

Letters From My Father
Week 27
2 Timothy 2:20-26
“Called to Holiness - Part 2”
Vessels for Honor

Introduction

But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My Name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Acts 9:15 (NKJV)

When Christ called the Apostle Paul to the ministry, He called him “a chosen vessel” to bear His Name. I find it most interesting that The Scriptures often refer to people as “vessels” (**Acts 9:15; Romans 9:21-23; 2 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Peter 3:7; and 2 Timothy 2:20-21**). So what is a vessel anyway? It is a jar, bottle, pot, etc., that has been specifically designed to contain something else. The most interesting description that I have heard in regards to this matter is one *Bible* teacher’s explanation of a Coke bottle.

When you see a Coke bottle (one of the old glass ones, not these new cheap plastic things), you don’t even need to see the label to identify it. It has a distinct shape and design so that you know right away what it was meant to contain. Now, let us take that to the spiritual realm for a minute. Christians are designed to be “God bottles”. When people see us; how we live, how we speak, and the things that motivate us, they should automatically realize that we are filled with Christ. After all, He is the “real thing”. (Sorry couldn’t resist that last part!). Simply put, we have been created to serve God in this lost and dying world. We are to be “God bottles”.

Last week, we began our study to discover just the type of vessels that God uses. He will not serve those He loves in dirty dishes. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us as Believers to be holy in all that we do. To be holy is to be “set apart” for a specific purpose. God uses cleansed vessels to contain His Name, so that we can go out and demonstrate the holiness of The LORD. It is impossible to represent something that is wondrous and beautiful with something that is dirty and unkept. *The Bible* says that without holiness, no one will see The LORD (**Hebrews 12:14-15**). The natural progression of this reality is without holiness, no one will see The LORD *in us!*

So, we must make every effort to be made holy. While this can only be done by the sanctifying work of The Spirit, this does not mean that we are not responsible for doing our part. We are to offer ourselves as “living sacrifices” (**Romans 12:1**), so that God Himself can cleanse us for His noble purposes. In order to be sanctified, we must be submitted to Christ. In this manner, we do our part and The Spirit does His. So how do we do this? I’m so glad that you asked! Paul explained in detail to Timothy what he must do if he was to be holy and useful for God’s intended purpose.

As we discovered last week, the first thing that must be done for a vessel to be used by God is that it must be emptied. We must deny ourselves, before we can be filled to the brim with God’s Spirit. Our fleshly nature and The Spirit of God are at odds with one another.

For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don’t do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Galatians 5:17-18

So, the simple truth is this. If you want to be fully sanctified in order to be used by God, then you must be fully submitted to do His will. **You cannot stay where you are and go with God.** This is why so many so-called “christians” today are weak and ineffective.

So today, let us continue to discover for ourselves what it really means to be holy (sanctified) in order to be useful to God. I don’t know about you today, but I want to have a meaningful impact upon this planet for God’s glory! In order to do this I must purge myself; from *False Believers, Fleshly Behavior, and Futile Brawling*. Please allow me to explain.

False Believers (vs. 20-21)

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 2:20-21

We touched on this particular passage last session, but there was too much to cover at the time so now let us revisit. When Paul speaks here of “a large house” he is referring to The Church. Within the church proper, there are true Believers and false ones. Jesus addressed this reality in the parable of the wheat and tares (**Matthew 13:24-30, 37-43**).

Not everyone in the local church is truly born again of The Spirit. Many within the congregation are false Believers. They appear to be Christians, but inside they remain unregenerate; meaning they are still living to please their own flesh. Those who are truly born again live to please The Spirit. But even a lost soul knows how to pretend to be spiritual. He just copies what he sees happening around him in the actions of the genuinely saved. But sooner or later these people will reveal their true nature. For you can only “fake” the Christian walk for so long.

Jesus called these phony Believers “tares” or “weeds” that the enemy has scattered among the good crop. Interestingly enough, there is a weed called “darnel wheat” (*lolium temulentum*) that mimics genuine wheat almost perfectly until it comes time for the harvest. Genuine wheat produces edible grains as it ripens, while darnel produces dark colored (almost black) poisonous seeds. As the two grow together it is nearly impossible to tell them apart, but at harvest time, the difference is obvious. So it will be with those who pretend to fit in with the church, when in reality they are simply deceiving themselves and others. But *The Bible* is clear that no one can get away with their sin forever.

... be sure your sin will catch up with you.

Numbers 32:23b

Instead of wheat and tares, Paul, as he often does, compares the people within the church to vessels. Some of these vessels are honorable and some are not (**vs. 20**). Now here is where the object of his message gets a bit confused in translation. The CSB and other translations take the position that the following verse is in regards to the cleansing of a vessel in order to be useful to God. While this is indeed a spiritual reality, it is not a perfect rendering of the original text.

In reality, Paul is saying that in order to be a clean vessel, one thing that we all must do is to “purge” (KJV) or “purify” (CSB) ourselves from the dishonorable. The word that he used for “purge” is actually “*ekkathairo*” (pronounced ek-kath-ah’-ee-ro), and it is where we derive the English “*cathartic*”. Paul is telling Timothy that he needs to purge himself or have a cathartic release from something that is holding him back from holiness. That “*something*” is not referring to personal sin in this verse, but rather, from sinful people. In short, the message should read, there are some honorable people in the church and some dishonorable. In order to be clean you must purge yourself from those who are dishonorable. Paul is commanding Timothy (and us) that if we want to be holy, then we must distance ourselves from unholy people. Hear to the words that he wrote to the church at Corinth.

