

2 Timothy 2.20-26 Vessels in God's House

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[0:00] And as you're turning to 2 Timothy chapter 2, a little bit of a quick review is that previously we saw that the church is a spiritual building. And as a spiritual building, it is a house.

And that house is the house of God. And the church is the house of God, is a pillar, a pillar that upholds the truth. And the church as a building, as a pillar that upholds the truth, is built upon the solid rock.

And what is that solid rock, that firm foundation, or should I say who is that rock? That's Jesus Christ, the church's one foundation. And so having looked then more at the structure of this spiritual building, the house of God, we now turn to consider the contents and the activities inside of it.

So in 2 Timothy chapter 2, we'll look at verses 20 to 26, but we'll start in 14. Before I read 14, I just want to read verse 2. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

And over to 14. And their message will spread like cancer.

[1:43] And they will spread like cancer.

They will spread like cancer. And they will spread like cancer. And they will spread like cancer.

Some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the master, prepared for every good work.

Flee also youthful lusts. But pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, and humility, correcting those who are in opposition.

If God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth. And that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

[3:15] Our great God, we thank you again for this time we have for the means of grace and to sit under your word. We pray, Holy Spirit, that you would illuminate the word to us, that you would make it effectual to us according to our needs.

We pray, Lord, that you would help us to be able to not only grow in knowledge, but also in understanding. That you would grant us to be able to free ourselves from the distractions that keep our minds from focusing on your word.

And I pray, Lord, that you would indeed illuminate your word to us. Thank you for the gospel promises of salvation. We thank you for the gospel promises of forgiveness of sins for all those who turn to Christ.

And so, Lord, we pray that you would indeed forgive us of all of our sins. We pray that you would help us to not be so burdened by our remaining corruption, but to gaze upon Christ crucified.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. And we're going to cover a few verses today, 20 to 26. And in those verses, we see that the church on earth is the visible manifestation of the house of God.

[4:29] And in that house, vessels must be suitable for their use. So, say it again. The church on earth is the visible manifestation of the house of God.

And in that house, vessels must be suitable for their use. So, we'll divide it into two parts. The first part, we see the vessels of the great house.

And then we'll see the conduct of vessels for honor. So, first of all, the vessels of the great house in verse 20. Now, to draw some greater context out of the expectation of this, of what it is we're thinking about, about this great house.

What is this great house that it's using the illustration of? Now, if we go back in the Old Testament to 2 Samuel, in 2 Samuel chapter 7, the setting is that the Israelites are in Canaan and at Jerusalem.

And they have a king. And now David is their king. And David builds for himself this great house. And he thinks, here I have this great house.

[5:36] And the Lord is dwelling with us in a tabernacle, in a tent. So, he wants to build a great house for the Lord. But the Lord's response is that it won't be him, but it will be David's seed that would build a house for the Lord's name.

And that the Lord will establish his kingdom forever. Now, we see it partially fulfilled in David's seed through Solomon. Solomon builds the temple, the dwelling place of the Lord with his people.

This great house in the Lord's name. But Solomon and the temple are but a type of one greater than Solomon and a house that is greater.

Something that is spiritual. So, this promise, this covenant promise with David in 2 Samuel 7, 13, where David's seed will build a house for God's name.

So, fast forward now. And whether you're, maybe when you start your New Testament reading in Matthew, you hit this point of genealogy.

[6:42] And there's all these names, or perhaps in Luke, in Luke 3, the genealogy. Now, there's multiple promises which are kind of brought together in that genealogy to demonstrate something.

But one of them is that King David is listed in that genealogy. And that genealogy then leads to Jesus. Or in Luke, it's the other way around. It's starting with Jesus.

Who is the son of? Who is the son of? Who is the son of? And working back to David. So, in the line of the Davidic monarchy, here we have Jesus. And Jesus builds something that is greater than Solomon's temple.

And when we were in 1 Timothy, in 1 Timothy 3, 15, and how the church is to conduct itself, remember, excuse me, that Paul, though he wants to go there, he says, But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself.

And what? The house of God. So, here we see this great house, but it is a spiritual house, with Jesus, who is the son of David, according to his human nature, and the son of God, according to his divine nature, who builds a great house greater than Solomon's temple, which is a spiritual house, the house of God.

