

Called To Be a Vessel of Honor

Let us turn to our Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 2, 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 19. Verses 19 through 23. Let us listen intensively to the Word of God, 2 Timothy chapter 2, 19 and following.

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal. The Lord knows those who are his. And let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts, but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. Let us pray. In these words penned by the Apostle Paul to the young pastor Timothy, spirit of truth and life, may we be encouraged and redirected to continue down the path of holiness, to flee the lusts that so easily beset us, God, to pursue righteousness.

To flee on the one hand and to pursue on the other, which is the call of all of us as believers. And we can, by your strength and your spirit, may these words encourage us as much as they encouraged young Timothy as a pastor. And therefore, as we see, they are still applicable to us today.

Gracious God, in your name we are glorified in our holy walk, that you would indeed cleanse us from the latter, that we would be vessels for honor, prepared for every good work. Amen. Paul continues here in these verses by reiterating the importance of departing from transgressions and iniquities and pursuing, on the other hand, righteousness and holiness.

This is, of course, that is the one half, departing from transgressions and iniquities is the other side of the pursuit of holiness. The two go hand in hand. You cannot have the one without the other.

The Apostle's concern for the young pastor here, of course, is still fitting for us today. It's not just for him. The rest of us can do whatever we want because, you know, he's special and holy.

Remember, in Sunday School class, we went over the medieval era a little bit, and we highlighted there amongst the three types of members of society in Europe. Those who work, those who fight, and those who pray. And those who pray, there are two types.

Those who are secular, that just meant they dealt with the temporary things of this world from the Latin there, and they interacted with the rest of us, the priests and the bishops. But then you had those special people, the regular priests, that is the monks, who lived off on their own. And they were the ones, apparently, this letter is for, in that kind of a scheme.

They're supposed to be super holy. We're all called to be holy. That's the point.

Vessels of Honor, the first point here, the Lord knows his own, verse 19. Nevertheless, the solid foundation of God stands. This is a very strong and stark word here, nevertheless.

Vessel of Honor: God Knows His Own

Stark to the prior verses, where we read, and their message will spread like cancer. Hominus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection has already passed and overthrow the faith of some, nevertheless. In spite of this fact and truth, Paul's going to explain something else.

Yes, there are those who apostatize. They deny the resurrection. They quibble over vanities, which he talked about earlier in verse 14, so that's part of the prior sermon I had, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit.

They cause divisions and troubles from such debates. And as we see here in verse 18 and 19, they eventually apostatize and deny basic fundamental truths of Christianity, like the resurrection. And naturally, reading this for the first time, Timothy and others, as perhaps Paul knows that others will be reading this, you think, well, now what? I mean, we've got these people who are of the church, in the church, presumably baptized, and they've fallen away from the faith.

They've apostatized. They've backslidden. These are influential men.

And the thought may be, what about me? What about my flock? What about the church at large? Is the gospel promise false? Has he failed these men, Jesus Christ? God forbid. No, rather, the nevertheless makes a stark contrast, and he doubles down on the truth of the gospel. The solid foundation of God stands having this seal.

The Lord knows who are his, the implication being that's not Emmaus and Philetus. They're not his. And God already knew that.

It didn't catch him off guard. The Geneva Bible Notes from the 1500s explains that God's elect are known to God and not to us, and therefore it is no marvel if we often mistake hypocrites for true brethren. But we must take heed that we are not like them, but rather that we indeed, such as we are said to be.

And thus the two-fold admonition here are encouragement and explanation of the seal, having this seal. The Lord knows who are his. There's no failure.

God has his elect. And let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity. Don't follow their path of backsliding and falling away from the faith.

That's the point here. The men fall away indeed is true, but that does not undermine the doctrine of divine grace and election, but should rather motivate us unto holiness. And given the concerns of the false teachers, Paul makes this great contrast then from the word nevertheless.

People fall away, nevertheless God knows who are his. The solid foundation that he speaks of here, nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands having this seal. So the solid foundation here is, it seems pretty clear more or less, God's election, God's plan, God's people, his seal upon them.

Calvin describes it this way, as if he had said the elect do not depend on changing events, but rest on a solid and immovable foundation because their salvation is in the hand of God. It is a solid, firm foundation. Unlike the best laid plans of mice and men that fall apart when things change and catch us off guard.

God is not like that at all. He is not caught off guard. He knows his and preserves his own.

Not just in the abstract solid foundation of God's people, but in the here and now, they are known by God Almighty for they are called to depart from iniquity as well. The foundation here of course is an apt metaphor that he'll unpack in the next few verses here, talking about vessels of honor and dishonor. And a house, a great house, verse 20.

