

Final Words

Vessels of Honor

2 Timothy 2:20-26

March 10, 2019 pm

HDBC

Tonight we return to Paul's last N.T. letter, 2 Timothy. He wrote it while in prison in Rome for the last time. He would not return to freedom in this life, but would be executed for his faith in Christ. He wrote Timothy to instruct and encourage him as he not only served as a pastor of a local church but as a leader of other pastors.

We are gradually working our way through this short book. In some ways it is unfortunate that there are so many long gaps between our sessions. We lose some of the continuity. So, I want to encourage you to read the entire book from time to time, just to keep the general flow of the book. Tonight we will look at a section that compares us to utensils used in a house. As these utensils (vessels) in a house that are used by the master of the house we are vessels in the hand of Jesus to be used by Him.

To be effectively used by Jesus, we need to be competent in what we know. That is why Paul wrote what he did in 2:15. It is a call to be proficient in the Bible, to know what it says, to study it and learn it. If our knowledge is flawed then our attitudes and actions are likely to be flawed as well. But knowledge alone is not enough. I have certainly seen examples of that!! I've known my share of people who had knowledge, but were not very effective as instruments in the hand of Jesus.

Character is also critical! Character speaks of inner qualities that ultimately show up on the outside. Honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility, diligence. These are examples of positive character qualities. Character reflects who we are and is seen by what we do. As the shadow of his impending death slowly filled his prison cell, Paul seems burdened to make sure Timothy understands the importance not only of knowledge but of character.

This section (2:20-26) addresses the importance of character.

1. The Illustration (20)

Paul's illustration comes from one of the most common scenes imaginable. He draws out attention to a large house which contains all kind of vessels. Bowls, plates, cups, pitchers, pots, etc. In the days prior to indoor plumber another important vessel would have been the chamber pot. Reserved for human waste. **Vessels** also referred to furniture and tools.

In this house some are made of gold and silver and others of pottery Good china for special guest and everyday dishes that are used when its only us. There is nothing wrong with common vessels in a house They are essential.

Paul's point is the household of faith in similar. Just as there are all kinds of vessels in a house there are all kinds of vessels in God's family. We are not all the same. We are not all called to do the same things. Variety and diversity are a reality in the family of God and this is **good!**

Paul then moves to apply the illustration.

2. The Expectation (21)

As Paul continues to write, it becomes clear that he is using these two classes of vessels to distinguish between the kind of vessels we want to be like and the ones we want to avoid. In a house, both kinds of vessels are important, the fancy and the plain. That is not his point here. He is using them to illustrate character. In terms of character, Paul is calling on us to be more like the gold and silver vessels, not like the ones made of clay.

The expectation is that we will strive to be vessels of honor. Be assured that this not a contrast between those who are truly saved and those who are lost. Both groups here are true believers. Honorable vessels represent believers who are faithful and useful to the Lord Dishonorable vessels represent those who are lazy, impure, undisciplined in their walk with Christ.

Paul uses a conditional statement to help us understand our responsibility in this process. There is one **if statement** followed by four **then statements**. The responsibility for being a vessel of honor is on us. We have to act. If we do, then certain things will be true.

Note what we are called to do. *If a man cleanses himself.* Our responsibility is to cleanse ourselves. Remember, the issue here is not salvation. That kind of cleanses only comes through faith in Christ and is a gift from Him. This kind of cleanses must come from us, in his power.

Cleanses – ekkathairo. Catharsis, which means cleansing of emotions through a powerful experience. Paul uses an intensified form of this verb which implies one who has been thoroughly scrubbed and disinfected. Once this cleansing has been done, there are four results.

1) ***Vessel of honor***

Going back to Paul's illustration, this is not simply a reflection of the inherent worth of the vessel but of the fact that it can be used to serve the best that can be offered even to special guests. A cleansed vessel can be used for an honorable cause.

2) ***Sanctified***

The word means *to be set apart for a special or specific purpose.* Kitchen knives are not to be used for repairing the car. They are set apart for a different purpose. We have Christmas dishes that are specifically set apart to be used at Christmas. They have a specific purpose.