[8:02] So, here we have a great house. And in a great house, there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay.

So, in a great house, we have vessels. Some vessels are for honor, and some vessels are for dishonor. Now, I want to give a little bit of an illustration to help us understand that the days of old, when nights were cold and toilets weren't invented, well, they would use a chamber pot.

Chamber pot has other names. It's also called a chamber potty, or it's called a guzz under, which is really shorthand for goes under the bed. It was also called a johnny, and I don't know the details of that one.

It's also called a thunder mug, and I'll spare you the details of that one. And it's also, maybe you've heard of a bordeloo. And it's named a bordeloo after a 17th century Roman Catholic preacher, whose preaching was so notoriously long, on average, well over two hours, that women who wore large dresses would sneak in a chamber pot with a lid on it, so that without having to leave the pews, they could relieve themselves.

So, it became known as the bordeloo pot. These are vessels which are used for, well, dishonor. So, also, in that same era before indoor plumbing, they would also use jugs for water, for storing water, for pouring water.

[9:45] And so, if you were to sit down at the table, let's say in that same setting, after a two-and-a-half-hour sermon of sitting down to eat, and setting the bordeloo off to the side, and out comes the drinking water.

This is my point. You wouldn't want to mix or confuse that vessel for dishonorable use for a vessel or a water jug, which is to be used for serving up clean and pure refreshment, clean drinking water.

So, some vessels are for honor, some vessels are for dishonor. And a distinction is made here in the great house, in the house of God. So, who is the distinction between?

Now, the fuller context of our passage is making a distinction between two categories and false teachers who bring defilement, or corrupt false teachers.

And then in verse 24, it speaks about elders. So, the context is about elders, or teachers, and the distinction of false teachers. So, to bring it together then, a vessel for honorable use in the great house is the faithful men, in verse 2, or qualified elders in the church.

[11:05] And the vessel for dishonorable use are these errorists, these corrupt false teachers in the church. One of them serves up pure drinking water, and the other defilement that is not fit for consumption.

Now, a side note here, not speaking specifically about the elders, but a side note, is that nobody is honorable based on their own purity. By our sin, we have all been defiled, but the redeemed, those whom have been purchased by the shed blood of Christ, have been delivered from sin, and have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God who has made atonement for sin with his own precious blood.

So, back to the vessels in this great house. There's a cleansing. It says, be diligent to present yourself, sorry, therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor. If anyone cleanses himself from the latter, being the vessels for dishonor, then he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the master, prepared for every good work.

Now, to really kind of drive the point home, 14 years ago, I spent half a year in Mali, which is northwest Africa, and the language there is Bambara.

[12:40] And in Bambara, the words for right hand and left hand don't translate the same literal words that we would use. It's kinibolo and numimbolo for right hand, left hand. So, before I tell you what those words mean, you need to understand that Mali, being a third world country, people cannot afford very much at all.

And meals typically would be rice and maybe a bit of meat. Now, because they were so poor, they also couldn't afford plates or cutlery.

So, it would be a shared bowl and everyone would use their hands to take food out, not put it on a plate, but straight to the mouth and then back to the bowl again and everyone would share the same bowl.

Now, something else about such a poverty-stricken country is that they couldn't afford toilet paper. Some of you might be getting ahead of me here, but just hold on. And not being able to afford toilet paper, things were done a bit different and there might be like a bowl of water to rinse one's hand off of.

But the concept, even those who could afford toilet paper and did use toilet paper and had indoor plumbing and used good soap, there was just this wall that they couldn't get past.

[13:56] So, back to this communal bowl of rice that everybody's sharing by sticking their hand in and putting it in their mouth and back to it again. We got a problem and we need a solution for it. So, the solution, the names for right hand and left hand, the literal translation would be rice hand and, well, dirty nose hand because that's a better thing to talk about.

Or nose-picking hand, it could be the same thing. So, one hand is for more honourable use, such as eating, and the other hand is for dishonourable use. And the two never mix.

And so, even though somebody might wash their hands and use toilet paper and all that, there's just this wall, this block that they can't get past. So, you would never, ever, ever put your left hand in the bowl of rice, regardless of how clean it is.