And so the foundation is not just the elect, but the elect in the sense of the historic church here and now. Not just in the mind of God from eternity past. Elsewhere the church is described as a foundation in fact, in Ephesians 2.19 and 20.

Christians are described by Paul as members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of what? The apostles and prophets. They are the leaders of the church. Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

So it's not unreasonable the idea here of foundation is not just God's election, but God's election in the concrete through the church. God preserves his church, all of us, his people. The seal here that he unpacks, the idea of seal is authenticity, certification, or proof of something, being genuine for example.

Not used often in the New Testament. It's mostly in Revelation in fact. It's kind of interesting of course as you know, the seven seals of this and that and being poured out of wrath.

But theologically, relevant to our text here, we see in a few places like Ephesians 4.30, which is the sealing of the Holy Spirit. We read, And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. So whatever sealing we have here, it's going to involve the Holy Spirit for his people.

And it's also described elsewhere as evidence. The word seal is not just describing who is sealing us as his holy people. We have the Holy Spirit.

But the use of the word seal is also to describe the significance and the proof or evidence of something. We read that in 1 Corinthians 9.2. In 1 Corinthians 9.2 we read, If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

The church, the people themselves. Now the seal here we are reading is not about baptism per se. Although it assumes that baptism, if we are saved by God, ordinarily we're going to be baptized, set apart by him.

The seal here specifically is, The Lord knows those who are his. The doctrine of election. Known that he knows who are his.

And on the other side, the implication is who are not his. Who are not his own. Verses 18 and 19.

Nevertheless, they fell away, but God knows his own. They're not going to fall away, brother. They're not going to fall away.

That's the necessary implication. Know, I think we know this already, in our churches and the experience I know many of you have growing up in the church, that the word know here is not just an intellectual knowledge of, well God kind of looked it up in a book somewhere, but an intimate knowledge of choosing and hanging on to and holding us and preserving us. God knows all things, for of course they are part of his eternal decree.

He is infinite and we are finite. And he knows his own in the salvific sense, that is an electing knowledge according to his eternal purposes. I may know my neighbors, we may say, I may know about them, we like to use that preposition, which is different than really knowing them, but I know my family much more, and with a greater love and commitment.

It's a similar idea. Romans 9.6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect, for they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children, because they are of the seed of Abraham. But in Isaac your seed shall be called, that is those who are of the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promises are counted as the seed.

And he continues to unpack the doctrine of election there, explaining that God has his own, and he's always known about his own, and he preserves his own, in spite of what you may see otherwise. Nevertheless, the Lord has always had his elect within the elect, a remnant within the remnant, in the Old Testament, that is, the church, in both the Old Testament and New Testament forms, is separated from the world through baptism. It's a visible public separation.

And so there are remnant, or a distinct elect from the world in that public sense, but within that elect or remnant, or the elect of the elect, or the remnant of the remnant, God's chosen, for the church still has wheat and tares, the parable of Christ himself, and he will take care of that, that's not our business. We are to deal with people as we can as humans, which is their confession, their actions, we cannot read people's hearts. The church was and is a vehicle of the divine will, and he uses it to purge and to bring forward those who are the tares in his own time, such as these men here.

They are exposed, discipline is a tool in that department, to purify the church and to strengthen his elect. Ephesians 1.13, we read about this again, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the

heavenly places, just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. What you read here, of course, is another clear passage of God's infinite grace towards his people, given to us while we were still yet sinners.

We also see a coupling here of God's election with holiness, very much like we read here in verse 19, the Lord knows those who are his, this is an evidence or a seal for us, an encouragement, and let everyone who names the name of Christ, what, depart from iniquity, which is clearly a way of saying, be sanctified, be holy, for the two go hand in hand. And Ephesians says this as well, just as he, that is God the Father, chose us in him, Christ, before the foundation of the world, to what end? What's the purpose of election in Ephesians 1.4? That we should be holy and without blame, what? To avoid or flee iniquity, to depart from sin. 1 John 2.19 capsulates what Paul is writing here of the nevertheless against these apostates, that God is not caught off guard, he knows his own, and of course he protects and preserves his own, and God has a purpose in doing these things.

1 John 2.19 explains part of this purpose, that why the tares are still here, and what he does with them in his time in the church. They went out from us, but they were never of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.

But they went out, that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. And it has always been the case. Those who leave the faith show who they truly are, for if they had been of God's people, they would have stayed and professed Christ.

