

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

An Honorable Vessel, Part 2

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:23-26

Code: 55-11

This morning we return again to 2 Timothy chapter 2 as our ongoing study of this great epistle continues. We're looking at a section from verse 20 through 26, a section about vessels unto honor...vessels unto honor, being useful to the Lord. And that little verse in Philemon, verse 11, just kind of hung in the back of my mind where Paul says about Onesimus, the runaway slave, he says to Philemon who was his master, "He was formerly useless but now is useful, both to you and to me." Formerly useless and now useful.

The thought of being useless is a terrible thought, of being responsible to serve someone, to perform duties on behalf of someone, to provide for someone, but to fail to do that. What a waste. And how much more distressing in relationship to God to be given responsibility, to render service to God, to provide within His Kingdom some area of ministry to which we are called and gifted, to render to God something that is definitely due His worthy name and to fail to do that, to be useless rather than useful. Tragic.

I know in my own heart I want to be useful to God. I understand what Paul said that he feared that in preaching to others he himself would be disqualified, 1 Corinthians 9:27, or useless, cast away, set aside. I don't ever want to be set aside. I don't ever want to go on the scrap heap of Christian ministries. I don't ever want to wind up useless to God.

Now it is perhaps important to say that our sovereign God does not need us to perform some service, but rather has given us that privilege. He has graciously given us the incredible opportunity to serve Him. And it's not because He needs us to accomplish His purpose. It's not because He needs us to reach His goals. It's not because He couldn't do it without us. But rather He is gracious and merciful and kind and loving to give us the privilege of serving Him. Because He is so worthy it should call forth all our very best. But don't think for a moment that God can't accomplish His purpose without us, it's just that He has privileged us to be a part. What a privilege to serve the living and true God, to be useful to Him.

Now Paul in writing this epistle to his son in the faith, Timothy, was certainly concerned that Timothy be useful. Timothy was gifted and called and positioned in a strategic way...to fulfill that which God had designed for him to fulfill in the development of the church and it was important that Timothy be useful to the maximum degree. He was to be a vessel unto honor.

In this passage Paul is reminding him of how urgent that issue is, that he be in fact a vessel unto honor. The constant repetition of these kinds of exhortations in the two epistles to Timothy let us know that Timothy was probably not functioning in the way he should. And so Paul again is calling him to the highest level of commitment, namely to be a vessel unto honor, as it is called in verse 20.

Now remember it began with an analogy. Look at verse 20 and I'll read it to you. "Now in a large house," remember we said that's the church which was introduced in verse 19 by the phrase "the firm foundation of God," "In the large house, the church, there are not only gold and silver vessels or utensils or furnishings, but also vessels of wood and of pottery, and some to honor and some to dishonor."

Now he's simply drawing an analogy, a very large house has some furnishings that are used for honorable purposes. They are prized. They are valuable. They are put on display. They are beautiful. They are clean. There are others that are ugly, unprized, much less valuable, never for public display, they do the dirty tasks of the household, taking out the waste and the garbage and things like that. They're made of pottery and wood and are defiled and unclean while the others are made of gold and silver and are spotless and pure.

And what he is saying is that within the church some of those who serve the Lord are useful and valuable and beautiful and honorable. And some are ugly and defiled and unprized and dishonorable. The church has all kinds. It has people who are the fine China and people who are the trash buckets...and everybody in between.

Now what is a vessel unto honor? Well we saw that, didn't we, last time in verse 21, a vessel for honor is sanctified, that is a vessel is separate from sin, separated from the world unto God. It is useful to the master, that is under the authority of the master, exhibiting obedience and then prepared for every good work has to do with being zealous. First of all, personal holiness in the word "sanctified." Secondly, personal obedience in the phrase "useful to the master." Thirdly, personal zeal in the phrase, "prepared for every good work."

That honorable vessel then is a holy, obedient, zealous person, separated from sin, and the flesh, and the world, committed to submissive obedience to the master and zealous to serve, ready, prepared for every good work. And in the perfect passive, the idea is having been put into a prepared condition.

