

You Must Choose

Paul's description of the false teachers in the prior paragraph contained an implicit appeal for believers to avoid and separate from the false in verses 16 and 19. God commands Christians to separate themselves from evil in order to be holy. However, the choice is ours, do we fully embrace God or embrace God with some of the world and its sin. What are the sins and the evil of the world? The answer is found in the entirety of the Bible and is not hard to identify. However, we are stubborn strong willed people with self-interests and short memories. Both the Old and New Testaments tell the same principles over and over to bring home God's commands of righteousness and identifying sin and evil. We have always been short sighted about many important things in life and ultimately we often see what we want to see. We are focused on today and cannot seem to see eternity. We see dimly and need the corrective lens of the Bible to allow God's spiritual light to penetrate us, and thus change our hearts and minds.

One of the questions that puzzled doctors and scientists in the 20th century was why the need for people to wear corrective eyeglasses increased from about 10% to 40% or even 50% in areas of Europe and America over the last 100 years. The common thought was more people need glasses because we were reading so much more than people in the past and this sounded logical. Reading required in school and life strains ones eyesight and glasses became somewhat of a symbol of intellectuals. However, now in the 21st century recent studies have come to realize a simple truth. People who spend the majority of their time indoors have a much higher need for corrective glasses. Those spending the majority of their time outside in the sun have a much lower need for glasses. The sunlight somehow nourishes ones eyes.

Scientists are now trying to find why this is true. Spending time in the light of God found in the Bible nourishes our spiritual eyes and gives us understanding of who God is and who we are in Him, and further what the world is and who the prince of this world is. Satan creates cataracts in our spiritual eyes causing people to see dimly and allowing false beliefs to enter into the church. As Christians if we desire to see clearly what is truth we must spend time in the Light of God, His Word and let it nourish our souls.

Now in verse 20 Paul introduces a different metaphor concerning God's truth and light, it is that of a house containing two kinds of vessels. It elaborates on his appeal for turning away from all that is false. Then in verses 21 to 26 Paul gives his application.

We begin with Paul's metaphor that expands on the prior verses of the last paragraph, look at verse 16, "But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness..." Jump down to verse 19, "The Lord knows those who are his", and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." (2 Timothy 2:16 & 19_{ESV}) Keeping in mind verses 16 and 19 let us now read Paul's metaphor in verse 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." Taken in context with the rest of chapter 2, the "great house" is Christ's Church universal. Just as in context verse 19 says, "God's firm foundation" and this also refers to the church. Paul is echoing Jesus thoughts when He told Peter, "I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) As a side note, the language of the Bible is rich, precise at times and multi-meaning at other times. Here the Aramaic word play between the two different words used for "rock", Peter's name and the different word for "rock" that follows, allows some movement for the phrase "this rock." It could mean "this rock" is Peter or is reference to Jesus himself as identified

in the 1 Peter 2:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:4. So even though the Catholic Church used this verse to claim Peter as the “rock” and therefore, the first Pope, again in context the “rock” is Christ. Even the Old Testament foretold Christ as the rock, “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:4) The Church is Christ’s and will remain until His second coming and there is nothing Satan can do to wipe out Christ’s true church or prevent Christ’s return. Christ’s Church will be remnant church that is faithful and living to glorify Him until His return.

As we saw last week Christ’s Church is made up mostly of believers. However, there are a growing number of those who believe they are saved, but believe in false teachings and doctrines, and therefore a false Christ and are in truth unsaved. Then there is a smaller number of unbelievers in the church, such as Hymenaeus (hoo·men·ah·yos) and Philetus (fil·ay·tos) found in verse 17, who are servants of Satan working to destroy the church from within.

Paul says in verse 20, this “great house” of God “there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.” We understand that the “great house” is the true Church of Christ and composed of true believers. The “vessels” represent individuals within the church. As always to understand what God is teaching us we need to keep the scripture passage in context.

Vessels of gold and silver here are not compared with gold and silver as idols being placed before Christ, as found in Acts, James or Revelation where John wrote, “... mankind who ... did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood.” (Revelation 9:20) The vessels are representing purpose and function. Paul wrote in Romans, “Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?” (Romans 9:21) Here one

understands that one is utterly dependent upon God's enabling grace and power as the Potter. We can submit and let Him mold us or insist on being what we desire and remain dishonorable, damaged or cracked pots.

God is not telling us that all vessels of gold and silver are honorable and all vessels of wood and clay are dishonorable. Outward appearances can be deceptive. Some of the most effective men to serve God were from very ordinary or humble backgrounds. Saul was considered a most handsome man and the end of his life was as ugly as it gets. The vessels represent people within God's Church, both those who are faithful and useful to God's kingdom and those who are less than faithful or not faithful at all. Those vessels of honor are defined in verses 3 to 6 as good soldiers obeying the orders of Christ their commander and waging war against evil using "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:17) and we are to apply the "word with God" with love, grace and mercy in hope of taking our enemy captive and making him one in Christ. It should not be our desire to slay him. As Paul worked to clarify faithfulness he related it also to being like the athlete that works hard to compete with the goal of winning or the hard working farmer that gets to enjoy the first fruits of his labor at harvest. It is the goal of every true believer to be a vessel of honor before our holy God.

