

MBC – 2/14/2021 Pastor Doug Thompson preaching  
 2 TIMOTHY – THE LAST WORDS OF PAUL  
**“Useful to the Master”**  
 2 Timothy 2:20-26

God has brought us again in our study of God’s Word to 2 Timothy. I believe He wants to do a deep work in each of us this morning through this passage, so let’s read it together—

- 2 Timothy 2:20–26 <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. <sup>23</sup>Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. <sup>24</sup>And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, <sup>25</sup>correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup>and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

***This passage answers the question:*** “How can I be useful to my Master, the Lord Jesus Christ? How can I be one of the vessels of gold and silver that He uses for His most important tasks?”

As a baby Christian, I read through the NT, over and over – at least 3 or 4 times a year – I didn’t have the entire Bible yet, but I was loving what I had! And 2 Tim.2:20-21 was one of my favorite passages, I must have heard it preached by John MacArthur back when he used the KJV Scofield reference Bible, because I memorized “*a vessel for honorable use*” as “*vessel unto honor.*” And I told God constantly that I wanted to be one of those “*vessels unto honor.*” I would write at the top of my notes in Bible school: V.U.H. – I thought about starting a club and calling it “Vessels Unto Honor!”

But as I was studying it again this week I saw how it exposes our hearts with this question: “Do I even *want* to be useful to my Master, the Lord Jesus Christ? Do I care? Is that the greatest desire of my heart?” Shouldn’t it be – to be useful to Jesus, who died for us? Remember that vision of Isaiah back in Isa.6 – he was in God’s holy Temple and heard the voice of God say, “Who will go for Me, and whom shall I send?” And Isaiah immediately says, “Here am I Lord, send me!” Is that you? Or have other things crowded Jesus out of your heart?

I pray that God does such a work in our hearts this morning, that nothing brings us greater joy than being useful to our Master - Jesus.

(Can we pray?) This passage tells how we can be vessels unto honor, useful to our Master—

### **I. Explaining the metaphor: what are the pots?**

- 2 Timothy 2:20 <sup>20</sup>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.

This is a simple picture. We all get it: You’ve got your nice china and silverware for when the company comes over. But when it’s just you and the family, it’s dixie plates and red solo cups, right? Or, truth be told, some of you just stand at the fridge and eat with your hands, but I’m not preaching on manners. . .

In Paul's day it was the same way: people had nicer "vessels" – pots and jars that were made of gold and silver. Remember in the Gospels how Mary broke that alabaster jar full of expensive perfume that she poured on Jesus' feet. They all knew what it meant to have the nicer kitchenware for special purposes and special occasions.

But for everyday use, they used pots and pans made out of wood, or clay. It didn't matter if they broke or were damaged – just throw them out and get some more.

- And Timothy and the church would have known what Paul meant by the vessels for dishonorable use: they didn't have flush toilets in those days, they used "privy pots" that they kept inside – and the servant who drew the short straw had the job of emptying the privy pots . . . Reminds me that Sir Thomas More, when he wanted to insult Martin Luther called him a "Privy pot!"

## II. Applying the metaphor: who are the people?

- 2 Timothy 2:21 <sup>21</sup>Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from ~~what is dishonorable~~ (not in the Gk., it just says "these") he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master ~~of the house~~, ready (or *prepared*) for every good work.

So here's what Paul is saying: In God's house, the *church*, there are two types of *believers*: those who are more useful to God – and those who are less useful. He isn't dealing with who's saved and who isn't. He's making one simple point: Even in God's house, when it comes to usefulness in service to Christ, God has His fine china and He has His dixie plates and red solo cups.

- And sorry if that sounds harsh. We have to remember that the Bible was written by primitive, backwards people who were not as 'woke' as we are! Now we know that we're all the same in every way. We never call anyone foolish, or ignorant, or lazy ( like the Bible does!) We're all fine china, and everyone gets a trophy.

Well, that's not what God says: He says that even among His beloved children, some are more useful to Him than others. Gold and silver – wood and clay.

And I want you to understand that this is not the same point as the Potter and the clay illustration that Paul uses in Romans 9. There, the point is *God's sovereignty* in choosing some to be saved, and passing over others for salvation. Here, Paul is putting all the weight on *human responsibility*: In this illustration, all the pots are elect, and it's the pots, not God, who determines their usefulness.

- i.e., As God's child, *you* are responsible to cleanse yourself from what is dishonorable – *you* make the choice to flee youthful passions; *you* are to have nothing to do with stupid quarrels. And *you* are to correct your opponents with gentleness. *You* – not God. So if you end up as a privy pot in the house of God, don't blame God. That's on you – not on God.

