was warned to hold on to a good conscience. This, you remember, refers back to Paul's instructions in verse five, where Tim was warned that sound teaching could be measured, not by its ability to produce questions, but by its ability to produce a pure heart that was typified by a clear or good conscience. The word *conscience*, I would remind you, is a comparative word *that measures what you see in the mirror with what you see in the mirror of the Word*. A good conscience is one that is able to reconcile the two: what God says His Spirit produces, and what you really are in your heart, the real you, where you think what you think when you think no one knows what you think. It is a life that is characterized by a heart that has nothing between itself and God or itself and others. So Paul continually goes back to a holy life and uses this as a guideline to determine the course you must remain on if your life is not to be shipwrecked.

### THE DANGER

This word, conscience, is a much-used word in Scripture,

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and it is a much-overlooked concept in the Christian life. For the conscience is God's sensing unit that quickens your mind and recalls the Scripture when you are about to make a choice. The choice may be so general that it might be over whether or not to believe God in a certain area or to give in to discouragement. Whatever it might be, it is a choice and your conscience working through the Holy Spirit using the Word will try to stop you from going astray. But shipwrecked lives don't just suddenly happen. They are the result of consciences that have followed a progressive pattern of denial until they no longer serve their intended purpose. I think it is a four-step process:

Step 1- We ignore our conscience. *We know better*, but along comes a temptation to do something or take something or eat something or say something we know is wrong. *We don't feel comfortable about it*, and a word of warning enters our hearts from the Scripture. But that troubling voice of the stranger whispers... "hath God said? Everybody else does it." And you simply begin to question the absolutes of Scripture and, in so doing, you justify ignoring that still small voice.

Step 2- We override our conscience. We are tempted to go one step beyond our first violation, and we know it isn't right, but we deliberately choose to do it anyway. This time we're more conscious of what we're doing is wrong and do it anyway. "I'm going to think that thought, I'm going to hold on to that attitude, I'm going to let that anger fester," ...or whatever it may be.

Step 3- The more we override our conscience, the less sensitive our consciences become. We slowly develop a seared conscience, the kind Paul describes in I Timothy 4:12. There he speaks of having your conscience "seared with a hot iron," literally "cauterized", or deadened. You can now do or say the things that once caused your conscience to send out signals of warning and now you no longer feel guilty. Your conscience no longer functions as it once did. The hearing aid has been turned down all the way.

Step 4- A seared conscience leads to a shipwrecked life, a life that coasts into the shoreline of apostasy or deliberate rebellion and no longer evidences any spiritual life or holiness. It may still be *religiously active*, but the fruit of the Spirit no longer flows, and the Mind of Christ no longer responds.

Step 5- The shipwrecked life begins to blaspheme God by



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life and lips and becomes, in effect, an adversary of the Gospel, instead of just *ignoring God*. Paul now gets specific. He says, “Tim, some have rejected these instructions (the clinging tenaciously to a life of faith, and the constant monitoring of a clear conscience), and *because they rejected these they have shipwrecked their faith.*”

They may have had all the advance billing and promotion the Titanic had. They may have been Sunday school teachers, pastors, or evangelists. They may have been authors, experts, seminary professors, or just promising laymen. But through the gradual erosion of their rest in Christ and the gradual rejection of the word of their conscience, they have drifted so far off course that their spiritual compasses no longer work. Their sensitivity to spiritual things has gone from ten-to-zero. They may or may not be busy in the church. But in their hearts, *where it counts*, they are dead and gone, shipwrecked.

### THE EXAMPLE

So that Timothy can't misunderstand the problem, Paul names names. He says “among them” (among those who have shipwrecked their faith), are Hymenaeus and Alexander. He says, “Tim, in case you don't get the drift of what I'm saying, turn on your spiritual recorder and fast-forward to the life of Hymie and Alex. You'll get the picture.”

Hymie was, no doubt, the one spoken of as a teacher of heresy in II Timothy 2:17. Though there were two Alexanders spoken of, the one mentioned here is probably Alexander, the metalworker mentioned in II Timothy 4:14, who did Paul a great deal of harm. At any rate, Timothy knew who they were, and Paul doesn't play games or use hypothetical people. He tells it like it is. His examples are real.

### THE CONSEQUENCES

But Paul doesn't stop there. Not only does he name Hymie and Alex as his examples of shipwrecked lives, he tells what he had done about it and why. Now please pay close attention. This is heavy, but it's written for our admonition.

Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

(I Timothy 1:20 NIV)

Paul is now confiding in Timothy about the spiritual action he

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had to take regarding these two, and the resulting consequences in their lives. He was dealing with two shipwrecked saints. These were believers. They once had sailed the high seas of spiritual victory and, like the Titanic, were thought to be unsinkable. But they neglected two basic issues in their lives. They let their minute-by-minute walk of faith slide, and they let their consciences become clouded and eventually seared until they no longer were spiritually perceptive. One has become an out-and-out heretic. He is teaching things that are contrary to sound doctrine. The other has become divisive, contentious, and bitter, challenging the apostle's authority and undermining his leadership. Both have become blasphemers. The word *blaspheme* means *to wrongfully destroy the name or reputation of another*. They had taken the Name that is above every Name and brought reproach to His reputation.

