

Flee and Pursue - 2nd

Call to Worship: Psalm 112
1st Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:1-19
2nd Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:20-22

Hymn #477- *Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus*
Hymn #547- *My Jesus I Love Thee*
Hymn Insert- *In Christ Alone*

Introduction

Timothy has been warned and exhorted to take a stand against false teachings (“profane and idol babblings”), which serve to defile, corrupt and destroy the body. And he is to do this, by positively, properly exegeting and expositing God’s Word (“rightly dividing the Word of truth”), while negatively, shunning and rejecting the false teachings. For, men, such as Hymenaeus and Philetus have already overthrown the faith of some, convincing them that the resurrection of the dead has already past. And so, Timothy must be alert and prepared to deal with these kinds of dangerous, doctrinal intrusions upon the church.

This morning, as we move forward into verses 20 and following, we will find Paul continuing on with this theme, first, affirming that such intrusions ought to be expected, and then, exhorting Timothy to engage in a process of “fleeing” certain vices, while “pursuing” other virtues.

I. A Realistic View of the Church

Notice, in verse 20, continuing on with his previous thoughts, Paul states, “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.” Now, remember in verse 19, Paul had just stated that, in spite of those who have been swayed away from the truth, having their faith overthrown by false teachers (like Hymenaeus and Philetus), the true people of God will not be turned away. They will withstand, because, “The Lord knows those who are His.” They hear *His* voice and follow Him. And those who do hear Him, will depart from iniquity. And so, those who name the Name of the Lord, if their faith is genuine, then they will affirm their profession by departing from iniquity, rather than being swept away by false teachings and the defiling applications of those teachings.

Well then, in verse 20, when Paul begins with the word, “But...,” he is preparing to add a point of clarification to what he has just said in verse 19. And his point of clarification could be likened to this statement, “Although, God knows those who are His, and He calls and brings them into His Church, and they follow and obey Him, there are still, within that same *visible* church, those who are not truly His.” That’s what Paul means, when he states, “But in a great house (in a house of great stature and value), you will not only find pure and valuable assets, such as vessels of gold and silver, but you will also find common and valueless objects, made of wood and clay; the former vessels for honorable use and the latter for dishonorable use.”

Let me illustrate the point here, with a modern example. You see, even in the best of homes, you have certain things that are brought out into the open, as a means of beautifying the home; things you would like guests and visitors to enjoy, visually (and perhaps, some things of great worth), which appeal to the senses, and speak well to the overall glory of the home. That’s why we sweep and clean before guests come over, as well. We want to present a clean, welcoming and pleasant environment to them. We might also use special dishes and silverware and cloth napkins...etc. But generally, you don’t go into the bathrooms and take the plungers and the toilet cleaning brushes out; and you don’t pull out all of the hidden mouse or ant traps, and you don’t dig up the bag of old dish and shirt rags (used for painting/cleaning projects) and put them out in the open or drape them all over the furniture. No, you hide and bury those things. They are valueless, even though they serve a necessary purpose. They are there, but they bring no beauty or glory to the home. If possible, you’d rather not have any of those things, but they serve a necessary purpose, on this side of the grave.

Well, in this case, Paul is referring to the church (as a “great house”), which in its visible, present state on earth, contains both honorable and dishonorable vessels. And the vessels, here in Paul’s example, are actually the people within the *visible* gathering of the local assembly. Notice, in verse 21, Paul states, “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, *he* (that person himself) will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.” And so, the household vessels, emphasized in Paul’s illustration, find their objective reference, in the people within the local church. Well, how then do we translate the overall Illustration? “Timothy, although God’s true people are in the church, until we get to

glory, in the mean time, there will also be hypocrites, false teachers and those who will apostatize, within that same *visible* local body. And so, rather than be surprised by this reality, we ought all the more to be prepared to deal with it, biblically. We ought to properly expound the Word of God, and we ought to shun, reject, and put out all that is contrary to His Word.”

“And, amongst those who are not genuine believers (amongst those who are presently dishonorable vessels), if anyone cleanses himself from their defilement (from their dishonorable use, turning away from the false teachings that govern them, and submitting themselves to Christ), he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (vs. 21). Unlike his former state, where the ungodly principles that governed him, served only to defile himself and others, now, in submission to Christ, he will be an honorable, useful vessel. He will be a useful tool in the hands of his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, prepared for every good work (in edifying and building up Christ’s Church, rather than destroying it, as he once did, as a dishonorable vessel). And furthermore, those who steer clear of the destructive heresies of the false teachers, themselves remaining pure by submitting to the truth, as it is found in Christ, will be fit for profitable use in Christ’s Church.

Having affirmed that the visible church will contain both wheat and tares, as it were, Paul then moves on to exhort Timothy to engage in a process of “fleeing” certain vices, while “pursuing” other virtues.

II. Flee and Pursue

“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (vs. 22).

