

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

Characteristics of a Useful Vessel

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:14–26

Code: 80-342

I want you to open your Bible, this morning, as we wrap up our Shepherds Conference to 2 Timothy chapter 2. It would almost be a serious oversight if we would have a conference of pastors and church leaders and elders and not deal with portions of Scripture in 1 and 2 Timothy because they are, after all, the pastoral epistles and they speak directly to the responsibility that we have in serving the Lord in His church.

I always feel when we come to the end of the Shepherds Conference on this particular Sunday that there's a burden on my heart to speak to the pastors, even though the whole congregation of our church is here, to direct the message to them. And in so doing, you in no way ignore the congregation because whatever standard the Lord sets for the pastor is set so that the pastor can be an example to the flock. Paul said to Timothy, "Be an example to the believers in word and conduct." The Apostle Paul said that you are to follow me as I follow Christ.

So when we talk about the standard that God has established for the pastor, we are establishing that so that he can be the model for the people to follow. Whatever a pastor is to be in his own sanctification, whatever a pastor is to be in his own commitment to the Word of God, whatever a pastor is to be in his own behavior is so that he can be the model for what everybody else is to be. And so, we're simply lifting the standard of leadership so that leadership can lead people to the very standard which is their standard.

There's a passage of Scripture that I think directs our attention to this. It begins in verse 14 of 2 Timothy 2 and I want to read the text to you and then we'll hear from the Lord with regard to its significance.

Verse 14, "Remind them of these things and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the Word of Truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter for it will lead to further ungodliness and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place and they upset the faith of some. Nevertheless the firm foundation of God stands having this seal, the Lord knows those who are His and everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness. Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels but also vessels of wood and of earthenware and some to

honor and some to dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord's slave must not be quarrelsome but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. And they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

In verse 14 you see the word "useless." In verse 21 you see the word "useful." There's a contrast in this text about being useless or being useful. Anybody who serves the Lord Jesus Christ, I think, would desire to be useful. In chapter 4 of this same epistle and verse 11, Paul speaking of John Mark says, "Pick up Mark and bring him with you for he is useful to me for ministry." There was a time when Mark was useless and Paul would not include him on his second missionary journey. But there came a time when he became useful.

When Paul wrote his letter to Philemon, appealing to Philemon to receive back the run away slave, Onesimus, who had run away from Philemon, ended up in Rome, run right into the Apostle Paul and become a believer. So Paul sent him back with the words in Philemon verse 11 that he had been useless but he was now useful. I think we all want to be useful to the Lord rather than useless.

Now that drives us to sort of the heart of the passage in verse 21. What does it mean to be useful? Verse 21 says, "Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared for every good work." Being useful here is like a vessel that is honorable. This is an analogy. The word vessel is *skeuos* in the Greek, it means a household container. It is a domestic term. It refers to domestic gear, a plate, a platter, a serving dish, a serving bowl. The master of the house, the despotes, the ruler of the house, has certain vessels that are honorable. They are honorable because they are sanctified. They are therefore useful for every good purpose.

On the other hand, there are some other vessels, they are dishonorable. Verse 20 says, "In a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and earthenware and some to honor and some to dishonor." The honorable utensils, the honorable platters, plates, dishes, bowls, those are the ones that are gold and silver. The dishonorable ones are wood and earthenware.

Paul is giving us a picture, believe it or not, of the church and the master here in this large house, which is the church, is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. And within the church there are contrasting vessels that serve the congregation. Some of them are worthy to be brought out in public. They are beautiful. They are valued. They are prized. They're clean. They're useful for every purpose. There are others that would never be brought in to public that are not for public view, that are not for

any clean usage. The honorable vessels are made of gold and silver, things beautiful, valuable and prized. The dishonorable vessels are made of wood and earthenware, pottery.

