



# A “Vessel of Honor”

- 2 Timothy 2:14 - 26

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*2:14-26 Remind [them] of these things, charging [them] before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be*

*diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 16 But shun profane [and] idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. 17 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, 18 who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. 19 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." 20 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. 21 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. 22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 23 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. 24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, 26 and [that] they may come to their senses [and escape] the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to [do] his will.*

## 2:14

“Remind [them] of these things.” What *things* is Paul speaking about here? The things that he had been covering with Timothy so far in this letter. The warnings against legalism, even self-imposed legalism, the call to strength in service and one’s stand in the Word. To endure. To stay focused on one’s calling, to remain faithful.

Paul tells Timothy that he needed to “remind” those under his care about these things. This too, is my calling as pastor here. To remind you, the flock, of these things, despite the fact that such often makes me less than popular. Sadly, we need to be reminded often because seldom do we see ourselves with the clarity that is required. This again is necessary so we don’t forget where we came from, where we are going and how we are supposed to get there.

But Paul points out that while Timothy IS to focus on these things, he is NOT to focus on things that do NOT matter! He emphatically charges us, “before the Lord,” to not “strive” about words. “Strive” (gr) “to contend about words, to wrangle about empty and trifling matters.” It means to “major on the minors”...to obsess about

the inconsequential. And usually such is done at the expense of the big stuff! The fact is, most of us are far more apt to debate scripture than submit to it.

“subverting” or “ruin” NKV means (gr) “overthrow, destruction” - ... “the extinction of a spirit of consecration.” It is so easy, in our pride, to argue about issues of Spirit that have no bearing on our salvation or upon a disciplined walk. The fact is, the issues today that divide believers are many, but very few are worth fighting over. The battles so often stem from pride and our arrogance. There is a great difference between “defending the faith” and “being an idiot.”

The greater church is forever being tempted in a thousand ways to take our eyes off of the goal...off of the prize. And to do so is a ‘slippery slope.’ What begins as a mere trifle can eventually become our undoing! We should remember always that the things we say are said “*before the Lord.*”

## **2:15-16**

The Old King James uses the word “study” (2 Tim. 2:15), yet it does not really have anything to do with books and teachers. It means “to be diligent” as the NKJV says. To “be zealous.”

The focus here in this text is that the workman needs to be diligent in his labors so that he will not be ashamed when his work is inspected. “Rightly dividing” means “cutting straight” and can be applied to many different tasks: plowing a straight row, cutting a straight board, sewing a straight seam, and honestly and clearly handling of the Word of God.

The truth is, we often argue and debate in order to get “one up” on the competition or to win Biblical arguments. These things are based upon selfish pride. Paul is saying our energies are better spent in an exercise of diligence to present ourselves for God’s approval. This, in a nut-shell, simply means, “the only opinion of you that really matters is that of God Himself.” Thus our approval by those outside are meaningless in comparison to the critical approval of our Father!

On the flip side of this matter is that for many the cry of “God’s opinion of me is the only one that matters,” is in reality a defensive and arrogant move to attempt to dance around any human accountability. It is easy to say “I am only under God’s judgment and approval” when God is not physically standing here amongst us to dispute your standing and slap you in the head! So for many of us such is affectively just a “God Card” to be played when we want anonymity and excuses.

We should note that Paul Himself spoke of the need to have a good reputation and Proverbs 25:22 reminds us that there is wisdom in much counsel. Saying that, I am not attempting to soften the impact of the text but rather to point out that spiritual isolationism is not the goal here.

Notice it says to be ‘diligent to present ourselves to God in a righteous light.’ But he goes on to say that such is done from the position of a “worker” not a mere “church attender.” We are to be servants of God and kingdom...lives that we will never have to be ashamed about. We are to be “diligent to present ourselves as a worker approved by God.” Clearly, we have a personal part to play in our relational dynamic with Christ. It’s not a one way association. Truly this is one of the most ignored verses in scripture!

(Guzik) “Timothy, *as a faithful pastor*, was to be rightly dividing God’s word; that is, he had to know what it said and didn’t say, and how it was to be understood and how it was not to be understood.”

If we can **rightly** divide the Word, then it goes without saying that we can **wrongly** divide the Word also. It's common to hear someone claim, "*Well, that's my interpretation...that's what I believe.*" But we need to study hard, rightly divide the truth, so ours will also be **the** interpretation...**HIS** interpretation!

Paul pulls no punches here by referring to such a practice as the exercise of "profane and idle babblings!" The Living Bible says "worthless and foolish talk." He goes on to state that such a practice is not static or harmless, but begins through ungodly motivations and only leads to a "greater level of ungodliness!" So in other words, nothing good comes from it.