I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolators; otherwise you would have to leave the world. But actually, I wrote you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a BROTHER OR SISTER and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 (emphasis added)

The plain truth of it is; if you are intending to walk with God, then you have to stop associating with the false Believers. This doesn’t mean that you do not love them, pray for them, try and correct them, but it does mean that we are not to keep company with them. “**Bad company corrupts good morals**” (**1 Corinthians 15:33b**). If your intent is to follow Christ then you cannot do it by following the immoral crowd. Even when that crowd claims to share your faith. To be holy is to be set apart, useful, and prepared to do God’s will in this world (**vs. 21b**).

Fleshly Behavior (vs. 22)

Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Timothy 2:22

Not only are we to run away from false Believers, we are also to flee from all fleshly impurity (sin). In order to become a holy vessel, we must become a clean vessel. Again, God does not use dirty dishes to feed those He loves. So we must, in order to be holy, first empty ourselves to be filled with His Spirit, and then allow that same Spirit to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The KJV renders these unrighteous acts as “youthful lusts”, which brings with it the image of sexual immorality. However, there is far more to what Paul is speaking of in this context. He is referring to any and all fleshly desires that come so natural to the unregenerate.

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21

So you see, there is a lot more here to “youthful passions” than at first meets the eye. Paul is speaking of the fleshly desires of the unregenerate. When Timothy received this letter, he wasn’t a kid anymore. He was nearing his forties. But he knew full well what his former “passions” would have been, when he was unsaved in his younger years. The lost person lives for himself, but the saved soul lives to please Christ Jesus our LORD.

So, as Believers, we are to run from the false Christians and also to flee from the sinful passions that once came so natural to us. But we are not simply to run away from them, we are to run toward something else, the very nature of The Spirit. We run from fleshly behavior to righteousness, to the faith, love and peace of The Spirit. To allow The Spirit to replace our passions with His own. And we are also to run along with others who call on The Name of The LORD with a pure heart. In short, we go from bad company to good company as we pursue the righteousness that God requires of us. We are who we run with.

In his commentary on 2 Timothy, John Phillips writes:

“Righteousness” evidences itself manward. It has to do with being right and doing right. “Faith” is Godward. It has to do with trust in God, His Word, His will, and, above all, Him. “Charity” (love) reaches outward. It is what caused God to reach out from heaven to a lost and ruined world. Love is also what causes the Believer to reach out to people who desperately need the Savior. “Peace” is inward. Peace means that the war is over. The peace of God reigns within the Believer’s heart, enabling him to meet the circumstances of life with equanimity.

John Phillips commentary series, *Exploring the Pastoral Epistles*.

While I am in no ways as eloquent as he, I am however in complete agreement with his description. In order to be holy, we must run from our fleshly behavior in to the arms of The Spirit to embrace the righteous fruit thereof, and we must do so with others who are running to the same end.

But the fruit of The Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The Law is not against such things. Galatians 5:22-23

Futile Brawling (vs. 23-26)

But reject foolish and ignorant disputes, because you know that they breed quarrels. The Lord's servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth. Then they may come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. **Timothy 2:23-26**

If the **Fruit of The Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control**, then if we are filled with The Spirit, we must be kind, gentle, and patient with others, even those who would cause us harm. In short, we do not engage in brawling, but rather, we gently persuade for correction whenever possible. When it is not possible, then we walk away. No one ever came to Jesus and His salvation based upon losing an argument. They can only be persuaded to believe by the power of The Spirit. Therefore, word fighting is in and of itself an exercise in futility.

Now, trust me, as someone who is generally as opinionated as myself, I am often tempted to force capitulation upon those who do not agree with me. But that is not a trait of The Spirit, but rather, an attribute of my own fleshly nature (you know, the one that I am supposed to run away from). What was it that Paul said about our fleshly nature again? ...strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions,... and the list goes on. None of these things have any place within the body of Christ. We don't browbeat. We love. We don't condemn. We offer grace. We don't manipulate. We emulate. Want to tell who's real and who's not? Look for these character traits. If you do not genuinely love others, then you do not possess Christ.

Dear friends, let us love one another because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. **1 John 4:7-8**

There is a very specific reason that we are to be gentle, kind, and patient with those who oppose our message. We want them to be won over to Christ. For in the end, this is all that truly matters. The word that Paul uses translated "*perhaps*" in the CSB is *mepote* (pronounced may'-pot-eh), and it carries with it a negative connotation. It is as if Paul is saying "in the unlikely event" that God will change their hearts and minds to lead them to repentance. Even when dealing with the most blatant of sinners, we must never give up hope that The Spirit may reach them, even when that seems unlikely.

The best way that I can possibly convey this truth is that we never write people off. We continue to try and reach them with kindness and love. For it is not ours to judge or condemn, those things are left to God. And He is far more qualified to decide these matters. The bottom line is that our enemies today, may in fact become our brothers or sisters in Christ tomorrow. For such is the nature of God's grace. And were it not so, we too would be hopelessly lost in our sins forever.

So to be used of God, one must be made holy, set apart for God's noble purposes, emptied of self, to be filled and cleansed by The Spirit. We purge ourselves of *False Believers*, *Fleshly Behaviors*, and *Futile Brawling* living in the peace of God that passes all understanding. So, in all things, we possess the calmness that comes from knowing, He Who gave His life to free us from sin makes us holy.

TRUTH!!!