The contrast frankly is really extreme because the honorable vessels in the house were what you served the food on. And the dishonorable vessels are what you took the waste out in. In the church there are honorable vessels who serve the heavenly food and there are garbage buckets, trash cans. You want your people to see, you want your guests to see the beautiful. You would never want your guests to see the garbage bucket, the filthy pails. That's how it is in a big house though. You have both.

What is it to be a useful vessel? What is it to be a gold and silver serving dish to bring to people the heavenly food? Well if you go back to verse 21, it says there are three things that describe the useful vessel. First of all, it is sanctified. Secondly, the master employs it for his good purposes. And thirdly, it is prepared for every good work. Sanctified...very important to understand the Greek text here because it's a perfect passive...having already been sanctified, having already been sanctified. The gold and silver, the honorable vessel, the *doulos* if you want to use the term in verse 24, the Lord's *doulos*, the master's *doulos*, the useful slave, the useful vessel if you use the metaphoric picture of the dishes is to be sanctified in this sense. Perfect passive, already having been sanctified...having already been sanctified.

That is to say, it is sanctified before it ever shows up in a ministry function. The ministry is not the place to work on an unsanctified man. A person is not a vessel unto honor until that person is already in a settled condition of being separated from sin to holiness. That's why the Bible says, "Lay hands suddenly on no man." Don't put someone in the ministry before they're in a settled condition of having been sanctified. A man in the ministry must already have been proven, must already have been known as a man who is above reproach, a one-woman man, temperate, dignified, etc., sober minded, etc., and not greedy and on and on the requirements go.

This is not a place where you put people in a trial and error environment. They have already been set apart. They have already been made clean and thus they are brought out into the public place on behalf of the master to serve the heavenly food. When it says they are useful to the master, it means they are submissive. It has the connotation of obedience.

And then they are prepared for every good work. And that again is a perfect passive, having already been established in a prepared condition. You don't go into the ministry until you have already been sanctified, until you already have demonstrated obedience to the master, until you already have become prepared.

Then you go back to verse 20 and again look at the analogy...a large house. This pictures the church. There are valued, prized, pure, clean, beautiful utensils that are used to serve the food. But there are

also cheap, ugly garbage buckets. The contrast is really extreme...really extreme.

Some ministers are prized by the Lord, the Master...noble, useful, having been sanctified, having been prepared. Others are disgraceful, should never appear in public at all. That this house is the church can be drawn from verse 19 where it says, "Nevertheless the firm foundation of God stands." Almost all commentators think that phrase, "the firm foundation of God," refers to the church, which is called by Paul in 1 Timothy the pillar and foundation of the truth. So we're talking here about the church. The master of the church, the Lord of the church recognizes that there are in his church those that are noble and honorable and those who are ignoble and dishonorable.

And that leads us to ask the essential question, "What makes for an honorable servant? I really don't think you want to be anything other than that. So what are the characteristics of a noble, useful, honorable vessel? And there is no mistaking the answer. This is what you desire to be. Let me give you seven characteristics of the noble servant, the noble slave, the noble vessel.

Number one, biblical fidelity...a biblical fidelity. Back in verse 14 we read this, "Remind them of these things, things to come in this text, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God." Now we're in to this solemn charge which Paul loved to use and you will notice it again in chapter 4 verse 1. "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and by His appearing in His Kingdom preach the Word." In other words, you are mandated to preach the Word under a solemn charge, under the omniscient scrutiny of God and of Christ. And you have the same thing here, "I solemnly charge them in the presence of God..." that is, you have an accountability to God, you are visible to God, you are under His omniscient eye with a view toward a future judgment of your effort. It is a very solemn charge, as solemn as it gets before our watching God.

And what is the charge? It's the positive charge to preach the Word in chapter 4 verse 2. It's the negative here, "Not to wrangle about words which is useless to the ruin of the hearers." To wrangle about words which is useless to the ruin of the hearers. The word "ruin" by the way here is the Greek word *katastrepha*. It is catastrophic, it is devastating, it is destructive. That word is used in 2 Peter 2:6 to refer to the devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah which was reduced to ashes. For a minister to get caught up in wrangling about words is catastrophic, it is devastating, it is destructive, it is like raining down fire and brimstone on a congregation, reducing them to ashes.

