

Letters From My Father
Week 26
2 Timothy 2:14-21
“Called to Holiness - Part 1”

Introduction

Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as The One Who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct, for it is written, “Be holy, because I AM holy.” **1 Peter 1:13-16**

If we were to go around the room this morning and ask everyone here if they would like to be used by God for His glory, I dare say that most if not all of us would answer in the affirmative. That being said, then why is it that so many, who call themselves “Christians”, today have little or no impact in this world of any real or lasting significance? The answer isn’t as complicated as one might imagine. Just as any good mother would use only clean utensils to serve food to her children, God only uses clean vessels to minister to those that He loves. And apart from God, we can do nothing on our own (**John 15:5**). Simply put, God only uses holy people. You cannot have one foot in this world and the other foot in the kingdom and accomplish anything for God. You cannot stay where you are and go with God.

The Scriptures are clear on this matter, but sadly, many so called “churches” don’t really pay that close attention to The Scriptures these days. This is why the church at large is ineffective and anemic, having little impact upon the world to which we have been sent to share God’s truth. Pastors these days are far more concerned with appeasing the people, rather than preaching truth. And like it or not, the truth we need is often painful and even offensive to our fleshly natures. We would much rather hear how far we’ve come, or how good we are, than take a hard look in the mirror to correct any flaws.

Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works — this person will be blessed in what he does. **James 1:21-25**

As the Apostle Paul awaited his execution in Rome, his mind was set on the furtherance of the gospel and the kingdom of God. And Paul knew one thing for certain, if the message of God’s grace was to have any lasting impact, it must be carried, guarded, and shared by a holy people. His desire, more than anything, was that his son in the faith, Timothy, (whose name means “one who honors God”) would be such a vessel that God could use for His glory. And so, in his last correspondence with the young pastor in Ephesus, he urged Timothy to be diligent in matters of holiness.

As we read this passage today, we will see just the kind of man that God uses, and also get a bit of insight into those who will oppose us, in this our holy calling. To be used of God, we must be Steadfast in our faith, Sealed by The Spirit and called to be Separate from this world and its false teachings. To accomplish these things we must, as James has said, be not only hearers of The Word, but doers as well. We need to be cleansed so that we can be used. For the next few weeks let us each examine our hearts in regards to personal holiness. For without holiness, no one will see The LORD (**Hebrews 12:14**).

Steadfast (vs. 14-18)

Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to fight about words. This is useless and leads to the ruin of those who listen. Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth. Avoid irreverent and empty speech, since those who engage in it will produce even more godlessness, and their teaching will spread like gangrene. Hymenaeus and Philetus are among them. They have departed from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and are ruining the faith of some. **2 Timothy 2:14-18**

Paul wanted Timothy to share everything that he had written in the letter; his charge to be dutiful as a soldier, dedicated as an athlete, and diligent as a farmer, along with the hymn of the faithful, with his congregation at Ephesus. He wanted the church there to brace itself for the persecutions that were sure to come and to embolden them to stay committed to the cause of Christ no matter the cost. For the gospel, our sacred entrustment, is far too valuable a thing to discard even at the cost of one's freedom or even their very lives. This was the urgency of the moment, and Paul knew that for such a time as this, what was needed was courageous and committed soldiers of the cross. So he charged Timothy to lead by example.

He also wanted to remind his timid protege that it was useless to engage with those who wish to dispute over truth. **Truth does not have to be argued to make it so.** It simply *is*. Jesus has not called us to be obnoxious in the defense of the faith. For there are some who will never believe no matter what we say. To argue with them is pointless. I am reminded here of the many debates one can observe online between apologists for the faith and staunch atheists. No one ever truly "wins" those debates. Paul calls this type of activity "fights about words" (literally "*word fights*" in the Greek). I would dare to say that no one has ever been won to Christ in a shouting match.

Wherever Jesus preached the kingdom of heaven, he often repeated this phrase, "***He who has ears to hear, let him hear!***" This simply means the message is available for all who are ready and willing to accept it, but no one will be forced to accept it. Its called "free will", and God has given this to us for a reason. No one will be forced into the kingdom of God. But they would be wise to heed the call of God. But sadly, no matter what we say, or how compelling we say it, some will never accept the call. That is not the time to argue further. It is, however, the time to walk away. Christ Himself has said:

If anyone does not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. **Matthew 10:14-15**

Paul goes on to admonish Timothy to "**be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching The Word of truth.**" This verse has been translated in several different ways. The **KJV** begins by saying "**Study to show thyself approved...**" For this reason, many have speculated that Paul is speaking here of a pastor faithfully studying his *Bible* in order to teach others the truths of God's Word. While this is completely necessary, it isn't actually what the original intent of the phrase actually means.