Now such holiness and such obedience and such zeal is available to all of us. None of us can say, "Well I don't have the ability, the capability, the means to be useful." Yes you do. In 2 Corinthians, speaking to all those who name the name of Christ and know His Son, the Apostle Paul says, "And God...one of the great verses of Christian resources in all of Scripture...and God, 2 Corinthians 9:8, is

able to make all grace abound to you that always having all sufficiency in everything you may have an abundance for every good deed." Now that verse is so full of superlatives that it's hard to even identify them all the first time you read it. But listen again, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you that always having all sufficiency in everything you may have an abundance for every good deed." It's incredible...incredible to think of the resources that you have. You have all you need. As Peter put it in 2 Peter 1:3, "All that pertains to life and godliness," as Paul will say in the third chapter of 2 Timothy and verse 17, "You have all you need to be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." There is no spiritual resource that is unavailable to any child of God...none. We have all that we need.

The only question is whether it is a priority for us to be a vessel unto honor. The means of grace are available. The grace of God is there to provide the holiness of life, the obedient submission and the zeal to serve if that's your desire. So the question is, is that your desire. Do you want to be a noble, honorable vessel? And if the answer is yes, then here are the principles that make that a reality.

First of all, verse 21, he says, "Therefore if a man cleanse himself from these he will be a vessel for honor." These refers to the nearest antecedent, the dishonorable vessels mentioned in verse 20. So we said the first characteristic of a noble vessel is a pure fellowship, we saw that last time, a pure fellowship. Stay away from dishonorable vessels. Stay away from the defiled people of the church. That doesn't mean you don't go to them and admonish them to clean their life. It doesn't mean you don't go to them and exhort them to godliness. It doesn't mean you don't admonish them like a brother, as Paul says in his epistle to the Thessalonians. But what it does mean is you don't socialize with them, you don't fraternize with them, you don't make your group their group. You live, in a sense, separated from them in the normal routines of life. But you keep on exhorting them. You keep on admonishing them. If need be you put them through the process of discipline. You show love to them. But you do not stay around them, you do not make that the point of your socialization within the church because that kind of person will defile you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump, said Paul.

So the fellowship of the noble godly will assist you in being an honorable vessel. Secondly we saw, still reviewing, in verse 22 that in order to be an honorable vessel you must be a part of a pure fellowship and you must have a clean heart. He discusses the clean heart in verse 22 saying, "Flee...that is the word we have in English, fugitive, in the Greek pheugo, flee from youthful lusts, that's the negative, what you're running from. And pursue, this is what you're running after, righteousness, faithfulness, or integrity, trustworthiness, love and peace or harmony with those who call on the Lord...that is with other believers...who have a clean heart.

So you're to be like the clean hearted. You're to associate with the clean hearted and you're to be like the clean hearted, having a clean or pure heart yourself. Clean from sin. You need to be one of those. To be a useful vessel demands a clean heart. And what you are on the inside determines

your effectiveness on the outside. The issue in ministry is not what do you know, it's what are you like. What's going on in your heart. So a pure fellowship and a clean heart.

Thirdly, and now we come to this morning's section, a discerning mind. If you are to be a vessel unto honor, God desires that you have a discerning mind. And this is familiar turf for those of us who have studied through 1 and 2 Timothy. He goes back to a very very important point which he has made repeatedly in these epistles. Verse 23, "But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations knowing that they produce fights." Pursue some things, he says in verse 22, righteousness, faithfulness, love and peace, but refuse some other things...refuse foolish and ignorant speculations. The word "refuse" means that avoid reject, having nothing to do with. And this is not a new message. He has been giving this message to Timothy all through 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy. And it let's me know that Timothy was really...really in a dangerous point in his life. The fact that the Apostle repeats this issue about staying away from false teaching so many times indicates that Timothy must have been flirting with that, that the temptation was to get involved in listening to the philosophers and religionists of the day and get your mind all filled with all of that unbiblical, anti-biblical stuff. And he's saying to him, keep your mind pure, stay away from that stuff, guard your mind, have a discerning mind.

I see so many people who start out affirming the Word of God, expose themselves to the garbage and the trash and the lies and the speculations of so-called theologians who in the name of academia attack the Word of God. And as a result of all of that, it undermines their confidence, undermines the strength of their faith, undermines their convictions, creates all kinds of doubts, the tragedy of over-exposure to the kind of thing that robs conviction and produces nothing but fights and arguments and quarrels, the mind is to be guarded.

