

## Paul, Timothy and Troubled Times Part 5

Paul is giving Timothy instruction on how to live, how to serve the Lord and His church in troubled times. He has talked about followers of Jesus making it through troubled times as good soldiers, disciplined athletes, faithful farmers, diligent workers and beginning in verse twenty he talks about Christians as vessels and as servants in the Master's use in a house.

The English Standard Version reads, **“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. 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.” 2 Timothy 2:20-21**

Remember from last Sunday, Paul talked about the bad workers who were spreading false teaching. Among them were two that must have been well known to Timothy and the church in Ephesus. It seems Paul is comparing the false teachings and the false teachers to those vessels of dishonor, those vessels made of wood and clay that can't withstand the fire, vessels that are not useful to the Master. That being the case, we obviously want to be vessels of honor and useful to the Master. How does that happen?

Paul says, “If anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use.” Can we cleanse ourselves? Paul isn't talking here about our salvation, about our being cleansed from sin, but rather about our discipleship, our ongoing choices to turn away from sin and from false teaching and follow Jesus.

None of us can save ourselves. Paul writes, **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8** And to Titus Paul writes, **“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.” Titus 3:5** We can't cleanse ourselves in the sense of remitting or washing away our sins. We can't earn salvation by works, but only by his saving grace. Again, Paul is talking not about salvation, but about discipleship. He is talking about cleansing ourselves from false teachings, from false doctrines and from the influence of false teachers. If we want to be vessels of honor and useful to Jesus, we have to get falsehoods and false doctrines out of our minds and wickedness and sinful practices out of our heart and life. Paul calls Timothy and us to purity – purity in doctrine and purity in mind, in

heart, in life. If we cleanse ourselves from false doctrines and false teachers we will be vessels of honor, made holy, useful to the Master and ready to do good works.

Notice Paul describes honorable vessels in three ways: holy, useful, prepared. Holy means sanctified, set apart to God. Have you given yourself to God, allowing him to set you apart for his service, for his purpose to be carried out in your life, in your choices? Are you cooperating with the Lord in such a way that you can say you are a vessel of honor?

Think about yourself like the good dishes, you know the ones your Mom uses when company is coming or for a special occasion. You don't use your Mom's best serving bowl for a project in the garage. It's set apart for a different purpose. You don't use your Xbox to prop the door open. It's set apart for a special use. You are holy, set apart for a special use. Don't let the devil, don't let another person, another man or woman use you for something dishonorable. Don't surrender yourself to a dishonorable purpose when he has set you apart for his own.

Second, vessels of honor are useful to the master of the house. Whatever the Lord wants to do with us, wherever he asks us to serve, whatever purpose he desires, that should be our goal and desire. I want to be useful to the master of the house. "Lord, use me however you choose". When you realize you are useful to the Lord, you won't be as quick to allow something or someone to misuse you. I want to keep myself and my life holy and pure so I can be useful to the Lord all of my life! Finally, he says we are to be prepared, "ready for every good work." Paul tells Timothy in chapter four to be instant in season and out of season, always ready and prepared to answer the Lord's call, to testify of Jesus and share the gospel, always available. Are you prepared, ready to serve, ready to say yes to Jesus, walking in holiness, all the time?

If we intend to be honorable vessels we are going to cleanse ourselves from false doctrine and false teachers, we are going to live holy lives, saying no to sin and yes to God, obedient to whatever he calls us to and ready to say yes always to the Lord. Let me say again, Paul is calling Timothy and us to a holy life, to a life of purity in our doctrine and our lifestyle, our choices and actions. It's not just to be pure in what we think or believe, but also pure in how we live. To make it even clearer Paul brackets this paragraph between verses 19 and 22, **"Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."** And **"Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."**

Turn away from wickedness, from sin and evil choices as well as from false doctrines and teaching. Flee youthful passions. That sounds like sexual passion, but it's more than that. It's youthful passion, like self-indulgence, trying to get what we want and trying to please ourselves rather than pleasing God, chasing after his plan for our life. It's self-service rather than serving God and others, selfish ambition, arrogance, so sure we know what's best that we don't even ask the Lord for his direction. Flee that kind of youthful passion, those kinds of rookie mistakes. Instead, join with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. Four essential marks of a follower of Jesus.