What does it mean wrangling about words? It means dialogue, conversation, debate with lies and false doctrine. The abandonment of biblical fidelity, the abandonment of biblical conviction, the abandonment of sound doctrine, the abandonment of clarity, the abandonment of authority, propositional declaration in favor of a dialogue with the devil, in favor of a conversation which is the buzz word today. Don't be dogmatic, enter the conversation. We're all talking and all ideas are valuable and all ideas ought to be laid out on the table and we ought to be able to find as much

common ground as we can. The conversation the church has with the world is always catastrophic, always because it's being conducted by the garbage buckets, in Paul's language.

Perhaps an anaptnalogy(????) could go further and include the fact that this dialogue with the garbage buckets has allowed the seepage from the world's sewer of ideas to pollute the stream of truth. That's why churches affirm evolution, that's why churches affirm abortion, that's why churches affirm homosexuality and homosexual marriage, and premarital sex and divorce and unholy leaders and pride and self-esteem and corrupt theology about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit, about Scripture and about the gospel and every bad theology and its consequent bad behavior. You'll find all of those things being advocated in a church or in churches.

You don't engage in dialogue with those people. Any pastor who is a part of that should be ashamed. Verse 15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed, you forego the wrangling, you forego that and in its place you accurately handle the Word of Truth." Be diligent, spoudazo in the Greek, it means to give maximum effort. I know the old King James said, "Study to show yourself approved." It's not the word "study," it's be diligent, be eager. This is not a picture of a student. This is a picture of a master craftsman. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed. You don't want to bring your work up to God if it's a work to be ashamed of.

The picture here is the ergates, the worker, the master craftsman, the journeyman, the one who has perfected his trade. Be diligent to perfect the trade. What is the trade? It is accurately handling the Word of Truth. And you want to perfect it in such a way that you can literally present it to God and have His approval. And that is such a vivid picture cause it says in this verse, "Present yourself approved to God," and the verb "present" is paristemi and it means to stand beside. Take your stand beside God without fear of His disapproval or discipline. Vivid picture.

Can you stand beside God and say, "This is my work that I offer to You?" And to draw the analogy out, "Having Him put His arm around you and know He'll say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'" That's how you want to minister.

How do you do that? By handling accurately the Word of Truth. Handling accurately is a verb, orthotomeo from which we get orthopaedic, orthodontic, it means to straighten. Our responsibility is to cut it straight. It means to cut a straight line, cut a straight road, cut a straight path, cut a straight edge. We're to be craftsmen cutting the truth straight.

Our responsibility is not to engage in some kind of a conversation with the devil and with the liars and the false teachers and those who would destroy the truth, and find some common ground with them. Our responsibility is to be diligent so as to have become craftsmen in the way we can handle the truth.

Then he repeats in verse 16 again as if we needed to hear it again because we do, "But avoid worldly and empty chatter for it leads to further ungodliness and that kind of talk spreads like gangrene." Again he says, "Avoid worldly and empty talk." Worldly is prophane(???) in the Greek, profane talk, talk like the world, language like the world. And empty chatter, kenophonias, phonias from which we get telephone, having to do with sound, keno means empty sounds, empty babbling. Stay away from all of it, be a craftsman who can proclaim the truth straight because all this other worldly empty chatter, it will lead to further ungodliness. There's already ungodliness, it just leads to further ungodliness. What does that mean? It spreads, it's exponential. Don't give them a voice or it's just going to produce more ungodliness. It goes down, down, deeper, deeper, wider, wider into ungodliness. And he gives an illustration of one example of this, "Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus," these would be two, two pastors who allowed themselves to engage in dialogue with the devil, who bought into the lies that were being told, who listened to the garbage buckets, you might say, and allowed the sewage from the world to seep into the pure stream of the truth. And as a result, confused the people they were influencing. They went astray from the truth saying that the resurrection had already taken place. And they upset the faith of some.

