

### A Continuation of Paul's Personal Remarks to Timothy

#### 2 Timothy 4:14-18

2 Timothy 4:14-18: *"Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. <sup>15</sup> You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words. <sup>16</sup> At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. <sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. <sup>18</sup> And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!"*

#### Background Notes

In verse 14, the "Alexander" who opposed the apostle Paul *may* be the "Alexander" mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:20. That Alexander had "made shipwreck" of his faith, and as a result of his compromised testimony, he was excommunicated from the church. Timothy 1:19-20: *"Having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."*

If the Alexander mentioned in 2 Timothy 4 is the same man as the Alexander in 1 Timothy 1, it's clear why he turned against the apostle Paul. He may even have heard about Paul's negative reference to him in the first letter to Timothy. However, Alexander was a common name in the 1<sup>st</sup> century - an "Alexander" is also mentioned in Acts 19. So we don't know if this is the same Alexander.

In verse 16, Paul mentioned his "first defense." Was this a reference to his trial during his first Roman imprisonment? Probably not. It was probably a reference to his current trial, and the "first defense" was his first court hearing. At this preliminary hearing of his trial, no one supported him. Why not? What about Luke? Luke was with Paul in Rome (v11), but perhaps he was away from Rome at the time of Paul's first hearing. Or Paul may have been referring to reputable Christians in Rome who could have come forward to testify to Paul's innocence, but they didn't - most likely because of fear.

It was dangerous to be an outspoken Christian in Rome at this time. As early as AD 60, when Paul was imprisoned in Rome, the danger had begun. In Acts 28:22, the Jews of Rome said to Paul, *"But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."* The risk and danger of being a Christian greatly increased after Nero claimed that the root cause of the devastating fire in Rome (AD 64) was that the pagan gods

were angry, because the Christians would not worship them. And it was especially dangerous to be associated with Christianity's leading spokesman - the apostle Paul. So no one who could have testified in Paul's favor came forward in Paul's defense.

The "lion" (v17) was probably not a reference to literal lions that were used for torture and death in various arenas around the Roman Empire. Paul was a Roman citizen, so he would not have been sent to the lions. Is the "lion" a figurative expression for Nero or for Satan? Maybe. But probably it's just a figurative expression for great danger. Psalm 22, that wonderful Messianic psalm, used the lion as a symbol for great danger. *"But You, O Lord, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen!"(Psalm 22:19-22).*

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The Lord will support His people through times of opposition.

Two forms of opposition were mentioned in verses 14-16: active and passive. In the case of Alexander the coppersmith, the opposition was active. He actively tried to harm Paul (v14), and he actively resisted Paul's words (v15). We don't know when and where this opposition took place. It may have been at Paul's court hearing, or perhaps it was earlier, maybe at Ephesus.

In verse 16, the opposition was passive. At Paul's first defense, no one supported him. People who could have done something to help and support Paul did nothing. Passive opposition against the believer continues today as well. Christians who are in administrative positions in schools or government agencies, who could speak up and do things to further the kingdom of God and policy decisions, may do nothing because they fear they'll lose their jobs.

As Christians, we can expect opposition - but the good news is that the Lord will always be there to support us. *"But the Lord stood with me" (v17).* In Matthew 28:20, the Lord Jesus said, *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* In Hebrews 13:5, we read that the Lord said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* The Lord will support His people through times of opposition.

As the Lord supported Paul, so He will support you when you experience opposition. The Lord doesn't promise we'll never have opposition, but He promises to support His people through times of opposition.

### 2. The Lord will strengthen His people for testimony.

Verse 17: *"But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear."* When Paul went before the Roman court, he used this hearing as an opportunity to witness for Christ and preach the gospel! Many Romans would have been at his trial - and they all heard the gospel.

What a great opportunity, arranged by God! It was similar to Martin Luther's great stand on behalf of the authority of Scripture and the gospel.