It seems so hard to learn the gift of "shut up in the Spirit!" Paul has already told us in his first letter to Timothy that we should seek "to lead a quiet and peaceable life..." We often grasp the peaceable aspect, but fail on the "quiet" part.

## **2:17-18**

Guys like these two still do an amazing amount of damage, especially in our age of digital media where there is no debate and no proof required! On the surface their "spiel" may seem ridiculous, but their sort manage to create just enough doubt and confusion to create uncertainty and hesitation. The reality is, mankind just seems to embrace dirty laundry easier than the truth. Apparently, nothing has the impact that the truth does, so we often try to avoid it.

The terminology Paul uses is graphic. NKJ says "cancer" and the old King James says "canker", or "gangrene." Either way, the picture is vivid and stark. Their message spreads, but spreads as evil and is destructive to the listener. Destructive, and if left untreated, **deadly**.

Cancers cannot be "healed", but rather must be "cut out". They seldom just "go away." Thus note that Paul is dealing with this issue with the utmost expediency and seriousness. He even goes so far as to name names. Thus throughout history these two guys will go down in history as false teachers, enemies of God, and enemies of the church. Some folks we know will only be remembered that same way, I'm afraid! Sometimes...if we love the flock, clarity in the danger warning is imperative. And sometimes that means we have to name names too. There is indeed a time to call such individuals "out into the street."

Notice that the text says that these two 'strayed' from the truth. Meaning that they once were in possession of the real truth and then inexplicably moved away from it. It wasn't that they were ignorant of the facts of God and His Word, but rather they simply didn't want it or didn't want that version. Thus they moved to a more comfortable one, or a more individually centered one, or a version that allowed them some illegitimate latitude to operate outside of the real truth. The reasons are too numerous to expound upon further, but the results are the same: they **had it**, they **strayed** and they **became an enemy** of God.

In doing so, they of course began to systematically recruit others to their position. This is nearly always part of the process because gaining followers somehow legitimizes their position for which they have no innate peace. These may seem to be nice folks and old friends, but they are blind and spiritually cancerous and will, if given the opportunity, "overthrow your faith."

## **2:19**

Despite such opposition, God and His truth have not moved. There is no "new truth" nor is there a "new gospel." Malachi 3:6 tells us flat out "For I am the LORD, I do not change."

How do we know whether we are standing on firm ground? Paul gives us two signs. One, he says the “Lord knows who are His.” Not just in the sense that He recognizes you, but more so He approves and appreciates you.

John 10:14 *"I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own."*

John 10:27-29 *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."*

But how do *we* know? Well, how do you know if someone loves you? How do you know if you are in good standing with your spouse? **Relationship**. You know His voice, and He knows yours. There is communion and peace. There is fruit and overflow. There is a state of quality and a joy that is recognized by everyone around you. When two people are truly in love, they do not need to tell the people around them. It's obvious!

Secondly, those that stand upon His solid foundation “depart from iniquity.” Those that are his...those that name the name of Christ, depart from unrighteousness, leave behind sin and wrong. It is a simple concept that somehow always escapes us!

Numbers 16 gives us a classic picture of what Paul is trying to tell us here: “*Who gave you the right to rule over us?*” Korah, Dathan, and Abiram asked Moses. And Moses wisely responded by saying to the two hundred fifty men with them, “*If I were you, I would depart from them. They're causing division. They're a big problem. Stay away.*” But Moses' warning went unheeded. So the earth swallowed them all.” (Numbers 16:32)

“If you want to find yourself swallowed up by despair or confusion, hang around those who cause problems. I have yet to see a man or a woman prosper who causes division and problems in a church.” (Courson)

## **2:20-21**

STORY: A man used to visit a tiny general store in the country. The proprietor had a clerk named Jake, who seemed to be the laziest man in the world. One day the man noticed that Jake was gone. He asked the proprietor, “Where's Jake?” “Oh, he retired,” was the answer. “Retired? Then what are you going to do to fill the vacancy?” The owner replied, “Jake didn't leave no vacancy.”

So let me ask you, “What kind of vacancy would there be in this church if you left?” It is God's clear intention that every one of His people be used in serving the Lord Jesus Christ. He has given gifts to each one to be used as good stewards. And yet for so many that name the name of Christ, their faith is like football - an occasional Sunday spectator sport. They are not serving Christ day by day. But if you truly know Christ, you can't be happy sitting on the bench or in the stands. You want to be in the game.

(Steven Cole) “Our text reveals the kind of person God uses. You may think that God uses people who have impressive abilities and gifts. While spiritual gifts play a part, they are not the main feature in being used by God. Or you may think that God uses a person who has been to seminary and has a lot of training. While seminary has its place, I know of many men who went to seminary or Bible school, but they're not even in the stadium, let alone in the game!”

