

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

An Honorable Vessel, Part 1

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:20-22

Code: 55-10

My soul desire to be used by the Lord to build the Kingdom, thank you, Jubilant. I know you gathered up in that song my own heart, the hearts of many of us today.

I long to be useful to God. I can say that's my soul desire. I hope it is with you. But I can remember a time when I wasn't so useful to the Lord. Even though I was a believer there were things in my life, limitations in my life and my commitment that made me more useless than useful. When I think about being useless to the Lord I go back to my childhood. And I remember my father saying to me on numerous occasions when he gave me a job to do and I didn't do it the way he prescribed it to be done, he would say, "Johnny, you're...you're really just about useless." In fact, his favorite expression was, "You'll never amount to a hill of beans."

And I know that there were times in my spiritual life as well when I was well nigh useless to the Lord. I was unfaithful to be who I should be so I couldn't do the tasks He might otherwise have given me to do. But it's always been the desire of my heart, in fact I can say it's a soul desire in many ways in my life that I would be used of God.

Many years ago I learned a little song that was written by Audrey Meyer, it's lingered in my mind all through the years because I think it expresses what I feel. It goes like this, "To be used of God, to sing, to speak, to pray, to be used of God to show someone the way. I long so much to feel the touch of His consuming fire, to be used of God is my desire."

Every one of us should have that compelling desire. Every one of us should see that as the single reason why we live. And just the word "useful" is such a lovely word. And it's a word we find in our text today. Let's look together at 2 Timothy chapter 2. And in our ongoing study of this wonderful epistle from Paul to his son in the faith, we come to verse 20 of this second chapter. We're going to consider verses 20 to 26 as a unit, this Lord's day and next. And in it the Apostle Paul talks to Timothy about being useful to the Lord.

In verse 20 he writes, "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. Therefore if a man cleanses himself from these he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations knowing

that they produce quarrels and the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

I want to just grab that little word in verse 21 "useful." It means serviceable, euchreston. It's used in chapter 4 verse 11, it says, "Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me." It's used in that wonderful letter from Paul to Philemon explaining what had happened to his runaway slave Onesimus. And speaking of Onesimus in verse 11 he says, "He was formerly useless to you but now is useful both to you and to me." What a compliment. He formerly was useless to you but now is useful both to you and to me.

Could that be the story of your life? It certainly is in my spiritual experience, even since becoming a Christian. There were years in my life when I was useless but I have by God's grace and mercy alone found usefulness in serving Him. I know that was the deepest desire of Paul's heart. And reading 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verses 24 to 27 certainly affirms that. Paul writes, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run but only one receives the prize. Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way as not without aim, I box in such a way as not beating the air, but I buffet my body and make it my slave lest possibly after I have preached to others I myself should be disqualified." His great fear was to become useless, disqualified by sin.

Paul's sole desire was to be used of God. He wanted that to be Timothy's sole desire and ours as well. This then is a call from Paul to Timothy to be a useful vessel, a vessel unto honor, as he calls it in verses 20 and 21...a vessel unto honor.

Now as he calls Timothy to this kind of honorable, noble usefulness he begins with an analogy. It's a simple one but a very very clear one. Notice verse 20, "Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver utensils, or vessels, but also vessels of wood and of pottery and some to honor and some to dishonor." Now that's the analogy. That's the illustration. It's a simple comparison. He speaks about a large house. The idea is that the house being large has many utensils. The word "vessel" or "utensil" as I translated it is skeuion skeuos and it's a very very broad term referring to anything that could be called domestic gear. It could be furniture, it could be furnishings. It could be tools. It could be utensils that would be used in a kitchen. Just about anything that would fit into a domestic environment. So he says there's a very large house which assumes that it contains very many furnishings, some of them, he says, are gold and silver, expensive, valuable, beautiful, clean, put on exhibit, used with people in public settings, prized highly, cleaned carefully and other utensils are made of wood and pottery, cheap, not prized, not used for public occasions, not put on display, ugly, unclean.

If you know anything about past history you would understand that this was in a time when we didn't have the sophistication that we have now in our homes and all of the wonderful things that have been invented to place in our homes in order to make them as lovely as possible. And you would probably know that what Paul has in mind is a contrast between what was used for people to eat on, what was used to grace the rooms of that lovely home as decor and on the other hand what was used as garbage and even human excrement. Some of it was honorable and some of it was dishonorable. It all served some kind of function. But there were some that were useful only in things that were not even to be spoken of, just out-of-the-way behind the scenes things that you hope no one ever really saw. Some had noble purposes and some had ignoble purposes. Some the dishonor were disgraceful, contemptuous, ignominious.