Paul said that the Lord not only stood by him, but He strengthened Paul as well. The Lord infused him with courage and with strength so that he was not fearful and trembling before the Roman court. Paul was bold in his witness, because the Lord strengthened him.

Back in my college days at a secular university I was given the opportunity to witness to about fifty members of one of the fraternities on campus. This opportunity was totally unexpected, and I was really afraid - to the point that I literally felt my knees shaking! "Lord, help me!" was my silent prayer - and He did! I literally experienced strength from the Lord. I stopped shaking and was able to speak boldly to the fraternity about Christ. It was not my strength - it was **His strength!** The Lord will strengthen His people for testimony.

### 3. The Lord will deliver His people from failure.

Verse 17b-18: *"Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!"* The Lord delivered Paul out of the mouth of the lion. This was probably a reference to the great danger that he escaped at his first trial.

Then Paul went on to say that the Lord would deliver him from every evil work and preserve him for His heavenly kingdom. What did he mean? He certainly didn't mean that he would escape death, because he knew that "the time of his departure" was near (v6).

Verse 18 is not a guarantee that Christians will be kept from or delivered from persecution and martyrdom. God can deliver **from** physical persecution and martyrdom if He chooses to do so, as He did for the three faithful men in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). But God can also deliver His people **through** martyrdom - and bring them safely Home to Heaven. That may be what Paul had in mind in this verse. He knew that even if the Roman authorities tortured him or put him to death, this would be God's means of rescue for Paul. It would not be a victory for Rome, because he would be delivered out of the clutches of Rome.

The other possibility here (and the one I've tried to capture in the doctrinal point) is that Paul was confident that the Lord would *preserve him from failure*, and from any evil work that would lead to failure. He was confident that the Lord would preserve him all the way to the end. As Paul looked to the Lord for courage, he was confident that he would not deny the Lord or compromise the gospel or deny his faith. This thought led to Paul's burst of praise at the end of verse 18: *"To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!"*

Paul wrote about deliverance from failure during his first Roman imprisonment as well. In Philippians 1:20 he wrote, *"According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness as always, so*

*now also Christ will be magnified in my body whether by life or by death.*” Paul was confident that the Lord would deliver His people from failure, whether in life or in death.

Remember the words of the Lord’s Prayer: *“Lead us not into temptation.”* In other words, we are asking, “May we not be led into temptation. Lord, please deliver us from evil – and the evil one.” As we look to the Lord, we can be confident that the Lord will *“give grace to help in time of need”* (Hebrews 4:16). The Lord will deliver His people from failure.

## Practical Applications

### 1. Let’s use our common sense!

In verse 15 Paul told Timothy to beware of Alexander the coppersmith, because he had greatly harmed Paul. Notice - Paul didn’t say, “Timothy, don’t worry about Alexander the coppersmith. The Lord will take care of you, and He’ll prevent Alexander from harming you.” No! Paul said, “Timothy - use your common sense! Beware of this man!

We, too, should use our common sense. Yes, the Lord can and will protect us, and He is able to take care of us - but we shouldn’t “kiss our brains goodbye” or ignore our God-given common sense. Let’s look to the Lord for help - **and** use our common sense!

### 2. Never take your own revenge.

“Never take your own revenge” is a paraphrase of Romans 12:19: *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves but rather give place to wrath, for it is written ‘Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*

Paul certainly put that biblical truth into practice here. In reference to Alexander the coppersmith, Paul said, *“May the Lord repay him according to his works”* (v14). That’s not an imprecation or a wish – it’s a prophecy. From the Old Testament Scriptures, Paul knew that **God will repay** the wicked. Paul didn’t have to take his own revenge!

Look also at verse 16: *“At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.”* This reminds us of our Lord’s words on the cross: *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34). It also reminds us of what Stephen said as he was being martyred: *“And he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord do not charge them with this sin’”* (Acts 7:60).

When people wrong us, we can be confident that God knows all about it, and He will judge righteously. We are not to avenge ourselves, because we don’t need to avenge ourselves! Never take your own revenge!