Let me tell you a little about your brain in general, since I don't know your brain specifically. But your little three- pound brain that sits between your ears and only occupies about two percent of your body weight but uses up 25 percent of the oxygen supply in your blood just to keep it functioning, your little brain has ten billion cells, at least. Now some of those cells are nerve cells in the cerebral cortex, part of the nervous system. But by far, the majority of those ten billion cells between your ears are memory pockets. Those cells take in everything you experience. And you want to know something? It's all in there. Once it goes in there, it stays in there. It can become more difficult to recall because of non-use, or you could have an injury to some part of your brain or a disease that could erase that. But apart from some such disease and apart from misuse, sort of eliminating your ability to pull it back up out of its little pocket, your brain keeps everything...everything.

And all those ten billion cells are criss-crossed and networked by little tiny fibers. And those little tiny fibers send impulses back and forth from those cells that help you associate all of those little pieces of memory together to make up your whole thought pattern. Now your little memories are locked into those cells by coated proteins which store them. So just know this, whatever you put in there, my friends, is going to find a place and it's going to be networked into the association process in your

thinking.

Now you need to protect your mind. Once stored, those little pieces of information become part of the networking of your thinking process. They remain permanently in your mind and mix in the association which can weaken your commitment to the truth which can suck the very strength out of your spiritual life, which create doubts in your mind about what you really believe or whether or not what you say you believe is genuinely true. In Philippians we have a good word, one that we ought to take heed to, Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren...Paul says...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good report...that's six things...if there's any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." There is no premium ever in the Bible placed on letting your mind be occupied with error. You must have a discerning mind. Your mind is a treasure house, not a dump.

Now if you go back in to 1 and 2 Timothy and just sort of...let me just pick out everything he has told Timothy to avoid, the list is very long because he's given this same kind of instruction repeatedly. Going all the way back to the first chapter of 1 Timothy and just hopping through as far as we've gone, specifically Paul has told Timothy and the rest of us to avoid strange doctrines, myths, endless genealogies, fruitless discussions on biblical assertions, worldly fables fit only for old women, different doctrine not agreeing with sound words, and doctrine conforming to godliness, controversial questions, disputes about words, worldly and empty chatter, opposing arguments of what is falsely called knowledge, battles over words, useless talk which spreads like gangrene. And now he adds foolish and ignorant speculations. The word "speculations," suzetetes means disputings, debates, questionings and arguments. The word "foolish" is the word moros from which we get moron. Dull, stupid, sluggish is its intent. The word "ignorant," apaideutos means untrained, uninstructed, undisciplined, uneducated, senseless. Stay away from moronic senseless arguments, debates that attack the veracity of Scripture.

In Titus he will say the same thing to Titus in verse 9, "Shun foolish controversies, genealogies, strife, disputes about the law, they're unprofitable, they're worthless and a factious man, an argumentative man after the first and second warning, reject him and knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning being self-condemned." Don't waste your time. One or two warnings, you're gone, you're out. Don't expose yourself to ignorant, untrained, uninstructed, undisciplined men who spout senseless arguments against God's precious holy Word...all that does is produce quarrels and fights. You're not to be a fighter and a quarreler and a quibbler and a debater and an arguer.

Arguments with fools are foolish. Proverbs 18 says it so well, it's just so direct. Proverbs 18:2, "A fool does not delight in understanding but only revealing his own mind." Boy, is that true. A fool does not want understanding, he just wants to shoot off his own mind. And verse 6, "A fool's lips bring strife and his mouth calls for blows." You don't want to waste your time with a fool.

Now I'm not disagreeing with what Peter said in 1 Peter 3:15 when he said to be ready to give to any man who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. If a man comes to ask you, give him a reason for the hope that is in you. But if a man comes to debate you, after one and two admonitions against that man's heresy, don't waste your time. We're not called to debate, we're called to proclaim. We're not called to expose our minds to the lies of Satan, we're called to keep our minds set on the things of God. False teachers pursue debate. Those who are true servants of the Lord pursue harmony and peace. So keep your mind from such things. Guard your thoughts. Have a discerning mind. Be expert in God's Word. Master God's revelation. Proclaim it, don't debate it. And don't expose yourself to the lies. It's so sad to see how many people who start out in the Word of God and become influenced by all the anti-biblical stuff that they hear from the philosophies of men, religious liberalism and all the rest, literally lose their conviction. They have doubts in their minds. Tragic. Stay away from them. The Bible could not be more clear. There's no justification for you to take the pure mind that God has given you and fill those little pockets of memory with a lot of lies and a lot of anti-biblical information.

You want to be an honorable vessel? Maintain a discerning mind, keep that mind pure...along with your clean heart and your pure fellowship. Fourthly, there is another factor here that he brings up and that is a gentle manner...a gentle manner. This certainly follows right along, verse 24, "The Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged...patient when wronged."

