

2 Timothy

I. Introduction

A. **2 Timothy 2:20-22** . . . “Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. [21] Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. [22] Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

B. Prayer

II. Being vessels for honor requires cleansing ourselves

A. [20a] **Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware . . .**

1. A large house with gold and silver eating and drinking utensils would likely belong to someone who is rich.
 - a. And yet, even a wealthy home has some common utensils used in preparing food, and for feeding such folks as street people, farm workers just coming in from the barn or field, and family pets. These common utensils would be the vessels referred to as wood and clay.
 - b. In applying this picture to us, the four kinds of vessels refer to God’s people who make up the Body of Christ – be it the universal church or individual groups of believers.
2. To apply it more specifically, we know that within the Body of Christ – whether universal or a small group of believers – some are better at understanding and applying the scriptures than others. Some are better educated. Some are better speakers, leaders, teachers, evangelists, musicians, and worship leaders. Some are better at child-care, nursing home visits, comforting the sick, visiting the prisoners, and encouraging the discouraged. And some have natural talents that are useful to the church.
3. However, the important issue is not what kind of vessel you are, such as being gold or wood, or, silver or clay. Neither is the important issue who is better at something – though that is of some significance.

- a. The important issue is, are you clean. Are you a clean vessel that God can use to accomplish His purposes in the church and in the world?
- b. If you are not a clean vessel, then it must be because you are dirty and still in need of cleansing? If you are still in need of cleansing, then you are the kind of vessel **God does not choose to use** – any more than you would choose to use dirty vessels to prepare food or to serve food to your family and invited guests.
4. So once again, the important issue is, are you a clean vessel, for those are the vessels for honor that God chooses to use.

B. [20b] **And some to honor and some to dishonor.**

1. This second part of **vs 20** creates some difficulty, because we cannot be completely certain what Paul is referring to.
 - a. For example, is the contrast between vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor a reference to God using the gold and silver vessels for leadership type positions and service in the church, and the wood and clay vessels for the less spiritually demanding and therefore more ordinary positions and service in the church?
 - b. Or are the vessels to honor the clean ones, and the vessels to dishonor the dirty ones?
 - c. It is my opinion that this second understanding is the better one, for it supports the message of **vs 21**.
 - d. Therefore, the issue is not are you gold, silver, wood, or clay, but are you clean. Or, given the reality of our humanity, are you at least making a sincere effort to cleanse yourself so that you are becoming a useable vessel for God to accomplish His purposes.
2. In considering the difference between vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor, I included the use of Webster's Dictionary.
 - a. Therefore, in bringing together the wording of **vs 20-22** with the dictionary definitions and the larger context, I believe we can describe a **vessel for honor** as a Christian who rightfully deserves respect and esteem for the life he or she is living as a Christian – which includes the kind of discussions he engages in.
 - b. In contrast, a **vessel for dishonor** is a Christian who is not making a sincere effort to put away known selfishness and sin, so that either intentionally or carelessly, he continues bringing some measure of shame on himself, on the reputation of Christians in general, and on God – as a result of some of the ways he talks and some of the things he does.

3. The scriptures make it clear that God calls us to (1) **either be** a vessel for honor, or (2) **be intentionally and purposefully heading in** the direction of becoming a vessel for honor. For example, we read in –
 - a. **Ephesians 4:1**, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, **implore you** to walk in a manner **worthy of the calling** with which you have been called.”
 - b. **Colossians 1:10**, “...Walk in a manner **worthy of the Lord** (*upholds His honor*), to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”
4. Now you may be wondering, how do we become the kind of clean, worthy vessels that God uses? We cleanse ourselves from that which defiles us and put godliness in its place.

C. [21] **Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things (*the things that make us dirty vessels*), he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.**

1. According to this verse, God places the responsibility for getting clean **on us** – that is, on the average, every day, ordinary Christian. And in **vs 22**, God places the responsibility to flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace **on us** – that is, on the average, every day, ordinary Christian.
 - a. In other words, to become and remain a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, and prepared for every good work, we must cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God (*to quote 2 Corinthians 7:1*).
 - b. Or as **James 4:8** says it, we must “Cleanse our hands from sin; and purify our hearts from double-mindedness.”
 - c. The point is, the responsibility for getting clean is our responsibility.
2. Bearing this responsibility does not mean that God is absent or uninvolved. He does not watch from a distance while we try to do this on our own. On the contrary, God is powerfully involved.
 - a. He dwells within us. He has given us the Holy Spirit. We have the scriptures – which are living and active. He guards us against being tempted beyond our current ability to resist.
 - b. And He keeps His ears attuned to our prayers for help, and our prayers for strength and wisdom and for whatever else we truly need to fulfill the responsibility He has placed on us.