In the typical Pauline fashion, the Apostle Paul gives Timothy a “put off” and “replace with” or “put on” list, as he does in some of his other Epistles. And his “put off” list, while limited to one concept, is actually a general topic that covers several areas, which is why he uses the plural here. Notice, he exhorts, “Flee youthful *lusts*...” And so, what does Paul mean by this summary concept of “youthful lusts?” Well, in a general and most obvious sense, he means those specific types of lusts, which dominate the hearts of young adults. Remembering that Timothy was a young man, it would not be foolish to assume that, not unlike our own

materialistic, lust driven culture, certain types of sins would have appealed to him, which were common place among the young adults of his surrounding culture and environment.

No doubt then, at the very base and foundation of this category of “youthful lusts” would be every form of promiscuous, sexual sin; fornication (sex outside of marriage), adultery, tampering with prostitutes, pornography, homosexuality...etc. And beyond that, we could probably assume drunkenness, partying, drug use, compulsive gambling, obsession with material things and wealth, and every other vice that dominates the culture of teenagers and young adults of our own day. Timothy was to *flee* such youthful lusts, which no doubt the enemy would gladly set before him, especially as an alleged means of temporal escape from the burden of having to continue on, in a ministry, which was saturated in all manner of trials from within, and persecutions from without, with a hope of glory, that is not presently realized, and can seem so distant, in a context of present/felt sufferings with no foreseeable end in view. And the idea of “fleeing” here is critical, and much more effective than if Paul had simply said, “avoid youthful lusts,” because it conveys the idea of needing to immediately run away from such temptations; to not even give them a thought, lest they sink in and wrest the soul away from Christ. [Ex: Joseph fleeing from Potiphar’s wife is no doubt reflected here]. And so, Paul orders Timothy, especially in a context of controversy and trial (as a leader in the church), to flee youthful lusts.

And equally conscious; and with equal force and fervor, Timothy, in fleeing the one group of vices/lusts, was to pursue other virtues. Indeed, in his pursuing of these virtues, he would find no time to get caught in the snare of youthful lusts. Fleeing the one is not enough. He must equally pursue the other, if he is to persevere. He must not only strip off the clothing of the world, but he must further clothe himself in Christ. And what virtues ought he then to actively, consciously pursue?

“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (vs. 22). And so, let us briefly consider each of the virtues that Paul lists here, which are to be pursued, while fleeing youthful lusts.

1) Righteousness: In a very obvious sense, Paul, under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit would have us pursue righteousness, in accordance with the standard of God’s Law (and not our own standard). That is to say that, as we yet (in this life) must still deal with

remaining sin, we must seek to put all remaining sin to death, while pursuing what God deems right, in accordance with His holy Law, which is revealed in every imperative command given in His Word. We are to strive unto perfection, until we become the perfect man, complete in Christ, as Paul states in Ephesians 4. Indeed, as a local church body, we work together unto this end, correcting and speaking the truth to each other in love. And this implies being willing to receive correction from others, as well as examining ourselves in the light of God's Word and striving to prayerfully apply what we find there, especially as our lives are in contradiction to God's Law.

2) Faith: We must pursue faith. That is to say, that through our trials (which Timothy was certainly no stranger to, in this whole context) and all of life's circumstances, we must ever strive to increase our faith, confidence and trust in God, by acknowledging Him and doing what He calls us to do, even when our natural understanding and desires are contrary. We must contend against our flesh, to lay hold of our invisible God and Christ, at all times, which will stretch and improve and grow our faith. In other words, faith is not something that simply begins at salvation and remains stagnate. No, it must be improved upon. It is like a living organism that must be fed, nurtured and reared unto maturity. It must be exercised daily, in our communion with God, and in our striving to remain loyal to Him at all times.

3) Love: We must continually pursue love; first for God, and then toward others (and especially toward the people of God). Indeed, we exercise an active love for God by keeping His Commandments, which are divided into two main channels; loving God and loving others. And our love for God is best increased by pondering His love for us, as our Creator and especially as our Savior in Christ. Meditating daily on the perfect, multi-dimensional, unending love of Christ for us (in all that He has done and continues to do), will inevitably increase our imperfect love for Him. And that love for Him will (it must) make its way outward, in acts of righteousness, and good works of service toward others. This leads to consciously, proactively, looking to understand the needs (physical and especially spiritual) of others, and seeking to meet those needs, in so far as we are able. It involves sacrificially serving one another, looking for ways to manifest the love of Christ toward others, even as He has manifested His love toward us...up to and including, laying down our very lives for one another, if necessary. This, we must pursue!