Well the analogy is very simple. That's very understandable to people living in that culture. That would be understandable to people living in some other cultures today...cultures more primitive than our own. You say, "Well what is this depicting?" Well you remember last week that as we looked at verse 19 we said in verse 19 the Apostle Paul referred to the church. And he referred to the church in this statement, "The firm foundation of God stands." And would be possible to interpret that a number of ways if you just looked at it and read it without digging a little deeper. But with a little bit of careful study of both context and related context, we find that the firm foundation of God which stands refers to the church. In fact, back in 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 15 Paul refers to the church as the pillar and foundation of the truth. So it is not uncommon even in these pastoral epistles for the Apostle to refer to the church as a foundation for the truth, the foundation of God which stands, the firm foundation. And I believe it is that that triggers Paul's analogy. He thinks of the firm foundation of God which stands, that is the church, and then he says in verse 19, "The Lord knows those who are His," and refers to election, one of the seals or marks of authenticity of the church is that it is elect. The second seal or mark is that it is abstaining from wickedness. In other words, it is an elect church from God's viewpoint. It is a righteous church from man's viewpoint.

And so, verse 19 then introduces the elect and righteous church. And then the analogy picks that thought up...the large house is the church. And in that large house there are all kinds of utensils and they're all degrees of usefulness with regard to those utensils. Some are gold and silver and there's even a difference between gold and silver. Gold is more valuable than silver. Some are just wood and pottery, behind the scenes, not to be seen, not lovely at all. Some are hidden and some are exposed to as many as possible.

That's how it is with believers in the church. Some are useful and some are less useful. And some are hardly useful at all and some are useful only for tasks that no one ever sees. The church is mixed. It's not just mixed between believers and unbelievers as in the parable of the wheat and the tares and the sheep and the goats, Matthew 13 and 24. But the church is mixed with believers who are useful and well nigh useless. There are Christians who are not faithful soldiers, as he pointed we

are to be in verses 3 and 4 of this chapter. Christians who are not faithful athletes, as we find in verse 5. Christians who are not faithful farmers who sow the seed and enjoy the results...who are not faithful to keep their focus as verse 8 indicates on the Lord Jesus Christ and suffer whatever might come as he talks about in verses 9 and following. There are those Christians who by virtue of their failure to live the way they ought to live are not useful to God...at least as useful as they might be.

So he introduces to us then this picture. The church is a large house. There are many in it. Some are put forth for the noble purposes and some are hidden behind the scenes for the ignoble purposes. Now it goes without saying that having established that very clear picture, the assumption would be that most of us would like to be used for the noble purposes. With that in mind, we come to verse 21 where he says, "Therefore that being true, if a man cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel for honor." Stop at that point.

The assumption here is we all want to be vessels for honor. I don't want to be a spiritual garbage pail. I want to be useful to God. I want to be a vessel unto honor, not for my sake but for His sake. I want to be one who is prized, valuable. I want to be one who is eminently useful. And I really believe and I think it's so wonderful of the Lord to time things the way He does that what He has here in mind primarily is one who leads the church. This is written to Timothy who is the overseer of most significance in the church at Ephesus at this time. The other overseers of the church are struggling. Some of them have defected from the truth and are teaching error. Some of them had to be disciplined right out of the church, namely Hymenaeus and Alexander as we found in chapter 1. And Hymenaeus is still sitting on the edge of the church, having picked up with another man named Philetus and sowing seeds of lies and false doctrine that eat like gangrene as he said in the prior passage. So Timothy has been placed there to set the church right. And I believe that Paul is writing to Timothy saying, "Timothy, I want you to be maximally useful, I want you to be a vessel to honor."

If you will compare that thought to verse 24, he says, "And the Lord's bondservant," and I believe that too to be a technical term referring to the pastor, elder or overseer of the church. It says he must not be quarrelsome, be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged. Verse 25 adds meekness or humility, gentleness. Those are a repetition of the qualifications of a pastor given in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and Titus 1. So I believe in writing to Timothy, he's saying, "Timothy, this is what is required of those in spiritual leadership."

