

2 Timothy 2:20-26 – “The Vessel God Uses”

Summary Statement:

Paul reminds Timothy that within the house of God there will exist servants that will serve in honor, and some in dishonor. The charge is to purify ourselves from that which is fleshly and pursue that which is spiritual. Then we'll be vessels of honor.

Outline:

1. The Purpose for Purity – 2:20-21
2. The Pursuit of Purity – 2:22-23
3. The Patience in Purity – 2:24-26

1. The Purpose for Purity – 2:20-21

2:20 - *But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.*

It's good to remind ourselves of the passage that preceded what we're going to look at today because it provides some important context for us to help us connect to what Paul is addressing here.

Last Sunday Pastor Cole took us through vv. 14-19 where Paul was again reminding Timothy to stay true to the Word of God despite false teachings spreading through their midst like cancer. Even though false teachers are creeping into the church, *“the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’...”* (2 Timothy 2:19).

So we need to recognize that nothing is going to thwart the work of God or His church. Jesus said that even *“the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”* (Matthew 16:18).

Paul writes this to remind Timothy to not give up. Though there may be enemy infiltration, there is still a work of purification that will be accomplished. Because this is God's house, and God will see to it that His work will continue.

So, Paul continues to build on this imagery of true believers and false converts. We've seen that God has laid the foundation. And what do you do with a foundation? You build a house. So, we picture the house now.

What is this house? In the context we have before us, it pictures the place where all believers and professing believers congregate. This is the church. And throughout history it has become a **great house**.

And within a house you will see all kinds of different furnishings or utensils. Some are for noble purposes and others for ignoble purposes.

Paul makes a clear distinction between these vessels that are being illustrated.

- Some are **vessels of gold and silver**. This implies they are vessels that have a special purpose for them. You don't use a bowl made of gold for a dog food dish. These are set aside for special purposes.
- If you're doing a backyard BBQ with friends, you're not bringing out the fine China (**gold and silver**); you've got the Dollar store paper plates (**wood and clay**) that are usually a little thinner than a conventional paper towel. You're lucky to get them back to your lawn chair before your food is dropping through the center of them.

Paul's point is that within the church we're going to see two very different types of people – those who uphold the truth, and those who do not uphold God's truth. Though they may all give the impression that they are servants of the Lord, their service will either be honorable or dishonorable based on their faithfulness to God's Word.

So, Timothy doesn't need to be surprised by false teachers or corruption in the Church. God knows those who are His.

- In fact, Jesus revealed this very reality when He spoke on the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). These two grow alongside one another and at first are indistinguishable from each other. But when you recognize the tares, pulling them up may cause harm to the wheat. But in the end, God will make the proper judgment and separation.
- This is not to mean that Timothy just needs to let these false teachers have their way, but he must not be surprised when they pop up, and he must remember that God will deal with them.

So how do we ensure that we are being vessels of honour, rightly serving our Lord?

2:21 - Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

The key is sanctification. Setting ourselves apart for God's Work. The dishonorable work is when we are serving ourselves or corrupting the truth of God's Word – when we're not rightly representing God. That's what these false teachers were doing. And we're to cleanse ourselves from the latter – speaking of the practices of these false teachers.

God wants us being useful instruments, or vessels for the Lord. You wouldn't pull a glass out of the dishwasher that hasn't been washed yet to give a drink to a guest that dropped in. That wouldn't be a useful cup. It still has a film on it from the last drink.

In the same way, we're called to cleanse ourselves from the filth that can easily get attached to us so that we can be set apart for the Lord's use – ***useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.***

- I'm so glad that God desires to make us useful. We can all sometimes feel like we're a little bit useless. Maybe you've been told that before. But God's desire is to use you, and He's prepared you for every good work. Think about that.
- **Ephesians 2:10** says that, *"we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."*

Now we are created for good works, but we must prepare ourselves to carry out these good works. Part of that work is setting ourselves apart to God and for the service of God.

There is a work that God does in cleansing us and sanctifying us, but there is also a work that we do in cleansing ourselves from things that may defile. Paul says that we must willfully separate ourselves from those that are living dishonorably. Have nothing to do with them. Paul is speaking of those false teachers and those corrupting God's Word.

- If you separate (cleanse yourself) from such dishonorable people, you will be useful for the Master. Just as we have gold vessels, or our good china set aside for special purposes, God too uses those who have been set aside in purity for special purposes.

So how do we go about purifying ourselves? Paul gives us some instruction in the remainder of this chapter:

2. The Pursuit of Purity – 2:22-23

2:22 - *Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

Timothy needed to be aware of the temptations that would seek to grip his heart. These lusts are not just the lusts of the flesh or of a sexual nature as we would often connect this to. It certainly contains that, but it encompasses all desires that originate from the flesh – power, greed, pride, fame, desire for wealth, an argumentative spirit, selfish ambition, etc. Timothy was to flee all these kinds of vices that feed the flesh.

Now we often think of Timothy as a guy fresh out of youth group. But in this day “the term youth was not confined to the teenage years. In fact, only two phases of life were recognized – youth and old age.”¹

Still, he needed to avoid activities that would stir up physical desires. I imagine he had to protect himself from unnecessary arguments with people who were trying to misinterpret the Scriptures. Perhaps he would have preferred to resolve conflicts physically rather than just praying for them. Paul advises Timothy, and us, to deal with these temptations strongly and swiftly. Flee from these things. There’s no time to consider your options, you gotta run!