4) And finally, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart: Springing out of our love for Christ and others, we strive to pursue peace, especially with our brethren, recognizing that the unity, which the Spirit calls for (and which displays Christ to our lost and dark world) must be preserved and kept from spoiling. And the assumption here, Brethren, is that we all, still having remaining sin and personalities that will offend, must strive to bear with one another in love, seeking unity and reconciliation (where offenses exist) first and foremost for the glory of Christ, who has called us and who is sanctifying us, and then, unto the mutual edification of one another. Indeed, Christ has grouped us together, the whole lot of us, with remaining warts and scars, so that we might help sanctify one another, while learning to love other fellow imperfect creatures, even as Christ has loved (and continues to love) us. Rather than be surprised by offenses and the sins of one another, we ought to anticipate that offenses will come, and we ought to be ready, with grace in hand, to help build up Christ's presently imperfect church, until He returns to complete our sanctification.

All in all, Brethren, let us be especially reminded here that these virtues must be consciously pursued. They don't just come to us. [III. A police officer in search of a criminal, doesn't buy a dozen donuts and sit at the police station, waiting for the criminal to turn himself in...etc]. We must consciously flee youthful lusts (running for our very lives, as it were, prayerfully, proactively fleeing them), while consciously pursuing these virtues. Such was the case for Paul's young protege, Timothy, and such is certainly the case for us.

III. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) It is important to realize that everything that Paul is addressing here is in the context of dealing with the false teachers and their false teachings which corrupt the church. Now, I say this to emphasize again the critical importance of sound doctrine. What we believe always effects how we live. We see that principle over and over and over again in our study of the Scriptures. The well spring of our minds, which are influenced by what we put in them, is that which our souls drink from, leading us to live in accordance with what we believe. In other words, Brethren, you cannot separate godly living from godly beliefs and ungodly living from ungodly beliefs. The fruit always comes from a root. That is why Paul commands us in Romans

12 not to be conformed to the world, but to renew our minds in accordance with the teachings of Christ, which will lead us to prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Brethren, the importance of this matter cannot be stressed enough. Sadly, there are many, many churches today which skip all of the doctrine and spend their time preaching anecdotes and all kinds of practical life stories, which, tend to appeal to our “movie theater” mindsets and emotions. Entertainment appeals to all of us. And that’s okay, *outside* of the worship service, but not when seeking to discern the will of God for our lives, and for seeking real heart change in Christ. Preaching cannot be “all application,” nor should it even begin with application, but rather, preaching must begin with understanding the indicatives (the knowledge and truth) given in the text, before applying it, because the indicatives are what motivate and empower us to keep the imperatives. Again, all of what Paul commands Timothy here, regarding fleeing youthful lusts and pursuing godly virtues, springs out of a context of Paul calling Timothy unto the proper exposition of God’s Word and the fervent rejection of false teachings. And so, let us never, ever, diminish the importance of sound doctrine, and let us be careful that we never exchange the tedious but profitable practice of mining God’s Word, for movie theater entertainment.

Every aspect of our Christian walk takes hard work, commitment and diligence, from our seeking to understand biblical truth to our fervently applying that truth by fleeing lusts and pursuing godly virtues. There is no painless, comfortable way through this walk, and those who seek such a way, wind up in apostasy.

2) In consideration of Paul’s “great house” illustration, let us always have a realistic view of the visible church, and let us not be surprised when there is conflict or the need to confront heretical influences. There is no perfect church. And if you flee the church when problems arise, rather than weather the storm, stay the course and work toward biblical growth, you will only serve to stunt your own growth by running elsewhere. Some people run away from the church, whenever conflict arises, and they never grow....ever. It’s like getting a divorce every time there is a conflict and expecting things to just somehow get better in the next marriage. No one enjoys conflict, but on this side of heaven, it will always arise. And God means to use even such conflicts for our own personal growth and sanctification.

3) Finally, let me just say a few words to the young adults and young people, who are among us. Understand that, temptation toward the world will be great. And if you are not prepared for it, it will sweep you away into a sea of hardness and rebellion against God. It all looks appealing, friends. But know this. It is the way of death. You see, what you sow, you will reap. This world (in all of its media and cultural aspects) thrives on “the immediate and the now,” and it has very little understanding of the big picture. It delves into the temporal joys of sexual immorality and alcohol and drug abuse and partying and all kinds of God hating debauchery. But, what it fails to show you, because the world itself is hardened, deceived and in denial, is that you will, individually, on your own; you will stand before God one day and there will be a day of reckoning. And the consequences of your sinful words, thoughts and actions here, will be eternal in their duration.

Don't let anyone (anyone!) convince you that it is natural and okay to pursue ungodliness in your younger years. You are not guaranteed tomorrow, and even if you live to three hundred, your heart may be hardened beyond repentance when you get older. [Nursing home hardness]. There are many young people in hell, and God would be righteous to cast you into hell right now. The burden is on you, to seek salvation in Christ. And God calls you to “flee” youthful lusts and to sanctify yourself unto Him; to pursue godliness, in Christ. [The Gospel!!!]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25