

Text: 2 Timothy 2:20-23

Title: Useful for Honor

Truth: The Christian must take care to be useful to the Lord.

Date/Location: Sunday August 14, 2016 at FBC

Introduction

Do you want to be useful to the Lord? Do you have that as one of your life's primary goals, right alongside loving God, honoring God and witnessing for God? My own desire is to be as useful to the Lord as possible. It is a privilege to serve God with my life, and I do not want to waste it.

If you do not have that desire to be useful to God, I have to ask a diagnostic question: what is wrong with you? Do you want to be useless? Do you care? Do you love God?

The word *useful* brings out a key idea in this passage of Scripture. We see it also in 2 Timothy 4:11 regarding John Mark, who was useful to Paul for ministry after initially being useless (Acts 13:13). Onesimus was useful (Philemon 11). It translates the idea of being eager or willing to work in Proverbs 31:13. Its opposite is *useless*, in such passages as Acts 14:15, 1 Timothy 6:5, Titus 3:9, James 1:26. It is like the idea we find in 1 Cor. 9:24-27 where Paul does not want to be useless for God.

I. The Illustration. V. 20, and dipping into v. 21

A. Picture a very large house. In it are many furnishings, many vessels, many utensils, many domestic kinds of objects. *Vessel* is a general word for an article, object, container, jar, property, dish, bucket, basket, pot, pan, cup, mug, utensil, instrument, tool, and many other things. The word "utensil" is too limited to convey the idea.

The word *vessel* is used in Acts 10:11 for the 'object' which was the sheet lowered down from heaven in Peter's vision about unclean foods.

Luke 8:16 mentions a vessel covering a lamp. See also John 19:29 and Hebrews 9:21.

B. These vessels are differentiated by their composition. Some are made of gold or silver and are therefore valuable and expensive. This value dictates how they are used and treated and washed and stored. They would be kept and treasured and not thrown away. Others are made of wood and clay and are therefore less valuable and cheaper. These would be used, cleaned and stored differently than the previous category. They might be disposable and are more easily replaced.

C. The vessels are also contrasted by their use and therefore status in the house. Some are used for noble purposes; others for dishonorable purposes. One kind of vessel might be used for eating and decoration versus the other kind that was used for garbage and human waste. All the vessels have some use by the residents of the house and the owner of the house, but not all have the same use, or the same level of use, or the same honor of use.

The word *honorable* is from the same root as Timothy's name, which means 'honoring God.' Paul wants Timothy to be like his name, not an a-timothy, a vessel for dishonor.

D. Now, to what does this illustration refer?

1. The reference to the vessel is clear enough, because in verse 21, it says, "he will be a vessel." So the vessels represent people. See Acts 9:15, 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Thess. 4:4.
2. What about the great house—to what does it refer? I can see several options: the world, the church considered in a non-technical and very broad way (like *Christendom*), or a particular local church. The first two views are possibilities and can fit well with the context here. I can take the last position, but not comfortably because the vessels that are associated with dishonor, un-sanctification, and unpreparedness do not appear to be coordinate with those who name the name of Christ departing from iniquity in verse 19.

I don't want you to think that you can sit here in the church and by virtue of being "in the house" that you are OK. Don't think that it is right to be a useless sinful vessel and that staying that way for your whole life is a valid option. It is not! Inexpensive vessels will break or be thrown out of the house with little notice.

That said, however, I am willing to recognize that there are new or immature people in every local church, or people who have been matured for some time, but have fallen down and need to be raised up to usefulness to God again. There is in a church a level of diversity where people are at various levels and kinds of utility.

3. I think we have to remind ourselves of Romans 9:21-24. Here the two kinds of vessels are of radically different sorts. We cannot validly transfer that meaning to our present passage, but we ought to consider the possibility of where we are at.
4. Your job in this message is to figure out where you are and get on the useful wagon again if you are not now there. We must strive to be

useful for God, and more useful to God, and that will mean some changes in our lives. To make it somewhat more pointed, think of the reverse analogy: look at the church meeting and think of each of us being replaced with a "vessel" of some sort sitting on our chairs. They may be nice to look at, but "showing up" is not all the use you can be! What do you DO for God?