The word the **KJV** renders as "study" is better translated to be "diligent" or even "steadfast". He is speaking here of Timothy's need to be consistent in his teaching. And in a manner of speaking, that does indeed require a careful study of God's Word. But there is more to consistency than just studying. Many people know their *Bible* pretty well, but far fewer actually live according to its teachings. Timothy not only needed to *know* The Word, but he needed to be a *living* example of it as well. No one ever wants to hear the teachings of a hypocrite!

The **KJV** renders the next portion of the verse as "**rightly dividing the word of truth**", whereas the **CSB** translates it "**correctly teaching the word of truth.**" While it is true that every pastor is required to know how *The Bible* is to be handled and to correctly disperse The Word, so there can be no

error in doctrine, the Greek word Paul uses here is rather complex. “*Orthotomeo*” in the Greek literally means *to cut something in a straight line*, such as a farmer would plow with straight rows before he plants his seed. The **KJV** translators assumed this meant the properly dividing of Scripture, in order to teach it clearly. We as pastors are taught to interpret Scripture in the light of other Scripture, for God’s Word never (despite what its critics might say) contradicts itself. So therefore, when *The Bible* is properly “divided and disseminated”, it will be clear and comprehensive. Which is without question a true statement.

That being said, this may not have been Paul’s intent, when he used the word *orthotomeo*. One of my heroes in the faith is Pastor Charles “Chuck” Swindoll, who is currently the senior pastor of Stonebrier Community Church in Frisco Texas. In his commentary on *1 and 2 Timothy*, he points out the the word *orthotomeo* was actually a metaphor for practicing what you preach. The word is only used once in the entire *New Testament* and twice in the Septuagint (Greek version of the *Old Testament*) and both of its uses in the OT are in reference to living according to God’s word or will. It would be akin to us saying, “Always make sure that you walk the line.”

If this is indeed the metaphor that Paul is using here, it fits perfectly with the context of the passage. So these verses could very well be rendered to say; “*Timothy, make sure to teach the folks back home the spiritual truths I have shared with you here. Be consistent in your teaching so that they will all know the truth. Don’t waste your time arguing with foolish men who will never believe you. And whatever you do, practice what you preach!*”

Paul goes on to give an example of those we should to avoid in ministry. The false teachers *Hymenaeus* (pronounced hoo-men-ah-yos), whom Paul had expelled from the church at Ephesus (**1 Timothy 1:20**), and one of his disciples *Philetus* (fil-ay-tos’) had been spreading false teaching about the resurrection, undoubtedly so they could discredit Paul and entice many to fall into sin. Paul compares their doctrine to gangrene, for the way it had spread so rapidly. There is a reason for this reality. False teaching is *always* designed and intended to appeal to the fleshy desires of men. And it is for this reason that it is so readily accepted by the masses. For it offers them the kind of doctrine their wicked hearts already crave. Things like repentance and holiness are removed from the menu, as they are replaced with the so called “prosperity gospel”, along with a license to sin. But the fact will always remain, without holiness, no one will see The LORD. So if we are to be called holy, we must be steadfast in our hearing and doing The Word of God avoiding falsehood at all cost.

Sealed (vs. 19a)

Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, bearing this inscription: The Lord knows those who are His... 2 Timothy 2:19a

Paul’s disdain for the false teachers who oppose God and His servants is on full display here. The reference that He quotes is from **Numbers Chapter 16** and is a reference to what is known as “*Korah’s rebellion*”. Korah, the son of Izhar, was a Levite who was jealous of Moses’ leadership over Israel, especially since Aaron, Moses brother, had been chosen to be the High Priest over the people. Korah was ambitious and desired to have more authority within the religious structure of Israel. So he rallied some foolish supporters, and they confronted Moses, even accusing him of choosing his brother as High Priest without God’s input.