3) ***Useful to the Master***

Valuable or profitable. Quality tools are important in the hand of the master craftsman. A great mechanic does not generally pick up his tools at K-mart or Walmart. A successful artist does not buy materials at the Dollar Tree. They would not be useful to the master.

4) ***Prepared for ever good work***

Literally, *one who has been made ready.*

Paul then offers instructions for how we can cleanse ourselves. The goal is to become a vessel of honor. The expectation is that we will cleanse ourselves in order to do so. Here, now are some examples of the kinds of things that will result in a cleansed vessel.

3. The Instructions (22-26)

Paul then offers a series of instructive statements to help us become and remain clean vessels. If followed, these instructions will result in the following character traits. These seven things are a reflection of the one who is a vessel of honor, sanctified, useful to the master and prepared for every good work.

1) Pure mind (22)

Pure mind can only be achieved when we run from the bad stuff and run toward the good stuff. The bad stuff is described as ***youthful lusts***. The good stuff is described as ***righteousness, faith, love, peace***.

Youthful lusts can certainly refer to sexual temptation, and it does. But, it also includes lust for money, power, position, admiration and more. Anything that robs a person of his or her contentment. It is not enough to empty a vessel of that which is unclean, it must be filled with that which is good.

Note that Paul calls upon us to strive for a pure mind in fellowship with others who are striving in the same direction. We were never meant to walk the path of righteousness alone. That does not mean marriage is the ultimate answer. Friendship, fellowship, companionship are dependent upon marriage. Whether married or single, we were meant to live and grow in community with other believers.

2) Grounded theology (23)

Ignorant – moronic, uninformed speculations. Pointless debates over things that are not defined in the Scripture and therefore are not essential. ***Speculations*** refers to that which is seriously disputed and is controversial. Not basis in truth. ***Refuse*** literally has the idea of begging off, or making excuses to avoid.

We need to know what we believe, not being influenced by the bad theology of others, but we must also avoid unnecessary and often damaging debates with unbelievers and other believers who want to argue interpretations and applications. **Twitter and Facebook have greatly intensified this problem!**

3) Kind heart (24)

There seems to be a subtle shift in verse 24. In a general way all of these principles and challenges apply to all believers. But there is a more specific application to those who would be leaders in the church. This becomes more pronounced in this verse. We are all **bondservants** of the Lord, but it seems that Paul is using it in a more specific way here.

Paul contrasts quarreling with kindness. It is hard to do one if the other is present. If you are kind you will not quarrel. Kindness is better.

Leaders don't fight, they influence. Leaders are gentle, friendly, tender.

4) Ability to teach (24)

Church leaders must be able to lead others to know and understand what God has revealed. That comes from teaching. Spiritual leaders must be ready, willing and able to pass along biblical truth. For most, this does not come naturally, but can be learned and developed.

5) Forgiving spirit (24)

Patient when wronged. This may be one of the most valuable character traits we can develop, not only as leaders but also as individual believers. We must get over the belief that we deserve to go through life without being offended or attacked by others. Some people walk around with a chip on their shoulder and a hair trigger, expecting to be offended. Let's let go of that approach to life.

6) Gentle approach (25)

One of the responsibilities of spiritual leaders is correcting those who are in opposition to what God is doing in and through His church. Leaders are to do this with gentleness. A gentle spirit in the process of confronting and correcting very well be the difference between a major church crisis and a minor bump in the road.

Jesus used this term to describe Himself. It speaks of being under control, exercising gentleness without surrendering strength. Gentle strength.

7) Unselfish focus (25-26)

The goal of correction is always redemption. The desire is never to be punitive, but always restorative.

How do I know if I am a vessel of honor or dishonor?

Diagnostic Questions:

1. What am I avoiding and what am I pursuing?
2. Do I avoid useless debates or participate in them?
3. Am I more inclined to quickly forgive or desire revenge?
4. Do I sincerely desire the redemption of trouble-makers, influenced by Satan?