But, beloved, that does not eliminate the rest of us because the reason the leaders are to be like this is that they may set the example because this is the way God wants all the people to be too. There's no dichotomy there. Leadership is what it is in order that it might set the pattern.

Now I believe there must have been some major struggles going on in the life of Timothy for the reason that Paul repeats these things over to him so frequently. Having given him all the instruction he did in six chapters of the first epistle, he now seems to go back and repeat some of the very same

things, almost as if he is deeply concerned that Timothy come around to being all that God would want him to be. Anyone who is a pastor or leader in the church, an elder, one who stands in the place of example must desire to be a vessel unto honor. We have to set that as the standard for all the rest of the church to desire as well.

But what's involved in that? Well he gives three modifiers that describe the character of this honorable vessel. Look at them in verse 21. An honorable vessel would be described, first of all, as one that was sanctified. An honorable vessel is sanctified. It's a perfect passive, literally having already been sanctified, one who is in a settled state or condition of being set apart for the worship and service of God. Sanctified means to be separated from sin, separated from the world, separated from the flesh, separated from Satan, separated from self-will. A vessel unto honor is separated in a situation of having already been set apart from sin. So we could say then that the first characteristic of a vessel unto honor is its cleanliness...its purity, its holiness. It has been set apart for holy purpose as opposed to those that carry the filth of the house away to the waste places. It's set apart for holy purposes. And if you want to be a vessel unto honor, you've got to get clean. Whatever might defile you has to be washed off, rubbed off, cleaned off.

The second aspect of describing a vessel unto honor in this house is that it's useful to the master. In other words, it's the kind of thing that is performing its intended function. It is a utensil that is of great use to the one who chooses to use it, here called the master. The Greek word is despotes from which we get despot, which is a synonym for dictator. The master of the house was the despot, he ruled the house. And he was in charge of the utensils. There was never a utensil that said I refuse to be used, they just did what the despot wanted done. And the second element of being a vessel unto honor is to be submissive. The first one has to do with cleanliness, the second one has to do with submissiveness. If we are to be vessels unto honor we must be sure that we are separated from sin, from the world, from the flesh, from the devil, and we must be equally certain that we are committed to an obedient submissiveness. This is the heart attitude of one who bows the knee to the master and the master here obviously if you compare Jude 4 has reference to Jesus Christ. He is the master of all the utensils, but sad to say not all of them are equally useful, for not all of them are equally clean and not all of them are equally submissive.

Thirdly he says this vessel unto honor is not only sanctified and useful, but it's prepared for every good work. The idea of prepared here has to do with eagerness. It's eager to be used. It has a zeal for noble purposes, agathon, which means intrinsically, inherently good, noble is the way it is often to be translated. In other words, you're in a condition of offering yourself for noble use. We could call this availability or eager service. So that utensil in the house, that article in the house, that instrument, that tool, that furnishing in the house which is clean, which is submissive, and which is eager to serve is the honorable one.

Those are basic things, aren't they? If you want to be an honorable vessel, a noble vessel, a useful vessel and it starts with being separated from sin and it starts by being cleansed, purged, purified and then by being submissive to the one who rules over you and doing whatever it is he asks you no matter what it is, and also not doing that reluctantly but doing that in a spirit of readiness and eagerness. That's what the idea of being prepared means...having already been prepared. Or a better way to translate that perfect passive, having been put into a prepared condition, or just sitting there waiting to be used, no reluctance. No attachment to sin, no hesitation to obey and no reluctance, that is a noble vessel...an honorable vessel.

Not all believers are like that. Some hold on to sin and they're too defiled and dirty to bring out and use. Some of them don't want to be submissive and be fulfilling the purposes that God intends and some of them aren't eager at all, they're reluctant to even be called to serve. They're not equipped by holiness. They're not equipped by obedience. And they're not equipped by preparedness for every good work that God might grant them opportunity to do.

I want to ask you a question. You heard the song this morning. "My sole desire to be used of Thee." Is that your sole desire. That's the question I want you to ask because if that's not your sole desire, then you have to face the reality that you're in rebellion against God. I don't care how you want to work your way around it, that's the bottom line. And if it is your sole desire, then here are the means to make that a reality. The grace is there, granted by God to provide for holiness of life, submissive obedience and eager zeal to serve...the provision is there in the indwelling power of the Spirit and the Word of God. The only question is, what about you? Is your sole desire to be used of God? Do you see things in this world as either, one, things to be pushed out of the way so that you can get the work done, or things that could be used to enhance the work you do for God? Do you see everything around you in your environment and your world as something which hinders you're being used by God or something which can be used to facilitate your being used by God? That's the way you have to see everything...everything.

