

**Text:** 2 Timothy 2:22-26

**Title:** More on Being Useful to God

**Truth:** Usefulness arises out of a life that is holy, wise, humble and skillful.

**Date/Location:** Sunday August 28, 2016 at FBC

## Introduction

Last time (2:20-21) we asked ourselves whether we really want to be useful to God, like a vessel that is used for honorable purposes in God's house. Undoubtedly there are vessels in God's house that are more useful than others; and some are downright useless, like Hymenaeas and Philetus.

Then we examined a key piece of wisdom from the Bible on *how* exactly to be such a useful person for God. What that involves is cleansing yourself from dishonorable vessels, which means to disassociate from sin and from the people who are like the dishonorable vessels. In other words, if you want to fly like an eagle, you don't hang around with a bunch of turkeys! (That's a sort of paraphrase of Proverbs 13:20!) Avoid contamination by bad fellowship, by bad input, by bad company, whether inside or outside of the church.

When you actively take this step of cleansing yourself, God will see to it that you will be sanctified, useful, and prepared for His service (v. 21).

The text carries forward with more sound counsel on how to be useful to God. This applies especially to pastors. But since pastors are supposed to be mature Christians, and all Christians want to be mature Christians, this applies to the Christian reader as well. Paul's words concern the pastor's holiness, his wisdom, and his manner of life.

## I. Holiness: Flee Youthful Lusts and Pursue Righteousness, v. 22

Purity must be pursued—purity from sins without (v. 21) and within (v. 22).

A. Flee. This is a command, not an option. It means to run, seek safety by scrambling, elude or avoid a danger, or keep from doing something because of its danger and damage. A good Biblical illustration is Joseph in Genesis 39:12.

1. Lust is something that is good turned to excess. Lust is the desire for something that you should not have according to God's moral law. Joseph kept his sinful lusts under control. Potiphar's wife did not, and as a pagan idolater, actually *could* not.
2. Lusts are not sexual only, but that is included. Lust encompasses all kinds of evil desires, like greed, covetousness, power, pride, personal recognition, glory, honor, anger, etc.
3. Flee means not just physically to run away, but to stop doing something; to turn away from it; to decisively move your life in another direction. You cannot "run in place." You have to *go* somewhere! Psalm 119:9, 11.

4. We are not told for sure if Timothy has a problem in this area, but since he was human, if he did not, then he *could* have at any time. Any pastor can have problems in this area, and we know this because Paul is careful to tell us to avoid these problems.
  5. The issue of *youthful* lusts probably conjures up in your mind the youthful passions of a young man or woman; the youthful zeal for pleasurable things in life that is not tempered by godly maturity. But I don't believe for a second that such lusts entirely go away with mere age. Nor does spiritual maturity solve the problem. The lusts may lessen in their attraction or strength, but they are there. And the more mature you are, the more you realize that you have other sins that are just as problematic. As you grow in holiness, sin that went unrecognized or minimized before becomes more grotesque.
- B. Pursue. This is clearly the opposite of *flee*. It means to move rapidly and decisively toward an objective. See Philippians 3:12, 14; Haggai 1:9. It is a word that describes a hunter going after his game (think *dinner*).
1. Righteousness. Uprightness exhibited in internal character and external conduct.
  2. Faith(fulness), loyalty and trustworthiness to God. We all must pursue strong, confident trust in God.
  3. Love. This is the well-known Christian kind of love—God's kind—which moves us without conditions to seek the best and highest for those whom we love. It is certainly the opposite of hate.
  4. Peace. This virtue is the absence of strife; it means that to a very great degree, word-wars are avoided in the man's life, and in the church he leads if he is a pastor. (See verse 23.)
- C. Your "running partners" in this Christian endeavor are those who genuinely call on God. These are true believers who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. They are genuine, clean hearts. These are believers, not just pastors, who call on the Lord. Some call on God out of an impure heart, and are not genuine or sincere in their so-called conversion. Those are not your running partners, but the ones who truly and humbly call upon Christ, these are. You run not alone, then, but with a company of fellow citizens of heaven.
- D. Application. Usefulness has to do with purity, not ability. Usefulness has to do with integrity, not intellect. Usefulness has to do with holiness, not riches. Usefulness has to do with humility, not popularity. You make every Word-directed and Spirit-filled effort to be pure and flee sin, and watch what God will do with your life!

