

Keep Yourself Pure

2 Timothy 2:20-22

Although our text for today is actually 2 Timothy 2:20-22, we will begin reading with verse 19 because it sets the stage for the thoughts we will be dealing with today.

2 Timothy 2:19-22 (NLT):

¹⁹ *But God's truth stands firm like a foundation stone with this inscription:*

"The Lord knows those who are his," and "All who belong to the Lord must turn away from evil."

²⁰ *In a wealthy home some utensils are made of **gold and silver**, and some are made of **wood and clay**. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use.*

²¹ *If you keep yourself pure, you will be a **special utensil** (vessel)¹ for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.*

²² *RUN FROM ANYTHING THAT STIMULATES YOUTHFUL LUSTS. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.*

This passage begins with a call to avoid wickedness, a call to "turn away from evil." It is a charge to keep ourselves pure in mind and body. Then we are given an illustration as Paul refers to utensils or vessels in the home.

A vessel in the Bible describes a container often used for liquids. The most common vessels were of earthenware (clay)² followed by baskets, and vessels of metal, skin, stone, and wood. Pottery vessels included bowls, basins, jars, flasks, pots, and goblets. They were used for storage and transportation (of water, oil, grain, and olives). They were also used for cooking, eating, drinking, and presenting offerings. Vessels of gold, silver, copper, and bronze were employed in the tabernacle and Temple service.³

In 2 Timothy 2:20 and 21, Paul tells Timothy that GOD HAS PLACED BELIEVERS IN THE CHURCH THAT HE WANTS TO USE IN HIS SERVICE. The people to whom He provides salvation are His vessels. Some become vessels who **honor** God and some are vessels of **dishonor**.⁴ If you are a believer, you are a vessel that God wants to use to accomplish His will for all mankind. **It is up to you** to determine if

¹ Parentheses mine.

² Jer. 18:4; Rom. 9:21; figuratively, 2 Cor. 4:7.

³ Exod. 37:16; Num. 7:85; 2 Kings 25:14; see Mark 11:16; the RSV translates *skeuos* as 'anything.'

⁴ George T. Brooks, – *Expositions from the Book of Second Timothy*, (Austin, TX: WORDsearch Corp., 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Vessels to be Used by God".

you are going to be a vessel of gold, silver, wood, or clay.

“At the beginning of the Reformation, Martin of Basle came to a knowledge of the truth, but, afraid to make a public confession, he wrote on a leaf of parchment: ‘O most merciful Christ, I know that I can be saved only by the merit of thy blood. Holy Jesus, I acknowledge thy sufferings for me. I love thee! I love thee!’ Then he removed a stone from the wall of his chamber and hid it there. It was not discovered for more than a hundred years.

“About the same time Martin Luther found the truth as it is in Christ. He said: ‘My Lord has confessed me before men; I will not shrink from confessing Him before kings.’ The world knows what followed, and today it reveres the memory of Luther; but as for Martin of Basle, who cares for him? ⁵

You might want to ask yourself right now how you would rate yourself on a scale from one to ten between Basle and Luther, one being Basle and ten being Luther.

Now we will begin taking a more in-depth view of these verses.

2 Timothy 2:20:

²⁰ Now in a **large house** there are not only **gold and silver vessels**, but also vessels of **wood and of earthenware**⁶, and some **to honor** and some **to dishonor**.

In a house that is large in size, we would probably see all kinds of furniture, pots, pans, and other utensils. This is a picture of the **Church** which is made up of all kinds of people who have the potential to be used by God. Some can be very useful because they bring **honor** to the Church and therefore to Christ. Some can hardly be useful at all because they bring **dishonor** to the Church and to God **by the way they live their lives**.

The faithful church members are those who are of greatest value to the church. These are the **vessels of gold**, those whom God can fully trust. A Christian’s faithfulness is dependent on his/her relationship with God. The stronger our relationship with God becomes the more He can and will use us. God uses those whom He can trust.

The faithful are those whom Paul called vessels of gold in the large house.⁷

⁵ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

⁶ Clay.