But God purifies the church in his own time, in his own way. And 1 John 2.19 is a classic passage to remind us of that fact, that just because someone's baptized, makes the same confession, signs and believes the same things, goes to church with you, doesn't mean one day they won't apostatize. And we're going to talk a little bit about this afternoon, providentially, on backsliding.

And so I think part of the implication here is that we should not be afraid, for the Lord knows the heart of men, he knows his own, and he preserves them. If you trust in Jesus and hate sin, you have the Spirit of God and you are his. It's not just willy-nilly and you wake up one day and somehow you apostatize.

That's not how it works. Do not let those who fall away discourage you. I know you've seen them, I've seen them.

It's sad to see. But rather motivate you to persevere in good works by the Spirit of God, to flee sin, to depart from iniquity.

Vessel of Honor: Depart from Iniquity

The second point, to be a vessel of honor in God's household. Verses 19, 20, and 23, because he picks up the same idea again in verse 23. So I'll put them together here. The metaphor here of a vessel of honor, something useful in God's kingdom.

Paul explains that his world, God's kingdom, has good and bad vessels, according to his plan and purpose, of course. The point of the metaphor is to encourage us to cleanse ourselves, to not be like those who have left the faith. Do not follow the path of Hymenaeus and others, who threw it all away.

Seek to be rather vessels of honor, someone useful in God's kingdom, sanctified and useful for the master, in fact. This should be the goal in our life. Not useful always the way you'd like it to be useful, but as God has designed it in your particular circumstances, both your own gifts, your own abilities, and where you are in life, but nevertheless useful.

Such vessels in God's house should be prepared for every good work. That's the purpose. And that's done through what? He describes it here as cleansing.

But in every great house, there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also wood and clay, Hymenaeus and others, some for honor, some for dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, that is, of being dishonorable in sin, is the implication, of course, that he will be a vessel for honor, for good. It's an important way to be found useful in God's house for every good work is to flee sin.

Depart from iniquity. Being justified by faith alone is, of course, not all there is to salvation. It's very significant.

Without it, we have nothing. But we also are sanctified. We grow in our sanctification.

That is a life of holiness, which is twofold. And we see it here in this description. I went over that last year in Sunday school class as I covered sanctification, that you have the call of mortification, killing sin.

Part of killing sin sometimes involves departing or fleeing from it. It just withers away and dies. It doesn't feed off you anymore like a vampire.

And on the other hand, you have vivification or giving of life, pursuing holiness and righteousness. It's twofold. Put off the old man.

Put on the new, Paul says elsewhere in Ephesians. There's different ways of describing it, but it all comes down to that basic paradigm. You cannot have a moral vacuum in your life that's not sufficient just to simply kill sin.

You must fill it with obedience by God's strength in your life. Therefore, as he describes here, I always find this interesting, to be useful, sanctified, and useful for the master. Sanctification, in other words, isn't just for your own personal benefit.

It feels really good. I'm not sinning. That's good.

I'm not saying that's a bad thing. I'm glad you think that and you feel good about it. Keep it up.

Keep being helpful in your family, working hard, helping one another, obeying God. But you do it for one another, helping one another, being useful for the master for the work of the kingdom of God. And so, back in verse 19b, we read, and let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

So the metaphor is to unpack this in particular. Don't be a vessel of dishonor. Be something beautiful and useful in God's kingdom.

That vase, as the rich people say, right? The vase in the corner there, that's beautiful, but not just beautiful, but useful. You can actually put some water in it, put some food in it, and to be helpful, not just to look pretty. And so the point here, then, is to depart from iniquity, the more negative half of the picture.

For whom God saves, he transforms by the power of regeneration. We are born again, and part of being born again means we will fight the world, the flesh, and the devil. We will wish and desire to depart from iniquity, but we still need encouragement at times because we still have the remnants of sin among us and within us.

And if Timothy needed this encouragement, we need this encouragement. Never give up. Fight the iniquities within us.

The point of the morality of believers, of course, is the main thrust here, that is holiness and righteousness. And he says there in verse 19b, let everyone who names the name of Christ, I think we know the idea of naming the name of Christ means you're owning Jesus as your own in a public sense. So baptism is implied here, public confession of adults.

Any public claiming of Jesus, that we are of the church, we're members therein. We have named the name of Christ as our own. We don't typically think of it that way, but it's a label, a label in the sense of identification.

I'm a follower of Jesus. I name the name of Christ as my own, and he is my master, and I am his servant. And thus you have a public responsibility to depart from iniquity.