You want to stay away from this. It just leads to compounded godliness. And this is such a vivid picture. "It spreads like gangrene." What does gangrene do? It eats the healthy flesh, it eats the healthy flesh. You let that stuff loose in a church, in the body, as it were, and it will just eat everything that's healthy. And, in fact, this kind of activity isn't even imagined among true ministers of Christ because verse 19 says, "Nevertheless the firm foundation of God stands, the church has this seal. The Lord knows those who are His." And how does He know them? How are they recognized? "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness." And that's borrowed from Numbers 16. Korah's rebellion in God's judgment. Back in Numbers 16 judgment fell on the corrupt, shameful, useless, destructive men. And it will fall on them again. But God knows His elect. God knows His true and faithful ministers because they have biblical fidelity and it shows up in the way they abstain from wickedness. Good behavior is always the product of good theology.

So the call to be a vessel unto honor, useful to the master, prepared for every good work, set apart from sin is then a call to a biblical fidelity. And right alongside that, number two, it is a call to a pure fellowship, it is characterized by a pure fellowship. And this ties right in, verse 21, notice this, "Therefore...which comes immediately off the previous verse, and I'll explain that in a moment...Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared for every good work."

What do you mean these? To what does these refer? What is the antecedent of these? Well backing up from there, what do you mean by cleanses? Compound, ekkathairo, catharsis is a cleansing. This is a compound catharsis, this is a total cleansing, a real purging, a complete removal of all that defiles. If a man removes literally away from himself, pushes away from himself, these...what do you

mean these? Well the antecedent can only be one thing, only one thing. Go back to verse 20, "In a large house there are vessels of gold and silver, vessels of wood and earthenware, some to honor and some to dishonor. If anyone cleanses himself from these..." Well that would have to be the vessels of dishonor, the vessels of dishonor. Thoroughly remove yourself from them...the nearest and only antecedent, the only possibility, the vessels of dishonor.

The first exhortation is to be faithful to biblical interpretation and cut it straight and don't get caught up in a conversation that sucks your conviction out and spills lies into the stream of truth. And the second one is, stay away from the kind of people who espouse those things. It's Psalm 1, that's an absolutely foundational concept of spiritual life. "How blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked, doesn't stand in the path of sinners, doesn't sit in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law does he meditate day and night. He's like a tree planted by the rivers of waters, he flourishes." This is a call for separation from corrupt influences. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5, "There's a man corrupting a church with his immorality. Put him out cause a little leaven leavens the whole lump." Jesus said, "Confront people's sin. If they don't repent, put them out." Proverbs puts it this way, "The companion of fools will suffer harm." Paul told the Corinthians, "Evil company corrupts good morals."

The gold and silver vessels need to hang out together. That's the idea. That's why it's so wonderful to have a conference like this, isn't it? We wouldn't want to have half gold and silver and half garbage buckets. What kind of production would that be? What would be the end result of that? There's no value in going to a school where you sit in the seat of a scoffer. There's no value to having a conversation with someone who is going to pollute the stream of truth. It's a pure fellowship that is called for. And that's why we do what we do. That's why you come because you know it's a pure fellowship cause you understand the power of that pure fellowship to strengthen you, to give you accountability, to challenge you, to encourage you.

Third thing he says is this, "If you want to be a useful vessel, if you want to be an honorable vessel, you must have not only biblical fidelity and you must have a pure fellowship, but thirdly, a clean heart." And they're all overlapping and intertwined, aren't they? A clean heart, verse 22, "Now flee from youthful lusts."

That's the negative. The positive is pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart...pure heart. Very similar to 1 Timothy 6 where Paul says, "Flee the love of money," verse 11, and then "Follow after righteousness." Same idea.