⁷ op cit., Brooks.

Paul also mentioned that there were **silver vessels** in the house which were less valuable than the gold. These represent people in the church who are less faithful, people you can depend on most of the time but not all the time. The silver vessels are people who have only partially surrendered their lives to Christ. Which of these vessels do you believe Christ would prefer using? Vessels of gold bring greater honor to Christ than vessels of silver.

Vessels of wood and clay are vessels that are used for less important functions and they are easily disposed of and replaced. I believe we could therefore conclude that vessels of wood and clay bring far less honor to the owner of the house than those of gold and silver.

There are too many Christians who are satisfied with being wood and clay vessels of dishonor. They have little motivation for being faithful, loyal, dedicated, devoted, and committed. They want the salvation Jesus offers, but they do not want to give back any service for the One who saved them. This was a heads-up for Timothy to remain faithful, to be a vessel of gold.

You might want to ask yourselves right now whether you are a vessel of gold, silver, wood, or clay.

Paul uses the figure of a vessel in several other letters as well to describe Christians. For instance in 1 Thessalonians 4 he wrote:

1 Thessalonians 4:3-4:

³ *For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from **sexual immorality**;*

⁴ *that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in **sanctification and honor**.*

This is very similar to what Paul has been saying to Timothy in chapter two. Then when writing to the Corinthians Paul said this:

2 Corinthians 4:7:

⁷ *But we have this treasure in **earthen vessels**, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;*

We are to recognize that the power for whatever we do in our human vessel does not come from our willpower alone, but actually comes from God the Holy Spirit who lives within those of us who are Christians. Michael Millican, pastor of Lakeland Bible Church in Florida, has said, "For years, I tried to be what God wanted me to be and I always failed. Why? I was trying to serve God in my strength, not His power." Jesus said in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him,

bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”⁸

Now, coming back to 2 Timothy 2, the **large house** represents **the Church of God**, the body of Christ, composed of all true believers who are the **vessels** referred to here—the honorable **gold and silver vessels** and the dishonorable **vessels of wood and clay**.

Gold and silver would be primarily used for decoration or for serving important guests to make them feel honored. The items of wood and clay were plain, inexpensively replaceable, unattractive, and often dirty. Some were used for the garbage and human waste of the house. To display them before guests would be considered in very bad taste (**dishonor**).

Let us understand that:

“Honor and dishonor do not refer to believers and unbelievers. Jesus makes clear in the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13:24-30 and in His teaching about the sheep and goats judgment of the nations in Matthew 25:31-46 that **the Church on earth will contain both unbelievers and believers** until He returns and orders the final separation. But Paul is not speaking here in 2 Timothy about those events.”⁹

Timothy is writing to the church in Ephesus and making it clear that among them are people, “vessels,” both of honor and dishonor. **The honorable vessels** represent believers who are faithful and useful to God and Christ. By contrast, the dishonorable **vessels** are those people who dishonor God and themselves by their behavior. They are only capable of performing the lowliest of tasks. **Honor and dishonor** therefore refer to the ways in which **genuine believers** are found useful to God in fulfilling the work to which He has called them.¹⁰

All believers should be, but are not always, vessels of honor.

Some **Ephesian** leaders, including Timothy, were becoming discouraged and feeling inadequate in their service to the church. Part of the problem was that false teachers such as Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus, were making them feel inferior, inadequate, and fearful of failure.¹¹ Paul seems to be trying to inspire Timothy. “It is worth noting that the name *Timothy* comes from two Greek words which together mean **‘God-honoring.’** Paul was encouraging Timothy to live up to his name!”¹²

⁸ From [http://llakelandbiblechurch.org/Sermons/beatitudes/Pure In Heart.htm](http://llakelandbiblechurch.org/Sermons/beatitudes/Pure%20In%20Heart.htm)

⁹ John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary – 2 Timothy*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 86-90. Emphases added.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *The Bible Exposition Commentary* © 2001 by Warren W. Wiersbe. All rights reserved. First printing 2003 Printed in the United States of America. Database © WORDsearch Corp., 2005.

