

Introduction:

In our home, we have different kinds of plates. We have the ceramic Pfaltzgraff plates, which are our everyday stuff. We have plastic plates, which are just above paper plates used for gatherings in which spending time with people is more important than impressing them. We even have some fine china, which are for...well...I'm not really sure because I can't remember a single time we've actually used them. We were told when we got married that we needed to register for china, so we did, and we received some of it. But I get the idea behind it. These are the fancy delicate plates that are put out in honorable circumstances. They are to be used for special guests or during special celebrations. We don't want to use them every day or in common circumstances because we don't want them to get damaged. Paul recognized this dichotomy of dishes in **II Timothy 2:20-21**. In every great house, there are some dishes that are pulled out in honorable situations and there are some that are just the everyday, common kinds of dishes. For you Downton Abby fans think in these terms: there are some dishes for upstairs, but there are different dishes for downstairs. For those who are not Downton Abby fans, that means there are some dishes to be used for the masters of the house and a different set of dishes to be used by the servants. I can imagine if you and I were dishes, we'd want to be dishes useful for the master of the house. We want to be ready to be used for his every good work. We wouldn't want to be just the common, ordinary, everyday dishes stuck downstairs in the servants' quarters. This is of interest to us right now, because in the midst of this word picture, Paul describes these dishes for honorable use and useful to the master as "set apart as holy." Isn't that exactly what we want? Don't we want to be set apart as holy? Don't we want to be vessels fit for our Master's use? Don't we want to be ready for His every good work? Paul dealt earlier in this letter with what the Master has done to bring us into His great house. In **II Timothy 1:8-10**, Paul explained that God saved us and called us to a holy calling. This didn't happen because of our great works done in holiness but because God through Jesus Christ abolished death and brought life. Therefore, as Paul said in **II Timothy 2:8**, we need to always remember "Jesus Christ, risen from the dead." But while we were not brought into this house because of our great works, we were brought into this house to accomplish great works (cf. **Ephesians 2:8-10**). What then do we need to do? If we want to be the honorable vessels of gold and silver, set apart, useful to the Master, and ready for every good work, what must we do now that we are in His house? Paul gives two very pertinent points in **II Timothy 2:22** that we need to follow. He points out that we have some things we need to flee and some things we need to pursue. In this lesson, we'll examine what we need to flee. In the next, we'll examine what we need to pursue.

Discussion:

I. Flee youthful desires.

- A. According to Paul, there are some vessels useful to the master because they have been cleansed. Therefore, he says, flee youthful passions (other translations say desires or lusts). Regrettably, because the words passion and lust are used in some translations, we often limit this to a desire of sexual immorality. While that would be included, that is not the limit.
- B. Paul's point is there are some desires that seem to be characteristic of youth. The issue is not simply that of age, but of maturity. Obviously, some people are beyond their years in maturity and some are way behind. Paul is telling Timothy to flee immature desires. While he doesn't spell out these desires explicitly, there are hints throughout Paul's letters to Timothy that I think will give us some insight.

II. Flee the Pride of Position

- A. Immediately before this discussion of honorable vessels, Paul tells Timothy to avoid irreverent babble (**II Timothy 2:16**). After, he rebukes ignorant controversies (**II Timothy 2:23**).
- B. The preceding section calls to mind the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. The seals mentioned in **II Timothy 2:19** both relate back to that event (see **Numbers 16:5, 26** in the Septuagint). These three men and their supporters were full of irreverent babble, empty talk. They were upset that Moses and Aaron had a seeming place of higher honor. In a sense, they saw Moses and Aaron as those vessels of gold and silver and were upset that they were merely vessels of wood and clay. However, because they refused to simply allow

God to choose who His servants would be and how they would serve, some of them were swallowed alive by the ground and others consumed by God's holy fire.

- C. When we consider the ignorant controversies Paul mentions, I can't help but think of several powerful proverbs. **Proverbs 20:3** says it plainly, "It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling" (ESV). Perhaps this is because as **Proverbs 18:2** says, "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinions" (ESV). The immature rarely desire understanding, they desire to be heard and seen as the wise. Therefore they flaunt their opinions (ignorant though they often are), because they think it gives them a place at the table. How often would the immature do well to heed **Proverbs 17:28**: "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent" (ESV).
- D. Is this pride of position not a common desire of the immature? They seek a position rather than pursuing the work it takes to be seen as a leader. Sadly, how often is this seen by how the immature handle similar teaching in **I Timothy 4:12**? They see the first half of this statement that says, "Let no one despise your youth," and rebuke the more seasoned and experienced, "Hey old man, you're not allowed to look down on me because I'm young. I have just as much right to be part of this discussion as you." However, they miss the latter half of the verse which says, "but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." Paul's point is not command older people not to look down on the young. Paul's point is no matter your age, be an example of maturity giving no cause for anyone to look down on you for immaturity. Flee the immature desire for pride of position.