Notice please the Lord's bondservant, doulos. As I mentioned to you last time, that is a technical term used here with reference to someone in Timothy's position, a leader, a pastor, an elder, an overseer in the church. And this little statement "must not be quarrelsome but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged," is really a list of qualifications for one who is a pastor. It's very much like the qualifications in 1 Timothy chapter 3. In fact, it's almost identical. First Timothy chapter 3 and verse 3, "Not pugnacious but gentle, uncontentious." It's just the same qualifications.

In Titus 1 where he gives further a list of the qualifications for an elder, he is not to be self-willed nor quick-tempered, not pugnacious or fighting, quarrelsome. So in 1 Timothy, in Titus and here in 2 Timothy, the pastor, elder, teacher here called the Lord's bondservant is to be one who is gentle, who has a gentle manner. This is likeness to Christ. Second Corinthians 10:1 speaks of the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Yes we must contend and fight for the truth, once for all delivered to the saints, as Jude 3 says. Yes we must fight against principalities and powers, the rulers of darkness, spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies as Ephesians 6 says. Yes we must fight the forces of hell with the spiritual weapons mentioned in 2 Corinthians 10:1 to 4. But not quarreling with opponents. There is to be a gentleness in our manner. We fight for the truth. We fight against Satan and his forces. But we do so with a gentle manner...speaking boldly the truth but kind to all...I love that...be kind to all, he says. And that's what it means, to all. There's a gentleness in demeanor. There's a softness in

authority. Paul says to the Thessalonians, "We were like a nursing mother among you." Nothing more tender in the world than that. Never harsh, never abusive, never overbearing, never unkind, never ungracious, easy to approach, easy to speak to, easy to please, very sensitive...that's to be the demeanor of the true bondservant of Christ...a gentle manner, gracious spirit, being kind to all, treating people with kindness. So simple.

Then he says, "Able to teach." What does he mean here? It's didaktikos, it's only used one other time and that's in chapter 3 of 1 Timothy where again it has reference to the pastor or elder or overseer. It says he is to be able to teach, at the end of verse 2, 1 Timothy 3. It means skilled in teaching. But notice this, the implication here is not so much how good he is at collecting the data or how good he is at organizing the data but how good he is at communicating it. It has to do with the skill with which he communicates. And here the idea has reference to his kindness, gentleness, graciousness. He is not abusive, he is not overbearing, he's not dominating, he's not ungracious, unkind. The one who would truly teach the church of Jesus Christ must have kindness and tenderness and must be skilled at communicating truth in a gracious, gentle way.

You say, "Man, if you do that you're going to get stepped on." That's why he adds the last point, "Patient when wronged."

Patient when wronged. That's one word in the Greek, forbearing. It means ready to put up with evil literally, ready to endure mistreatment without retaliating. It's almost like he expected that, isn't it? He did expect it. I understand why he expected it. It happens...it happens all the time. Here is a faithful bondservant of the Lord who doesn't want to engage in fights, who doesn't want to engage in debates, who is not argumentative in spirit but gentle. He is kind to all. He is skilled at graciously instructing and, believe me, he'll be wronged. He'll be offended. He'll be as the text of 1 Peter uses it, reviled. He'll be persecuted but he is to be patient, he is to be ready to put up with evil. He is never to retaliate. He is never to become bitter. That's...that's so basic.

And the model, as I said, in 1 Peter chapter 2 is our Lord Himself who when He was reviled, reviled not again. When suffering, uttered no threats but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously. Just committed Himself to the Lord. That's been so helpful to me. For some strange reason there are people who continually feel the need to attack me, it seems more so lately than ever before. It's not easy sometimes to be patient when you're wronged, there's something in your flesh that wants to lash out as the Proverbs says, and hit a fool in the mouth. But you find that the grace of Christ restrains that kind of thought. The attacks come constantly. They come from the outside. They come sometimes even from inside the church. And you have to be patient and forbearing and you just keep looking at Christ who was perfect and they killed Him and He was perfect. And you say to yourself, "I'm not perfect, what hope do I have of escaping the kind of treatment that He endured?" But it's important that if you're going to serve the Lord, you're going to be a useful vessel, you maintain a gentle manner and you never lose that and you endure things. And you do with a gentle

spirit, a gracious spirit, not fighting, not quarreling, not defending yourself, not being self-justifying, not being filled with vengeance or bitterness or anger...but just continuing faithful to teach God's Word, be gracious and kind, endure whatever comes and know that God is still on His throne. Commit yourself to the one who is faithful in keeping you as Christ Himself did as well.

