

**Bethel Christian Fellowship
Fair Lawn, NJ**

**The Message Of 2 Timothy (10): “Dealing With False Teaching,” Part Two
2 Timothy 2:20-26**

June 18, 2023

Toward the end of The Pilgrim’s Progress, Christian and Hopeful came to a place called the Delectable Mountains. They’re in Immanuel’s Land, within sight of the Celestial City. Up on the mountain tops, close to the King’s Highway, four Shepherds were tending their flocks. Their names were Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincerity.

When the pilgrims approached them, they were asked about their journey (how did you find this Highway? how long have you been traveling? And how have you managed to persevere thus far?) When they heard the pilgrims’ answers, they said “Welcome to the Delectable Mountains.” Here’s the next part of the story:

The very next morning the Shepherds called Christian and Hopeful to walk with them upon the Mountains. So they went off together, enjoying the lovely views on every side. Then the Shepherds said to one another, ‘Shall we show these pilgrims some wonders?’ They decided to do so and carefully escorted them to the top of a mountain called Error. It was very steep on its farthest side. They told them to look down to the very bottom. So Christian and Hopeful looked down and saw at the bottom several dead bodies that had been dashed to pieces; these had fallen all the way from the top.

‘What does this mean?’ asked Christian. One of the Shepherds replied, ‘Haven’t you heard of those who listened, and were deceived by Hymenaeus and Philetus, who promoted a false doctrine concerning the resurrection of the body?’

The pilgrims answered that they had. Then the Shepherds said, ‘Those whom you see dashed to pieces at the bottom of this Mountain are they. To this day they remain unburied, as you can see, as an example for others to heed. Climbing this Mountain can be treacherous, especially when one goes too high or ventures too near the edge.’”

Sad to say, Mt. Error is still a very popular attraction for many professing Christians today. There are any number of reasons why some start to climb this dangerous slope, including ignorance, rebellion, resistance to the truth, listening to the wrong teachers, and leaning “upon their own understanding.” Many spend so much time on their own speculations that they lose sight of the core issues of the Christian life. Once they get to the top, they are so preoccupied with their new vantage point that they don’t watch their step, and walk right off the precipice. Their pilgrimage comes to a sad and disastrous end.

That’s why Paul had such contempt for Hymenaeus and Philetus, as we saw in last week’s study (2:14-19). It’s also why he gave Timothy several directives for dealing with those in error: **(a)** remind God’s people of the truths they have been taught, and warn them against quibbling about words (v. 14); **(b)** be zealous to present yourself approved unto God, handling the Word of truth accurately (v. 15); **(c)** shun their godless chatter because of its destructive effects; it ruins the faith of some (vv. 16-18).

In the verses before us today, Paul uses an illustration to support these directives (vv. 20-21). He compares two kinds of utensils in a large house; those of honor and much value, and those of dishonor and little value. The honored utensils maintain their value by separating themselves from the dishonored utensils. The application then follows (vv. 22-26). By changing metaphors, Paul explains how a “bondservant” should go about handling troublesome people in this large house, especially those who are in opposition to the truth.

A. The Illustration (vv. 20-21): *“Now in a large house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. 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.”*

The first thing to note is that Paul is presenting a picture of the mixed condition of “the large house” (v. 20). The “house” is a symbol of the professing, visible, universal church. In this house, there are two types of utensils for performing different household functions. The gold and silver vessels are those of honor (used for special occasions); the wood and clay are those of dishonor (used for everyday meals). The distinction is between true teachers of the Word and the false teachers Paul has previously described (2:16-18).

Any minister or member of the “house” who rightly handles the Word of truth is like a “gold or silver vessel.” He brings honor to the Lord Jesus Christ. False teachers are just the opposite; they bring dishonor to the Master of the house, no matter how popular they may be. In the words of John Stott, “Paul is still . . . referring to the two sets of teachers he has contrasted in the previous paragraph, the authentic like Timothy and the bogus like Hymenaeus and Philetus. The only difference is that he changes the metaphor from good and bad workmen to noble and ignoble vessels.”

