

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. Just a reminder of what we talked about from **vs 20-21** – it is not what kind of vessel you are, such as gold, silver, wood, or clay, but rather are you a clean vessel that God can use to accomplish His purposes in your home, the church, and in the world.

1. In **vs 21** we learned that God places the responsibility for getting clean on us. We must cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.

2. However, bearing this responsibility does not mean God is absent or uninvolved. On the contrary, God is powerfully involved. You may at times feel like God is uninvolved, but in spite of such times, I am urging you to rise each day confidently relying on His involvement to progressively give you victory over your old, sinful nature, and enable you to put on those godly qualities that exemplify His nature.

C. Prayer

II. Fleeing / Pursuing as a community of believers

A. [22a] **Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace.** . . .

1. Paul wrote something similar in **1 Timothy 6:11**, “But **flee** from these things, you man of God, (*i.e., false doctrines, conceit, interest in controversial questions, disputes about words, and using the Christian religion to enrich yourself financially*), and **pursue** righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.”

a. In both **1Tim. 6** and here in **2Tim. 2**, Paul is writing these words to Timothy, the leader of the church in Ephesus, and Paul’s disciple and premier co-worker. And if Timothy needed to hear these words, we can conclude that we need to hear them, too. Of course, hearing is only good if we heed them as well.

- b. Therefore, Paul is exhorting us to flee from the things that weakens our faith, damages our spiritual health, and limits our usefulness to God, while pursuing the things that strengthens our faith, improves our spiritual health, and makes us vessels that God wants to use.
2. The words **flee** and **pursue** speak of deliberate, active actions with the intent of accomplishing a specific purpose or reaching a pre-determined goal.
 - a. According to Webster's dictionary, **to flee** is to run away from danger or evil.
 - (1) Therefore, **to flee** youthful lusts is to actively move away from any thought, desire, fear, or activity that binds us to the ways of our flesh, the world, and the devil. In other words, we are to flee anything that in some way threatens our spiritual well-being, and therefore our usefulness to God.
 - (2) But what are youthful lusts?
 - (a) From an early age, we display childhood forms of selfishness in wanting our own way, and in wanting attention.
 - (b) Then there are the longings for pleasure, excitement, entertainment, popularity, vanity, and the freedom to do as we please (*self-rule*). And this list could go on.
 - (3) But the sad thing about youthful lusts is that most of us bring many of them into our adult life.
 - (a) The difference, however, is that most of us learn to discipline ourselves in ways that enable us to make our youthful lusts more adult-world acceptable.
 - (b) Yet the driving motive behind our adult refined youthful lusts is the same as the motive behind their crasser version in our youth – self-interest – which we express through selfishly driven choices and behavior.
 - (4) It is for this reason that Paul tells us adults **to flee** these self-serving, self-pleasing, and self-comforting desires. However, to flee effectively, we must take thoughtful, planned, committed, zealous, Holy Spirit empowered, prayer and scripture supported, and persevering action.
 - b. **To pursue** is to relentlessly go after something with the intent to take hold of what you are pursuing.
 - (1) Paul expresses this idea well in **Philippians 3:13-14**, “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching

forward to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

(2) Here in **2 Tim 2**, we are urged to pursue, with the goal of laying hold of, righteousness, faith, love and peace.

B. [22b] **pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. . .**

1. The godly qualities of righteousness, faith, love and peace are both foreign to and at odds with our old nature – a nature whose ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving we must flee in order to effectively pursue these godly qualities. There is no other effective method!
 - a. This is not a quick and easy task, because we grew up with, nurtured, and even defended our old nature way of life.
 - (1) In fact, we liked our old nature habits, fears, and desires. We enjoyed and even loved what they did for us. We believed our old, selfish ways of life made our lives better. And we didn't want our youthful lusts to be restricted or terminated by God, our parents, or forms of godliness.
 - (2) The reality is, by the time we came to God, repented, trusted in Jesus, and proceeded to live a life of godliness, our old nature ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving had become our preferred ways.
 - b. Therefore, **fleeing** what we grew up loving and believing in, and **pursuing** what we once concluded was too restrictive to how we wanted to live all those years, makes pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace seem unnatural at first.
 - c. It is for this reason that fleeing youthful lusts, and pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace requires thoughtful, planned, committed, zealous, Holy Spirit empowered, prayer and scripture supported, persevering action on our part.
2. There is one more truth that needs stating before moving on.
 - a. We have been created with the ability to grow and change, to stop bad behavior and begin good behavior. The proof of this is seen in unbelievers who have broken free from the enslaving and self-destructive bondage of alcohol or drugs.
 - b. However, when it comes to the depth of change God call us to make, that is, to becoming a new creation with new beliefs, values, thinking, and attitudes, we cannot do it on our own.
 - c. We need God's involvement, for without it, change will remain on the surface, rather than reforming the core of our being so that the godliness that was once unnatural, becomes natural.