- E. Remember from verse 19 that everyone who names the name of Christ must depart from iniquity. Church people constrain their sin, kill their sin, mortify their sin. They leave sin, run from sin, flee from sin. And to the extent that is not the case, they exist in the dishonored group of vessels. Feel the force of *dishonor*. You don't want to be a slop bucket, do you? There is limited usefulness there, but it is not an honorable position!

II. What Does a Person Do Who Wants to be Useful to God? V. 21-23

Back in the early part of chapter 2, we noted that Paul was using a number of figures or metaphors to describe the minister's life, and the Christian's life for that matter. He spoke of a child, a soldier, an athlete, a farmer, and a workman. Now he adds a vessel, and in the upcoming verses he will add a servant.

If you want to be a useful tool for God, what do you do? The text tells us very clearly, with the word *therefore*.

- A. If you want to be useful for God, cleanse yourself from sin and especially sinful associations.
1. If you are walking in sin, you *may not be* a true Christian, but you *most certainly are not* useful to God.
 2. When God says if "anyone" cleanses himself, I take it that He is talking about not just pastors. This is anyone—you too. Me too.
 3. When the Bible says if anyone cleanses himself from "these," what does it mean? *These* refers to the dishonorable vessels of the prior verse.
 4. So when you "cleanse" what do you do? You remove, you thoroughly clean out, you rid, you throw away. You separate from those vessels that are dirty and useless. Yes you separate from sin in your life and wage war against it by the power of the indwelling Spirit, but more to the point here, you follow the Word's guidance in standing clear of those vessels (people) in the church or Christendom or world that are dishonorable, cheap, not honorably used vessels. Avoid contamination by bad fellowship. Shun gangrene and cancer—they

are contagious by virtue of proximity. Nearness can infect you with what they have. Leaven moves through a whole lump of dough (1 Cor. 5). Sinners in the church are a problem. For purposes of purity and shame, we must follow the exhortations in 2 Thess. 3:14.

5. What kind of people do you want to be around? Prov. 13:20. Don't "hang out with" those sorts that will defile you. Holy people help you to be holy. Sinful people entice you to sin. Practically, this means some things about what you do with others, even with some people who may be in the church. You might have to stay away from them to avoid their influence.

B. When you do that cleansing, that separating, then you will consequently experience some things. You WILL BE! This is a marvelous word. The text is not saying you have to do these things, it is saying you WILL BE them.

1. Verse 21 says you will be a vessel for honor! Thank God.

2. It says you will be sanctified. Glory. You can develop positive holiness by pushing out sin. We will see below that we also must replace sin with something else.

3. It says you will be useful for the Master. The master here is the despot of the house—the lord of the house. In this context, we are talking about God. We must not reject the oversight of the master, but must be obedient. Yes, we strive to be useful, but God makes us useful. God works usefulness in us so that we can work usefulness out for him (adapted from Philippians 2:12-13).

4. It says you will be prepared for every good work. Preparation for good work is not just a matter of competency or giftedness. The text is telling us here it is a matter of holiness! To be prepared means to be ready and willing, as was Ezra (7:6, 10). If you are prepared, you know Eph. 2:10 and are committed to it without reserve.

C. If you want to be useful for God, you flee youthful lusts and run toward righteousness. See 1 Tim 6:11. You are a fugitive from sin and you pursue with every effort character traits like righteousness, faith, love, and peace. By so doing you will be useful to God.

D. If you want to be useful for God, you also sidestep things that cause strife. They are foolish and ignorant. The useful vessel does not get caught up in dumb stuff.

Conclusion

More next time!

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