The minister is a running man. He's a running man. Flee is the word pheugo from which we get fugitive. He's a fugitive from all that defiles. He's a fugitive from all that corrupts. He's a fugitive from all that stains and blights. He runs with all his might from youthful lusts, the desire for wrong things and the wrong kind of desire. And by the way, they're youthful lusts because they begin in youth, not

because they end there. They are those lusts that are activated as someone becomes an adult that is so powerful and they remain.

I stood over the bed of a dying man in his late seventies, praying for him as he was entering heaven. And he said, "I just have to tell you one thing. I'm thankful for the grace of God because I have never been able to overcome my attraction to pornography." Those are youthful lusts that last a lifetime. Run from youthful lusts, keep on fleeing. The kind of sinful yearning that goes beyond the sexual, it could be an inordinate craving for money, an ordinate craving for power, self-assertiveness, desire for material things, jealousy, envy, pride, you name it. All those things that fire up in youth.

Timothy, by the way, was in his late thirties...at most his early forties. Paul was at least 30 years his senior. Paul identifies those things as the things that are born in a fire in your youth and continue through your whole life.

How do you run? Well you can run physically, Genesis 39, like Joseph and leave your coat and get out of there. You can run mentally, Philippians 4, by thinking on things that are pure, just, holy, good. I think you run biblically, "Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin," right? How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your Word.

Timothy was young and Paul understood that. I don't think Timothy was in some kind of horrible sin at the situation...at this time in his life in some kind of situation which was overwhelming him, I just think Paul is giving him good instruction because of the reality that we are though Christians, simultaneously righteous and sinful.

So he says flee...flee from youthful lusts. And then he says, "Pursue," imperative, keep on pursuing, keep it up, keep running. You're a running man, you're running away and you're running toward. Run toward righteousness, doing right according to God's standards. That's what that means, living in harmony with God's Law. Living in obedience to His Word.

But it's not just that. There's a second word here that's so very, very important. You're not only pursuing righteousness, you're pursuing faith. The word could be better translated faithfulness. Righteousness speaks of adherence to the Law. Faith only speaks of loyalty to the person. So that we live our Christian life both as an effort to be obedient to the Law of God, and secondly, to be loyal to the person of God.

I think you understand that from the time you're a child. You want to obey your parent because the parent lays down the law. But you also want to obey your parent because you love your parent. And the same is true in the spiritual dimension. We run from iniquity because we want to fulfill the Law of God. We want to be obedient to the Law of God because we want to be loyal to the one who gave Himself for us.

And he adds love...love, agape, the love of choice, the love that works in the selfless, the love that works sacrificially. Love toward God is the idea. We want to be faithful to the one we love.

And then he adds peace, undisturbed tranquility. When you run toward righteousness and you run toward loyalty, and you run toward the love of God and the consequent love for others, you are running toward a life of peace. Obedience, loyalty, love, peace, marks of holiness.

And notice what he says at the end of the verse. "With all those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." This is what pure hearted people do. "Call on the Lord" is a salvation expression. "Call on the Lord" is a salvation expression. It has to do with that. Romans 10:12 to 14 says that, that calling upon the Lord is the equivalent of expressing saving faith in Him for salvation. And of all those who call on the Lord, the ones whose hearts are truly pure are the ones who run from youthful lusts and run after righteousness. You want to have a pure heart, a clean heart. You win the battle in the heart, right? Because that's where lust conceives and brings forth sin, James 1. Lust when it conceives in the heart brings forth sin and sin brings forth death. So you have to defeat sin on the inside before it produces on the outside and brings about destruction. Win the battle on the inside, maintain a clear conscience.

I love that Paul always said that. My conscience is clear. My conscience is clear. He told the Corinthians, "No matter what the false teachers say about me, my conscience is clear that I have served you in a blameless way. Accuse me whatever you will, my conscience is not accusing me." Win the battle on the inside, genuineness, clean heart.

You want to be a vessel useful to the Master, biblical fidelity, critical. Pure fellowship which provides the accountability and the stimulation for godliness and purity. And then the pursuit of righteousness and a fleeing from all that corrupts.