In verses 21-26, Paul identifies what qualities are part of the faithful believer who brings honor to God:

- ☞ A cleansed life
- ☞ A life committed to living as sin free as possible
- ☞ Being useful to God
- ☞ Being prepared for service
- ☞ A pure heart
- ☞ A mind that is able to anticipate what is right
- ☞ A gentle manner
- ☞ A humble spirit
- ☞ Compassion¹³

So as we move on to look at verse 21 we see that Paul is encouraging Timothy and others to cleanse themselves so that they might be vessels of gold.

2 Timothy 2:21:

*Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from **these things**, he will be a vessel for honor.*¹⁴

“**Cleanses**” is from *ekkathairo*, an intensified form of *kathairo* (the Greek word from which we get ‘*catharsis*,’) which means to clean out thoroughly, to completely remove any impurities, including impure motives. One commentary has said that “the Greek word *katharos* speaks of more than a person's motives. There are many sincere people whose motives are pure who never come to God. . . . Truly pure motives always produce holy deeds. . . . A person may think his motives are pure and say he is religious, but if his deeds aren't in accord with God's Word, his heart isn't focused on God.”¹⁵

“**These things**” in verse 21 refer to the “**vessels of dishonor**” mentioned in the previous verse. If these vessels of wood and clay can get their act together and realize that they are not bringing honor to God by the way they live their lives, and that they need to develop the qualities just listed, then they can be of meaningful service to God as vessels of gold. Paul may also be suggesting here that **believers separate themselves from associating continually with impure believers**, who are not clean, not obedient, not submissive to God and Christ, and not eager to serve.¹⁶

“Sin is contagious, and hanging out continually with openly sinful and shameless people can draw you into their lifestyle.” Listen to Solomon's advice: ‘*He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm*’ (Proverbs

¹³ Op. Cit. MacArthur.

¹⁴ Silver and gold.

¹⁵ From <http://lakelandbiblechurch.org/Sermons/Beattitudes/PureInHeart.htm>

¹⁶ Op. cit, MacArthur.

13:20). God also said this through the prophet Isaiah:¹⁷

Isaiah 52:11:

Depart, depart, go out from there, Touch nothing unclean; Go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, You who carry the vessels of the LORD.

“An immoral and/or corrupt believer, especially a leader who is influential, is more dangerous than a pagan or atheist, because weak or careless brothers and sisters may assume—or rationalize—that certain practices and ideas are permissible simply because they are practiced and taught by some church leaders.”¹⁸

Warren Wiersbe comments that “A useful human **vessel of honor** does not get involved in the popular things of the world, even the ‘religious world.’ He must remain holy, and this means he must be separated from everything that would defile him.”¹⁹

Paul spoke the following to believers in Corinth:

1 Corinthians 5:9-13:

⁹ *I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people;*

¹⁰ *I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.*

¹¹ *But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.*

¹² *For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?*

¹³ *But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.*

A few verses back we read in:

2 Timothy 2:16-17:

¹⁶ *But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness,*

¹⁷ *and their talk will spread like **gangrene**.*

If you associate regularly with Christians who are wood and clay, there is a good chance that some of their sin will rub off on you. “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Op. cit. *Bible Exposition Commentary*.

“It is said that the Christian writer C.S. Lewis was approached by someone who wanted to compromise his walk with the Lord: a little sin here and there, a little worldliness. He felt that the Lord must surely forget the sin if he was a fairly good Christian; after all, a little sin isn't so bad, is it, if everything else were okay?

“C.S. Lewis answered by saying: ‘No clever arrangement of bad eggs ever made a good omelet.’”²⁰

Faithful service to God requires that you do not have steady contact with brothers and sisters who might lead you astray.

Jeremiah 15:19 (NLT):

¹⁹ *This is how the LORD responds: “If you return to me, I will restore you so you can continue to serve me. If you speak good words rather than worthless ones, you will be my spokesman. You must influence them; do not let them influence you!”*

The writer of Hebrews gives this sobering warning:

Hebrews 12:15 (ESV):

¹⁵ *See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;*

Bitterness, even in a believer who has a pure heart, is highly destructive and can seriously demoralize and weaken an entire congregation, and so can the other behaviors we have discussed that are outside the will of God.

