



2 TIMOTHY 2:20-3:9

# Set Apart as Holy, Useful, and Ready

2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER LENT – MARCH 12, 2017 (AM)

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## INTRODUCTION

Paul makes an interesting statement in Phi.2:12 ... *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* For some, the first half of this statement is a stumbling block. We don't earn God's favor. So, hearing of any sort of *work* being put into our *salvation* just sounds wrong. For others, the latter half is the stumbling block. If it is *God who works* in us to accomplish *his good pleasure*, what keeps us from being robots, mere puppets on a string? In reality, because we've been made alive in Christ by the sovereign grace of *God that works in (us) for his good pleasure*, we *work* to cast off every self-willed attitude and action in favor of walking in obedience to Him, enabled by His Spirit. We press hard to cooperate fully with the saving, sanctifying grace He has showered upon us in Christ.

This lesson from the Apostle Paul is a good one to keep in mind as we move into our text (2Ti.2:20-3:9) because we hear a lot about human effort here. Paul is describing the attitudes and actions of those who live (*honorably*) before *God* in contrast to those who live (*dishonorably*). He's giving Timothy instruction on how to help as many as will to press on in the *honorable* direction, even while reminding him that the *dishonorable* crowd will always be present, and increasingly so as we move through these *last days* (3:1).

Having mentioned *God's firm foundation* (2:19) of the church, which *stands* even in though it's been invaded by false teachers (17b-18), Paul launches into this teaching on two types of *people* who inhabit *God's great house* built on that *foundation*, raising the question of which type we want to be.

Let's walk through this passage in three steps.

## INSTRUCTION OF THE VESSELS FIT FOR HONORABLE USE – 220-26

Pursue honorable use yourself (20-23).

You heard Paul's opening of this new paragraph: 20 *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.* And it doesn't appear that he means *gold and silver vessels* are for *honorable use* and *wood and clay* ones are for *dishonorable*. Many a (*wooden*) spoon has been put to *honorable use*! But so has many a *silver* spoon. Yet they're hardly interchangeable. The *silver* spoon is of uniquely *honorable use* in a formal dining room, while a (*wooden*) spoon comes in much more handy in a woodshed.

Have you ever looked at yourself compared to others in the church and thought: *Wow, they're silver and gold. I'm wood. I'm clay. I can't do what they do. I can't serve like they serve. I can't speak like they speak.* I know that feeling. There's many a preacher whom I listen to and think: *I can't do what they do in the pulpit.* But then I'm reminded of passages like this one—and there are many more—that remind us we're not called to compare ourselves with each other, but just to do what *God* has called and equipped us to do for the achievement of His purpose through us. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: 2Co.10:12 ... *when (we) measure (our)selves by one another and compare (our)selves with one another, (we) are without understanding.* If you're a (*wooden*) spoon by God's design, God's assignment, don't waste time and energy wishing you were *silver* or *gold*. Just be a (*wooden*) spoon for His glory. And enjoy every minute of it.

That's what Paul is getting at when he writes: 21 *Therefore, if anyone—gold, silver, wood, clay—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.* There are all kinds of vessels in the house. And there are all kinds of (*uses*) for those vessels. Don't fret what you're made of. Just rejoice that you're *useful to the master*. After all, He's the One Who purchased you for His house.

22 *So, how do we do it—give ourselves to the use He's assigned? How do we Phi.2:12 ... work out (our) own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 (knowing) it is God who works in (us), both to will and to work for his good pleasure?* Paul tells us here: 22 ... *flee youthful passions—run from dishonorable (uses)!* Run from self-serving, self-gratifying aims—and *pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.* Turn away from the desires of the flesh, and engage with the church in the work

of God's Kingdom. Engage with all the brothers and sisters who are in Christ by faith. *Seek first his kingdom and righteousness* (Mat.6:33) together.

23 *Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.* We need to pause here for a moment. This is the second time this word *quarrels* has appeared in this passage (14, 23), both times as something to *avoid*. We talked last week about not giving the time of day to *irreverent babble* that *leads people into more and more ungodliness* (16) and *(spreads) like gangrene* (17). And Paul says it again here: 23 *Have nothing to do with these foolish, ignorant controversies...* But that's raised a question for several of you: *Do we engage any false ideas?* Answer: *Yes, of course we do. If we're proclaiming the gospel in this day and age, we surely will!* But what we *avoid*, what we don't give the time of day to, are *quarrels* about such ideas. And that's just where Paul goes next. He urges Timothy to...

### **CALL OTHERS TO HONORABLE USE (24-26).**

24 ... *The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness.* Don't get dragged into ugly *quarrels* over false ideas, Jam.1 20 *for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.* Rather, engage them (*patiently*), (*gently*), trusting God to work. (*He*) *may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.* That would be excellent! God may use us to others into *honorable use*, just as He's done through others in us!