\*We talk so much about the sov. of God around here, that we get kinda nervous and shift in our seats when we read about our own responsibilities – sounds Arminian! No, Scripture teaches both: on the one hand, only God can cause you to grow and make progress in any of this – amen? But your sanctification is *synergistic* = God working with and through your hard work—

- Philippians 2:12–13 work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (that's your part, and here is God's), <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Oh, this is so important for us to understand: In your sanctification, God's work follows yours: the more you strive to "work out your own salvation," the more you can expect to see God work in you, "both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

- So you don't have to sit there and wonder: "What kind of vessel will I be in God's house?" Nope, no mystery involved here. You will determine that. It's up to *you* whether you are a vessel unto honor – or a bedpan . . .

That's what it says: v.21 "Therefore if anyone (any believer in God's house) cleanses himself. . . he will be a vessel for honorable use." And *God* will say, "Here's a child I can use for My highest purposes!"

I hope that now, you can't wait to find out the answer to the question—

### III. "How can I be useful to my Master?"

How can you make yourself holy, useful, and ready? Well there are things you must *flee*, and things you must *pursue*—

#### A. *Flee*—

##### 1.) *False teachings and false teachers.*

- 2 Timothy 2:21 <sup>21</sup>Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use . . .

In the Gk. it just says, "If anyone cleanses himself from "these" – these things, but what is that? Well what was he just warning Timothy about in vv.14-19?

v.14: quarreling about words.

v.16: irreverent babble that leads to ungodliness and spreads like babble.

v.18: then he gives two examples of false teachers – Hymenaeus and Philetus

He brings it up again in—

- 2 Timothy 2:23 <sup>23</sup>Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

And Paul is going to bring up false teachings and false teachers *again* and *again* in chs.3 and 4. It's really striking. Satan and his demons are ruthless in seeking to obstruct, and distract from the *work*, while they also seek to pollute and corrupt the *message*. So the *first* thing in being useful to the Master, is to avoid being a casualty in this spiritual war! You must avoid false teachings and false teachers. You can't allow yourself to get sucked in.

#### ***The sword and the trowel.***

This is serious: We can't just whistle a happy tune and plan our VBS and the next church picnic, oblivious to our enemy! The perfect illustration of what we are doing is found back in Nehemiah, when he was overseeing the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem. They were under constant attack from their enemies. Listen—

- Nehemiah 4:15–23 <sup>15</sup>When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. <sup>16</sup>From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, <sup>17</sup>who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. <sup>18</sup>And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. <sup>19</sup>And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, “The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. <sup>20</sup>In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” <sup>21</sup>So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. <sup>22</sup>I also said to the people at that time, “Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day.” <sup>23</sup>So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand.

Charles Spurgeon entitled his magazine, “The Sword and the Trowel.” He knew that there’s no such thing as Gospel ministry without intense spiritual warfare. We’re always building and fighting at the same time. And God’s Word is our tool for building, and also our weapon for fighting – right? It’s our sword and it’s our trowel!

\*God is saying to you this morning, that *you* – Christian – must purge yourself of any false teachings, and avoid false teachers and their distractions if you want to be useful to your Master.

As your shepherd, I plead with you to think about what God is saying here. How many times do I hear: “Oh pastor, can’t we just be positive and encouraging? People are hurting!” I know that. And they will hurt more if they end up in hell. I.e., “Pastor, just use the trowel, and put down the sword! It puts people off when you criticize other religions, and call out other preachers.”

- “I don’t like it when you talk about the Roman Catholic church, my aunt is a Catholic and she loves Jesus. . .” I hope she does, but the Catholic church is an apostate, false teaching, false-church, and if you believe what it teaches, you *cannot* be saved. How unloving and unfaithful would I be if I didn’t tell you the truth!
- People have left this church because we teach against false teachings and false teachers – and even name names! But beloved, Paul did this, out of love for the church – and Jesus did this – even named names, out of love for His church. We can never put down the sword because our enemy still goes about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour! Some of you still have his teeth marks in you, amen?

And listen to what the Spirit is saying here: “You won’t be a vessel for honorable use, if you minimize, tolerate, or ignore false teachings and false teachers.” Why? Because we are called to be faithful stewards of the *truth* – right?

I can make it very simple. When God looks for someone He can use, He looks for the Christian who carries *both* the sword – and the trowel. Then we must flee—

## **2.) Youthful passions.**

- 2 Timothy 2:22 <sup>22</sup>So flee youthful passions . . .

Your Bible might say, “Flee youthful lusts,” the Gk. word is *epithumia*, which can mean sexual lust. Certainly a vessel useful to the Master must be sexually pure. Satan has used sexual temptation to ruin many men and many churches. And do you notice that Paul doesn’t say, “Fight youthful lust!” No, he says “Flee!” Flight not fight is the way to deal with sexual lust. If you linger too long, if you look too long, you’re a goner.

When Potipahr’s wife was hitting on him, he didn’t stay and fight, he said, “Feet don’t fail me now!” Have you ever seen in Proverbs how many times Solomon warned his son to *stay far away* from immorality?

