

In a Great House

II Timothy 2: 20-22 Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.

21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

A man used to visit a tiny general store in the country.

The owner had a clerk named Jake, who seemed to be the laziest man in the world.

One day the man noticed that Jake was gone.

He asked the owner, "Where's Jake?" "Oh, he retired," was the answer.

"Retired? Then what are you going to do to fill the vacancy?"

The owner replied, "Jake didn't leave a vacancy."

That leads me to ask, "What kind of vacancy would there be in the church if I left?"

It is God's clear intention that every one of His people be used in serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

He has given gifts to each one to be used as good stewards.

And yet for so many, personal faith is sometimes like football—an occasional Sunday spectator sport.

They are not serving Christ day by day by day.

But if you truly know Christ, you can't be happy sitting on the bench or in the stands.

You want to be in the game.

Our text reveals the kind of person God uses.

You may think that God uses people who have impressive abilities and gifts.

While spiritual gifts play a part, they are not the only feature in being used by God.

As we have seen in the national news before, a person may be a gifted Christian leader and yet bring terrible disgrace to the name of Christ.

Or you may think that God uses a person who has been to seminary and has a lot of training.

While seminary has its place, I know of many men and women who graduated from seminary, but they're not even in the stadium, let alone in the game!

Or you may think that God uses a person who has a great knowledge of the Bible.

Being careful students of the Bible is very important, it is still not the only thing.

You may be a renowned Bible scholar, and yet be detrimental to the cause of Jesus Christ.

The simple message of our text is that God uses cleansed people, who are defined by two characteristics:

God uses cleansed people who flee sin and pursue godliness.

Paul is telling Timothy how to deal with some difficult problems in the church of Ephesus, where he was ministering.

In the verses just before today's text, he encouraged Timothy to use the scriptures properly, not as Hymenaeus and Philetus, whose false teaching had led some astray.

He reminds Timothy, (*II Timothy 2: 19* *“But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.”*)

Now he urges Timothy to be a cleansed man who flees sin and pursues godliness, summed up under four qualities: *righteousness, faith, love and peace with the Lord’s true people.*

Paul uses the illustration of a large house that has different kinds of vessels.

The gold and silver vessels are kept clean so that they may be used for honorable purposes, such as dinner parties.

The wood and earthenware vessels are used for dishonorable purposes, perhaps in the kitchen or to carry out garbage, or maybe even human waste.

They often get broken and are cheaply replaced.

It would be easy to misapply Paul’s point here.

If you took his illustration to its logical conclusion, you could say that the dishonorable vessels serve a legitimate function and thus are just as necessary as the gold vessels.

But that’s *not* his point.

Rather, the large house represents the professing or visible church.

I believe that most people who associate with the church are truly born again.

Others, such as the false teachers Hymenaeus and Philetus, are probably not born again.

They are the vessels for dishonor.

Paul is saying that no one should be a vessel for dishonor.

To put it another way, he is saying that God isn’t going to use a garbage pail life to serve the pure gospel to a hungry world.

Can you imagine being a guest at a wealthy home, where you're seated around a magnificent table?

The kitchen door swings open and the cook comes out with a garbage pail and starts dishing the food out of the pail.

Even so, God isn't going to use dirty lives to serve the good news of Christ to the world.

Rather,

1. God uses cleansed people (2 :20-21).

Note three things:

A. You must choose the type of vessel you want to be.

Clearly, Paul is presenting us with a choice: Do you want to be a gold or silver vessel, used for honor, or will you be a cheap clay pot, used for dishonor?

Again, you may think, "Well, both are used of God, aren't they?"

The answer is, "Yes, but you don't want to be used as a vessel for dishonor!"

It's interesting that Paul uses this illustration in **Romans 9:21-23**, although with a different emphasis:

21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?

22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,

23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—

In that text, Paul is emphasizing God's sovereign right to do as He pleases with His creation.

As the potter, He can do whatever He wants with the clay, and the clay has no right to challenge the potter.

But in **2 Timothy 2: 20-21**, Paul's emphasis is on our responsibility to cleanse ourselves from the defilement of sin, especially the sin of false teaching, so that we will be vessels for honor.

The Bible is clear that as the Sovereign of the universe, God uses even evil people for His righteous purposes.

He uses Satan and the demons, even though they are opposed to Him.

In Moses' day, He raised up Pharaoh and used him to demonstrate God's power (**Rom. 9:17**).