Those who claim to be Christians, this should be number one on their list in our sanctification, is to depart from sin and transgressions. And probably, in particular here, the transgression of false teachings, the iniquity of lies, hence the nevertheless, right? These are those who have strayed concerning the truth, saying the resurrection has already passed. So it's not about who's marrying whom, or divorce, or what we call orthopraxy, straight practice, or what they're doing in obedience to the law of God, but more narrowly, doctrine and teaching.

He calls it iniquity. It's sinful to teach wrong things and lies about Christ and the Bible. And so, of course, it doesn't remove the warning against violating practices of holy living, of course.

It's the teaching and the living going hand in hand, or they're supposed to. And so broadly here, the claim to be followers of Christ means we shouldn't be living a wicked lifestyle. That's a problem in the churches today.

I think I've mentioned this, and it's been a long time, I think. I've gone over the poll numbers, but I felt like I was repeating myself a lot, so I haven't. But it's there in the church.

Fornication, adultery, that's the second table of the law, let alone the first table of the law. As we saw, people are missing Sunday worship for the Super Bowl. It's more important to them than being with God's people and worshiping Him.

That's a sin as well. It's a public sin. People who name the name of Christ, this is a bad thing.

Not just them, it's within our circles as well. We too sin, and we ought to be therefore warned and reprimanded as well. And so this reprimand and this warning, or encouragement, depending how you want to take it here, just let everyone who names the name of Christ, every Christian out there, depart from iniquity.

Don't be known as those who make excuses for sin by saying, as I saw in one advertisement online, where they're like, well, yeah, God called us to live together. What? He did what? I'll tell you, the comments were encouraging. A lot of people are like, what are you talking about? God didn't call you to do that? Good! But they still do it anyways, unfortunately.

This is a calling, of course, for church officers, above all, that is, more particularly. They are called to be above reproach, there in 1 Timothy 3. Not perfect, but in the public sense of, hey, this is clearly a good guy, even the unbelievers recognize he's not out there making a scandal and causing problems and everything else. So churches ought to have high standards for pastors.

I've talked about this before, and this is another example of what this means and what this entails for church leaders, because it makes the church look really bad. We keep making excuses for famous and popular pastors, and that has happened, unfortunately. Being saved, in other words, means being changed.

Not transformed in the sense of perfect, not, hey, everything is done away with and I've got no more struggles, to be sure, but God's elect who have his seal are eternally known by him, also empowered by him, to flee iniquity, to hate sin, to struggle and wrestle against it, night and day. And in particular here, he hones in, flee also youthful lusts, verse 22. Timothy was a young pastor, so it makes sense to describe it as youthful lust, but young or old, we must overcome that which tries to overcome us.

By lust here, he means unbridled passions of any type. Contextually, it seems even more tied to needless debates, right? Remind them of the things charging them before the Lord, not to strive about words, to no profit, to the ruination of the hearers. But shun profane and idle babblings, verse 16, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

So here, it's somewhat specific, although I wish a little more specific, like what babblings exactly is he talking about? But it's clearly something of the mouth, and the passions behind the mouth, the things they're saying, the debates they're having. Calvin describes it this way, if some debate has arisen, young men more quickly grow warm, are more easily irritated, more frequently blunder through want of experience or lack of experience, and

rush forward with greater confidence and rationalness than men of riper age. There's a word for that.

Sometimes you call the young men hotheads. And that's true. It needs to be redirected carefully.

It needs to be curved, but not extinguished. I mentioned this before. Sometimes people talk about the caged stage Calvinists, and they're really concerned about them.

My concern is I want them to not lose that fervor for God's truth. Yes, it should be curved to some extent, better, I think, redirected, right in the right direction, but don't lose it. It should be zeal for God's holiness and his word.

But here, of course, it's a little too much zeal. It ends up turning into babbling and vain debates that are unprofitable, that cause conflicts in the church. It continues in verse 23, or I'm skipping over to 23 because I'm dealing with the negative part, to be a vessel of honor, supposed to depart from and flee from sin, avoid bullish things, verse 23, and ignorant disputes, knowing that they only, what, generate strife.

It's just fighting left and right. What is going on with these people? He mentions this, 1 Timothy, a few times, three or four times, I think, and mentions it here again, three or four times, clearly a problem he's dealing with. It's remind them, church members probably, or other people arising in prominence in the church, verse 14.

The concern here is over false teaching and distracting debates, heated debates that cause problems in the body of Christ, likely hinted at elsewhere, I think it was in Titus, a Judaizing discussion of genealogies. They have these debates over the genealogy, apparently some of the Jews thought if you had a certain genealogy, it reflected the kind of person or spirit you had or characteristics that you had. And of course, this is especially the case for church officers, all the more because of their position publicly and how that can harm the church.