And there's also not a whole lot of meat. There'd typically be less pieces of meat than there are people eating. So, the meat needs to be broken in half, but you could only use your right hand. So, you'd pick up a piece of meat and hold it up, and someone else would take their right hand and grab the meat and tug-of-war until it breaks in half because you never put your dirty nose hand in the rice bowl.

[15:15] The two should never be mixed. The two should never be confused. So, back to these vessels of honour and dishonour. What does it mean to cleanse oneself from the vessels of dishonour?

Now, the ministers of the word must cleanse themselves from the defiling effects of the vessels of dishonour. The defiling effects and the conduct of these errorist false teachers.

Remember, what their false teaching did, it led to further ungodliness, to further defilement. So, the effects of these errorists was ungodliness. It was defilement.

So, they need to cleanse themselves from the effects of the error that these false teachers were peddling, such as Hymenaeus and Philetus, for they will increase to more ungodliness, and their

message will spread like cancer.

So, such a cleansing from the defiling effects of false teachers and their influence necessitates robust, right-handling of the word in order to flush out the defilement that was effected by these false teachers, and then fill up with what is pure, what is refreshing, and what is life-giving.

[16:40] So, the vessels in the house of God must be suitable for their use, which is honourable. So, next we see the conduct of vessels for honour.

In verse 22, So, the conduct of vessels of honour includes circumvent, correct, and conciliate.

So, first of all, to circumvent, to flee, to avoid. So, it's to flee also youthful lusts, to flee youthful lusts, as Joseph did from Potiphar's wife when she tried to seduce him.

And pursue righteousness. Pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace. So, having believers, Christians, having the imputed righteousness of Christ and the gift of faith and repentance, walking in right conduct, according to the word of God, by the grace of God, how then does one grow in righteousness?

And the answer to that would vary greatly depending on that church's understanding of the proper distinction between law and gospel. But how does a Christian, who has the imputed righteousness of Christ, who has the gifts of faith and repentance, how does a Christian grow in righteousness?

[18:16] And the answer to that isn't looking within ourselves, and we're looking to ourselves, or trying harder, or here's ten steps of how to be more righteous. But the answer to how to grow in righteousness is to grow in grace.

So, then the question is, well, how do I grow in grace? Because grace is a gift. It's granted. So, if I grow in righteousness, by growing in grace, it's granted to me.

How do I grow in grace to grow in righteousness? So, there's two parts to it. First of all, it cannot overlook being quickened by the Spirit and reoriented to God. A regeneration, being born again, being converted.

So, having been reoriented to God through regeneration. Second part, so to grow in righteousness, by growing in grace, grace is imparted and communicated through the primary means of grace.

The primary means of grace, the Word, sacraments, prayer, and corporate worship. And then secondary to that, and this is to supplement the primary means of grace, it by no means replaces it, but secondarily, private reading of the Word and private prayer.

[19:28] It is through the means of grace, means of grace, in which grace is communicated to those who hear the Word, who, in the sacraments and in prayer.

And then it goes on to say, avoiding disputes. Now, avoiding disputes does not mean to avoid all conflict. Avoiding disputes is not peace at all costs and truth if possible, but rather, as Martin Luther said, peace when possible, truth at all costs.

It says, avoid foolish and ignorant disputes. It's not avoid confronting and disputes at all costs, it's avoid the foolish and ignorant disputes.

Now, this is jumping ahead to the next verse a little bit where it says, to correct, but not to quarrel. We see that to avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, but also to correct and not to quarrel, that the minister of the Word must be discerning.

Because there are times where, that it is necessary to dispute, that it is necessary to confront and to correct, but to not quarrel, it does not mean that doctrine divides, so anything goes, not confronting anything that is in opposition.

[20:54] Rather, what it's speaking to is that it speaks to how the correcting is carried out. Not with a quarrelsome spirit, not being contentious, not being pugnacious.

So, a question to ask then with the opposition that's presented in the moment, is this a dispute worth confronting and correcting? There are, we can divide things into primary, doctrine, secondary, and tertiary.

Primary is that if you are in opposition to it, you are outside of the faith. It is a different religion. If you believed that you are justified before God based on your works, that is a primary doctrinal error. So, that is, by all means, necessitates confronting and correcting. Secondary doctrine is something where, if there's two opposing views on it, you can still be in the faith, but it's something that will probably mean worshipping in a different way at a different church, but still brothers in Christ.