He used Judas in His plan of putting Jesus on the cross.

Acts 4: 27-28 explains, *"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."*

As **Proverbs 16: 4** puts it, *"The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil."*

If you're thinking, "Then we're just robots or puppets," you're wrong!

The Bible also clearly declares that each of us is a responsible moral agent.

Although God ordained that Judas and Herod and Pilate would play roles in crucifying Jesus, each of those men were guilty sinners, responsible for their own terrible sins.

You will fall into error if you let go of either God's absolute sovereignty or man's full responsibility for his own sins.

Paul's point in our text is, you have a choice: Will you be a filthy vessel that God uses for dishonor?

Or, will you be a clean vessel that God uses for honor?

You are accountable for your choice!

B. Cleansing starts as your responsibility.

Note in **verse 21**, “**Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things....**” In the context, “**these things**” in this instance, refers to the false teachings that were being spread.

It’s worth noting that false teachings are not just mental mistakes—they are *sins* that need to be cleansed out of our lives!

When Paul says that a person needs to cleanse himself, he is not teaching that by our own efforts we can atone for our sins.

If you could do anything in and of yourself to deal with your sin problem before God, then the death of Christ was pointless.

But you can and must avail yourself of the means of cleansing that God has provided in Christ.

And that is *your* responsibility.

If you come into the house dirty after a day of working in the yard, you don’t lick yourself clean like a cat!

Rather, you make use of the soap and water to cleanse yourself.

The soap and water are the means of cleansing.

But you make use of them by applying them to your body.

God provided the blood of Jesus as the means of cleansing us from all our sins (**1 John 1: 7,9**).

There is a sense in which we are completely clean the moment that we trust in Christ as Savior.

But we walk in the world, where we can get defiled.

When we confess our sins, we apply the blood of Jesus to our dirty lives.

To be a vessel for honor, you must walk in the light, confessing all known sin to God.

Vessels of dishonor walk in the darkness and do not cleanse themselves from sin.

So, you must choose the type of vessel you will be.

Cleansing yourself to become a vessel of honor is your responsibility.

C. Cleansed people are useful to the Master and prepared for every good work. (2: 21).

1. Cleansed people are sanctified.

The word means, “set apart” unto God.

It is used three ways in the Bible.

Through the death of Christ, believers have been sanctified once for all (**1 Cor. 1: 30; 6: 11; Heb. 10: 10**).

As we grow in Christ, we should be continually conforming to His image (**2 Cor. 3: 18; 7: 1; 1 Thess. 4: 3-7**).

Finally, when we see Jesus, we will be like Him, which is *ultimate* sanctification (**1 John 3: 1-3**).

In our text, Paul is talking about the process of sanctification.

We must be growing in the process of being separate from all doctrinal and moral evil, set apart as clean vessels for the Lord’s use.

2. Cleansed people are useful to the Master.

“Master” is the Greek word from which we get our word *despot*.

It emphasizes Christ’s absolute Lordship.

Paul’s point here is that dirty vessels are not useful to the Master, except for purposes that you don’t want to think about.

Have you ever been in a restaurant and discovered a previous customer's dirty egg crusted on your fork or plate?

You would rightly demand a clean fork or plate.

The dirty one is not useful.

In the same way, if our minds embrace false teaching and our lives are tainted by sin, we are not useful to our Master.

3. Cleansed people are prepared for every good work.

Prepared, has the idea of being willing and ready.

The cleansed vessel is waiting for the Master to pull it off the shelf and put it to honorable use.

Dirty vessels are not ready to be used in this manner.

Have you ever been grumbling about something when you encountered a brother or sister who needed a word of encouragement or prayer?

Because of your present spiritual situation, you didn't even notice the need, let alone respond appropriately.

But if you are cleansed, you're ready to serve the Lord in any good work that He sets before you.

Paul's point, **(2: 20-21)** is that God uses cleansed people.

He goes on to show what this looks like in practice:

4. Cleansed people flee from sin and pursue godliness (2: 22).

There are two commands, **flee** and **pursue**.

We are to flee from youthful lusts and pursue what we may sum up as godliness, broken down under four qualities: **righteousness**, **faith**, **love** and **peace** with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart, that is, peace with other believers.

“Now flee from youthful lusts....” We usually associate the term with sexual temptations, but as one older seminary professor told me, “Men, they aren’t just *youthful!*”

The word translated “lusts” may refer to any desires, although it usually refers to sinful desires.

