

1 Timothy 1:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:

Analysis

Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Paul identifies two essentials for faithful ministry: "faith" (pistin, πίστιν) and "a good conscience" (agathēn syneidēsin, ἀγαθὴν συνείδησιν). "Faith" here likely refers both to subjective trust in Christ and objective doctrinal content—the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). "A good conscience" means moral integrity, alignment between profession and practice, freedom from hypocrisy and hidden sin.

The verb "holding" (echōn, ἔχων) suggests active maintaining or guarding, not passive possession. Timothy must deliberately protect both sound doctrine and moral integrity against constant threats. These two elements are inseparable—doctrinal orthodoxy without moral integrity produces hypocrisy; moral sincerity without doctrinal orthodoxy produces futile religiosity. Both together enable faithful warfare against error.

Paul warns that "some" have "put away" (apōsamēnoi, ἀπωσάμενοι)—rejected, thrust aside, or deliberately discarded—a good conscience, with catastrophic results regarding faith. They "made shipwreck" (enauagēsan, ἐναυάγησαν), a nautical term meaning total ruin. Once a ship wrecks, it's destroyed; similarly, rejecting conscience ruins faith. The progression is clear: moral compromise leads to doctrinal defection. When leaders rationalize sin, sound doctrine inevitably suffers.

Historical Context

The connection between moral integrity and doctrinal faithfulness appears throughout Scripture. Jesus identified false prophets by their fruit, not merely their teaching (Matthew 7:15-20). Peter warned that false teachers follow sensuality and bring the way of truth into disrepute (2 Peter 2:1-3). When moral failure isn't repented of, doctrinal error typically follows as people rationalize their behavior.

"Shipwreck" as metaphor for spiritual ruin would resonate powerfully in the ancient Mediterranean world where sea travel was dangerous and shipwrecks common. Paul himself experienced shipwreck multiple times (2 Corinthians 11:25; Acts 27). The image conveys sudden, complete disaster—what was afloat and making progress toward its destination is suddenly destroyed and sinks.

Paul's warning that "some" had already shipwrecked regarding faith indicates this wasn't merely theoretical danger but present reality in Timothy's situation. The false teachers in Ephesus apparently exhibited this pattern—compromising conscience, rationalizing sin, then developing doctrine to justify their behavior. Their theological error didn't occur in vacuum but stemmed from prior moral failure.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. In what areas might you be tempted to compromise conscience, and how do you guard against this?

2. How have you seen the connection between moral compromise and doctrinal error in your experience or observation?
3. What practices help you maintain both sound doctrine and moral integrity as inseparable elements of faithful Christianity?

Interlinear Text

ἔχων	πίστιν	καὶ	ἀγαθὴν	συνείδησιν	ἣν	τινες
Holding	faith	and	a good	conscience	which	some
G2192	G4102	G2532	G18	G4893	G3739	G5100
ἀπωσάμενοι	περὶ	τὴν	πίστιν	ἐναυάγησαν		
having put away	concerning		faith	have made shipwreck		
G683	G4012	G3588	G4102	G3489		

Additional Cross-References

1 Timothy 3:9 (Faith): Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

Revelation 3:10 (Parallel theme): Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

1 Timothy 6:9 (Parallel theme): But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

Revelation 3:8 (Parallel theme): I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Titus 1:9 (Faith): Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

2 Timothy 4:4 (Parallel theme): And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

Hebrews 3:14 (Creation): For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;

1 John 2:19 (Creation): They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

1 Corinthians 11:19 (Creation): For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

1 Timothy 1:5 (Faith): Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:

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