- Proverbs 6:23–25 <sup>23</sup>For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, <sup>24</sup>to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress. <sup>25</sup>Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes. “Don’t stare at those eyes, son!”
- Proverbs 6:27–29 <sup>27</sup>Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? <sup>28</sup>Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? <sup>29</sup>So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; none who touches her will go unpunished.
- Proverbs 5:7–8 <sup>7</sup>And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. <sup>8</sup>Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house,

Don’t see how close you can get, see how far away you can stay! Flee. All that said, that’s not the youthful passions Paul has in mind here. V.23 explains the youthful passions Timothy must flee—

- 2 Timothy 2:23 <sup>23</sup>Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

It’s the temptation to get lured into word-wars, the irreverent babble, useless arguments and majoring on minors. Paul knows that would be a real temptation – for Timothy to roll up his sleeves and give his opponents a piece of his mind. But it would waste precious time, it wouldn’t change the minds of these people – and it would bring out the worst in Timothy. Nothing brings out our flesh like getting into a useless argument, right?

- I’ve known as many pastors who lost their ministries due to pride and spiritual bullying as due to immorality. Two men I taught with at the seminary lost their churches due to stubborn arrogance – one of them bragged that he ran his church with an iron fist! That’s not like Jesus.

Sometimes we need to stand our ground and fight: for truth, for love, for those who are suffering – but many times, we need to run from a fight if it’s just a waste of time – if the person on the other side is unteachable. We all know what Proverbs says—

- Proverbs 26:4 <sup>4</sup>Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.

Jesus said it another way: “Don’t cast your pearls before swine.” Don’t waste your breath on someone who has their hands over their ears. But what does the next verse in Proverbs say?

- Proverbs 26:5 <sup>5</sup>Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

There is no contradiction: Sometimes you answer – sometimes you don't. But how do you know when to apply v.4 and when to apply v.5? When to flee or when to fight? – Let me tell you, you start on your knees, with prayer! And great humility. I pray daily for wisdom in this – when to speak, and when to bite my tongue—

- And it's not just a matter of the other person's receptivity – it's also a matter of my own spiritual condition. If I'm not filled with the Spirit, I should keep my mouth shut.

Know when to *flee* from useless, unprofitable conversations—

- Proverbs 20:3 (NLT) <sup>3</sup>Avoiding a fight is a mark of honor; only fools insist on quarreling.
- Proverbs 17:14 (NLT) <sup>14</sup>Starting a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so stop before a dispute breaks out.

I read about a pastor who had the discernment and the guts to do that—

- One large-church pastor had two persistent critics. He gave them time and emotional energy, but nothing blunted their hostility. Finally, one critic was in his office, lambasting him, while the church's staff-oversight committee met nearby. His patience depleted, the pastor stood up and pointed: "The pastoral oversight committee is meeting in the next room. If I am the derelict you say I am, they need to know about it now and begin the process that will end in my dismissal. Let's go." Whoa!
- When the critic blanched, the pastor said, "If you don't take your charges seriously, then neither will I," and refused to meet with him again. Later, he took the same approach with a second critic: "If what you say is true, the presbytery needs to begin church discipline against me. Let's call the chairman of the committee now." When she declined his invitation, he declined to meet her again.

I want to meet this guy! I need to sit at his feet. And we have a biblical example of this in Nehemiah – he had serious enemies. That's why he always had his sword in one hand! But he didn't let them jerk him around—

- Nehemiah 6:1–4 <sup>1</sup>Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), <sup>2</sup>Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm. <sup>3</sup>And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" <sup>4</sup>And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.

I love that: "You're phonies, I'm busy doing God's work, so take a hike!" Repeat 3 times! This is just what Paul meant when he said: "If you want to be useful to the Master, *flee* from foolish, time-wasting controversies." But he also tells Timothy—

### ***B. What to pursue.***

- 2 Timothy 2:22 <sup>22</sup>So flee youthful passions and *pursue* righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

This is so good: “Timothy, apply yourself to being the kind of person who knows when and when not to speak – and being the *right kind of person* when you *do* speak!” Put your passion into pursuing—

- righteousness, faith, love, and peace – He said almost exactly the same thing in his first letter—
- 1 Timothy 6:11 <sup>11</sup>But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

Work on godliness – and you won’t have the *appetite* or the *time* for foolish arguments. But when they come up, and they will, this is a checklist for your own heart to know if you are ready to deal with them in a way that will honor Christ—

1.) Am I filled with the Spirit? Love, joy, peace. . . .

2.) Will this bring glory to God?

- 1 Corinthians 10:31 <sup>31</sup>So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

3.) Will this contribute to love and peace in the body?