So if I ask you...do you want to be useful to God, if you want to be an honorable vessel...and you say yes, then you need to understand there are some principles that can make that a reality. This morning we'll look at two of them...the first one. Back to verse 21, "Therefore if a man cleanses himself from these he will be a vessel for honor." You want to be a vessel for honor? You want to be set apart from sin, useful to God, ready and eager to do His work? Then the first thing necessary is that you cleanse yourself from these. What does that mean? What does that mean?

The word cleanse is a tremendous word. There is a Greek word kathairo from which we get the word cartharsis which means a cleansing. This is that Greek word kathairo with a preposition stuck on the front which always intensifies the verb and it means to thoroughly cleanse...thoroughly cleanse. So the first thing he says if you want to be a vessel unto honor you must thoroughly cleanse yourself. The word "from" means "out from or away from." And then he says "these." What does that mean?

These what? The New American Standard translators put in "these things." What things? That doesn't help. What does he mean? And he doesn't mean things at all, really. What are these we have to cleanse thoroughly ourselves away from? Starting at the end of verse 20, just listen to what is read. Some to honor and some to dishonor, therefore if a man cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel for honor. What are these? They have to be the vessels of what? Of dishonor. Very clear in the context. The vessels of dishonor. The nearest and only reasonable antecedent must be the vessels of dishonor.

The first exhortation then is one, to stay away from fellowshiping with people who are contaminated. And we say point number one then in being a noble and excellent vessel, one that brings honor to the Lord is a pure fellowship. The noble vessel, the honorable vessel maintains a pure fellowship. He stays away from the defiled people in the church. I'm talking about other people in the church, other believers who are not clean, who are not submissive, who are not eager to serve.

You see, sin...sin is a contagious thing, isn't it? Beloved, you have to watch your fellowship. You have to watch who you hang around. In verse 16 of the same chapter, "Avoid worldly and empty chatter, it will lead to further ungodliness and their talk will spread like gangrene." That stuff spreads like gangrene and gangrene spreads so fast in the human body, as I said last week, they have to put people in pressurized sealed environments, inject them with penicillin in a sealed environment which doesn't allow the gangrene to move so that the penicillin can work because gangrene goes faster than penicillin does. Evil sin defilement is a disease that is highly contagious. And your associations are so very very important. And I'm saying in the church you cannot put the silver and gold plates in with the stuff that takes out the garbage and expect the garbage not to get on the silver and the gold. You've got to choose your associations.

Let me show you that for a moment in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. In 1 Corinthians chapter 5 Paul writing to the Corinthian church on this very issue, verse 9, "I wrote you in my letter...this was another letter which we have not in our possession, it's never been found, it was not an inspired letter but nonetheless spoke the truth, no doubt, to the Corinthian church and Paul reiterating what he said in that letter writes here under inspiration...I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people." Now what does he mean? "I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world." I'm not talking about staying away from sinners in the world...no. I mean, you can't do that. You can't get out of the world and you have to reach those people. But I'm telling I wrote unto you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person or covetous or idolater or reviler or drunkard or swindler and not to even eat with such a one. I'm more concerned with the people in the church that you hang around with than I am the people in the world because when they're in the world you know where they are, you know they don't believe, you know they're not in the family and you know their behavior is not acceptable. But if you hang around the garbage pails of the church, if you hang around the defiled people in the church, you'll begin to develop a tolerance for their defilement. Don't

do that because of what he says in chapter 15 verse 33, "Bad company corrupts...what?...good morals." Somewhere along the line you may have to change your relationships even in the church...even in the church.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse 14, "If anyone doesn't obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him so that he may be put to shame and yet do not regard him as an enemy but admonish him as a brother." Don't associate with him. For one thing it will contaminate you, for another thing it will make him feel comfortable and accepted. Separate for your own purity and separate so he will have a sense of shame over his own defilement.

When God was speaking through the prophet Isaiah in chapter 52 and verse 11, He said, "Depart, depart, go out from there, touch nothing unclean, go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord." If you're going to serve the Lord you've got to stay away from people that contaminate you.