Moses commanded the rebellious ones to assemble and let The LORD demonstrate who was His chosen one, saying, ...“**Tomorrow morning The LORD will reveal who belongs to Him, who is set apart, and the one He will let come near Him. He will let the one He chooses come near Him.**” (**Numbers 16:5b**). Paul, an old Pharisee, used this illustration from Israel’s history to remind Timothy, that God knows who He as chosen and whom He has not! Those who would oppose the chosen people of God will get what is coming to them. So there is no need to worry.

Paul described God’s people as being “*marked with an inscription*” (**vs. 19a**). The actual Greek reads, “*They bear God’s seal.*” It is a comfort for us to know that as Believers in Christ, we are sealed by

The Spirit of The Living God (**Ephesians 1:13**), and nothing can separate us from His love (**Romans 8:38**). Timothy, who was timid by nature, should have been encouraged at the reminder of God's promise from generations past. When God calls someone, He pledges to be with them always. False teachers, persecutions, trials, temptations, and even death itself can never remove the enduring seal that God has placed upon those who are His.

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, not height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our LORD. Romans 8:38-39

So take heart, oh soldier of the cross, you have been sealed by The Holy Spirit of God, and you have nothing to fear, for *The LORD knows those who are His!*

Separate (vs. 19b-21)

....and let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness. Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also those of wood and clay; some for honorable use and some for dishonorable. So if anyone purifies himself from anything dishonorable, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. 2 Timothy 2:19b-21

So, are you wondering what ever happened to old Korah and his cohorts in rebellion? God told Moses to warn everyone who didn't want to share their fate to step away from those wicked men (**Numbers 16:23-26**). And then the ground opened up and swallowed them all alive! So much for Korah's great rebellion and takeover. God knows those who are His, and those who aren't His, well... it never ends well for them in the end.

As Believers, we are commanded to separate ourselves from sin and sinful people. Simple as that. That's called "*holiness*" my friends, and it's not a suggestion. It's a requirement. **You cannot stay where you are and go with God.** If you want to know the reason that so many who call themselves "Christians" aren't having any real impact, that is the reason. You have to abide in Christ in order to be fruitful, and Christ doesn't use dirty dishes to feed those He loves.

Paul continues by saying that in every house there are items used for noble purposes and some for dishonorable. The word "holy" simply means "set apart" for a higher purpose. Did you know that your toilet, and your fine china are made out of the exact same thing? One is set apart for a noble purpose and the other... not so much! I find it interesting that these items are made of clay, just like us. Some people, who are made from clay, live their lives in self-serving fleshly worldliness. Those people will not survive the Great White Throne of Judgment (**Revelation 20:11-15**).

Then there are the other set of people made from clay. They have repented of their sins and placed their faith in Christ. They shall have eternal life with Him when He returns. When the two options are considered, is there really any other choice to make? Sadly, many will choose foolishly to continue to live for themselves, rather than become a vessel of honor for God's glory. So which path have you chosen?

As Paul continues to describe in detail those who have purified themselves in order to be useful to God, we can see a stark contrast between what is good and what is evil, what is true and what is false. We will continue to examine what this holiness looks like in the coming weeks, but for now, each of us must examine ourselves, not in a superficial way, but with intensity, looking into the "mirror" of God's Word in order to see where we do not measure up. For in all things the Believer in Christ longs to please Him (**2 Corinthians 5:9**).

Due to the constraints of time, we are not able to fully expound upon the concept of holiness today, but I will leave you with this parting thought. If you were to use a filthy container to feed your

children today, would you not first cleanse the container? The first step to cleansing, my friend, is that the container must be emptied, before it can be cleaned. In order to follow Christ, a person must first deny himself (**Matthew 16:24**). You must decide for yourself if Christ is worth everything to you. No one can make this decision for you. You must choose. It's either you, or Him. He will not share the Lordship of your life with you.

Only by the emptying of ourselves to be filled with His Spirit can we ever be made holy. No one without The Spirit has ever achieved holiness. So would you be willing to give up your very self, to lay down your plans, your personal ambitions, and all that you are, in order to become all that He has in store for you? A filthy container must be emptied, before it can be cleansed, and it must be cleansed, before it can be filled with the finer things. To be holy is to be set apart in order to be useful to our Creator. So I leave you with this one question today: **Are you being made Holy, by His Spirit... for His glory?**

TRUTH!!!