- 1 Corinthians 16:14 <sup>14</sup>Let all that you do be done in love. And—
- Romans 14:19 <sup>19</sup>So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

And don’t miss the last part of v.22: Pursue all of these “*along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*” If you want to be useful to the Master, you must hang out with people who seek Him, people who are pursuing a pure heart. Does this deserve a whole sermon?

- Proverbs 13:20 <sup>20</sup>Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.
- 1CO 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."
- Proverbs 14:7 <sup>7</sup>Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge.
- PSA 1:1-2 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.
- Psalm 119:63 <sup>63</sup>I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts.

And finally, Paul instructs Timothy on—

***C. How to deal with those who oppose.***

- 2 Timothy 2:24–26 <sup>24</sup>And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil.

Again Paul accentuates the positive: be intentional and aware to be *kind* with people. – able to instruct from God’s Word (instead of arguing over your own opinions), “Patently enduring evil” is just one Gk. word – don’t blow up! Don’t react with anger, but be patient, count to 10! And look carefully at what Paul says next—

- <sup>25</sup>correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup>and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Now does this seem out of place to you? How can you correct your opponents if you’re warned over not to get into it with them? Well he’s obviously talking about people who are open to listen – these aren’t the “swine” Jesus talked about who just want to turn your words against you. And they aren’t the “mockers and scoffers” of Proverbs who are beyond instruction – Solomon said, “Don’t try to correct them, just drive them out!” These people are willing to listen.

But who are they? Well they’re wrong, and need to be corrected, and they’re in sin, and need to repent. And in fact, they’re unbelievers because they haven’t come to “*a knowledge of the truth.*” But by God’s grace, you have an opportunity to talk to these people, and you have two objectives—

**1.) You seek to correct them.** – not argue with them – not simply get something off your chest, or set the record straight. And what is that brings correction?

- 2 Timothy 3:16–17 <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction.

You want to bring an unbeliever to the Word of God. Whatever the issue on *their* mind, you want to answer it with God’s Word – not your own arguments and opinions. Because your prayer and objective is that—

**2.) You want God to save them.**

- God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, (only God can do that, right?) <sup>26</sup>and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Paul reminded Timothy, and he reminds us: unbelievers are not our enemies – they are prisoners of war – blinded by Satan—

- 2 Corinthians 4:4 . . . the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

And only the Gospel can cut the barbed wire around their hearts, open their eyes, and set them free! Isn’t that what God wants too?

- 2 Peter 3:9 . . . not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.
- 1 Timothy 2:4 . . . [God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

And what is it that can open the door for God to do His saving work in opponent's heart. One word: "25-correcting his opponents with *gentleness*."

Gentleness can open locked doors and break down barriers. It disarms people. It takes them off the defensive. Gentleness has the power to win people over. This is amazing—

### **1.) Those who are angry:**

- Proverbs 15:1 <sup>1</sup>A **gentle** answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

### **2.) Those who are caught in sin:**

- Galatians 6:1 <sup>1</sup>Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of **gentleness**.

### **3.) Those who are unsaved:**

- 1 Peter 3:15 <sup>15</sup>but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with **gentleness** and respect,

### **4.) Disobedient husbands:**

- 1 Peter 3:1 <sup>1</sup>Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives when they see your respectful and pure conduct (and) . . . the imperishable beauty of a **gentle** and quiet spirit. . .

Jesus draws His enemies to Himself by His gentleness—

- Matthew 11:28–30 <sup>28</sup>Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am **gentle** and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Isn't that why you come to Jesus? Doesn't He always correct you in gentleness when you are in opposition to Him? What a gentle Shepherd we have for our souls!

I know we have covered a lot this morning, but what is God saying to you? Is it your deepest desire to be used by God? Is there anything in your life, any idol, that is competing with that desire? What do you need to flee to be useful to God? And what do you need to pursue?

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Back in 2012, I went to Uganda to preach, to do a marriage conference, and to train pastors there. As we were getting ready to come home Pastor Vanensio received an invitation from a pastor in Southern Sudan to come and preach to pastors there. That was a dangerous place for Christians, and Dustin and I had to get home, but Greg Reed from CBC and Vanensio and David Kabaale – another African pastor, decided to accept the invitation. So they made their way to Sudan.

Once they got there, they discovered that the pastor who invited them was a liberal who rejected the authority of the Scriptures. And the more they taught, the more he opposed them and contradicted

everything they were saying. It was very discouraging. They wanted to be useful to God, but it looked like this one man was going to stand in the way. This is what David Kabaale wrote to me:

- “We tried to tell him we were teaching what the Bible teaches but all fell on a deaf ear; we tried to ask him if we could pray together and the pastor said he didn't want to pray with us which amazed all of us. After the meetings, we cleaned the church as everyone had left and rearranged it which broke his heart to come and talk to us again . . .”

What broke this man's heart? They *proclaimed* God's Word, but it was the way they *lived* God's Word that pierced his heart.