John MacArthur and R.C. Sproul were great friends, but their very framework of the Bible was so different that they wouldn't have been elders at each other's churches, but they were still Christians and still great friends.

[22:15] And then the tertiary doctrines are things that believers within the same church can disagree on and it has no impact. If you have a different view on who the Nephilim are, you don't have to go find a different church.

We can still worship together. So, another thing to ask is the opposition being confronted with, is this person teachable or are they grandstanding?

If they're grandstanding, they're probably just looking for a further opportunity to show off their plausible arguments in front of the people that they're grandstanding in front of. In Proverbs 26, 4-5, you have two principles back-to-back that seem to contradict themselves.

And it says, do not answer a fool according to his folly lest you also be like him. And the very next verse says, answer a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own eyes.

Now, the Proverbs aren't promises, they're principles. And two situations may be different. And perhaps a fool in his folly is grandstanding and to answer him will just cause you to be sucked into the foolishness.

[23:24] Or perhaps a fool has a teachable spirit and there is an appropriate time in such case to answer, to confront, to correct. So, the conduct of vessels for honor is to circumvent but also to correct.

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility, correcting those who are in opposition.

Now, a servant of the Lord who is correcting somebody in opposition means approaching a sinner in their sin.

So, if you're approaching a sinner in a sin, there's a really good chance that person's going to act sinfully. They're going to sin against you. You just might, they just might respond sinfully by sinning against you.

Thus, the need to not quarrel but to be gentle and patient. It says, having gentleness or self-control, not to be pugnacious but also to not be passive, to not just let anything go but rather while being gentle and patient to intellectually disarm the opposition, to disarm their position, their error and to do so, to do it in a way that at the end of correcting them, that they'll shake your hand and offer to buy your coffee.

[24:56] Now, to do so, it says, able to teach and to go back to 1 Timothy chapter 3, the requirements for an elder is he must be able to teach.

It doesn't say an elder must be a nice fellow. it doesn't say, if it's convenient, it would be good if he knows how to teach, if he's able to teach, but it says, must be able to teach.

This is a non-negotiable prerequisite for an elder. And it says here, and a servant of the Lord is correcting those in opposition.

He's not overlooking because doctrine divides, so we'll just do away with that doctrine and overlook the differences. It's not anything goes as long as you can say that you love Jesus and everything's okay, but correcting in humility those who are in opposition.

To do so necessitates being able to teach. Must be able to correctly handle the word, to discern error and opposition, and to correct it.

[26:07] So circumvent, correct, and then conciliate. if God perhaps will grant them repentance so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

Who is it talking about? If God perhaps will grant them repentance, who's the them? Them is the opposition. It's the errorist, the false teacher.

And it's to be done in a way to not burn any bridges, to not burn the bridge, to not slam the door shut never to be opened again.

Because if God perhaps will grant them repentance, repentance of their error, then they would be amiable to reconciliation and restoration.

But if the door was slammed behind them and locked, they would not want to come back through. If the bridge is burned, there's no way to come back across.

[27:14] But if it's done in such a way where they're amiable to reconciliation, then there is a possibility for restoration. Because it's hard enough to say, I was wrong.

And to correct opposition is to point out how the opposition is wrong. So having pointed out the error, should the false teacher, the errorist, or the opposition, should God grant them repentance and that they see it, they realize, I am wrong.

I was wrong. It's hard to say that. It's hard to come back and say, I was wrong. It's even harder to say I was wrong to somebody who's being abrasive and pugnacious than it is to somebody who's gentle and patient.

Now repentance says, if God perhaps will grant them repentance. Repentance is the flip side of the coin of faith. A coin has two sides, heads or tails.

It's like faith and repentance. Faith is turning to something. Repentance is turning away from something. To turn to something, you have to turn away from something else. Faith is turning to Christ.

[28:25] To turn to Christ, you're turning away from sin. So faith and repentance. In this case, it's error. to turn to Christ is to turn away from sin and error.

So also for God to grant repentance is to turn from error to truth. To turn to Christ. To turn to knowledge of the truth with the sense of it, understanding of it, and with trust.