In Jeremiah chapter 15 and verse 19 similarly, "Therefore says the Lord, if you return then I will restore you. Before Me you will stand. And if you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become My spokesman." You want to be used by God? Then separate the precious from the worthless. It means a pure fellowship.

I don't want to hang around people even in the church who are defiled. I don't want to hang around people whose life style is a dishonor to Christ. Even though they may be brothers and sisters, I don't want to be around people whose language doesn't honor Christ. I don't want to be around people with bitter critical tongues. I don't want to be around people whose commitment to God is shallow and cheap. I don't want to be influenced by people who tolerate evil in their lives and name the name of Christ. I don't need that. I want to be around people who lift me up, people who pull me up, people who set a standard of holiness for me.

Proverbs 13:20 says, "The companion of fools will suffer harm." It rubs off. And in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 15 it says directly, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble and by it many be defiled." You take one bitter person and they'll defile everybody around them with their defilement. Don't get near those people because if you want to be an honorable vessel, useful, set apart, prepared to serve, you have to be in a pure fellowship. The purer fellowship rubs off and keeps you pure. Hang around the clean vessels, you understand that? Not the defiled ones.

Secondly, not only does that vessel that would be honorable in the service of the Lord need to have a pure fellowship, but secondly a clean heart. Verse 22, a clean heart, "Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a clean heart...or a pure heart." Now that sound just like 1 Timothy 6:11, almost identical. "Flee from these

things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness," almost identical. In verse 11 of chapter 6, "Flee from these things." What things? Is that the same as youthful lust? Pretty much. He goes back and talks about conceit, controversy, disputes, envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, constant friction, love of money, all those kinds of things. He says run from those toward righteousness. Identify yourself with those of a clean heart.

Now the command here in verse 22 is really one command with two sides...shun youthful passion, that's the negative side...aim at righteousness, that's the positive side. Let's look at it a little more closely. Now, the word "now" is there which transitions us into these things which are going to make us a noble, useful, honorable vessel. First verb, "flee," that's an imperative, it's the Greek verb pheugoin the imperative mode, it's the word from which we get fugitive. Be a fugitive, be on the run, keep on continuously fleeing from youthful lusts. The word "lust" or "desire," epithumiais used many many places in the Scripture. It's a general term, it can be and is sometimes used for a good desire. The intent of the desire is dictated by the context and here the fact that he says flee from this unto righteousness puts it in contrast with that which is right, so he's talking about an evil desire or a desire for evil things. And this is typical of young people. It's not that old people don't have evil desire, it's just that young people have evil desire of a certain kind and Timothy was young and he was identifying with Timothy. Timothy was somewhere between 36 and 42 years of age at this time, probably on the younger end. He was 30 years younger than the Apostle Paul, had a long way to go in the maturing process. And Timothy is told here to flee from youthful lusts.

Now we might think of that purely in the sexual area but it's not just that. It can also include an inordinate craving for money, a tremendous compelling desire for power which leads to jealousy, envy, fighting, an argumentative spirit, a quarreling spirit, self-ascertiveness, self-promotion, ambition, pride, all those things that are part of the virility of youth as it moves toward finding itself and identifying its place in the sun. He says you've got to run from it...all of it. Running from youthful passion may be a physical things sometimes, like in Genesis 39:12 when Joseph ran from the hands of Potiphar's wife and literally physically fled. But it's not really that which the writer has in mind here. In 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 11, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." He's talking about running from the things that war in your soul. Sometimes the running can be physical but mostly the running is spiritual, mental.

Now I want to say at this point that I believe this deals with an issue in Timothy's life. I alluded to it earlier and I just point it up again, I think Timothy was in a very precarious position personally. I don't think he had sinned some gross kind of sin or he would have been disqualified and replaced by Paul who had already shown that he had replaced men who were unqualified. So I don't want to conclude that Timothy was at this point living in sin. I just think he was in a time of great weakness. As we saw from the first epistle he was timid by nature. We also saw that he was a bit ashamed of being identified with the Apostle Paul because of the price you had to pay to be identified with him. He also