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE VESSELS FIT FOR DISHONORABLE USE – 31-9**

31 *But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.* Not everyone will respond to our gospel witness. Not everyone will be redirected by our (*patient*), (*gentle correction*) (2:24-5) 2 *For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,* (We could define each of these words to add nuance to Paul's description of the escalating *difficulty in the last days*, but I think he's done a pretty good job painting a picture here that communicates even without added nuance!) 3 *heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,* any questions? Now, here's the kicker: 5 *having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.*

This is *pretend religion*: a few elements of the *truth*, but separated from the true *power* of *God*—like cut flowers, a corpse dressed up for the casket. Yet, *people* prefer this—relentlessly self-driven, and determined to win the day.

And when this is where they are, there's no way to engage them without *quarreling*. When *people* caught in this sort of attitude and action are challenged, they don't know any other way to respond. They don't want to change! And they don't want to hear from anyone who thinks they should! So, Paul writes: 5 ... *Avoid such people.* 6 *For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions. So, the people we avoid* are not the ones who are interested in testing their ideas and actually finding the *truth*. They're the ones who prey on the most vulnerable ones in the church, those who are 7 *always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth*. These guys aren't interested in *truth* themselves. And as they talk to others, *truth* is always just around the next corner. It's like a religious soap opera where satisfying resolution just never arrives. *Truth* never arrives. If it does, something went wrong. And they're out of work!

8 *Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth.... Jannes and Jambres* aren't mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. But they *are* mentioned in the *Targum of Jonathan*, (a Jewish commentary) on Exo.711 (*Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts.*). They were Pharaoh's magicians who imitated the early signs Moses gave to prove he was from God—like casting down his staff and having it turn into a serpent—so Timothy would've known their names (Guthrie 177). And like them, these false teachers in Ephesus are 8 ... *men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.* 9 *But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of (Jannes and Jambres).* They were fighting a losing battle! And so is anyone like them!

## WHAT DO WE GAIN FROM THIS PASSAGE? – 221

We've seen in this extended passage a description of two types of *people*: those fit for *honorable use* by *God*, and those fit for *dishonorable use*. Part of the work of those fit for *honorable use* is to (*correct*) *his opponents with gentleness* and (*patience*) (2:24-5). And that is no small assignment! The long list that opens c.3 give us a clear sense of how increasingly entrenched in (*dishonor*) our *opponents* actually are.

But our calling is still clearer. And we get a concise and helpful word on just what to do back in vv.21-25, especially in v.21. Vv.22-25 give us the concrete instruction on what to do once we've heard the big picture aim. But that aim is expressed in v.21: *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.* Tell me that's not the desire of your heart today: to be *set apart by God as holy, useful to (Him), and ready for every good work!*

But doesn't it sound here like each of us has to get there on his own? Doesn't Paul clearly say: *If anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable he will be a vessel for honorable use?* Yes, he does. But it's within the context of this whole letter, not to mention the whole of Scripture, that we understand his meaning here. This is Paul just emphasizing the first part of what he wrote to the Philippians: 2:12 ... *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* But we've seen the rest of the picture right here in 2Ti., even right here in this passage (26). What is true for others is also true for us: it's only *God Who can grant us repentance leading to a knowledge and experience of the truth.*

But we've also seen it from the very beginning of this letter: it is 1:7 ... *God Who gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.* It is *God 19 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.* And it is *God who secures our eternal destiny: 1:12 ... for I know whom I have believed, Paul wrote, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.* Phi.2:13 *For it is God who works in (us), both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* And, my friends, that is the good news today!

## CONCLUSION

*God* has already done what is required for us to 2:1 ... *(cleanse ourselves) from what is dishonorable and to be set apart as holy, useful to the master..., and ready for every good work.* Whether you're made of *gold and silver* or *wood and clay*, it makes no difference. The *God* of our *salvation*—the *God* of all creation—has opened the way for you, here and now, in this life, to be *set apart as holy*—think of that!—to be *useful to (Him)*. There are those among us whose deepest longing in life is to be *useful* to anyone. In Christ, we become *useful to God Himself*—men, women, boys, girls, rich, poor, healthy, infirmed. In Christ we can be *useful.* *God Himself* says so, right here!

In Christ we can be *ready for every good work*. So, once again, how do we do it? We receive and cooperate with the *work God* has already done, and is still doing, in us *for his good pleasure* (Phi.2:13). We 22 ... *flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart*. We 23 *have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies... that they breed quarrels*. 24 *And (we are) not... quarrelsome but are kind to everyone, (teaching them), patiently enduring evil, and* 25 *correcting (them) with gentleness, trusting that God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth*. Then, by His grace He will actually be doing through us to them what He's already doing in us. This is just what was needed in Ephesus back then, and it is surely what is needed in our day today.