Confidence, not only that this is true, but confidence in it, trusting in it, trusting in God's word. it also says if God will grant them repentance so that they may know the truth and that they may come to their senses.

Now the Greek word, which is translated to come to their senses, the Greek word actually signifies to awake from a drunken sleep. So the state of sin, the state of error, is like being in a spiritual drunken sleep until God quickens them to new life, like in Ephesians 2.

God quickens them to new life and opens their eyes. And then it says that they're taken captive, which helps, I think, with the perspective of instead of being abrasive and pugnacious and burning the bridge and shutting the door, but to be gentle and patient, realizing that the opposition is taken captive.

[29:56] The opposition, the person who is the false teacher, whose teaching error isn't the devil, but rather taken captive by the devil.

It is the captive. They're victims of the devil and have been trapped in his snare. So they are not the devil themselves, they are his victim and just might be liberated and granted repentance.

Now faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. So this person in error just might be liberated from being captive and from being in error.

How does this happen? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And what goes before that in Romans 10 is how then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?

And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? Which illustrates all the more why it's so important to ensure that true doctrine comes forward and not false doctrine, not only for the salvation but also for the communication of grace, for the granting of repentance for those who are in error.

[31:10] And this is the primary means of grace. Through the primary means of grace, the captive are set free and faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

So a few concluding uses that we can take from this text is that first of all, when we look at historic orthodoxy, that which is upright, that which is true, through doctrine, throughout all of the ages, whenever there's changes to historic orthodoxy, that change will erode orthopraxy.

Orthodoxy is right doctrine, orthopraxy is right conduct. So when there's a change to right doctrine, it will erode right practice and lead to, of course, wrong practice.

Wrong doctrine leads to wrong practice and result in ungodliness and ruin, having compromised on faith and a good conscience, having suffered shipwrecked, of whom was Hymenaeus, who is mentioned in 2 Timothy 2.

Hymenaeus, who was excommunicated earlier, but yet he did not go away. Even though he was excommunicated, he's still a problem. So excommunication put someone out of the church as, if they're in the church, it's as a church-approved person.

[32:28] Having been put out of the church, they are no longer a church-approved person. But he continued to peddle his error through another avenue.

Perhaps he went, I don't know, perhaps he went down the road to a secret-sensitive church that didn't have requirements for elders and, oh, he says he loves Jesus. Great, let's put him in the pulpit.

I don't know. But he was a problem and he did continue to peddle his error. His name required being brought up again. So what, then, what is the best way, if Hymenaeus was excommunicated but he was still a problem, still peddling his error, what is the best way to remove the threat and

influence of such opposition of men like Hymenaeus?

The best possible way, I would say, would be their conversion. Such as Saul of Tarsus. Saul was a persecutor of the church. His conversion, he now was an advocate for the kingdom of Christ.

So their erroneous influence prior to conversion, having been converted, their erroneous influence has died in Christ and having been quickened to new life, is now instead an advocate of the truth.

[33:47] And this is why the criteria of able to teach is imperative and that correction be done with the door open to reconciliation should the Lord grant them repentance.

However, restoration does not happen without repentance. And a lot of churches churches that do away with church discipline, they do away with the requirement for repentance.

But restoration, to restore someone to the church, it does not happen without repentance.

Repentance is granted, it is by grace, communicated by grace.

So it's not restore the person to the church and tolerate whatever it is, their error or their unrepentant sin, in hopes that the Lord grant them repentance.

Rather, correcting in humility, knowing that future restoration is possible. The duty is ours, the results are the Lord's.

[35:00] Repentance is a saving grace, which is something that's important to remember. It's not a human generated work. The repentance is not generated by the sinner, and repentance is not generated by the preacher.

So where does repentance come from? It is a saving grace. In the text it tells us, it says, if perhaps God will grant them repentance.

So perhaps then you have been ensnared by the devil. The Baptist Catechism defines repentance as this. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.

See, repentance is to see the vileness of sin, understand the vileness of sin, to turn from it to God, to apprehend the mercy of God, not just to know that sin is wrong, we know that by nature, but to apprehend the mercy of God, to embrace Jesus Christ, to embrace his satisfaction of divine justice, to embrace his righteousness, to embrace his salvation, to embrace his merits, to embrace his mediation, and to embrace all of his benefits.

Let's pray.