seemed to be a bit chagrined about being identified with the Lord who was mocked so frequently in his society. He was concerned about being persecuted. He was concerned about being young and some were no doubt condemning him for his youth because he was trying to step in and set in order a church that no doubt had older men. And in the midst of all this intimidation, Timothy was battling with his own desires as any individual Christian does, his own wrong desires, wrong ambitions. The tendency was to be quarreling and argumentative and fighting and striving rather than to be godly and virtuous. He was battling in his own life, his own integrity and credibility spiritually as well as the issues of the ministry to which he had been thrust. And I think he was in a time of great weakness, a time in chapter 1 of the first epistle where Paul has to say to him...stay away from all these errors and all these false things, hold on to what you know to be true. And he reiterates that to him again in the first chapter of the second epistle. In other words, don't jettison your doctrine. But he was in a very precarious situation, struggling greatly. And so he says to him, "Look, Timothy, run continuously and run fast from youthful lusts." And the flip side of that, "Pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace." You can't run from unless you run to...is that not so? You can't run no place. When you left here you went somewhere. And when you ran from you ran to and you run from youthful lust to these virtues.

How do you do that? May I share with you what I believe to be the key? It's found in one lovely statement in Psalm 119 verse 9, "How can a young man keep his way pure? How can he? How can he flee youthful lusts? By keeping it according to Thy Word."

How do you keep your way pure? By regulating it according to the Word of God. Nothing mystical about that. That's submitting to God's Word. That's overcoming evil with good, as Paul says in Romans 12:21. The positive pursuit of what is right, the positive commitment to the Word of God is what keeps the way pure. And so we run from sin toward virtue. And you do that by knowing the Word and by ordering your way according to the word, Psalm 119:9.

Now as you move along, what are you pursuing? Let's look, four things. First of all, you are, present imperative, keep on continually following after...number one...righteousness. I know that word is a theological word but it's so simple, I need only to say it means doing what's right...doing right. By whose standards? God's, living in harmony with God's law, living in harmony with God's Word, living in obedience to God's Word, just what Psalm 119:9 said, by ordering your way according to His Word, constantly pursuing what is right in God's eyes as He has revealed it in His Word. You can't just stand around and run from evil unless you know where you're going and where you're going is toward that which is right as revealed in God's Word. Set it in your mind, beloved, to pursue what is right...to pursue what is right...righteousness.

Secondly, and we could say a lot more about righteousness but for the sake of the grasp of the text we go on to the second one, faith. It's translated faith, a better way to understand it would be to translate it faithfulness. He's not so much talking about faith as the essence of believing as he's talking about faithfulness, loyalty and trustworthiness. Pursue, if you will, integrity, consistency,

loyalty to the Word of God, faithfulness to God Himself. What a lovely word is faithfulness. Run after doing what is right, run after being loyal to God, loyal to His Word, loyal to His church. Be a faithful trustworthy person.

The third word is love, agapan(?), there are several words in the Greek that refer to love but this one is the noblest of all because it is the love of choice...it is the love of the will, not the love of the emotion, not the love of affection in a family, not the love even of the impulse and the desires that we know as sexual love. It's not that. It's not that love which is compelled by sexual feelings. It's not that love which is compelled by emotions. It's not that love which is compelled by attraction. It's not that love which is compelled by family affection. It is that love which is authored in the mind. It is the will to love. It is the love of choice...the noblest of all love because it loves whether there is feeling or not. It loves whether there is emotion or not. It loves because it is right to love, it loves because it loves like God loves, who loved those who were His enemies and who loved those who were unlovely, who loved those who were unlovable because it was His nature to love. It's the love of choice, and the love of choice that results in sacrificial selfless service and self-giving on behalf of all those in need. We are to pursue that. We are to pursue doing right. We are to pursue being faithful, loyal, trustworthy people. We are to pursue love so that we are known as those who love God and love men. And our love is not conditioned by any human impulse but our love is built on a will to love, a will controlled by God.

And then peace, the beautiful word eirene from which we get the lovely name Irene...undisturbed harmony, tranquility. He's saying, "Timothy, you're in the midst of a volatile situation." Get this picture. The leaders at the church at Ephesus who having had the best teaching, Paul himself having been their pastor for a number of years and poured his life into them, taught them the whole counsel of God, they were used of God to found the other churches of Asia Minor, tremendous tremendous church. That church at Ephesus with all of that potential had fallen down so tragically. Its leaders were corrupt. Paul himself removed two of them and others had to be removed by Timothy. When Paul gives the standards for an elder in chapter 3 of 1 Timothy, it's polemic. In other words, he says use these against the men that are in leadership there and get them out and the right ones in. He had a tremendous job to do. He was confronting ungodly leadership. He was confronting ungodly living. That's way the word eusebeia or godliness is used so frequently in these epistles.