Now look carefully at what Paul did about it. "He handed them over to Satan". There are several possible interpretations of this sentence. Some say it indicates excommunication from the church. Some say it meant being thrust out into the world system to find their way. But most believe it was much more specific than that. We read in I Corinthians 5:5 of the man in the Corinthian church who was guilty of incest. Paul recommended that he be "delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." We see Satan's capacity to bring physical pain and destruction on God's people when he is allowed to do so. We see it in Job 2, in Acts 5, and in Acts 13. And it would appear that Paul has asked God to remove His hand of protection on these two offenders, freeing Satan to bring something into their lives they could not handle, thus allowing God to get their attention once again.

Now be careful about praying that prayer. It was not an, "I'll get even with those two," kind of prayer. It was a solemn sentence of spiritual judgment on two who had purposefully and knowingly brought reproach to the Name of Christ. And remember Paul's purpose: it was for the purpose of restoration, that they be taught not to blaspheme any longer. Their salvation wasn't at stake. Their restoration and repentance was.

And all because they had, little by little, offense by offense, ignored the warnings of God's Spirit as He tugged at their consciences, and had willfully refused to listen to that still small voice that urged them to repent.

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Before they knew what happened, they were shipwrecked. They thought they were just cruising into uncharted waters. But jagged rocks awaited them. Soon the swirling floods of judgment poured into their wayward vessels, and they began to sink. They had played Satan's game; now they became Satan's game. Did they ever repent? We don't know. But one thing we do know; to God this was serious business. It couldn't just be ignored in the name of love or pushed under the carpet in the church foyer.

So Paul handed them over to Satan. He let them go. And you can bet the devil opened the gates of hell, and the heat flew in like a furnace ablaze.

The message is that our spiritual lives are nothing to play games with. We're in the thick of an intense conflict, a life or death battle for the souls of men, and too much hangs in the balance for us to take it lightly. And should we choose little by little to let our spiritual guards down and let compromises deaden our consciences until we no longer hear the voice of God, God will act. He will quietly remove the barricades He has erected to protect us and let the enemy slither into the depths of our lives until He gets our attention. No, most tribulation is not the result of our being handed over to Satan. Much of it is a tribute to our faithfulness, as it was with Job. But we know deep down, when we have so offended the heart of God and so ignored the voice of God that something severe has to be done if we are to return to the arms of God. In those cases, God's love is so strong that He allows us to be thrust over to Satan for a season to learn our lessons.

It isn't hard to see what the next questions are: How tender is your conscience toward sin? Do certain things and certain thoughts not even jab your heart any longer? Is your conscience slowly being deadened as you ignore its cries for conviction? Instead of becoming increasingly more sensitive to sin as the days go by, does God have to scream for your attention where once a whisper would do? If so, your good ship may be headed for troubled waters. You may be spiritually asleep and not even feel the waves as they beat against the ship. But treacherous rocks lie beneath the shallow water, and except our hearts repent and come alive, the next sound we hear could be the sound of Satan laughing at our calamity. He will only have to say one word, "Shipwrecked".

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Please bow with me as we close:

*Our Father,*

*We don't like these kinds of lessons. We don't like these kinds of truths. We don't like to discuss the things that go on in the spirit world that are consequences of apostasy and rebellion. And yet, Father, we recognize even today that we have not taught the whole counsel of God if we are not honest and faithful where these matters are concerned. And if this was important enough for Paul to tell Timothy, then it's important enough for us to take heed.*

*There may be some of us here this morning that need to take a fresh look at our consciences, at the little compromises we have allowed to fester so long that we no longer even think they are wrong. The thoughts we harbor that at one point in time we never would have thought of thinking, the tiny compromises that have given way to big sins. And though we may be playing the game well, we may have so seared our consciences that we no longer feel guilty.*

*Father, thank you for the warning this morning that you could put a sign over our door in the days to come that says, "shipwrecked", and You could turn us over to the enemy to be awakened. But we pray this morning, Father, that that might not be necessary. That each of us might take a fresh look into our hearts and peel back the layers of self that have shielded us from having the nerve endings of our hearts sensitive to You. Help us to return to that kind of conscience that controls us when Christ controls our spirits. May we as a church, may we as individuals become increasingly sensitive to sin, increasingly sensitive to wounding others, increasingly sensitive to wounding You. May we reach that stage of walking with You in a fresh and new way in which the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts (the real us), be acceptable to You, oh, Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. For we pray in Jesus' name,*

*Amen.*

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