

LIFE: Abandon the World

Abandon the World

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Bible Text: 2 Timothy 2:22-26; 1 John 2:15-17

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In 2 Timothy chapter two we come to the part of the half time speech every half time speech that I have been a part of. In baseball you don't really have a half time as it is intermixed during the game. There is one thing that I have learned that coaches always communicate when they are getting a team or they are getting a group of people ready for the next stage, three simple things. The first one is always this. What needs to stop? What are we doing wrong that is causing us to possibly lose the game and that needs to stop happening? The second thing is what are we not doing that needs to start happening? And the last thing is what is it that we were expecting to see that we haven't yet been surprised by and we need to be on the alert? What needs to stop? What needs to start and what about the surprises in life?

And I want you to open to 2 Timothy chapter two and the Lord is going to give every single one of us today a half time speech about how to live this thing called life as we go forth from this place today.

Beginning in verse 22 of 2 Timothy chapter two it says:

Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.¹

Now there are two kinds of overarching themes that I want you to see before we get into these three specific points and the first one is this. That it is really the first verse and a half of this passage, verse 22 and the first part of verse 23 that summarize everything that we need to learn. The rest of this simple passage is really just putting meat on the bones or putting details to those main points.

The second thing that I want to share with you is this. That the message today from the Word of God specifically at the time was written from one man, Paul, to one man Timothy. However the intent of 2 Timothy wasn't just to change one man's life. This was a man who was a leader of men and a leader of women and a leader in his community and the message is not just for you individually. It is not just for your family. This is a message for an entire community. This is a message for an entire church. This is a

¹ 2 Timothy 2:22-26.

message for an entire culture of what is it in our lives, individually and collectively, that must stop, that must start, and we cannot be surprised if this occurs.

So let's begin with the first point. What needs to stop in our lives? What needs to stop in our families? What needs to stop in this thing that we call our culture? It is the first phrase of verse 22. Flee youthful lusts. Now let me break apart these three words systematically here and explain them thoroughly so we will really understand what needs to stop.

Now I have been at half time situations before and specific players or maybe the offense or the defense are instructed. Stop making penalties. Stop breaking on those routes. Whatever those things may be, we need to recognize that there are activities, there are endeavors, there are things that are being endorsed in our lives and in our culture that need to stop. The Bible calls them youthful lusts.

Let me share with you what that word lusts means. First, I know it has an overtone of a very, "intimate" nature. But the term lust literally means a craving. It means a desire. It means a passion for. You really cannot understand the word lust unless you qualify it with another word. For example, I would encourage you to lust after righteousness. I would encourage you to lust after holiness. We need to lust after purity. We need to lust after fidelity. So to lust after something is to crave and to desire. But notice what the Bible says. Flee youthful lusts.

How many times have you made the statement, "If I only knew then what I know now?" Because every one of us, no matter what our physical age is, every one of us recognizes and everybody understands that in our youthful days we oftentimes fell into the trap of making decisions of impulse, immediate gratification. I want what I want and I want it yesterday.

If you have the book of 1 John chapter two open as I alluded to just a moment ago, I want to give some color commentary on this idea of youthful lusts. In verse 15 of chapter two of 1 John it deals with this concept of how the world will entice us with its lusts and not God's lusts or the lusts after godly things. It says:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.²

It basically says those youthful lusts, those things that we crave with our eyes and we are so guilty of. If we were not guilty of having lustful eyes after things of the world, then a ball game on TV would never be interrupted by a commercial again. They understand that we are tempted by what we see. We are tempted by what we touch. That is why they have showrooms in a store. That is why they parade things in front of our eyes and they

² 1 John 2:15-17.

put cars out in the parking lot so at night when they are not there you can actually touch them and say, "Ooh, that would be nice sitting in my driveway." Why? Because we crave the world.

It says here in verse 22 of 2 Timothy that when it comes to youthful lusts, there is a word that needs to be implored in our life. It is the word flee. Now let me define for you what the word flee is not. Flee does not mean let it hang around in the back bedroom, it is not going to bother you. Flee is not well, it is ok if they are involved in it. I am not involved in it. It is not that big a deal. Flee literally means this. Run. That is what flee means. I mean, as a dad, as a father, if I had a child that was in the middle of the road with a car coming I would not softly say, "Son, this could end up bad. You might want to consider taking a step to the left or the right." What would I do? I would scream and yell and holler. "Get out of the way." That is exactly what 2 Timothy 2:22 is saying. When it comes to the things of this world, the carnal things that we so crave and desire, but according to verse two and to 1 John two they have no eternal benefit whatsoever, get away from them.