So, while sexual temptation may be included in “youthful lusts,” it may not be the primary focus.

Paul was probably referring to wrong desires that younger men are more prone to than older men are.

However, as an older man, I will humbly offer this warning, It’s not just young men that suffer from this spiritual malady, or the phrase, “Dirty old man,” would not exist.

Also, Paul was telling Timothy that while it is right to defend the faith against serious errors and to stand firm on the central doctrines of Scripture, there is a right and a wrong way to go about it.

He will go on **(2: 23-26)** to explain the right way.

Here, he is warning against the wrong way, which is to be arrogant about how much you know, impatiently to blast those in error, and to be argumentative and self-assertive.

When you look at the fruit of the Spirit it includes things like patience, kindness, and gentleness, along with self-control **(Gal. 5: 22-23)**.

Being young and impetuous is not on the list!

Paul says to flee from these youthful temptations.

The Bible also commands us to flee from some other sins.

1 Corinthians 6: 18 says, ***“Flee immorality.”***

You don’t flirt with it.

You don't just stand there and pray about what to do.

You don't get near it.

If it comes knocking, run for your life!

1 Corinthians 10: 14 says, "**flee from idolatry.**"

You may be thinking, "Well, at least that one isn't a problem for me! I'm never tempted to set up an idol."

Really?

You're never tempted to set up anything in the place that rightfully belongs to God alone?

Run from anything that pulls you away from full devotion to God!

1 Timothy 6:11 tells us to flee from the **love of money.**

Do you look at the rich and think, "I want to live that way"?

Run!

Are you tempted to be greedy rather than generous?

Run!

Cleansed people flee from sin.

5. Cleansed people pursue love.

You say, "Well, I'm just a naturally loving person!"

I hate to be the one to break it to you, but no, we are naturally selfish!

That's why Paul commands, "Pursue love!"

That requires getting your focus off yourself and onto others, so that you can treat them as you would want to be treated.

It means giving your time to listen to someone who is hurting.

It means befriending someone who is lonely.

Sometimes it means having the courage to talk to a brother (or sister) who is in sin with the aim of restoring him to the Lord.

It means being patient, kind, considerate, and not easily provoked.

Pursuing love means investing constant effort to love others.

6. Cleansed people pursue peace with all who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Peace usually doesn't just happen.

You have to pursue it deliberately, sometimes with much effort.

It is debatable whether the comma should be inserted after "peace."

With the comma, the sentence means that you should join with other believers in the common pursuit of peace.

Without the comma, the idea is that the peace that you should pursue should be with other believers, here described as those "who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

"Pure" is related to the verb "cleanses" (**2: 21**), and thus refers to a heart that has been cleansed from sin.

The implication of the command is that even though Christians all call upon the name of the Lord out of hearts that have been cleansed from sin, they still will have conflicts and misunderstandings with each other.

Thus, they need to pursue peace with one another.

The other day I came across a T-shirt that had a picture of a Dinosaur on it.

The caption read, "Let's eat kids."

Then it said, "Let's eat, kids."

Then it said, "Punctuation saves lives."

The world's way of dealing with misunderstandings or conflict is to nurse hurt feelings, to spread gossip, and to stand up for your rights.

God's way is to go directly to the one who offended and seek to be reconciled.

Jesus said that this is so important that even if you are worshiping, leave your worship and first be reconciled to your brother or sister; ***Matt. 5: 23-24.***

Recognizing that it is difficult, Paul said (***Rom. 12: 18***), "***If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.***"

Pursue peace!

Conclusion

It's a great honor for an athlete to be put into the starting line-up of a big game.

But even greater than the honor of being used by the coach is to be used by God.

To be in His starting line-up, you don't have to have great talents.

To be used by God, you have to be a cleansed person who constantly flees from sin and pursues godliness.

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1. God uses cleansed people (2: 20-21).

A. You must choose the type of vessel you will be.

B. Cleansing is your responsibility.

C. Cleansed people are useful to the Master and prepared for every good work (2: 21).

1. Cleansed people are sanctified.

- 2. Cleansed people are useful to the Master.**
- 3. Cleansed people are prepared for every good work.**
- 4. Cleansed people flee from sin and pursue godliness (2 :22).**
- 5. Cleansed people pursue love.**
- 6. Cleansed people pursue peace with all who call on the Lord from a pure heart.**