The second thing to note is that the honorable vessels must not be contaminated by the dishonorable one. This is the one indispensable condition that the Master of the house lays down for useful and honorable service: *“If anyone cleanses himself from what is honorable, he will be set apart as holy . . . useful to the master . . . ready for every good work”* (v. 21).

Q. How, then, do we enjoy such a privilege? **A.** By keeping our distance from the kind of teachers (like Hymenaeus and Philetus) who deny fundamental tenants of the gospel, *and* who have lapsed into any pattern of unrighteousness. But, once again, in the words of Stott, “What we are to avoid is not so much contact with such men as their error and their evil. To purify ourselves ‘from these’ is essentially to purge their falsehood from our minds and their wickedness from our hearts and lives.” The sterling silver and the stainless flatware cannot be placed in the dishwasher side by side!

B. The Application (vv. 22-26): In these remaining verses, Paul gives three additional directives that are *essential* for dealing with those in error.

1. *“Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart”* (v. 22). These youthful desires include not only bodily appetites, but “all the wayward impulses of youth” (NEB), including self-seeking ambition, arrogance, contentiousness, love of money, and the shameless flaunting of one’s so-called “knowledge.” All of these things can ruin the usefulness of God’s young servant (Timothy), and any of His servants.

The only safe course of action is to keep on fleeing from these evil desires, *and* at the same time, to cultivate and develop the fruits of the Christian life, produced by the indwelling power of the Spirit. Righteousness, faith, love, and peace are the four essential marks of a genuine Christian, and these virtues are best cultivated in the presence of *good company* – “*with all those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*”

2. “*Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, or “ignorant speculations” (NASB), because you know they produce quarrels”* (v. 23). The reason these arguments are stupid and senseless is precisely because they are speculative. They go beyond the teaching of Scripture so that one person’s opinion is as good (or bad) as another’s. There is no impartial, biblical court of appeal. That’s why they only result in strife and pointless quarreling. Any faithful minister and member of a Bible believing fellowship *must* decline to participate in them.

3. “*And the Lord’s bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will”* (vv. 24-26).

In the first half of these verses, the emphasis is on *how* the Lord’s bondservant is to deal with those in error (vv. 24-25a). It’s never enough to expose and correct the error; a bondservant must be able to clearly teach the truth. (If there’s mist in the pulpit, there’s fog in the pew!) However, he must not be quarrelsome, but rather kindly to all, forbearing (patient when wronged) and gentle when correcting his opponents (all easier said than done). Why? Because a bondservant’s purpose in the Master’s house is *not* to win arguments but to win lost souls.

This purpose becomes clear in the second part of these verses (v. 25b-26). There is always the possibility (“*if perhaps*”) that God will use the faithful teaching of His Word to bring the deceived to repentance (“I was wrong – I have changed my mind and have come to my senses”). This is the first step that leads to “*the knowledge of the truth.*” The Lord’s servant also recognizes that his opponents may be trapped by the snare of the devil, and that it is God who must grant them repentance. (If they are POW’s, how else will they be released from Satan’s captivity?) The devil has sought to entrap people in a web of lies from the very beginning (Gen. 3:1-7); he does the same today (2 Cor. 11:3-4; 13-15).

Mt. Error still looms large on the spiritual landscape. There are many ministers and members of the church who begin their pilgrimage by professing to believe in the truth. But then they embrace falsehoods, having been deceived by Satan, who masquerades as “*an angel of light*” (2 Cor. 11:13-14). Before the angel Moroni seduced Joseph Smith into founding Mormonism, he attended Christian churches. Before Charles Taze Russell founded the Jehovah Witnesses, he was an avid Bible teacher. Sun Myung Moon was a Presbyterian before he founded the Unification Church, and David Koresh of the Branch Davidians was a former Seventh Day Adventist. The list goes on.

In light of all this, can we think of a more important word for today’s church than Paul’s directives within these verses? It’s only by cleansing ourselves from false teachings that we shall be fit vessels for noble use, serving the Master of the house. It’s only if we are forbearing and not quarrelsome, as the Lord’s true bondservants, that God will grant our adversaries repentance, knowledge of the truth and deliverance from the devil. What can possibly be better than that?