

# Two Kinds of People (2 Timothy 2:20-26)

**Big Idea:** There are two kinds of people in the church: useful and dishonorable. Cleanse yourself so you can be useful to God, and ready for every good work.

There are two kinds of people in this world. You can fill in the rest.

- Bath people and shower people
- Crunchy peanut butter people and creamy peanut butter people
- Black licorice people and red licorice people
- Toilet paper over people and toilet paper under people

I could keep going on. In every case I've mentioned, by the way, I've put the obvious right choice first: baths, crunchy peanut butter, black licorice, and toilet paper over. But I will defend your right to be wrong on any of these matters.

There are two kinds of people in this world. And in the passage we just read, Paul says the same thing except for the church. There are only two kinds of people in the church. Which kind are you?

## Some Background

I guess we'd better back up.

We're looking at a letter written by someone who was locked in prison for preaching the gospel. He seems to know that he wasn't going to survive. Shortly after writing this letter, he in fact was executed.

He wrote this letter to Timothy, who was a leader in the church in Ephesus, to tell him what to tell him how to lead within the church. And one of the things he had to do is to deal with corrupt teachers in the church whose false teaching was spreading like a sickness.

Paul wants the church to keep focusing on the good news of Jesus, to raise up more and more faithful leaders, and for the church to stay fixated on Scripture.

I can't tell you how important this is.

- Option A: stay focused on the gospel, keep raising up new leaders, faithfully teach the Bible, and become a healthy church that brings God glory and makes an eternal difference.
- Option B: lose track of the gospel, tolerate false teachers, drift from the truth, and become a sick church that doesn't bring God glory or make any difference whatsoever.

Which will it be? There are only two options for us as a church, and we must pursue option A.

But let's get personal. There are only two options for you. What kind of person will you be?

## **Two Kinds of People (2:20)**

Verse 20 describes two kinds of people:

*Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.*

What is Paul talking about here?

Paul is comparing the church to a large house. Imagine having a huge banquet at a rich person's house. You'd have gold and silver utensils and dishes. Those are the ones you'd bring out for a big banquet. They are what's fitting at a fancy banquet in a big house.

But you'd also have some others that wouldn't be appropriate to bring out for a big banquet. You have some that are wood and clay that are fine for being used behind the scenes. And you'd have some that are just dishonorable. You don't want to serve fancy hors d'oeuvres from a garbage pail. You *need* a garbage pail, but you don't want to serve food from the garbage pail. It's not what you pull out at a banquet. It's the difference between what it looks like if I set the table before I met Charlene, and how she has trained me to set the table now that I've learned a few manners.

So what's the point? You're one of these. The church needs vessels of gold and silver. It has but doesn't need the other. Which one are you?

How do you know? The context helps us. Paul's just mentioned some corrupt teachers in the church. So if you follow or promote corrupt teaching, if you deny key Christian truths, then you're not the kind of vessel the church needs. What you believe matters. It's not just what we teach up here. You matter. What you believe matters and will help determine what kind of church we become.

The church is a great house. It's been richly furnished by Jesus himself. And you're part of it. But what kind of vessel are you? Nobody wants to be a garbage pail when we could be something better in the great house that Jesus has created. Don't waste your life and settle for being a garbage pail at the table Jesus has set.

# Cleanse Yourself (2:21-26)

So what can we do? Verse 21 shows us what to do:

*Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*

If you're a wooden or clay vessel in a large house, you're never going to be a gold or silver vessel. But if you're a dishonorable vessel in the church, there's hope for you. Cleanse yourself.

It's like the TV show *Clean House* that ran for ten seasons. Experts in cleaning, organizing, remodeling, and painting sweep into a cluttered home with the purpose of leaving it more comfortable, attractive, and livable. Rooms are cleaned out, redone for more efficiency and attractiveness, and repainted. Curtains are hung, cabinets set in, and walls decorated. A transformation takes place, and when the family returns, any nervous anticipation quickly gives way to excitement and laughter when the family sees what's taken place. "Thank you, thank you," the family says often amid smiles and tears.

When Paul talks about cleansing ourselves, he's talking about taking action to take inventory and get rid of anything that doesn't belong so that we can be useful for service to our Lord. Clean out what's dishonorable, and you will "be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work."