III. Flee the Pursuit of Riches

- A. In **I Timothy 6:11**, when Paul made a similar point, the "these things" for Timothy to flee was the love of money and the desire to be rich (**I Timothy 6:9-10**). In **I Timothy 6:3-5**, Paul explains that a great deal of error and false teaching ultimately stems from thinking godliness is a means of gain. That is, using godliness and spiritual teaching as a means to pursue temporal, monetary gain.
- B. In contrast with that is the true great gain that comes from godliness. That great gain is, of course, eternity with God. We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. But what we will receive in the next world if we are in Christ will far outshine what we can possibly get here in the form of material goods, wealth, and riches.
- C. The problem is not with wealth and riches themselves. Paul is not saying we have to flee material goods or money as if the only way to be a faithful Christian is to pursue poverty. Rather, the love of money, the pursuit of wealth, the desire to be rich is the problem. If God blesses us with material goods while we bring glory to Him, that is God's business. But if our goal is wealth, if our driving endeavor is to be rich, if our main desire is to have more material stuff, Paul explains our craving and pursuit will lead us into snares, senseless and harmful desires, ruin, and destruction.
- D. This pursuit also causes people to wander from the faith. Perhaps Hymenaeus and Philetus who were upsetting the faith of some (**II Timothy 2:17-18**) were teaching for money instead of for the Lord. Even if that wasn't their particular problem. We do note that Paul said of elders that they must not be lovers of money (**I Timothy 3:3**) and of deacons that they must not be greedy for dishonest gain (**I Timothy 3:8**). When Paul wrote to Titus, he contrasted the honorable shepherds with the insubordinate, empty talkers of the circumcision party who were upsetting whole families as they taught for shameful gain what ought not be taught (**Titus 1:10-11**).
- E. While I recognize that young and old alike can be greedy, materialistic, covetous desirers of material goods and wealth, is it not true that the young and immature often have an unhealthy fixation on this life? In youth, we have an invincibility complex that makes it tough to see beyond the veil and consider what is going to come next. With that mindset the score card is all too easily the material goods of this world. However, with age, experience, and maturity comes a healthier sense of mortality that causes us to look to what is coming next. It is that maturity that causes us to realize that if we spend our lives with the goal being better clothes, nicer cars, and bigger houses we'll get to the end and wonder, "Is that all there is?" It is that experience and maturity that causes us to look to what is coming next, to realize that nothing we gain here financially will go with us. And so Paul encourages Timothy to flee this youthful desire for temporal, monetary wealth and instead focus on eternity.

IV. Flee the Seeking of Pleasure

- A. Consider Paul's threefold word picture in **II Timothy 2:3-6**. Paul's encouragements with these three pictures actually hit the nail right on the head for one of the great desires of immaturity: pleasure.

1. *Share in the suffering of a good soldier*: Let's face it. The desire of youth is to avoid suffering. Pleasure often governs the pursuit of the young and immature. We want the easy path, the path of least resistance.
 2. *An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules*: The immature don't want rules. They want to question rules. They want to dispense with rules. They want to go their own way. "Why do I have to do it this way?" "What if I don't follow that rule?" These are the questions of the immature.
 3. *It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops*: Again, the immature shun work. They want ease and relaxation. They want recreation and fun.
- B. The **Proverbs** deals with this issue of sloth and laziness again and again. Consider **Proverbs 6:6-11**. The immature sluggard wants ease, rest, relaxation, not work. Then there is **Proverbs 24:30-34**. Rather than working in his field, the immature sluggard sleeps and rests and procrastinates. Finally, in **Proverbs 26:13-16**, the sluggard will allow any excuse to keep him from working hard, he'd rather sleep an extra hour. Sometimes the sluggard can hardly even get up the gumption to bring his hand to his mouth from his own food bowl. But what is sad is the immature sluggards who are hearing this message don't even realize it is too them. They think they are wise and have it all figured out. In their false wisdom, they can string together a series of excuses for their immature laziness that at least sounds plausible to them.
- C. Don't misunderstand. Being a vessel useful to the Master does not mean never having any fun. It means recognizing the difference between a moment of pleasure and meaningful joy. The suffering soldier learns the joy of pleasing his commanding officer. Only the athlete who competes by the rules knows the joy of victory. Only the hard-working farmer knows the joy of the first share in the crops.
- D. So Paul encourages Timothy to flee this youthful and immature desire for pleasure, recreation, entertainment, relaxation, and rest. Which, of course, is why as Paul gets to the end of his exhortations to Timothy, he says, "Do the work of an evangelist" (**II Timothy 4:5**). Vessels useful to the Master flee the path of least resistance, they grow up, and they get to work.

Conclusion:

It is almost like every generation has to figure these things out. And so the young and immature flout authority, rebel against propriety, and pursue pleasure and ease. But Paul explains to Timothy, this is no way to be useful to the master. It may be easy, even fun at times, but it relegates you to the servants' quarters. If we want to be useful to the master, we need to flee these things. We need to escape from them. As Paul said in **I Corinthians 13:11**, we need to put away childish things. And then again in **I Corinthians 14:20**, we need to be mature in our thinking. There are some things we need to pursue, we'll examine those in our next lesson. For now, if you long to be useful to the Master of our house, flee these things, escape them. Don't let them hold you captive.