So a vessel unto honor is marked...marked by a pure fellowship, clean heart, discerning mind, a gentle manner. These are things which in my own heart I pursue...I haven't arrived at all of them at all times, but these are the goals which you must pursue if you want to be the Lord's servant, useful for every good purpose.

Fifthly, a humble spirit...and this ties right in and I just kind of pull this out of the first two words of verse 25, "With gentleness...with gentleness." It's the word prautes and it really would have been perhaps better to translate it "humility," or "meekness." It's really the word for meekness. It's talking about a meek spirit or a humble spirit. It's certainly a sister to gentleness...with gentleness, with meekness. The word means mild, gentle, soft, meek, humble. And there is to be a humble spirit.

A humble spirit basically says, "I'm not the issue." Can you get that thought? A humble spirit basically says, "I'm not the issue, you can attack me, you can do whatever you want to me, I'm not the issue. So I'm not going to defend myself and I'm not going to take out vengeance on my own behalf." That's not humility. Humility acknowledges unworthiness. Humility acknowledges sinfulness. Humility acknowledges that I have no defense for myself because if the truth were known, I'm unworthy utterly. But humility at the same time, prautes, meekness, is not cowardice, it's not impotence.

For example, the Greeks use of the word prautesis interesting. They used it to speak of a colt that had been broken. It was power under control, as opposed to an unbroken colt, power out of control. Power under control. The meek person is a powerful person, a person with convictions, a person with strength, a person with direction and goals in life, a person who longs to serve God with all his heart, but he is a person whose power and resources are under control and they are not spent for his own defense. It doesn't mean he's wishy-washy or flabby or cowardly or lacks conviction. It simply means he doesn't use his energies to defend himself.

Let me, if I may, quote myself out of the book Kingdom Living. "Jesus never defended Himself but when they desecrated His Father's temple He made a whip and beat them because meekness says...I'll never defend myself, but I'll die defending God. Twice Jesus cleansed the temple. He blasted the hypocrites. He condemned false leaders of Israel. He fearlessly uttered divine judgment upon people. And yet the Bible says He was meek. Meekness is power used only in the defense of God...meekness is power used only in the defense of God. Humility is not impotence, it is not poverty, it is not shyness, it is not weakness, it is not embarrassment, it is not cowardice...it is power constrained until it's used only in defense of God. Jesus never lashed out and blasted people with a

whip for what they did against Him only for what they were doing to His Father. It defends God, it doesn't defend self.

And if you want to be a useful vessel, you can't be self-justifying, self-defensive. You can't be running around taking vengeance on everybody in sight. You can't be trying to make sure that everything is the way you want it to fit your particular agenda. You are not the issue. Andrew Banar once said that he could tell when a man was truly meek. He could tell when a man was truly humble because he would elevate his Lord and talk less of what he was doing. That's it. He would elevate his Lord and talk less of what He was doing. He would be smaller in his own sight...a noble, useful vessel is selfless in the sense that he will die in the defense of his Lord...but not spend one ounce of energy in the defense of himself. That's true humility.

So an honorable vessel fit for the master's use has a pure fellowship, a clean heart, a discerning mind, a gentle manner and a humble spirit...and lastly and this is so important, a compassionate attitude...a compassionate attitude. You will notice verse 25 says that with his humility he also corrects those who are in opposition. And I want to say to you that just because you're humble and just because you're genuinely meek doesn't mean you don't properly correct people who oppose the truth. You do. And here the opposition is in the fellowship. And part of the ministerial task is the resolution of conflict. And there must be a time and a place for correction. That's part of ministry. We are, as Titus 2:12 says, to instruct people to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age. That's part of the duty. There are some Christians living insensibly, ungodly and they have to be corrected. It's a continuous tense verb...constantly correcting those who are in opposition. And the same word is used in Titus 2:12 that I just read, referring to the fact that instruction is to be given to produce a reversal of behavior patterns.