It's one thing for members to have a heated discussion in the corner. It's another for church officers to have a heated discussion in the corner. So, my point being, in reading this text and the admonitions that he gives, it is relevant to the context.

It's relevant to what is being debated or just discussed. Some people can be quite emotional. And who's doing it? To whom much is given, much is required. And the church office is a public office and there are strictures upon that.

Vessel of Honor: Pursue Righteousness

Lastly, vessels of honor pursue righteousness, not just flee wickedness, verses 20 and 22 in particular here. Again, the metaphor we went over and the picture where he's highlighting with this picture of vessels of something being useful for God's kingdom.

For the master, for we are his servants, pursue righteousness, to seek it out, that is to obey, not just righteousness in the abstract, but the Ten Commandments. That's why it's

important to know the Ten Commandments, why the church has recited or even saying the Ten Commandments. We are sanctified objectively, of course, through baptism that is set aside.

The word sanctified just means set aside for a special divine use, in this case, publicly. And we are, of course, being sanctified internally by the Spirit of God over time. That's subjective growth in obedience to his word.

And it takes work and hence he urges them to pursue it, to not give up and not get down, I guess, get down in the mouth either. You can look so much about avoiding sin that it can be discouraging. You kind of feel like you see sin everywhere.

But if you turn around and realize, well, I'm also going this way. I'm not just looking back and trying to stop the sins, but I'm going towards righteousness, towards obedience, towards being someone who takes care of the family, takes care of the kids, that takes care of the church in the case of church officers. So from that perspective, stick to the positive.

That is, the good things that you're called to do and see what you can do to be obedient to God and to be useful in his house as a useful vessel. And in describing it this way, but pursue, on the other hand, right? Verse 22. Righteousness, pursue faith, pursue love, pursue peace with those who call on the name of our Lord out of a pure heart.

So it's a communal effort as well, with those, not just by yourself. First of all, it's faith he wants us to pursue, besides righteousness. Now the description here of righteousness may be a general description of these things, including faith, love, and peace.

Those are obviously good things. They are righteous things in that sense. But I think he probably means just more broadly obedience in God's law.

Faith, of course, growing in our trust in Christ Jesus as part of our calling. The step out in obedience is an act of faith in God. To kill sin in the womb of conception in our hearts is an act of faith as well.

Pursuing holiness and love of our neighbor and the fellow Christians especially is to act out of faith, or it should be. It shouldn't be out of hypocrisy. I just want to put on a good face.

That should never be the case. You may stumble, as we've talked about. That's true.

But is your effort sincere and out of a love for God and one another? Which brings us here to the second thing we ought to pursue, not just faith, but love. He doesn't specify anything more than that, just love. Clearly he means love to God, growing in love to God.

Therefore we have to know more of him and of his will for us. Love towards our fellow believers, to care for them. Again, it's intimated here, peace with those who call on the Lord our God.

Love and peace and faith with those who call together. It's a communal effort in that sense. We are therefore to take care of one another, to pray for one another, to do what we can

for one another depending on our circumstances, especially, I think, for the church leaders, to pray for them and to love and help them as well.

And to have peace with each other in the body of Christ. Not to cause strife, as these men were causing strife in a public way, in public debates that were needless, because obviously there are going to be public debates when it's needful to defend the truth. These are clearly needless to the ruin of the hearers, as we read in verse 14.

It causes much heartache and problems in these matters. And in all these things, with what? A pure heart. Not a perfect heart, but I think he means, in the opposite, not with hypocrisy, that is to say with sincerity.

Pureness of intention, of desire, to grow, to be obedient, to love the saints, to be at peace with one another and not strife, needless strife. This is what he's calling us to do, brothers and sisters. We are called, as much as those Timothy is here to admonish, and certainly by implication, he has to apply it to himself, to depart from iniquity, and to do more, to pursue and seek out righteousness in our lives.

Faith, love, peace, and all good things. Paul could have gone further with the list. By God's grace, we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

You can cleanse yourself to be a vessel of honor and to pursue good and useful things in God's kingdom. It will take time. It is indeed hard, but it is not impossible, for God Almighty is with you, brothers and sisters.

Let us pray. We thank you, God, for these words and these reminders and these admonitions, Lord. To the extent that they are applicable to us, God, may we meditate upon them and be encouraged and convicted as needed to move forward to avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, but always, God, to pursue righteousness and faith and love out of a pure heart.

We ask these things by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.