Paul presents a picture that his readers would understand. Everyone's house has both utensils that are the good stuff...stuff to eat from, and then there is stuff you feed the dog from. Both Paul, and Jesus before him, foretold the same truth. The church is a mixed group, some true to their Lord, others are impostors (Mt 13:24-30). Though God knows who belongs to Him and though true disciples demonstrate a life reflective of His holiness, scattered among them are unbelievers who deny the truth by their doctrine and their lives. These are the wood and clay within God's earthly house. Their presence should not disturb or discourage those who are faithful.

Yet on the most basic level, outside of any outward spit and shine, what makes the difference between them? Two things: *what is put in them and what they were used for*. It's the same with us. We are holy...we are vessels of honor, *only if* we allow God inside of us, and are used by Him. So the only thing that truly separates us from a vessel of honor and one for dishonor is what is in it and what it is used for. But the reality is, there will always be both here amongst us: (Note Matthew 13:25-40)

But Paul's point herein is that if we desire to stand on the solid foundation of God's truth and be used by Him, we need to separate ourselves from such "vessels of dishonor." D. L. Moody said that "*God doesn't seek for golden vessels, and does not ask for silver ones, but He must have clean ones.*"

The Old King James uses the word *purge* here instead of "cleanse." We must never treat sin and its traps lightly. We must recognize the danger that awaits us...the subtly of Satan's methods and those who ultimately serve him even while attending church. Note the guarantee. We shall be a *vessel unto honor*. And being faithful, we have done our part. We ARE prepared for every good work.

## 2:22

"Flee": there's nothing glamorous or grandiose about that call is there? It comes down to just simply running away. The word "lusts" here in this verse had an original meaning that goes beyond the common use today. We are apt to make it exclusive to just sensual sin, but it meant much more than that. It encompasses all strong desires for things forbidden and even simple things that are not for you. It's been said that we need to flee the "three P's": pleasure, power, and possessions.

As a young man, Timothy would likely have had the same tendencies and selfisms that a young person would have today. Paul warns to apply active and conscious effort to "run away" from those things. But at the same time we are called to *offense*...to forward motion. To *seek* righteousness, faith, love, and peace. To seek to embrace the things of God.

Note he tells Timothy to not only pursue these things, but to do so with those that "call on the Lord". This is where the critical aspect of belonging to a Christian community comes into play. Timothy was not to even attempt to live his faith or walk his disciplined walk alone, or apart from the body of Christ. It was to be exercised in union with the church.

He told Timothy in his first letter:

"Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity." (1 Tim 4:12)

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 Jn 1:7)

## 2:23

“*foolish and undisciplined questions...*” We are not, as believers and servants of God, to spend time answering questions of division and strife for those who are not truly searching, and do not come seeking with a genuine heart. There are always those who just like to argue and debate. They pass through this church from time to time.

Then there are those who want to cause trouble to gather attention and followers unto themselves. We are better served by keeping our eyes upon the path ahead of us and ignore such disputes.

There will also always be those who will trash talk. Paul had them, Jesus had them. In fact, every servant of God that was focused on God and kingdom in scripture seemed to have his peanut gallery that would try to bring him down. Nothing good ever comes out of trying to debate them...it only “generates strife.”

## 2:24-26

“Servant” (2 Tim. 2:24) is the Greek word *doulos* which means “slave.” So Paul called himself “a slave of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). A slave had no will of his own; he was totally under the command of his master.

The Old King James uses the word “strive” (*gr*) in verse 24, meaning to “fight, quarrel, and dispute.” The focus is to not be on winning arguments, but gentle interaction between us and others, the ability to exercise the teaching of the Word, and the manifestation of patience through us.

When we DO have to deal with those who “oppose themselves” or one who places himself in opposition, we are to try to do so with a spirit of gentleness. Sometimes there is no avoiding a throw down with these folks. When that day comes, we should attempt to do so firmly but in humility, not with a ‘pop in the nose’ or even a heated verbal exchange. Never lose your cool! We should...and often it only comes through Holy Spirit empowering, seek to gently teach, and patiently correct those who get all up in your face.

The goal should always be to “bring them to repentance.” If we so firmly shut the door on them, they will have no place to go when and if that day comes. Paul is not suggesting that Timothy, or for that matter us today, be soft and compromising. But rather that he saturate himself in the Word, that he might be able to answer the truly seeking, and know how to close down the potential debates of those who are not.

Because the real fact herein is that these folks have been “taken captive by Satan” and are doing his will whether there are aware of it or not. They have been blinded and deserve our pity not our wrath.

Remember...*and this is crucial*, keep your wits about you in these situations, because ultimately such folks are never out of **God’s** reach. He is never testy, exasperated, nor helpless. He can reach them in ways you never can and never will. Trust Him. Pray for these folks. Deal with them when you have to, and leave the rest to Him.