Number four, if you would be a vessel fit for the Master, useful to Him, you must have a discerning mind. And here he comes right back to the same issue again, verse 23, "Refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing they produce quarrels."

You know, we don't debate...we don't debate. I remember early at Grace Church when I was in the chapel, I was preaching one Sunday there, the place was packed, people used to sit around my feet because you couldn't get them all in, in the early years. And it was a very small building, not a lot of places to sit. And it got pretty intimate. And people kind of felt like there wasn't really a platform and a speaker, it was just kind of me talking and they were there and they were all around the place. And on one occasion the familiarity of the whole thing manifested itself when a guy stood up and said, "Frankly, I don't buy anything you're saying."

Oh, this is a sermon, not a discussion. Well it immediately became a discussion. I had to make the point that I'm here to declare, I'm here to proclaim, I'm here to preach and teach. There are places when you...when you want to discuss and you want to go from house to house and instruct and you want to have private conversations, obviously. But there is an incredible power in the proclamation, "God has designed by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe," according to 1 Corinthians. There's...there's a tendency today of...it's more than a tendency, it's a movement today, turn the pulpit in to some kind of a dialogue. And if you don't let people stand up and talk to you, you...you speak to them out of the conversation by having them tell you what they want you to say. There are churches that actually have committees that make up the sermons. They decide what the pastor should say about what. This is a time for proclamation. This is not a time for argumentation. You can argue in your heart. You can argue in your mind. But the proclamation of the Word of God establishes the foundation upon which you can argue.

"Refuse foolish and ignorant speculations knowing that they produce quarrels." The brain is an amazing thing. You know, I just thank God, I've said this so many times through my life to pastors, I thank the Lord all the time that my brain is not a battleground between truth and error. I'm so glad I'm not slugging it out all the time in my mind trying to find out what I actually believe so that I can get up here and tell you. The brain is an amazing thing. Your's weighs about three pounds...some more, some less. I guess it has about ten billion cells, two percent of your body weight, 25 percent of the oxygen supply in your blood goes to your brain. The many nerve cells in the cerebral cortex, by far the majority are utilized in memory. These cells are linked together in chains of billions of association fibers, all of which can be reused indefinitely. Memories jump from cell to cell over the fibers to form associations. They're linked by coded proteins which store them and once stored, these memories remain permanently and they mix in the associations that either strengthen your convictions or weaken your convictions. I want to make sure that everything goes into my little three-pound deal strengthens my convictions.

Think on these things. If there's anything to think about, if there's anything praise worthy, think on these things, Philippians 4:8. "What ever is good and holy and just..." Your brain is a treasure house, don't turn it into a dump.

Specifically, if you just took the pastoral epistles, we are to avoid strange doctrines, myths, endless genealogies, fruitless discussions, unbiblical assertions, worldly fables fit only for old women, different doctrine, not agreeing with sound words with doctrine that is conformed to ungodliness, controversial questions, disputes about words, unholy, empty babble, opposing arguments of what is falsely called science, battles over words...words, useless talk which spreads like gangrene, and now foolish and ignorant speculations...foolish moros, from which you get moron, stupid and ignorant, untrained, undisciplined, uninstructed. It comes from paideuo, which means to train a child. And you put an alpha privative, apaideuo, it is untrained, unskilled, infantile, senseless. And the word for speculations

is zetesis, it means questionings, debates, arguments, disputes, all of that. What is the point in ignorant, untrained, uninstructed, undisciplined men spouting senseless arguments against the truth? Why would you engage in that conversation?

You know, in 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul says, “Don’t despise preaching. Don’t despise preaching. Don’t quench the Spirit. The Spirit is coming with truth through preaching. But exam everything carefully. Hold fast to what is good and reject what is evil.” You have to be discerning. You don’t want to get caught up with what only produces quarrels rather than conviction.

