

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. We’ve spent the past two Sundays talking about **2 Timothy 2:20-22**. Upon reflecting on what was taught, it occurred to me that it would be good to present some material on the HOW, or the method of **cleansing** ourselves, **fleeing** youthful lusts, and **pursing** godliness.
1. Therefore, we will postpone moving on to **2 Timothy 2:23**, and spend the next three Sundays looking at the HOW of cleansing ourselves, fleeing selfishness and sin, and pursuing godliness.
 2. The HOW of what will be presented is based on truths and principles taken from God’s word, along with a method for growing in godliness that works for me.
 - a. I acknowledge that the method I use is not the result of my own creative thinking or abilities. It was given to me by God in response to my asking Him to teach me what I had to do to put off my old sinful nature and put godliness in its place. For years I felt alone in using this method until reading literature by the Church Fathers and learning many of them used this same basic method long before I began using it.
 - b. It is probable that this is not the only God approved method for change. And it is possible that though this method works for me, it may not work for you. However, I urge you to try it for several months before rejecting it. Regardless, we all have the privilege of asking God to teach us what will work for us, and then using what He gives us to kill off our old sinful nature and pursue growth in godliness.
 3. For most of us, this is not new material. We covered a fuller presentation of this material in June and July of 2012. However, for those who heard it before, this reminder may be helpful, and for that reason alone I think it is worth covering it again.

4. As stated, we will spend three Sundays on this. During the first two weeks, we will look at God's word to examine the principles and truths provided there related to using this kind of planned, purposeful method. Many of the principles and truths will be taken from Israel's experiences – from being freed from slavery in Egypt to taking the Promised Land. On the final Sunday, I will present a flow chart of this method so you can see how it works.
5. In final preparation for today's teaching, I'm going to read two OT scriptures.
 - a. **Exodus 23:28-30**, "I (*God*) will send hornets ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you. [29] I will not drive them out before you in a single year, [so] that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. [30] [Rather,] I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land." (*These verses give us a picture of some of the ways God is involved, and why He is involved in these specific ways.*)
 - b. **Numbers 33:55-56**, "But if you (*the Israelites*) do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them, [they] will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they will trouble you in the land in which you live. [56] And as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you." (*These verses show us why we must be personally, intentionally, and persistently involved.*)

C. Pray

II. Principles and truths from God's word for spiritual growth

- A. God freed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt by means of ten, God-empowered, God-orchestrated plagues.
 1. Then, God crushed the Egyptian army in the waters of the Red Sea, thus breaking Egypt's power to hold the Israelites captive.
 2. God gave Israel a visible manifestation of His presence in the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. And God used His visible presence to lead the Israelites through the wilderness to the Promised Land.
 3. On their way to the Promised Land, God provided all the food and water they needed.
 4. All of this God did to save Israel from their enslavement in Egypt – a salvation which had to be all God's doing because the Israelites were powerless to do any of it themselves.

- B. In preparing to enter the Promised Land, Moses reminded the Israelites of God's command to take the land – either by driving out or destroying its sinful inhabitants. This was clearly different from their salvation experience, for it was no longer God doing it all on His own, but God and the Israelites working together to purify the land God was giving them.
1. Like Israel, our salvation from the power, practice and penalty of sin is all God's doing. And it has to be because we cannot save ourselves.
 - a. But when it comes to fleeing youthful lusts, and pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace, God's way is for you and God to work together.
 - b. And as with Israel, God has done, is doing, and will do all that He says He will do to empower and enable you to be victorious in fleeing sin and pursuing godliness. Therefore, if you are not changing and growing in godliness, it is your failure, not God's.
 2. And yet, like Israel those many years ago, we are totally dependent on God doing all that He has said He would do to make us victorious over our fleshly lusts, the world's ungodly influences, and the devil's temptations.
 - a. And why are we dependent on God? Because these three enemies are too strong, too well-fortified, and too well-equipped for us to gain the victory on our own.
 - b. And the worst part of this is, the strongest of these three enemies is within – that is, within our heart – with includes our beliefs and values, our irrational and foolish fears, our ungodly desires, and the foolish ways we think.
 3. But we are also totally dependent on doing our part, for if, or to whatever degree, we do not do our part, the work of putting off our old sinful nature and putting godliness in its place will not get done.
 - a. We read in the book of Joshua, that though God fulfilled His part of the task, the Israelites did not complete their part of the task. What we learn from this is that God is not the weak part of this two-sided effort, we are. And our failure can be costly.
 - b. This is why God said in **Numbers 33:55-56** . . . “If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain, [they] will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they will trouble you in the land in which you live (*i.e., lead you back into the ways of selfishness and sin*). [56] And as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you.” (*withhold blessings and bring discipline, punishment, and premature death upon them*)