Notice in verse 22 Paul points out an important distinction. There are some things we are to flee and some things we are to pursue. It's always that way. Flee youthful passion and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. Flee temptation and run to Jesus. Flee from that path that you know will lead to destruction and pursue that walk with Jesus that leads to eternal life. This is the work of a disciple. This is the ongoing, daily work of a soldier, an athlete, a farmer, a worker, a holy vessel, a servant of the Lord, that we deny ourselves and follow Christ, we put off what belongs to the old life and we put on the new character of Christ, we put sin out of our mind and we set our mind on heavenly things, we put sin out of our heart and we set our affections on Christ and his word, we crucify the flesh and we walk and live in the Spirit. We ruthlessly renounce sin and we wholeheartedly embrace Jesus and pursue this holy walk with him. This is what he calls us to! Flee and pursue!

In keeping with this instruction on how to be a vessel of honor for the Master, Paul gives us our last metaphor, that of the Lord's servant. **“Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.” 2 Timothy 2:23-26**

We move from vessels in the house to servants in the house. The Lord's servants live in a world of controversies and arguments, of division and quarrels and debates and yet Paul's instruction to Timothy and to us is “the Lord's servant must not quarrel.” Paul isn't telling us to not defend the faith. Paul himself argued for the gospel. He isn't telling us not to be controversial at times because the gospel itself is controversial. Truth is controversial. Paul tells

us to avoid controversies and quarrels that are foolish, that are merely speculative, quarrels that go beyond the Scripture, arguments over supposed “revelations” someone had. Notice too Paul says, “Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments” but he didn’t say don’t have anything to do with “foolish and stupid people.” That’s harder to do. It’s not in the bible but there is some truth to the claim that you can’t fix stupid. But what Paul tells us to do is, instead of quarreling and picking fights over stupid and foolish topics, things that cannot be settled and people that will not be convinced, instead... be kind to everyone, look for opportunity to teach rather than to try to win an argument. Don’t be resentful, and to those who oppose you, gently instruct them in God’s word, showing them with kindness God’s truth. Instruct, correct those who are in error, but always with that same characteristic at the forefront, kindness.

I have to say, I’ve been disappointed in things I’ve read in the past year from Christian leaders and pastors. They may have been defending a righteous cause, but too often they were anything but gentle and kind. Instead, they’ve been cruel, mocking, unkind. Kind to everyone. That’s what Paul said. Let that sink in. Kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful to those who oppose you, instead gently instruct them, as opposed to calling them names and demonizing them. There is a reason for this. “In the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth...that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil who has taken them captive to do his will.” It’s about bringing everyone to Jesus. It’s about eternity. The quarrels on Facebook that end up with people calling each other names and demonizing one another...they missed the point Paul was making to Timothy and to all of us. Read that verse again! “In the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth.” That’s the mission of the Lord’s servant.

As soldiers we are dedicated to pleasing our Commanding officer, as athletes we discipline ourselves to train and compete according to the rules, as farmers we patiently sow and work for the harvest, as unashamed workers we remain diligent, able to pass the test. As vessels of honor we are to be holy and pure in doctrine, conduct and character. As the Lord’s servant we are kind in our manner, staying focused on the mission of pleasing the Lord and turning people to repentance and to the knowledge of the truth! We want people to come to their senses and seek the Lord and escape from the trap of the enemy. That’s what it’s all about.

Feel the weight of this responsibility, yet at the same time, rest in the knowledge that God is at work in us, through us, that his Holy Spirit resides in us. This is how we live in troubled

times. This is who Jesus needs to bear his nature and share his good news with the world in a troubled time. Remember Paul begins this chapter with these words, **“Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”** This is how we bring hope in troubled times as soldiers, athletes, farmers, workers, vessels of honors, servants that obey and please the Lord and bring honor to him, all of it by trusting in and relying upon his strong, amazing grace!

We are going to pray. As we do, take a moment to examine your heart and life. Are you living as a vessel of honor, holy, useful to the Master, prepared and ready for service? Are you fleeing from evil and pursuing righteousness? Are you a servant leading with kindness rather than quarrelsome, leading others to a knowledge of the truth in the hope that God will grant them repentance? Are you trusting in and resting in his grace? Let's pray.

May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.