- d. In other words, changing the surface changes some behaviors, but it does not change our core values, beliefs, fears, and hopes from what they were under our old nature to what they ought to be as a Christian with a new nature.
 - e. To become what we ought to be as a Christian requires a depth of change that changes our behavior, mind, and heart – for only this depth of change enables us to become holy in all our behavior just as God is holy.
3. **Pursue righteousness:** To pursue righteousness is to pursue what is just, right, and good in all situations and relationships.
- a. You can start your pursuit of righteousness by doing **what you know** is just, right, and good. This is what Zaccheus did.
 - (1) Upon personally meeting Jesus, Zaccheus said, “Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much” (**Luke 19:8**).
 - (2) No doubt, he had many more things to repent of and change from old nature ways to godly ways, but he started pursuing righteousness by dealing with **what he knew** was unjust, wrong, and bad.
 - b. There are many things, situations, and people in our life that requires us to be just, right, and good. For example, we deal with a variety of people in a variety of relationships every day – and they all deserve to be treated in just, right, and good ways.
 - (1) In fact, even when they are behaving badly, God expects us, as Christians, to remain fair in doing what is right and good for them. This is especially important in our relationships with those near and dear to us.
 - (2) But to do this, you have to become aware of when and where you deal with others in unjust, unrighteous, and wrong ways – for without this awareness, you will not put a stop to your unrighteous ways, and put the ways that make for love and peace in their place.
 - c. Are you committed to pursuing righteousness in thoughtful, intentional, and persistent ways? Are you committed to treating everyone in just, right and good ways?
4. **Pursue faith:** This is not a call to pursue faith in general, but to pursue Christian faith – which includes trusting in the supremacy of God, the goodness of God, the ways of God, and the word of God.

- a. Trust in God is essentially reliance on God, His goodness, His ways, and His word, to bring about what He says He will do for us in this life and the next. However, this requires living according to what God says about how you are to live. Otherwise, it becomes unreasonable and irrational for God to do for you in this life and the next what He says He will do.
 - b. Therefore, Christian faith begins with a deliberate choice to trust in God, which results in living according to God's will and God's word. This is why we can tell what you believe by observing how you live.
 - c. So why do we need to pursue faith? Two reasons come to mind.
 - (1) **First**, our old nature is built on faith in self, and we are not quick to abandon self as the one we trust the most. Therefore, we need to intentionally pursue trusting God over self if our faith in God is to grow beyond trusting God for eternal life.
 - (2) **Second**, we are prone to disregard or fail to take seriously the connection between what we believe and how we live.
 - (a) It is my finding that few Christians thoughtfully examine their behavior to discern what they believe, and who they trust the most in any area of life – be it self or God.
 - (b) The reality is, knowing the language of Christian faith is not enough, because it is not what we claim to believe, but how we act – day in and day out – that accurately reveals in whom and what we trust the most.
 - d. Therefore, we each need to pursue faith in God if our faith in God is to grow and become the strong, overarching faith it ought to be.
5. **Pursue love** – As with faith and trusting self the most, we start life loving self the most. And when self-love discovers the advantages and pleasures of youthful lusts, it leads to forms of self-gratification and self-protection that can only be participated in at the expense of others – which is the opposite of righteousness and love.
- a. According to the Word of God, love seeks the good of others in the same manner and to the same degree we want others to seek our good – and this includes seeking the good of our enemies, those who persecute us, and those who mistreat us (**Mark 12:31; Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:35; Romans 12:14,17,19-21**).
 - (1) In addition, the Bible says love has its own, unchangeable qualities, regardless of what the people around us are doing.

And because of this, love does no wrong to anyone (**Romans 13:10**).

- (2) For example, husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church. This means husbands are to love their wives according to the unchangeable qualities of love regardless of how their wives are or are not loving them (**Ephesians 5:25**).
 - b. I suspect we all understand that loving in this way means we have to stop loving ourselves the most – which is why so many Christians see godly love as too costly, and therefore unrealistic.
 - c. Yet let me remind you that though godly love always seeks the good of others, it does not require us to have fond feelings for those being loved. Nor does love require us to always appease those being loved – as if keeping them happy is what it means to love them.
 - d. Genuine, godly love does what is best for others. And what is best is determined by what is just, right, and good – not only for the one being loved, but also for everyone effected by what we do for the one to whom we are showing love.
 - e. To love like this is costly to self-love – which is why we must flee selfishness and pursue love in order to love as love loves.
6. **Pursue peace** – Pursuing what is just, right, and good as a way of life, is hard. Pursuing trusting God implicitly, is harder. Pursuing loving as love loves is harder, still. But pursuing peace is possibly the hardest of all – for it demands the most from us in relation to giving up such things as self-protection, legitimate expectations, reasonable desires, personal wants, ease, comfort, and being treated in respectful, fair, and loving ways.
- a. And yet, God exhorts us to pursue peace. For example, **Hebrews 12:14** says, “Pursue peace with all men.” **Romans 14:19** says “So then...pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. And **Romans 12:18** says, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”
 - b. In any relationship, true peace requires both sides working together for the common good. In other words, true peace between family members, or between friends, or between co-workers, or between nations only exists when both sides give and take in ways that prevent either side from being taken advantage of or treated unfairly. Sadly, such peace is rare, just as true love in a shared relationship is rare.

- c. Yet we are still exhorted to pursue peace – which we can do if we will do our part to make peace possible.
- d. However, to make peace possible, we must refuse to create or prolong needless conflict; we must offer to resolve conflicts directly, or offer to seek outside help when needed; we must refuse to take offense or bear a grudge over another's unjust, unkind, unloving behavior; we must seek the good of everyone – including those who won't join us in resolving a conflict; and we must humble ourselves, give up our rights, and trust God to work all things out for good so that we do not add discord to the discord that is already there.
- e. The important point here is that peace is not always possible, but we ought never be the reason or a contributing reason that make it impossible. Therefore, let us earnestly and faithfully pursue peace.

III. Conclusion

- A. **Vs 22** ends with the exhortation to flee and pursue **with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart**.
 - 1. Christian living is challenging, demanding, and costly to self. For these reasons, it is not intended to be lived alone or on our own.
 - 2. God created the church so we could live this life in community – a community that will encourage, support, exhort, edify, comfort, bear with each other patiently, forgive, and pray for each other.
- B. Therefore, may we take seriously this exhortation to flee youthful lusts, to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, **and** to do this together.