Number five, if you want to be a useful vessel, honorable, you must be characterized by a gentle manner. I don’t know that there could be anybody more fiery than Paul. When he wanted to unload, he could really unload. And he learned it from Jesus because He could to, make a whip and clean the temple out and strip the false leaders of Israel naked with His words and leave them exposed for the wretchedness that they really manifested. But always there was this other side. And in verse 24, Paul hurries to say, “The Lord’s slave must not be quarrelsome but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged.” The Lord’s doulos must not fight, must not fight...that’s actually what it says.

By the way, the Lord’s doulos is a technical term, I think, for a pastor...the Lord’s slave. I think it’s a technical term, the Lord’s slave. And the Apostles owned it. Paul introduces himself in his epistles as a slave of God and of Christ. James calls himself a slave. Peter calls himself a slave. Jude calls himself a slave. And John calls himself a slave. It’s a technical title referring to an elder or pastor or overseer and it’s a wonderful picture because Christ Himself called Himself a slave in Philippians 1, “Took upon the form of a slave.” So the Lord was firm, the Lord was strong, but there was a side of Him that was gentle. Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 10:1 to manifest the meekness and gentleness of Christ. This is a delicate balance. The Lord’s slave has to fight for the truth, earnestly contend for the truth, as Jude puts it. He has to endure suffering. He has to fight the forces of Satan with spiritual weapons. He has to preach the truth against the lies. But he never descends to a fight. He is kind. There’s a soft authority. There’s a gentleness in demeanor with dealing with those in error, never harsh, never abusive, never overbearing, never unkind, easy to approach, easy to speak to, sensitive, tender.

And able to teach...so important. The only qualification that describes any function of an elder is that he be didaskos, that’s the word “able to teach.” What that means is that in a reasonable, sensible manner you can delineate what it is that is the truth. It’s so important because you can’t refute the error unless you can make it reasonable. That’s where your sensitivity, your kindness, your gentleness comes in. You have a skill in collecting the data. You have a skill in understanding the data. And you have a skill in disseminating it, that’s what it means to be a pastor, an elder, or teacher, that’s what sets them apart from deacons. But you do it with kindness and you do it with graciousness, and you do it with sensitivity. And even when there’s a hostile reaction, it says, you are patient when wronged. You teach with forbearance and patience, and, of course, that is what it says

in chapter 4 verse 2, "Preach the Word, but do it with great patience and instruction,.." Don't turn on your audience. Don't become bitter and caustic and abusive.

So, the vessel unto honor is marked by a biblical fidelity, a pure fellowship, a clean heart, a discerning mind, a gentle manner, and number six, a humble spirit. Verse 25 is with *prautes*, actually humility, correcting those who are in opposition but with humility. Let's just take that, with humility. It means a mild, gentle, softness, meekness.

That's such a hard thing to balance off, isn't it? I mean, when you know the truth, when you know you have the right answer and you know the others don't and you're bringing them the truth to not be overbearing, to not be brutish, to not be harsh. Really comes out of humility. This is the kind of meekness that has been defined as power under control...power under control. Proverbs 16:32 says, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he who rules his spirit better than the one who captures a city." Real power is the ability to know the truth, to have the truth and to be under complete control. That's meekness...power under control.

There is no one in any profession, any place in the world that has more power than a preacher. You have the power of life and death, right? Who's adequate for these things, Paul says. Your words are life unto life, or death unto death. But it has to be power under control.

We're not talking about cowardice. We're not talking about meekness in the sense of a kind of wishy-washy softness. We're not talking about some kind of passive acceptance of things. We're talking about power that never gets angry, power that isn't self-defensive and self-protective and self-exalting. Like John Bunyan who said, "He was already down, can't fall." There's nothing to lose. A meek person never defends himself because he knows he doesn't deserve to be defended. This is what we're talking about, being able to balance off this power that the truth has with humility is so important. It's not about impotence, not about poverty, it's not about shyness, it's not about embarrassment. It's about keeping the truth under control.

Horatia(??) Boner(??) said once that he could tell when a Christian was really humble because he talked less about what he was doing and became smaller in his own sight, like the morning star fading away before the rising sun. Living for the Lord with no thought of yourself.