And in that conflict of bringing righteousness into unrighteousness and holiness against unholiness and godliness against ungodliness, he is reminded that he is to pursue that with an attitude that makes peace, that brings tranquility, that generates harmony. Is that not part of the fruit of the Spirit? Along with love and joy, is peace? And so he says you must pursue these things, righteousness, loyalty, love and harmony.

And then he adds this, "With those who call on the Lord." Now let me just take that phrase. "With those who call on the Lord." What does it mean to call on the Lord? That's another way of

expressing salvation. That's the definition of a Christian. We are those who call on the Lord. We call on the Lord for grace. We call on the Lord for mercy. We call on the Lord for forgiveness. We call on the Lord for pardon. We call on the Lord for power and strength and wisdom. We call on the Lord for our needs to be met. We call on the Lord for the hope of heaven. We call on the Lord for life after death, for strength in trials. We are those who call on the Lord.

In fact, back in Romans salvation is so defined as calling on the name of the Lord. Romans chapter 10, "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek," verse 12, "the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him. For...verse 13 says...whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved...verse 14...how then shall they call upon Him on whom they have not believed," and so forth. So calling upon the name of the Lord is the equivalent of placing saving faith in Him. We then are those who call on the Lord. So he is saying, "Look, along with everybody else who calls on the Lord, you need to pursue these things, and particularly you since you set the standard...you set the pattern."

In 1 Corinthians also, verses 1 and 2 of the first chapter, "Paul as an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God and Sosthenes our brother to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...their Lord and ours." That's just the definition of a Christian. A Christian is somebody who calls on the name of the Lord.

But not everybody who calls on the name of the Lord, not everybody who is a believer is doing so from a pure heart. Christians can sin and become defiled. And what he is saying is again reminiscent of the first point, make sure that you're doing this pursuing along with those who name His name and have a pure heart. That pure heart has to do with sincerity, genuineness, godliness. Clean hearts pursue righteousness. Clean hearts pursue loyalty. Clean hearts pursue love. Clean hearts pursue harmony. Those are the ones, he says, for you to associate with.

You want to be an honorable vessel? Is your soul desire to be used of God? To build His Kingdom? Do you want to be one who is useful, zealous? Then there are some things that have to happen. You must maintain a pure fellowship and you must maintain a clean heart. You must pursue what is right and run from what is wrong. You see, your usefulness to God has much more to do with who you are than what you know. It has everything to do with your purity, your holiness, your virtue.

I just really want to close at this point, we have several remaining points which we'll cover next Lord's day. I hate to leave the visiting pastors out so we have your names and addresses, we'll send you a free tape just so you get the whole thing. But I just want to ask one question in parting this morning, it's the question I asked you some time back, do you want to be an honorable vessel? Now be honest. Some of you are content with less. Some of you are indifferent. If you're indifferent to what I've said to you this morning, God help you. If your sole desire isn't to be used of God, there's

something greatly wrong in your life. What else is there to live for? So ask yourself, do I want to be an honorable vessel, set apart, useful to the Master, ready to do every good work...every good work He would give? Let's bow together in prayer.

In the moment of quietness, you look in your own heart and ask the question...do I want to be an honorable vessel? A useful tool? And if the question doesn't even interest you, God help you. If the answer is yes, God bless you. If it's yes, then you know what the first two steps are and they're comprehensive enough to make the whole difference. Make a commitment to be a part of a pure fellowship, even if that means I have to say to some of my friends, "I know you're Christians but your influence is not good in my life," and bring upon them the shame that should be brought. And secondly, say, "I want to have a clean heart," that is to say I want to pursue with all my might in the power of God doing what is right, being loyal to God, loving God and others and everywhere I go creating peace and harmony. Are you a peacemaker? A lover of God? Loyal and trustworthy? Committed to doing what's right at all costs? If you are, you're going to be an honorable vessel.

Take a moment to just talk to the Lord and let His Spirit speak with you.

Father, we pray that You'll work in all of our hearts and give us a fresh commitment to be what You want us to be for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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