3. And yet, Paul makes no mention in these three verses of God's involvement. Why?
 - a. I believe Paul makes no mention of God's involvement because we Christians are to believe God is involved. And we are to believe that His involvement is more than sufficient for us to fulfill our responsibility, regardless of how hard it is or how long it takes.
 - (1) In saying, "regardless of how hard it is or how long it takes," I am acknowledging that growth in godliness, at least the kind of growth God is looking for, takes great effort and time.
 - (2) Regarding the length of time it takes, John Climacus put it this way: "As one who has suffered a prolonged illness can scarcely obtain health in an instant, so it is impossible suddenly to overcome the passions, or even one passion."
 - b. Remember the story of David and Goliath? King Saul, and the rest of his army, assumed they would lose a one-on-one battle with Goliath. Yet David assumed he would win – not because he believed he had superior fighting skills or weapons, but because he believed God was with Him. David was convinced that God would empower him to win a one-on-one battle with Goliath.
 - c. We read this in **1 Samuel 17:45-47**: "David said to Goliath, 'You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel ... [46] This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands ... [47] ... for the battle is the LORD'S and He will give you into our hands.'"
 - d. Like David's confident assumption in facing Goliath, this should be our confident assumption when putting off our selfish and sinful nature and putting on godliness.
 - (1) In other words, we should get up in the morning **confidently assuming** that God is with us, and empowering us, and working with us, and enabling us to cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.
 - (2) And no one who has this confident faith in God's involvement needs a reminder.
4. However, it is my experience that very few Christians rise each morning with this belief firmly fixed in their mind. I find that most of us are like King Saul and his army –
 - a. We know what has to be done in regard to sin and righteousness.

- b. We approach the task as if we have to do it all on our own – and many reinforce this belief by saying it feels like they are doing it all on their own.
 - c. And when we size up the enemy (*which is our flesh, the world, and the devil*), and when we look at the task at hand (*which is cleansing ourselves so as to become a vessel for honor*), we conclude the task is too hard and the enemy is too strong for us to be successful.
 - d. And so like Saul and his army, we stand back rather than make the kind of effort that is required to cleanse ourselves in order to become a vessel for honor.
5. This kind of thinking is self-defeating. Therefore, let us not be like King Saul and his army in the face of Goliath.
- a. Rather, let us be like David who believed God was involved without having to be told or reminded.
 - b. Therefore, let us rise each morning convinced that God is involved, and that His involvement sufficiently empowers us to gain the victory over our fleshly lusts, our entrenched sinful habits, the ungodly influences of the world, and the scheming trickery and temptations of the devil.

D. [21b] he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

1. If you will cleanse yourself from the things that make you unfit for God's use – such as youthful lusts, worry and anxiety, ungodly anger, resentment, bitterness, unforgiveness, lying, and worthless discussions, you will become a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.
2. To become a **vessel for honor**, we must cleanse ourselves from the things that prevent us from being a Christian who rightfully deserves respect and esteem because we are living like a Christian ought. If we will, we will be the kind of Christian God will choose to use in accomplishing His purposes in the church and in the world.
3. A **sanctified vessel** is one that is set apart and therefore easily identifiable as a clean vessel.
 - a. Picture it this way: God comes into His kitchen looking for a pitcher to serve water to His family and guests. He does not rummage around on the counter or in the sink looking for a mostly clean pitcher from among the dirty ones. He goes to the

- cupboard where He has set apart the clean pitchers from the dirty ones, and selects the one He wants.
- b. In this way, a sanctified vessel is a clean vessel that has been set apart from the dirty vessels so as to be easily identifiable for the Master's use.
4. A **useful vessel** is able to fulfill the purpose for which it is selected.
 - a. The idea of being useful to God goes beyond the limitations of whatever talent or spiritual gift you may have. To be a useful Christian is to be in such a condition, spiritually speaking, that God is able to use you for whatever He deems needful – even if you are not gifted or talented in that area.
 - b. Being useful in this way is possible for at least two reasons.
 - (1) **First**, it is God who is using you – and He is able to do with you and accomplish through you whatever He wills.
 - (2) **Second**, you cannot cleanse yourself from what defiles you without learning a lot about the scriptures, godliness, love, compassion, kindness, gentleness, and patience – which in turn makes you useful for a variety of tasks for which God may want to use you.
 5. This brings us to the last statement, being a **vessel prepared for every good work**.
 - a. To be prepared is to be fit or suitable for every good work that God asks or directs you to do.
 - b. The important truth here is that cleansing ourselves from what defiles us and therefore keeps us in the state of being a vessel for dishonor has the effect of making us useful and suitable for whatever it is God wants to use us to do.
 - c. This does not mean that being disciplined or getting an education or learning from experience are not helpful. They are. But they are not what makes you a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the God, and prepared for every good work. Cleansing yourself from whatever makes you a vessel for dishonor is what puts you in that “prepared for every good work” condition.

III. Conclusion

- A. Once again, the important issue is not what kind of vessel you are, but are you a clean vessel.
- B. And though God is powerfully involved, He has placed the responsibility for becoming a clean vessel on you and me. If we do not cleanse ourselves, we will not and cannot be a vessel to honor.