Now I want to describe to you a word picture, so to speak, of what this means. I want to take you back to events in Traci's and my life from our very first pastorate, the first church that we had the privilege of pasturing. The very first Sunday we were there there were 17 people there. It was literally in the middle of nowhere Texas. And no offense to anybody listening on the internet or radio, Gatesville, Texas, is not a metropolis, but it was home to the state's largest female penitentiary system. We actually had signs in our city that were posted. And said, "Please do not pick up hitchhikers."

That is kind of an interesting scenario there. If I were to give you or if I were to give anybody today directions on how to get to that church, these are the directions they gave me and the directions that I gave people for years about how to get there.

Get on the highway that runs through town, go outside of town about three miles. About three miles on the other side of the city limits you are going to come to a hill with a burned down house on the left. Take a left at that burned down house. Go a couple miles down the road till you get to a cemetery. When you get to the cemetery take a right down the dirt road for about a mile and a half and you will find the church right there.

Needless to say when people would come to the church needing benevolence or help and we asked them, well, how did you hear of us? And they said, "We saw you from the highway," we knew they were not telling the truth. Because God himself could barely see us from the highway. I mean, we were in the middle of nowhere.

It was the perfect spot, though, the perfect spot, for during that time of year that we typically know as Halloween or fall festivals, to get dozens and dozens of teenagers out there in the middle of nowhere, eat food, play games. And it was a perfect setting in all the world for that infamous thing known as a hay ride. And one year we were having one of these events at that season of the year. We had a man in our church whose name was David, but everybody called him Curly. They called him Curly because of his hair. And

he was a foreman on an asphalt crew. This was one of the largest, toughest, yet nicest, men I have ever had the privilege of meeting in my entire life. But he was a behemoth man. He scared teenagers just walking in the room. He was in charge of the hay rides and allevents because he had the equipment and such. And the kids just loved him because he was a teddy bear, but he was a scary looking guy.

Well one night we are doing this Traci and I were not married at the time, by the way. We were engaged, ok? So that adds kind of an appendix to this story. When Curly came to us as the kids were out on the hay ride and said those fateful words that you know you shouldn't say yes to, but there is part of you that can't resist. He said "Hey, I have got this great idea...."

Here was his great idea. Down the road from the church—remember middle of nowhere—down the road from the church there was an old abandoned house in the middle of a field that was very unkempt and had livestock in it. And legend had it, local legend had it and all of the high school kids believed that if one of the ladies from the penitentiary system got out of jail, that that is where she would hide until somebody would come and get her.

And so everybody was fearful of this house. It just so happened that Curly had talked a few of these young men into late at night after the hay ride going down to the house late at night after the hay ride and taking a peek inside. Here was Curly's bright idea. He took Traci and I down to this house with a 12 gauge shotgun and four shells. He said, "I want you all to hide behind the house and when you hear it and I give you the cue, I want you to come out screaming and shooting."

You all aren't surprised we did this, right? Ok, I am just hoping.

So that being said, we set out there for 30 minutes I don't how long it was. It was cold. It was dark and to be honest I was a little scared myself. That being said, but I did have the shot gun. The boys came. There were about five or six high school boys with him and they thought they were big and bad and tough Curly was with them and as soon as the cue was given I came out "Baboom, Baboom." I mean, it sounded like a bunch of junior high girls running across that field, scared to death. I reloaded, "Baboom, Baboom," four shells in who knows how much time. I was pretty quick. The boys went running screaming and yelling and here came Curly.

Now this was a scary man to begin with, but particularly in the dark in an environment like this. I expected him to be laughing. I expected him to be just bowled over having so much fun. He looked at me and he said, "Boy, now what are you going to do?"

I said, "What is wrong, Curly?"

He said, "Why did you shoot your last shell?"

I said, "I don't get it. What is wrong?"

And then I looked up and I don't know how many dozens of head of cattle were coming toward us. They even had bulls with them. It is dark at night. You can see the steam. They are all wound up. They have made a wall in front of us and I don't have another shell to scare them with.

I looked at Traci. We are not married yet. Aren't you shocked she married me after this? We are not married yet. And I said, "Honey, I think we have one option."

She said, "I know what it is."

We grabbed hands and said, "Run."

We ran as fast as we could. You know, cows don't turn real fast. We got through the lines of cows. We were running through who knows what and over who knows what. But we got to the gate. The reason I share that very frivolous story is when we realized what was surrounding us, when we realized what was hindering us, we didn't debate about. We didn't say, "Do you think we can negotiate with the lead bull?" No. We didn't call a conference. What we did was when we realized that there was something in front of us, something in the midst of us that we had no business being around and we got out of dodge.

Listen. If you have youthful lusts in your life, run. If there is something in your life of the world that is holding you back, run from it. Listen to what 1 John two says. It is going to pass away. Why would we waste our life and our energy on it? So we need to run. We need to stop messing with youthful lusts. But what do we need to start, if we are going to limit if we are going to run, so to speak, if we are going to flee? According to verse 22 it says, "But follow."

