

“Vessels of Honor and Dishonor”
2 Timothy 2:20-21
(Preached at Trinity, June 26, 2022)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In the previous verses Paul has been explaining the great danger of allowing false doctrine to infiltrate the church. In **Verse 18** he warned that these false teachings were overthrowing the faith of some of the members of the church of Ephesus.
 - a. Remember, this faith is not saving faith but a false faith based upon a false knowledge. These people did not know Christ and He did not know them. They were not regenerate, were not holy, were not filled with the H.S. – they had no spiritual understanding.
 - b. Paul made it clear, however, that the foundation of God's Church remained secure. God knows the genuine from the counterfeit.
2. Continuing this line of reasoning Paul now explains the reality that the church on earth will always contain both genuine believers and false pretenders. There will be those that live holy lives and "abstain from wickedness" – **V.19**. and there will be those whose lives and doctrine "lead to further ungodliness" – **V. 16** of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus. With their false doctrines they were cancers in the church—like gangrene.
3. In **V. 19** Paul reminds Timothy that just because there are counterfeit Christians within the church he shouldn't think for a moment that this is a sign of any weakness in the foundation. All is strong! All is well!
4. Beginning in **Verse 20** Paul describes the church as a “Large House” bringing a picture of the mansion of a wealthy man or the palace of a king. Paul explains that in the mansion there were both “vessels of honor” and “vessels of dishonor.”
5. Paul is using this “large house” metaphor to describe the church and the “vessels” are the members in the church. In the church on earth there will always be a mixture of genuine believers and counterfeits, vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor.
 - A. This is not to say that we should intentionally allow unbelievers to join the church. It just speaks to the reality of our imperfect discernment.
 - B. Over and over in the New Testament we are warned of the danger of a false profession of faith. Jesus said “Many” will come before Him on the Day of Judgment expecting a reward only to hear, “Depart from Me, I never knew you.” He told the Parable of the Sower that describes three types of temporary believers. This is what is meant here by the “vessels of dishonor.”
 - C. The church must give due diligence to guard the church from receiving unbelievers—vessels of dishonor.J. L. Dagg wrote: "The churches are not infallible judges, being unable to search the heart; but they owe it to the cause of Christ, and to the candidate himself, to exercise the best judgment to which they are capable."¹

¹ J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Church Order*, (Harrisonburg: Sprinkle Publications, 1990), 269.

I. The Vessels of Gold and Silver – vessels of honor

- A. In the home of a wealthy man there were costly pots and utensils that were displayed proudly and put to the master's use.
 - 1. Gold and silver are costly metals. These vessels were objects of great craftsmanship. They were expensive, beautiful, and long-lasting.
 - 2. Such vessels were used to hold the things of greatest value.
- B. Paul is using these vessels of honor as metaphors referring to true believers who have been carefully prepared for the Master's use.

2 Timothy 2:21 NAU - "Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these *things*, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work."

- 1. The Master Craftsman is none other than God Himself

Ephesians 2:10 NAU - "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

- 2. This is accomplished according to His sovereign good pleasure

Romans 9:21 NAU - "Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?"

- C. We are evidence of the work of God

- 1. This is accomplished through the true preaching of Gospel of Christ – in contrast to the preaching of false teachers that "*leads to the ruin of the hearers.*" – V. 14

Romans 1:16 NAU - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

- 2. We must build the church upon Christ alone –

1 Corinthians 3:11-13 NAU - "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be revealed with fire*, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work."

- 3. Only the vessels of honor will stand up to the fire of God's judgment.

- D. As Christians we are these “Vessels of honour” –

- 1. We are precious in His sight, beloved. We are being shaped and prepared for glory.

- 2. We bear the name of Christ. We are the custodians of His truth. We are the possessors of the Gospel.

- 3. We are related to Christ by adoption

Galatians 4:7 NAU - "Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

- 4. We are indwelled by His Spirit and have become His Holy Temple.