- C. For me, the example of God and the Israelites purifying the Promised Land provides an example for us of God and us purifying ourselves in pursuit of becoming holy, just as God is holy.
1. From God's word and their experience, we can learn that killing off selfishness and sin, and putting godliness in their place, not only requires a planned, purposeful, self-disciplined effort, it takes time – and often more time than you imagine. However, God not only works with this fact, He intends it to be this way.
 2. We learn this from **Exodus 23:29** where God said that He was not going to drive the evil inhabitants out of the Land in a single year.
 - a. Why? Because the Israelites would not have been able to settle into, occupy and protect the whole land in that short amount of time. You see, there was much that had to be done, and much for them to learn about their new land in order for them to occupy and protect it successfully.
 - b. The principle for us today is that growing in godliness not only takes time, it requires learning many important lessons needed to gain and sustain a healthy, mature Christian life.
 3. Without question, God had the power to destroy the sinful inhabitants of the Promised Land in the blink of an eye – and He could do it without any help from the Israelites.
 - a. But God chose an elongated process – a process that required Israel to conquer the enemy they could see – person by person, village by village, city by city, tribe by tribe, and area after area until all evil was defeated and good established in its place (**Exodus 23:27-33**).
 - b. Given the weaknesses of our humanity, and the legitimate limitations on our time, this God-ordained progressive process is just as needful for us as it was for Israel.
 - (1) Consider: how many irrational fears, or selfish ways, or ungodly desires, or sinful habits, or acquired ways of the world can you go to war against and change at a time?
 - (2) The reality is, most of us can only work at changing one or two selfish or sinful ways at a time. And if it is an established habit, changing just it will require a full-time, focused effort.
 - c. But that is not the only reason this is a progressive process that takes time. It takes time to learn, figure out how to put into practice, and finally cement into our being the kind of thinking, attitudes, values, beliefs, and actions of the new godly way we are taking on – so it is not easily forgotten or reversed.

- d. Israel spent approximately thirty years working God's prescribed method of clearing the Land, and at the end of those years the job was still unfinished. Therefore, we should not be surprised or get discouraged over the length of time it takes to put off our old nature and put on a nature like that of Jesus Christ.
- D. Though we have talked about some of these already, I want to state several truths and principles we can learn from Israel's experience in taking the Promised Land.
1. **First**, the Israelites had to take responsibility for their part in ridding the land of evil – if the land was to be purified. This means the land would be as pure as the effort they were willing to put forth to make it that way. The same is true for us.
 2. **Second**, Israel had to go to war against challenging enemies, trusting that God's promised assistance and power for victory was active and would be effective – even though they could not see it or touch it. The same is true for us.
 3. **Third**, Israel had to continue obeying God, because disobedience would eventually lead to defeat – which would mean at least part of the land would remain its evil self, and that would result in lost blessings from God and more trouble for themselves. The same is true for us.
 4. **Fourth**, Israel would battle only one or two enemies at a time. Though this would elongate the process, it would keep them from feeling overwhelmed and wanting to give up. In addition, it would help them grow in the ways necessary to keep taking more and more land while holding the land already taken. The same is true for us.
 5. **Fifth**, Israel would either be preparing for war, fighting the enemy, or recuperating – almost every day. Sustaining such a life-style requires a disciplined commitment to do God's will, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, self-discipline, good planning, perseverance, and the support of the community. The same is true for us.
 6. **Sixth**, Israel would have to remain vigilant, even after victory, lest any portion of the enemy return and retake land. Though this kind of vigilance is not as hard as going to war, it comes close.
- E. Though God's way of dying to self and growing in godliness requires hard, tiring work, it is rewarding. God promises blessings and rewards to those who pursue godliness, just as He promised blessings and rewards to the Israelites if they cleared the land and lived accordingly.

1. In my experience, there are numerous blessings and rewards for **cleansing** ourselves, **fleeing** youthful lusts, and **pursing** godliness. And I can honestly say that these blessings and rewards exceed the pleasures, control, and benefits I was seeking through self-rule, selfishness, willing participation in sin, and joyfully partaking of some of the ways of the world. For example –
 - a. Your faith will grow strong – to the point of becoming confident in God’s involvement, His provision, protection, empowerment, goodness, wisdom, and in what His scriptures say.
 - b. You will gain a consistency in obeying God and His word that will seem natural and easy rather than forced and burdensome.
 - c. You will develop the kind of thinking and nurture the kind of desires that want what God wants and abhors what God hates.
 - d. Your prayer life will change and grow – becoming something that brings you into intimate fellowship with God, as you walk and talk with Him throughout the course of your journey.
 - e. Scriptures like James 1:2-4 & 4:1-10, Romans 6 & 12, Hebrews 10:26-31, and Matthew 5:3-7:27 will convict you, instruct you, motivate you, encourage you, and comfort you as you flee sin and pursue godliness.
 - f. And you will come to know a never before experienced level of inward peace, joy, and contentment in spite of what is going on around you.
2. These treasures are priceless, and they can only be obtained by going through the process of cleansing yourself, fleeing youthful lusts, and pursuing righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

III. Conclusion

- A. **Philippians 2:12-13**, “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”
- B. **Matthew 5:6**, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”