The opponents of the truth are always spouting useless speculations, always showing off their ignorance. And they get some people caught up in what they're saying, either in theological error or wicked sinful talk. So Paul tells Timothy to be humble but be confrontive, be humble but be instructive. In a corrective way you go after the uninstructed, uneducated, untaught in truth. Be gracious, be gentle, be loving, be kind but speak what has to be spoken. The word "correcting," paideuo, is a word from which the noun form paideiacomes which means "child." It's like taking a child and correcting them. It's a major part of the ministry. I wish it weren't so, but it is. And anybody in the ministry of Christ who doesn't think you do a lot of time correcting is wrong. The motive for that correction is the issue here and I want you to see it.

You have to be correcting people. That's part of discipline, going to those that sin and calling them away from their sinfulness. It's required that we do that. So he says, "Correcting those who are in opposition," and that doesn't mean in personal opposition to you over some non-issue, over some personality thing, but those who oppose the truth, who oppose the Word of God, who oppose what is right and righteous. They must be corrected and here's the goal..."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."

My dear friends, the motive for this correction is compassion. It is not vengeance. And I will tell you that I see in the church and there is the temptation in the church to go after people who are in error, go after people who are a problem, go after people who are in opposition out of personal vendetta, personal vengeance, personal anger, personal self-justification rather than compassion. And here what Paul is saying is you correct out of a compassionate heart because you want God in His grace to grant them repentance and free them from the trap of the devil and release them to the knowledge of the truth. That's the issue.

By the way, verse 25 is a tremendous verse with great theological implications. It says if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth...and I want you to know something, the only place repentance will ever come from in this world is from God. Repentance is a gift of God's grace. No man in his flesh repents. That's a gift. No man in his flesh believes, that's a gift, Ephesians 2, God even gives us our faith. No man in his flesh loves, that's a gift of God, Romans 5:5, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." All spiritual reality is a gift from God by grace. And the only way you could ever repent and be saved is if God gave you repentance. God alone grants repentance. God alone grants faith. God alone grants grace and mercy. God alone grants love. That's a sovereign work. And if repentance is...and it is...I should say, repentance is a vital part of salvation, the God who grants the salvation must also grant the repentance. A tremendous statement.

Paul then rested on the sovereignty of God in his gospel preaching, but here he shows he also rested on the sovereignty of God in respect to his teaching of the church. He's talking here, I believe, to the church, not to unbelievers. But there are some in the church who need to repent. And repentance on the part of a believer is just as much a work of God's grace as repentance at the moment of salvation on the part of an unbeliever is God's work. And so he desires that God may grant them repentance. He isn't praying judgment on them, he isn't saying...God get those people who oppose me, God lay them low...he's saying...God help them repent, please, God, be gracious and grant them repentance and bring them to the knowledge of the truth. This is a compassionate attitude. The servant of God should be as gentle with the saints who error as he is with the sinners who are equally dependent on God for repentance. God needs to grant repentance to Christians, too.

In 2 Corinthians 7 verse 9, now he says to the Corinthians, "I rejoice not that you were made sorrowful but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance, for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God." It was the will of God that you be made sorrowful. It was the will of God that you repent. He's talking to Christians there, only God can grant that, only God.

This is compassion. If you are in error, if you stand apart from the truth or if you stand apart from righteousness, you are confronted and corrected in instructed not out of vengeance but out of compassion. The word metanoia which is translated repentance here, emphasizes a change of mind and a change of attitude that results in a change of direction. Comprehensive word...a change of mind, a change of attitude that results in a change of direction. He says, "I want to correct them so they'll turn around and go the other way and come to the knowledge of the truth." The knowledge is epignosis, the deep knowledge. It's a compound word, the full knowledge, the deep knowledge. I want them to come to the full knowledge. They know it in part, they're Christians, but I want them to come to the full knowledge. Vessels of dishonor I want to become vessels of honor. You see, there's no vengeance here...there's no bitterness here. There's no spirit of retaliation here, there's only compassion. The compassionate heart wants to teach skillfully and bring people to repentance so that they can come to the knowledge of the truth and be delivered, verse 26, from the devil.

Would you notice verse 26? "And they...they referring to those who by God's grace are given repentance...may come to their senses," not to salvation, this is believers, "May come to their senses," ananepho, may return from their drunkenness. It's like they were here, they went into a stupor, I want them to come back. Return from their drunkenness. By the way, it's only used in that verse the only time in the New Testament. They're in a stupor, they're in a state of drunkenness, they're senseless. The deceit of false teaching, the deceit of sin and bitterness and whatever is going on in their life has numbed their conscience, confused their mind, paralyzed their will. And he says, "I want them to come out of that stupor." Why? "Because they are in it by virtue of the trap of the devil." They've fallen prey to Satan.