But follow righteousness. But follow faith. But follow charity. But follow peace. And it begins to elaborate that a person who does this will be apt to teach in instructing others. And basically what it says is we need to stop living for the world and we need to start living for the Lord. It says there in verse 22, the first thing is righteousness. Righteousness is always directed toward God himself, not toward others. And I want to give you a list of priorities today of how to know in your life, your community's life, this church's life, in a culture and a civilization's life, what needs to start happening. What needs to start?

The first thing is this. We need to start acting and behaving and believing things that put God in the first seat and nobody else there. It says, "Righteousness." It needs to follow. Our lives, your life, your family's life, our nation's life, our world's life will be better suited if the first thing that we ask ourselves is: Will this honor God? Because if we put anybody else in the first seat there is a train wreck coming in every aspect of our life.

It says that we need to put righteousness first. We need to put faith first. And then it says charity. You know that the word charity has kind of been skewed in our culture, but it

literally means to put someone else's interests above our own. So the first thing that we need to start is making every decision, deciding that in every action, we will put God first. And listen to the second one. Others before ourselves. This is a radical concept in an individualistic society. Because we live in a world that says get what you want when you want it for you and you, as long as you benefit.

I remember Jesus said something about the first shall be last and the last shall be first. I remember Jesus saying in Mark chapter 10 that that Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom. And then that last statement in verse 22 says peace.

Do you want to know how to have world peace? You know, that is what they talk about in all the beauty pageants, right? They all want world peace. Let me tell you how to have world peace. Put God first, others second, yourself last. You will have world peace. Do you know what would happen if that occurred? Nations who hated each other would start getting along. Neighbors who couldn't stand each other would start getting along. People who had massive disagreements with one another suddenly would get along if they placed God first, the other person second and themselves last. That is the order that we must start placing our lives.

And so many times decisions are made on what will please me and who cares about everybody else. That is not what 2 Timothy says. In the half time speech he says, "Hey, if you are going to get with it in this thing called life, you have got to have righteousness towards God, charity towards others and then you will have peace toward and for yourself."

You know, there is a wonderful ministry in our land known as I am Second. If you have never been to the website, we have shown some of the videos here. Essentially what I am Second is, is a ministry showing a celebrity athlete and just kind of high profile individuals declaring not only their faith, hopefully in Jesus Christ, but their faith in believing that their life was meant to be lived for others before it was meant to be lived for themselves. Hence, I am second.

Without any disparagement toward that ministry at all, in light of 2 Timothy two maybe we ought to rename it I am Third. God first, others second, I am third.

So what needs to stop in our lives? What needs to stop? We need to stop chasing after youthful lusts. And if they are in our life we need to run to the hills. We need to flee. What needs to start? We need to start thinking God first, others second, then myself. But what about the surprises. I mean, after all the last statement in this passage says that we may be recovered from the snare of the devil. What about those events in life that come up that for a lack of better terms there is not a black or white answer? What about those situations that arise in our life where we can't turn to Proverbs chapter 13 and there is a verse that says you need to do this or you don't need to do that. What do we do? What happens when the devil surprises us? What happens when this world surprises? We have an opportunity or we have a discussion taking place or we have a decision to make where

there is really, from what we can see, no clear cut, “black or white” answer. What I want to address is what is alluded to here in verse 23.

“But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.”³

In other words, you can continue to discuss and to debate and to argue and it just becomes a cyclical argument. It keeps going and going and going. How do you get out of that cycle? How do you get out of that debate and actually render a decision about what I want to call a grey issue of life? Let me define, again, what a grey issue is. A grey issue is one of those areas that you don’t have a clear cut answer of what you need to do, should do or how to do it. But you know there is an answer. You just don’t know it is not like black. It is not white. It is somewhere in the spectrum of grey. How do you make a decision on what I want to call a grey issue?

There are six questions that you need to ask yourselves. Feel free to jot these down. They are on YouVersion on the web. Whatever they may, these six questions will save you much heartache, pain and misery when it comes to the grey issues of life.

The first question you need to ask yourself is this. What I desire to do or what I am debating doing, will it first and foremost, will it honor God? Can you literally sit up and say God is pleased with what I have done? He is thrilled with what I have done. God, I am honoring you by doing this, whatever this is.

If you really don’t have an answer you might say, “I don’t know what God says about this,” there is a second question. What does the Bible or what does Scripture say about it? This is where we dealt with verse 15 a couple of weeks ago. Study the Scriptures. You have to dig in there and find out. Because I am convinced there are principles and precepts all throughout the Bible that it may not be, “black and white,” but at least on the greys you say, “In this general situation, this is your answer.”