Refusing to associate with sinning believers is also for their own benefit. If they are not disciplined and are readily accepted into church fellowship while living a sinful lifestyle, they will become more comfortable in their sin. Being asked to leave the church for a time and to begin living in obedience may help them become ashamed and repentant. *“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame”* (2 Thessalonians 3:14).²¹

Now we must consider carefully what is best for the sinning believer. If he/she is openly committing sin where it is obvious to members of the church, then the above action is warranted. However, if the sin is being committed where it is not known to anyone else in the church, except perhaps the pastor, then we believe the pastor needs to make a determination whether the person can benefit from being in fellowship with the others and the teaching of the church, or whether the sin is such that the person might lead others astray.

²⁰ From <http://bradzockoll.tripod.com/youthworker/id2.html>

²¹ Ibid.

For example, suppose a person is addicted to heroin and uses only in the privacy of their apartment alone, and has been seeking help through a twelve-step program as well as spiritual counseling with the pastor. In that situation we believe the person may benefit from their involvement with the church. Asking him/her to leave the church might just drive them further into their addiction. Remember the major theme of this passage is to turn vessels of wood and clay into vessels of gold and silver.

Now we need to be aware that there is also a sad mixture in the Church today of saved and unsaved people united in the same church-fellowship. There are those who know Christ as Savior, and those who have never had enough faith to make that request, and consequently **prevent themselves** from receiving the blessing that would go along with a genuine faith and commitment to Christ. If you want to please the God who has provided you salvation and eternal life, you must separate yourself from all that is unclean. Then you “*will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.*”²²

2 Timothy 2:22:

²² *Now flee from youthful lusts and **pursue** righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

“The distinguished pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church in New York, Dr. Maltbie Babcock was approached by a physician, a member of his congregation, who was concerned about his [Dr. Babcock’s] health. Handing Dr. Babcock some theater tickets he said, ‘Take these. You need the recreation of going to this play.’ His pastor looked at them. Seeing they were tickets to a play of the kind he could not conscientiously attend, he said kindly, ‘Thank you, but I can’t take them. I can’t go.’ ‘Why not?’ the physician asked.

“‘Doctor, it’s this way. You’re a physician; a surgeon, in fact. When you operate, you scrub your hands meticulously until you are especially clean. You wouldn’t dare operate with dirty hands. I’m a servant of Christ. I deal with precious human souls. I wouldn’t dare to do my service with a dirty life.’”²³

“*Flee from youthful lusts.*” Paul warned about lusts or immoral behavior, as well as those passionate feelings and impulses which young men and women are drawn to. In arguments young people are more likely to

²² H. A. Ironside, *H. A. Ironside Commentary – Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, (San Diego, CA: Horizon Press, 1947), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 208.

²³ Tan, Paul Lee: *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers*. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979. Brackets added.

become angry and lose their tempers quicker than those who are older. They make more mistakes from lack of experience and rush into things more often without carefully considering what should be or needs to be done. Paul primarily wants to help Timothy avoid useless arguments.²⁴

“Pursue righteousness.” Paul recommends the qualities which are opposite of those things that might result from the hasty decisions that young people often make. First, Paul mentions righteousness, which is a right way of living; then he includes **faith and love** which is what creates righteousness. **Peace** is an important quality to pursue because it will help control any inappropriate action that could result from the kind of youthful impulses that we just discussed. Peace also speaks of the quality of your interpersonal relationships as well as of the quality of your relationship with God. The Lord has promised to give peace to those who love Him with all their hearts. He has called us to “. . . *so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*” (Romans 12:18).

So what kind of vessel are you? Are you fleeing the lusts and temptations that would try to pull you away from the Lord? Are you actively pursuing righteousness in all that you think and all that you do? Try practicing these disciplines in your life this week and come back next week and tell us if you noticed any difference in your life.

²⁴ Ibid.