This should fill us with hope. No matter where you are right now, you can be the second kind of person: "a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work."

Okay, but how? By getting rid of two things: falsehood in your head, and wickedness in your heart. That's what it means to cleanse yourself. The purity of your beliefs and the purity of your actions really matter.

And so Paul breaks it down in the next few verses. Flee some things, pursue some things, and avoid controversy.

## **Flee some things**

"So flee youthful passions..." If you take this out of context, you will think that Paul is addressing young hormonal people and telling them to avoid sensual desires. That is certainly a biblical idea, and something we should do, but that's not exactly what Paul is saying here when you look at the context. He's talking about avoiding things like self-assertion, headstrong stubbornness, arrogance, impatience, harshness. When you're youthful, you like a good fight. Flee from these things. Paul's going to give us some things to pursue in a minute. Whatever is opposite to those, get away from as fast as you can!

Verse 23 mentions something else we should flee: "Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels." Run away from false teaching and argumentative people. Flee from these things, because they will damage the church.

## **Pursue some things**

"...pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

Paul describes that the church should look like. I love how he says that these are the qualities of all who call on the Lord from a pure heart. What are these qualities?

- righteousness (right conduct) – It’s how someone lives who loves God and aims to please him. Want to be someone God can use? Pursue holiness in your life. When you turn to Jesus in repentance and faith, you are given Jesus’ righteousness, and then you are called to work that out by pursuing righteousness in your life.
- faith (belief and trust in God) – It’s amazing how important this is, simply to trust God in every area of your life.
- love – Love is central to who God calls us to be. We’re nothing without love. Love is the defining characteristic of God’s people. “Jesus talked to His friends a lot about how we should identify ourselves. He said it wouldn’t be what we said we believed or all the good we hoped to do someday. Nope, He said we would identify ourselves simply by how we loved people. It’s tempting to think there is more to it, but there’s not. Love isn’t something we fall into; love is someone we become” ([Bob Goff](#)).
- peace (tranquility and harmony with people) – As Paul says elsewhere, “So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Romans 14:19).

## **Avoid controversy**

What we’ve just talked about applies to everybody. But in verses 24 to 26 he makes special application to the Lord’s servant, for church leaders like Timothy.

*And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26)*

Leaders set the pace. So church leaders must embody these qualities. Look at how gentle pastors are supposed to be. Not quarrelsome. Not reactionary. Correcting, but with gentleness, and the hope of restoration. As [Ray Ortlund puts it](#):

*To speak frankly and publicly with one another about our disagreements and even our disappointments with such tenderness and respect and gentleness that the watching world is astounded and left saying, "How they love one another!"*

Church leaders must confront error, but they must do so in ways that show gentleness and patience and a desire to restore others. Your pastors and leaders will play a big role in determining what this church will become, so as a church we must have leaders who embody the qualities we want for the church.

## Putting It Together

Let's put this all together. Here's what this passage is saying to us in two sentences:

**There are two kinds of people in the church: useful or dishonorable. Cleanse yourself so you can be useful to God, and ready for every good work.**

Let me say that again. There are two kinds of people in the church: useful and dishonorable. Cleanse yourself so you can be useful to God, and ready for every good work.

God is up to something. He is building his church. We get to be part of it here in Liberty Village. He's taking ordinary people and turning them into something he can use. He uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways. I'm amazed that we get to be part of it.

But some of us will miss out because we don't take what Paul says here seriously. Don't miss out.

We exist as a church because we believe that Jesus changes anyone who comes to him with empty hands of faith. He not only changes them but redeploys them as part of the church. And he uses us – despite our weaknesses and our ordinariness – as we cleanse ourselves. If you do this, you will be useful. You will be ready for every good work. He will use your life for his glory and for eternity. And you will be the kind of person this church needs.

Lord, we don't want to show up in your large house as garbage pails. We don't want to be dishonorable vessels. So help us to cleanse ourselves. I pray that everyone in this room and on this call will trust in Jesus and be transformed by him. And then I pray that we would run as far and fast away as possible from immaturity and false teaching, and instead be transformed in our minds and our actions to be people who are just like Jesus.

Create a church that's full of vessels who've become vessels for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. In Jesus' name, amen.