- The problem however is most people who flee temptation leave a forwarding address. Don’t leave the door open. That’s why Paul says it’s not enough to flee what’s wrong, you need to follow after what’s right.

This is all very reminiscent of what Paul already instructed Timothy in his first letter (**1 Timothy 6:11**, *"But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness."*).

We can live a life of saying no to this and avoiding that, but if we’re not feeding ourselves what is good and growing in that which is of the Lord, we’re going to be lacking.

- Where a person ends up in life and their effectiveness for the kingdom is greatly determined by what it is they flee, and what it is they pursue.

So, Paul lists 4 qualities that we’re to be pursuing. Interestingly that word for

¹ Larson, K. (2000). *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Vol. 9, p. 288). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

pursue is the same Greek word for *persecute*. These are things we're to be going after with an intensity; not to destroy but to seek after with fervency.

So pursue:

- **Righteousness** – this is about doing what is right rather than the righteousness we have imputed to us by faith in Jesus. It's doing that which is right and just toward our fellow man.
- **Faith** – this may simply be speaking of faithfulness and continuing on in service. It could be speaking of the ongoing dependence he is to have on the Lord.
- **Love** – this is not only about loving God with all our heart soul and mind, but it's about loving our fellow man as well. Love is sacrificial and giving. This is where we consider others better than ourselves so we can properly care for them.
- **Peace** – Paul said in **Romans 12:18**, *"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."* This is to be our aim. There will be those who live contrary to the things of the Lord and will not want to be at peace with you. This is why Paul adds here in 2 Timothy that this is peace that should be attainable with **those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart**. This should always be our goal – pursuing peace with those around us. This ties in with the next warning Paul gives...

"This double duty of Christians—negative and positive—is the consistent, reiterated teaching of Scripture. Thus, we are to deny ourselves and to follow Christ. We are to put off what belongs to our old life and to put on what belongs to our new life. We are to put to death our earthly members and to set our minds on heavenly things. We are to crucify the flesh and to walk in the Spirit. It is the ruthless rejection of the one in combination with the relentless pursuit of the other which Scripture enjoins upon us as the secret of holiness. Only so can we hope to be fit for the Master's use. If the promise is to be inherited ('he will be a vessel for noble use'), the condition must be fulfilled ('if any one purifies himself from what is ignoble')." ²

2:23 - But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.

² Stott, J. R. W. (1973). *Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy* (p. 75). InterVarsity Press.

Some people like to argue because they just like the sound of their own voice. Some people dispute from a place of ignorance. They don't have their facts straight. They've been listening to the latest wingnut online who has a few followers and now thinks he's an authority.

- Some people participate in such disputes as sport. But it only shows their ignorance [*apaideutos*] which speaks of being undisciplined and uneducated.

The result of this arguing is that it only brings about strife. We should be people of peace not strife. Strife is the fruit of false teachers, whereas those who are walking in God's truth should have the fruit of peace.

So don't engage in things that are not going to cause you to be a vessel of honor. Avoid them.

3. The Patience in Purity – 2:24-26

2:24-25 - *And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, ²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,*

Arguing just does not profit. There are times we need to stand up and contend for the truth, but the things that Timothy was dealing with just didn't need to be engaged in.

The word for ***quarrel*** speaks of having a war of words. People were ready to come to blows based on disagreements. But Timothy was not to engage in this. In fact, any servant of the Lord needs to be careful how they engage with others. Because the servant of the Lord is to be ***gentle to all***. Not just those they like, but gentle ***to all***.

When there are disagreements, or an attack against the truth, the leader needs to do his best to teach through it – patiently. They're not to push buttons and cause the arguer to become even more argumentative. Rather, seek to correct those in opposition humbly, patiently, prayerfully. The goal is to see them come to repentance, ***so that they may know the truth***.

- This verse sounds kind of strange in that it seems God grants repentance to some, and to others He doesn't. We know that all who call on the Name of the Lord shall be saved. God is not choosing some to be saved and some to perish. This verse more precisely speaks of how servants of the Lord should

be seeking to win souls and not arguments. We want to see people come to that place of recognizing that they need Jesus and thus repent.

- God is willing and waiting to forgive all people who will turn to Him with an attitude of repentance – that is to see the error of their sin and to turn from this way of sin. The problem is not with God’s willingness, but with man’s willingness to admit their wrong.

So we need to pray that people will come to their senses on these things.

2:26 - *and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.*

When people recognize they’re under the sway of the evil one to keep them blinded to the truth, we trust they will come to their senses and repent. In doing so they escape the snare of the devil who is only out to steal, kill, and destroy. Much better to be set apart for the Lord than to be captive to the devil.

God is looking for vessels He can use. He doesn't require vessels that are impressive – He requires vessels that are clean, surrendered, and available. So flee what defiles you, pursue what makes you more like Christ, and when people oppose you, don't become a vessel of strife. Be gentle. Be patient. Be humble. Because the goal isn't to win the argument – the goal is to see the person set free. Don't settle for simply being a vessel in God's house. Be a vessel of honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

Points to Ponder:

1. Have I settled for being a “wood and clay” vessel when God is calling me to be gold and silver?
 - Usefulness to the Master is not automatic. It requires both God’s cleansing work and my willing separation from what defiles.
2. Fleeing without pursuing leaves a vacuum. What am I actively pursuing in its place – righteousness, faith, love, peace?
3. Do I treat disagreements like a servant of the Lord or like a combatant?
 - When truth is challenged, is my default posture gentle, patient, and humble – with the goal of the other person’s repentance, or do I slip into quarrels that only generate more strife?