So first thing, does it honor God. Second thing, does what I desire to do, I want to do, I want to have in my life, the decision I have to make, does the Bible defend it or support it?

Here is the third question. If you are still feeling grey, what do other believers in Jesus Christ think about this? Folks, if you are not a part of one yet, this is a great time to plug what we call Sunday School classes. These are people that you live intimate lives with. You do Bible study on our campus in whatever scenario. It is other believers helping one another out. And sometimes we don’t have answers and sometimes we are confused and sometimes we are just foggy on some things. And sometimes we just need other people to come alongside of us and either encourage us in the way we are going or stop us from going the direction we are planning on going. Honoring God, in the Bible, other believers.

³ 2 Timothy 2:23.

Here is question number four. What do wise believers in your life have to say about it? What does your Paul have to say about it? Now I do not mind. In fact, I actually encourage you. This happens a lot in my life where people will email me. They will call me. They will talk to me and they will say, "Hey, if this were your situation, what would you do?"

By the way, I am complimented when somebody does that. But hopefully you have got other people in your life. Sometimes they are friends. Sometimes they are neighbors. It doesn't matter what their definition is. It is that person that you see that even beyond Teaching a Sunday School class or other believers, you just look at them in this upper echelon of spiritualness. And you go to that person and you say, "You know what? I don't know if this is going to honor God. I really... I am not even completely sold what the Bible actually says about what I need to do in this situation. I have talked to other believers and they are kind of mixed up and what do you think?"

Which leads to the fifth question. If at this point whatever it is that is happening in life and you are still confused, you are still struggling about, you cannot get a clear cut, black and white answer, here is the fifth question to ask. Would you want to tell you descendants what you chose to do? These are called kids and grand kids. Is this what you would tell them? If you had a grandchild who is 15 years of age who came to you and said, "Grandma, grandpa, what would you think about this in my life?" Would you do this? What would you tell them? Because the last time I checked the advice you give them shouldn't be any different than the advice you live out in your own life. If it is different, that is what the Bible calls hypocrisy, living two different lives at a standard for your life that is different than theirs.

And there is one final question. And this is where the whole eternal nature of this passage comes in. It talks about coming out of the snare of the devil. It talks about fleeing youthful lusts. It talks about adding righteousness and charity and peace and avoiding questions. Whatever it is that you are struggling with do I change this? Do I alter that? Do I add whatever it is. Does it pass the death test?

Now whether fortunately or unfortunately in my life I have the privilege and opportunity of dealing with many families who are experiencing the death of a loved one or friends. And one of the things that I have learned throughout the years is this. That once you breathe your last breath, there is no longer the opportunity to explain what you did. There is no longer the opportunity to say, "But you don't really understand. This is what I meant to do. But if you would just see it my way."

I want to share with you the story of a man whom years ago was well respected in the community that Traci and I lived in. He was a man who was not a believer in Jesus Christ, but he was a great guy. He was a moral guy, a guy that everybody loved. He was respected in the business community. He was just one of those guys that every time you mentioned his name, you always got a thumbs up. You always got a positive. And even though he wasn't a believer in Jesus Christ, he really was a good guy.

Well, that being said when he was in his early 60s, I believe it was, he unexpectedly passed away. It was a quick experience. He didn't have time to prepare for it; often times as we see a long illness. It just happened. That being said, the family began to go through the normal routines of what you do when that happens. And it is some of the most difficult time for families in a situation like that is when taking that which was every day and either discarding or changing where it would go such as clothing and the drawers. I know many of you all have gone through this. And it is hard, because every piece of clothing brings back a memory. Every item that was on a shelf brings back a thought or an idea. It is a reminder. It speaks from the other side, but it reminds us. And this man that our family knew well his two boys that were grown began the process of cleaning out dad's closet and they were taking out, different things that you would see and you would expect to see and then behind all the suits there was something they never dreamed they would see. This was several years ago. It was a large stack of pornographic material that his sons never got ever seeing.

You know, I venture to say that if that man could speak from the grave, he might try to explain himself to his kids. He might try to say, "But, but..." Or might say, "I am sorry." But, you know, often times life doesn't give us the opportunity for explanation. Often times life doesn't give us the privilege of disclosing ourselves. And if you did not flee youthful lusts while you were alive, they will be revealed when you re deceased. And if you did not start living for God and others first it will be disclosed when you are deceased.

See, the great equalizer is what we call the grave. And every one of us is destined to go there.

Here is the question I want to leave with you. Whatever decision you have in life, whatever possibility that you have in front of you, whatever you are struggling with if that were the last decision and the last change and the last thing that you made in life, is that what you would want people to find in your closet as they were cleaning it out?