

Paul's Epistles to Individuals

Lesson 18 – 2 Timothy 2:20 – 26

I. Vessels (v. 20)

A contrast is drawn here between two classes of individuals by using the figurative descriptions of a great house, gold and silver vessels as well as earthen vessels.

A. House

The word "house" can mean a residence or an abode but many times is figuratively used to describe a family or those under the authority of the head of the house. In **Acts 5: 42**, the word is literal and describes Peter and the Apostles going from "house to house" preaching the Gospel after being warned not to do so by the Council. Similarly in **Acts 8:3** regarding the ravaging of the church as Saul went "entering house after house" dragging men and women off to prison. But as in the "household" of Cornelius (**Acts 11:14**), it may be figuratively used to describe a class of people. **Hebrews 8:8** speaks of the "House of Israel" and the "House of Judah" and in **Hebrews 10:21**, Jesus is called the "great priest over the house of God". Here the "great house" refers to Christians, as the previous verse (v. 19) makes clear, described with the phrases, "The Lord knows those who are His" and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness".

B. Vessel

A vessel is a container that may be valuable in itself, or may contain something of value or something worthless. A person is many times referred to figuratively as a vessel in the Bible. A wife is to be treated as a "weaker vessel" (**1 Pet. 3:7**), not because she is necessarily fragile but because she is valued and loving care is to be taken in her treatment. In **Rom. 9:21-23**, the figure is used to describe God's authority over his people, "does not the potter have a right over the clay", his patience with one class, "vessels of wrath", and making known "the riches of His glory" through another class, "vessels of mercy".

Here the large or great house informs us as to the wealth and influence of its owner, God. The vessels are those to be honored or dishonored. In the context, Hymenaeus and Philetus (v. 17) are examples of the less valuable and more easily destroyed earthen vessels worthy of dishonor while Timothy and other faithful Christians are examples of the valuable and more durable vessels worthy of honor.

II. Sanctified and Useful (v. 21)

Paul says, "Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work". This verse makes it clear that it is a person's own responsibility to purge or cleanse oneself from these evil influences and it is a requirement to be useful to the Master. Sanctification is a requirement of all Christians (**1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thes. 4:3-4, 7; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rom. 6:19-22**). It is not by some irresistible means that this cleansing occurs. Purveyors of false doctrines such as Calvinism would misuse **Rom. 9:21** to say that the cleansing is an irresistible force pushed onto man by God. This verse does not support that and does not refer to any unconditional election of an individual. God has the authority to use any man or even a nation to execute His plan and **Rom. 9:21** affirms that authority. We each have the responsibility to avoid the influences of false teachings and those who present them because they can and will have disastrous effects (**1 Cor. 15:33, 5:7; 2 Thes. 3:6, 14**).

II. Personal Instructions (vs. 22-24)

Several things are identified here that are to be avoided and pursued. It is not enough to only avoid detrimental things but it is also a requirement to do those things which are good and right in order to be “*prepared for every good work*” (v. 21). All a part of being a “*vessel for honor*”, one is expected behave in such a way so as to forward the cause of Christ in their lives.

A. Flee Youthful Lusts (v. 22)

Lusts (Gr. “*Epithumia*”) are strong desires of any kind. Although a form of the Greek word is sometimes used to describe good desires (Luke 22:15; Phili. 1:23; 1 Thes. 2:17), it is otherwise describing a bad desire. Lusts are well defined in 1 John 2:16 as “*the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life*”. Although not only a temptation for the young, some of these lusts are of particular concern earlier in life. Paul had already warned Timothy that he might be criticized because of his youth and to behave accordingly (1 Tim. 4:12).

B. Pursue Righteousness (v. 22)

Righteousness, faith, love and peace are worthy of pursuit. Similar admonitions are used in 1 Tim. 4:12 and 1 Tim. 6:11. Peace is added here which describes harmonious relationships with others. This is a critical need and expectation among Christians often ignored (Rom: 12:18; 1 Cor. 7:15; 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:3; Col. 3:15; 1 Thes. 5:13; Heb. 12:14). “*With those who call on the Lord from a pure heart*” shows us we aren’t alone in this endeavor.

C. Refuse Foolish and Ignorant Speculations (v. 23-24)

Another admonition to avoid worthless chatter and destructive arguments. A common theme of Paul’s letters, see also 1 Tim. 1:4, 6:4-5, 6:20; 2 Tim 2:14, 16-17. Here the verse specifically cites their tendency to produce quarrels as reason to avoid them. In contrast, we are to avoid quarrelling, be kind, able to teach and patient when wronged (v. 24).

III. For the Purpose of Converting the Lost (vs. 25-26)

Here the reason for the aforementioned instructions are made clear. The primary goal is to position ourselves to be able to instruct those who are lost. The quality of being gentle or meek (KJV) does not mean to be cowardly or tentative. It means one is not self-directed but God-directed. Jesus said “*I am meek and lowly in heart*” (Matt. 11:29) and he was certainly not cowardly or tentative (John 2:14-16). Prov. 28:1 tells us, “*The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion*”. Paul was bold to declare the truth of the Gospel even at great risk to himself but he was gentle in the delivery (Acts 17:22; 22–26). Peter and John spoke the Word with “*boldness*” (Acts. 4:31) and Stephen was bold in his preaching even to his death (Acts 7).

Notice in verse 26, the stated hope that those who were in opposition would “*come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil*”. The KJV here says “*that they may recover themselves*”. In Acts 2:37, those convicted by the Gospel asked, “*what shall we do?*” This is further evidence of the individual responsibility of the hearer to react to the truth. Each man is responsible to bear his own burden (Gal. 6:1-5) and will be accountable for actions done in the flesh (2 Cor. 5:10). This refutes any assertion that this recovery is as a result of some irresistible force pushed on man by God. When one hears the truth, he must by his own determination obey the Gospel and a terrible result is the outcome for those who choose not to do so (1 Pet. 4:17).