And then finally, number seven, if you want to be a vessel unto honor, you must have a confrontive will. If you go back to the verse we're looking at, verse 25, with humility, correcting those who are in opposition. You've got to be willing to correct.

Go over to chapter 4 verse 2, he says it again, "Reprove, rebuke, exhort." First Timothy 3 says that the Word given by inspiration of God is profitable for instruction and correction. People sometimes say to me about a pastor, "Oh, he just doesn't have a will to confront. He just will not confront

anything. He's just a nice guy and he won't confront." Then you're not really a vessel unto honor, you have to confront because the world is full of error and sin and it's your responsibility to confront that. In spite of all the love and the gentleness and the humility and the desire to make peace and avoid quarreling, the useful servant must confront. You must correct those who are in opposition, not for your own sake, but for their sake.

Why? Because if you correct them, God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth and they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

The bottom line, folks, look, God does the work. God gives repentance. God brings people out of the snare of the devil, but He does it by means of the truth. The end of verse 25, "Leading to the knowledge of the truth." Well somebody has to disseminate the truth. We could be talking about a non-believer. This passage could be talking about a non-believer that God would lead to repentance regarding salvation. We also could be talking about a believer who has fallen in to some error, some sin and needs to be confronted with the truth so that by that truth even a believer can come back to his senses, escape the snares of the devil where he's been held captive. But it doesn't happen without confrontation.

The tone today is just say what everybody wants to hear. Just say what they want to hear. Just say what's going to be popular, what's going to make you likeable. The opponents of the truth are always spouting their useless destructive catastrophic lies. Who's going to expose them? Be humble but be confrontive. Instruct in a corrective way. The uninstructed, the uneducated, the untaught and the truth, do it graciously, do it gently, but do it, correcting them. Constant correction, by the way, is implied in the form of the verb so that God may if He chooses grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. And they can escape the snare of the devil where they've been held captive by their misunderstandings. You want to bring people to their senses.

By the way, verse 26, it says, "May come to their senses," it uses the verb *ananepho* which means return from drunkenness, sober up, come out of a stupor. It's used only here in the New Testament. There's all kinds of lies floating out around there, all through the world, filtered in to Christianity by the dialogue that the church always wants to have. These false teachers numb the conscience, confuse the mind, paralyze the will and catapult even believers into a spiritual stupor like some kind of drunkenness from which they need to be delivered because it is a snare of the devil. And he'll hold them captive as long as he can and render them useless. And so we need to deliver them by a confrontive will.

Compassionate heart...yes, but we don't back off when it comes to truth. So you want to be an honorable vessel, you want to be useful to the Lord, a biblical fidelity, a pure fellowship, a clean heart, a discerning mind, a gentle manner and humble spirit and a confrontive will. I know that's the desire

of all who truly know the Lord and are called to this service. May it be a reality in all our lives to the glory of God. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we...we recognize that none of us is worthy for such a calling, we all fall short. But we thank You that by the strength of Your Spirit and the relentless outpouring of Your grace You accept us and You use us as vessels. We can't imagine ourselves being vessels unto honor, gold and silver, sanctified, useful, prepared for every good work. But by Your grace we can become so. Where there are failures and there certainly are, may we run to repent and run to be restored and may we never do anything to bring scandal on the name of Christ or the church. May we never be disqualified in any way. Would You raise up, Lord, many who are vessels of gold and silver, to deliver the heavenly food to Your church, and save us from those that should never been seen in public, never be heard, who only come to pollute? Keep us faithful.

And, Lord, as we think about this for ministers and pastors, we think about how important it is that people follow the same path because all of us as Christians have been called to live to this standard, to live to biblical fidelity, to engage in pure fellowship, to possess a clean heart, to be lowly and meek and humble and compassionate and gracious, as well as to confront sin. Raise up many pastors who can set the example so that Your people can be all that You would have them be for Your glory. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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