## II. Wisdom: Avoid Moronic Disputes, v. 23

- A. Avoid foolish—moronic—stupid disputes. We as ministers must refuse and reject uninstructed and uneducated and uninformed speculations. We have seen this

idea before. Pastors can have problems in this area of their lives. They may not be pursuing heresy, but perhaps are exposing themselves to philosophers and academics and scholars who are caught up in worthless arguments. Watch out what you expose yourself to. It will have an effect.

- B. Why must we avoid such disputes, you ask? It might seem interesting or entertaining to be involved in such debates. But the Bible says to avoid them because all they do is cause strife. Not only are they a waste of time, they cause problems in the church. Strife comes from lusts that war in our members, James 4:1 says. Just move on, and avoid such things.

These things are not just stupid, but can be heretical as well. We talked about a couple of these a few weeks ago, including odd doctrines and political debates. Be forewarned: do not sully your mind with garbage, with immoral, ungodly, false doctrine, etc.

- C. Application. Figure out how to deftly extricate yourself from conversations based on such disputation. That may mean to change the subject, or to walk away, or to avoid fellowship with someone if that is mostly what they talk about. You do *not* have to answer every question or conversation or issue that is brought by someone.

### **III. Manner of Life: Humble and Skilled, v. 24-26**

Some of the disputes touch on areas of doctrine that need to be taught so that those who have messed up thinking can be recovered—or saved!

#### **A. Humble**

1. Do not quarrel. The phrase *servant of the Lord* indicates we are primarily and first of all talking about ministers. The pastor must simply not be involved in heated disputes and debates. He is to walk above that, and pour water on those fires that pop up.
2. Must be gentle and kind. He can help the weakest saint, the person most beset with frailty and doubt; and the smallest child who comes to him with a question. He is to be reasonable and kind, not a fighter or pugnacious. See 1 Tim. 3:3.
3. He must be patient at all times, including when he is wronged. He will be wronged from outside and from inside. No lashing out! No bitterness or resentment. Again, he is to be more mature than that, on a higher level.
4. Humility. The attitude is that I am not worthy; I am a sinner; I am not important. It is more concerned to defend God than self. This is not cowardice.

#### **B. Skilled**

1. He must be able to teach. He must have knowledge. He must communicate. A pastor/elder/bishop/overseer/shepherd has to be able to teach and express

truth clearly. There is no way around it. By the way, this is no hypothetical ability. The one who has the ability must use it, or he is guilty of improper stewardship (1 Peter 4:10-11).

2. He must use his teaching to correct others. To *correct* means to achieve change as in training up children. This is the negative side of that, if you will. Correcting others must therefore be compatible with humility. Humility brings others up, not down.
- C. The hoped-for result in the life of the one who opposes truth is that God would grant repentance. God is the only source of repentance, which like faith is a gift from heaven. Salvation is a gift. New life is a gift. Forgiveness is a gift.
1. Repentance, you will notice, leads to the knowledge of the truth. You cannot really know the truth unless you repent of sin. Sin causes a blockade or embargo on really understanding the truth.
  2. Repentance also leads people to come to their senses (out of spiritual drunkenness) and escape the snare of the devil. The snare of the devil is any sin used to hold someone captive. Pride is the most notable of these (1 Tim. 3:7). Sometimes, Christians can be snared by the devil. Even a pastor can. Satan sifted Peter like wheat (Luke 22:32), but Peter quickly recovered. The snare of the devil is not freedom—it is bondage!
  3. Sometimes false teachers have to be engaged directly to work on them for repentance. After they reject that a time or two, they are to be rejected (Titus 3:10). Christians must uphold and defend the truth.
- C. Application. Help your pastor in this. Prepare your kids for it. Work on yourself in your character and skill in God's Word.

## Conclusion

We ask ourselves again, what is wrong with us if we do not want to be useful to the Lord? And once we settle that question, then we can apply what we have learned today to pursue holiness, avoid stupid arguments, and have a patient and humble manner about ourselves that will help promote the gospel among the lost we know.

All believers are vessels in God's house. The house has pastors as vessels as well. Let us all endeavor to be useful in service in God's house.

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