You say, "You mean a Christian could be caught in the snare of the devil?" You better believe it. First Timothy 3:7 says even an elder could, an overseer. It says, when you're choosing men to be pastors and overseers, make sure that they have a good reputation with those outside the church so they don't fall in to reproach and the snare of the devil. Yes, the warning there is that even an elder could fall into the snare of the devil. And I see right here believers who have listened to vain speculations, who have gotten involved in useless words and arguments and debates and have bought in to the lies of Satan, have fallen into his trap, have gone into a spiritual stupor. And they need to get out of because he says at the end of verse 26, "They are held captive by him to do his will." They are literally in a captive state, captive to Satan. Christians...imagine that...becoming captive to Satan, becoming the pawns to do Satan's duty in the church because of their sin. But he's not vengeful, he's compassionate. The compassionate heart calls the ignorant to truth, those who are in a stupor to sense, those in slavery to freedom.

So you're correcting all the time those who oppose the truth, those who oppose righteousness, but you do it with a crying heart that longs that they would be granted repentance so they come to the full knowledge of the truth and come back to their senses and be delivered from the trap of the devil in which they have been held captive. That's compassion. That's the heart of the noble vessel. It's a

heart of compassion.

So many people who minister for Christ get bitter and vengeful and angry and they've been personally taking all of the affrontery as if they didn't deserve any of it and they needed to justify themselves. And they lash out at people and their motive in correcting them is selfish, not compassionate. I want God to give me a compassionate attitude so that no matter what anyone says against me, no matter how greatly they may error from the truth, may misrepresent the truth, may attack, no matter how deep the wounds may be, the heart always says, "God please grant them repentance that they may come to the full knowledge of the truth for their sake, not mine, so that they may be delivered out of the snare of Satan and coming to their senses be removed from the one to whose will they have been held captive for so long." Free them from that bondage. That's the kind of attitude. Free them, Lord, from that bondage. That's compassion.

Do you want to be a useful vessel? A pure fellowship, a clean heart, a discerning mind, a gentle manner, a humble spirit and a compassionate attitude create a useful, noble vessel. I hope it's your prayer that you can be that vessel, fit for the master's use. Let's pray.

Our Father, You know our hearts this morning, each one of us, and You know how we long in our hearts to be all that You want us to be. Or, Lord, You know that we're struggling with that desire. It's my prayer this morning that You will show us ourselves, show us our hearts, open us up, help us to be honest.

While your heads are bowed for just a moment, this message has been really important for my own life right now. And I trust for yours. Let me ask you the question...do you want to be useful to God? If you do, why don't you just pray this prayer...Lord, I want to be a noble vessel, I want You to use me. I want You to help me to maintain a pure fellowship. Tell the Lord that just in the silence of your heart. I want You to help me to be part of a pure fellowship. Lord, I want to have a clean heart, a discerning mind, a gentle manner, a humble spirit, a compassionate attitude.

Can you pray that prayer? If you can't, if you can't, you're in sin...you're in sin. If you can't cry out with everything in you as a Christian and say, "O God, make me this vessel unto honor," then you're holding some vices closer to your heart than the purposes of God and you may be in a stupor and in a trap, the pawn of Satan, his prisoner in opposition to the work of God while being even in the church. I pray God will graciously grant you repentance.

But if that's the prayer of your heart and you can pray it with an eager spirit, then I know God will answer. Beloved, you must know that God wants to use you and all of us to do a mightier work than ever we have seen in this place, in this city. But He's not able to do it until all of us have come and made the commitment to the priority.

Father, I ask You even now to work in my own heart these things and in the hearts of all of us and answer every cry of every heart, those who are reaching out and longing to be a vessel unto honor of gold and silver. Father, may it be...may it be that You take some of the pottery and the wood and the defiled and You transform them into the gold and the silver. And for those who cannot even pray that prayer, the battle is so great, grant them repentance, God, that they may come to the full knowledge of the truth and back to their senses, delivered from the trap of Satan where they're being held captive. Help us all to serve You with a new commitment, a new devotion. And, Lord, we too pray for those who may be here who have never embraced Jesus Christ, who have never put their faith in Him as Lord and Savior, who have never come for the forgiveness of sin. We pray today, O God, that You'll move in their hearts and open their hearts with faith and repentance to believe...in Christ's name. Amen.

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