

Keep Yourself Pure

2 Timothy 2:20-22

We will start 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 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 believers to turn away from any kind of unrighteousness, evil, or wickedness, a call to “*turn away from evil.*” It is a call to keep ourselves pure in mind and body. Then Paul uses an illustration to help them better understand, comparing behavior to utensils in a home.

A **vessel** in the Bible describes a container often used for liquids. The most common vessels were of earthenware (clay)¹ 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.^{2 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 who have declared their faith in Christ are **God's vessels**. Some become vessels who honor God and some are vessels of dishonor.⁴ **If you are a**

¹ Jer. 18:4; Rom. 9:21; figuratively, 2 Cor. 4:7.

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

³ 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".

⁴ Ibid.

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 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

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 earthenware⁶, and some to honor and some to dishonor.

In a large house you would very likely see pots and pans and various cooking utensils. This is the Church which is made up of all kinds of people who are useful to God. Some can be more useful than others by bringing honor to the Church and to Christ. Then there are those who are hardly useful at all and bring dishonor to the Church and to God by the way they live.

Those vessels that are useful to God and trustworthy are vessels of gold. A Christian’s behavior depends on the kind of relationship he/she has with God. As our relationship with God gets better He can rely and trust in us more, and will therefore use us more. God uses those He can trust.

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

Paul also spoke of vessels made of silver in the house which were less valuable than those of gold. These people are somewhat less faithful but can be trusted much of the time. These people have not chosen to give their lives completely to Christ. Vessels of wood and clay are vessels that are not used at all for anything important. They just could not be trusted with any of the important work. Which of these vessels do you think Jesus would prefer using?

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.

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.

Paul uses the figure of a vessel in several other letters as well to describe Christians.

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 need to be aware that the power for whatever we do in our human vessel comes from the Holy Spirit who lives within those of us who are believing 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.”*

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 dispel them before guests would be considered to be in very bad taste.

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.”⁸

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 least important jobs. **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. All believers should be, but are not always, vessels of honor.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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!”¹¹

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
- ☞ Compassion¹²

Then 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 gold.

2 TIMOTHY 2:21:

*Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor.*¹³

“**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. “The Greek word *katharos* speaks of more than a person's motives. There are many

⁸ John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary – 2 Timothy*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 86-90. Emphases added.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *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.

¹² Op. Cit. MacArthur.

¹³ Silver and gold.

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.**"¹⁴

"These things" in verse 21 refers 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.¹⁵

"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 13:20). God also said this through the prophet Isaiah:¹⁶

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 doctrinally 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."¹⁷

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 defile¹⁸ 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.*

¹⁴ <http://lakelandbiblechurch.org/Sermons/Beattitudes/PureInHeart.htm>

¹⁵ Op. Cit, MacArthur.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Corrupt; dishonor

¹⁹ Op. Cit. *Bible Exposition Commentary*.

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).

"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.

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

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

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

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

²¹ Ibid.

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