Be Ready For Every Good Work

Beginning in verse 21 Paul clarifies his metaphor by writing, "Therefore, 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." We know when Paul begins a statement with therefore we need to pause and ask what is it there for? If we are to be vessels of honor we must cleanse or purge ourselves from the dishonorable. We understand the great house is the church of Christ and the vessels are those people in the church. To cleanse us of the dishonorable vessels means to purge the pseudo-believers and the unfaithful from God's church or to lead

them to cleansing faith. Sin is contagious and spreads like gangrene. The writer of Proverbs 13:20 warns, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” Mixing honorable and dishonorable results in the honorable being contaminated. God told the Jewish people exiled in Babylon through the prophet Isaiah, “Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD.” (Isaiah 52:11) One who feigns belief in God is more dangerous than those who are openly unbelievers. We are on guard against the influence of those belonging to the unbelieving world. However, we at times, do not see clearly those in the church. This is the reason Satan works so hard to place those in the church that are dishonorable vessels. Unbelievers seeking truth, eternal truth, have always been welcome in the church and we through the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit are to give them the answers to their questions.

Seek Purity

We are not to stop with being careful whom we associate with and guarding the true gospel against false teaching, but we are to look within ourselves. Look at verse 22, if we are to be vessels that honor God we must, “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” A faithful Christian is always running from the lustful passions that the world tries to instill in their heart. I simply do not know how someone, even those raised in the church, can avoid not having some of the filth of this world effect them when they are young. It is the job of parents and the church to keep the world’s passions from the hearts of our children. For those of us who are adults the passions of our youth will try to rear their heads even many years after becoming Christian. Fleeing youthful passions is not limited to sexual lust, although lust tugs hard on us as young adults. Youthful passions is really a long list including; pride, craving for wealth and power, ambition without boundaries, jealousy, envy and the list can go on

and on. The common thread of all these passions or lusts is that they take us away from God and they slowly put us to death as spiritual creations of God.

We must not only flee these passions, but also run with a purpose. To wildly run from the passions of youth without a goal is to run blindly. This type of running can lead us down the wrong roads and into dark alleys. As Jesus said, **“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”** (Matthew 7:13–14)

Paul says that as we flee passions and lusts of the world we are to run to **“righteousness, faith, love, and peace.”** If we are not running towards God as we flee sin, we will grow tired and sin will overtake us. Jesus said the solution to not growing weary and letting sin advance in your life is **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”** (Matthew 11:28–30)

Christ loves us unconditionally. He is the only one truly capable of agape love. The world’s form of love is broken and has so many conditions attached that it fills hearts with shadows and leaves one always unfulfilled. As we pursue Christ we begin understanding what agape love is and have a sense of overwhelming grace and love as we realize that even though we will never be able to love Christ unconditionally while we are here on earth, Christ loves us unconditionally and covers our sin with His sacrificial blood and beyond this amazing love and because of this amazing love God sees us through the pure love of Christ and does not see our sins.

Avoid The Foolish

Verse 23 helps us understand that if a relationship with God is what we desire, we must also **“Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that**

they breed quarrels.” If we are to be vessels of honor we must have a discerning mind for what is truth. An unguarded mind, even if it is the mind of a believer, is subject to deceit, misunderstandings, confusion and lies. An unguarded mind allows false teaching and doctrines to enter and this leads to sinful living. We have no need to argue, but just know God’s truth. Paul advised the Thessalonians to “test everything; hold fast what is good.”²² Abstain from every form of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21–22) To test something you must have a standard or benchmark to test against. For Christians, we have only one benchmark and that is the Bible, it is the lens that corrects everything coming into our minds and souls.

Correct With Gentleness

Reading at verse 24, “And the Lord’s servant *slave* must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.” We know the word Paul uses here is not servant, but *doulos* or slave.

Changing *doulos* from slave to servant or bondservant changes the impact of what Paul is saying. We are slaves of Christ because He bought us with the price of His life’s blood and deals with us with love, grace and mercy. We then, are to follow His example and be patient with those that do not know the truth. We are to guide others step-by-step to understanding God’ truth. Paul wrote, “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” (2 Timothy 4:2) Paul did not say preach the word with harshness but with “complete patience.” Christ loves us and sought us and pursues us until our spiritual eyes were opened and through the corrective lens of the Word, both living and written we began to know God’s truth. Should we love others any less than Christ loves us? Of course not! Obedient slaves to their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, will demonstrate their love by spreading the gospel. Hate mongers do not belong in Christ’s church. As Paul says being “kind to everyone” will build

relationships and give the opportunity to speak into the lives of others. Then God will use us and some will come to know Jesus is the Christ and they will believe in Him to salvation.

Know Truth

Paul makes clear that it is God working through us. We are but His slaves being obedient to our Master's command to share His gospel. Paul closes with "God 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." Paul says, "perhaps" they will come to the "knowledge of the truth" indicating it is up to God and our job is to be obedient and share His gospel. Without the saving gospel of Christ and coming to believe in Jesus as the Christ, no one will escape the "snare of the devil." Let me be clear the salvation found in believing in Christ is eternal and if one remains unsaved they eternally belong to the devil. Knowing this fact prompts these questions, "Why do we not spend time every day in studying God's Word and praying for Him to give us wisdom? Is this not what will protect us from falling into the sin of the world? Knowing that one either goes eternally to heaven or hell should we not have a burning passion to share the saving gospel of Christ that some might be saved?"

God calls, Christ calls and Paul calls us to engage like soldiers waging spiritual battle, to be competitive athletes running to win the race of finding Him, good farmers planting His gospel in the soil of people's hearts, honorable vessels in service to His kingdom. As His children we are to love others enough to share the truth that some might be saved. How are we doing? How can I help you do better? How can we help each other for we are the church of Christ? My beloved let us be good soldiers, athletes, farmers and vessel of honorable service to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!