1 Corinthians 3:16 NAU - "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*"

II. Vessels of Wood and Earth – vessels of dishonor.

A. In the large house there were also common utensils and bowls that were set aside for utilitarian use.

1. They were plain and cheap – easily replaceable – often ugly and vile. In a day before sewer systems they used vessels of this sort to carry away garbage or human waste. They used to be called privy or chamber pots.
2. To bring such vessels before guests would have been a great dishonor.

B. These describe the lost people within the church

1. They may be of some utilitarian use – God has use of all things according to His purpose.
 - a. They may give to the support of the church.
 - b. They may provide their services to the church.
2. They are to remain as long as they do not commit an act worthy of discipline.
3. Like the common utensils they will be discarded after they have served their purpose.

C. These are described as “vessels of dishonor” – they are a particular danger to the church. Their presence always weakens the spiritual condition of the church.

1. They are never holy, never spiritually minded. They are bored with the things of God, lukewarm – they only have a form of godliness.
2. **2 Timothy 3:5 NAU** - "holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these."
2. They are under constant danger of falling away, of having their faith overthrown, of being made shipwreck, since their faith is counterfeit.
3. Since they do not possess the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit their teachings are always prone to error.

1 Timothy 1:7 NAU - "wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions."

4. They do not possess a spiritual mind – cannot understand spiritual things, yet they will be involved in decisions that will effect the future of the church.
5. They do not have the ability to pray for the church since prayer is offered through Jesus Christ, our Mediator.
6. They do not have the ability to worship, since worship is also only possible through Christ. And true worship will bore them
7. It is particularly dangerous when they become leaders within the church. How terrible it is when a lost man pretends to lead God’s people and they follow this one who will never lead them closer to the Savior.

E. Their presence is only a temporary condition

1. False teachers will soon be gone forever.
2. Those who trouble the church and threaten her purity will soon be gone forever.
3. The danger of apostasy will also be gone – apostasy is only a reality in these last days.

2 Timothy 3:1 NAU - "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come."

- III. The existence of the dishonorable vessels must never lower our purity. They are not spiritually minded and not interested in spiritual things.
- A. The danger is that we lower the standard to accommodate these common vessels.
1. By changing our worship
 2. By softening our teaching
 3. By abandoning holiness and disregarding the law.
- B. Paul tells us to cleanse ourselves “from these” – that is from the vessels of dishonor.
- Paul tells us to consciously purify ourselves from their manner of Christianity.
- 2 Timothy 2:21 NAU** - "Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these *things*, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work."
1. This means at times we will seem most radical
 2. This means at times we will come into direct conflict with those who are void of spiritual understanding – this was the problem Timothy was facing
- C. By our best efforts we must strive to be a regenerate church.
1. While the unregenerate may be of some temporary utilitarian use to the church their presence will ultimately weaken us.
 - a. Sin is contagious.

2 Timothy 2:17 - "and their talk will spread like gangrene."

1 Corinthians 5:6 NAU - "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?"

1 Corinthians 15:33 NAU - "Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."
 - b. This is particularly true of church leaders – he is more dangerous than a pagan or an atheist because people will justify their actions as being permissible because they see their leaders doing them
 2. Usually they remove themselves (the benefit of the “six-month rule” in our constitution).

2 Peter 2:22 NAU - "It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, *returns* to wallowing in the mire."
 3. If they insist on living in corruption while remaining a part of the church they must be separated from us.

Romans 16:17 NAU - "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them."

1 Corinthians 5:11 NAU - "But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one."

2 Thessalonians 3:14 NAU - "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame."
 4. Often, their presence remains.

The church must be steadfast in maintain its purity.
We must pray that the power of the Gospel will prevail.

Conclusion:

These things bring us to ask some questions

1. Does your life demonstrate you to be a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor?
2. Do you surround yourself with vessels of honor?
We should not want to associate with those who have a critical tongue or who tolerate evil in their lives or whose commitment to Christ is shallow and superficial.
An honorable vessel cannot remain honorable if it is continually contaminated by vessels of dishonor.
3. Do understand how powerful your life is as an example?