I am super excited to see you all here this morning. This is my second time behind this pulpit to preach God’s word to you all. Let me be the first to say that this is a hard job. Many of you told me you were praying for me this week, thank you so much for those prayers. It such a joy to be a part of this church family and work with the staff here at First Free. I have been trusted with more and more responsibility since I have been here and that means I must continually communicate with people the details of what’s going on. I have had many failure stories with communication in my life. I have learned that it is important to communicate the right information and also to do it in the right way. It doesn’t really work well if you communicate the right information in the wrong way.

I learned this first hand when I was in college and a girl really liked me but I didn’t feel the same way. I knew I needed to tell her I didn’t want to be a in a relationship, but after trying to tell her this many times and failing I said this. “I am not physically or mentally attracted to you.” After those words came out of my mouth I immediately wished I could take them back. Guys if you’re wondering how to let a girl down easy; that is not the right way. I told her the correct information but did it completely wrong. When we speak to people we must not only be aware of what we say but also how we say it.

Before we read the passage this morning I want us to look at the second half of verse 25 and 26 in chapter 2. It says, “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.” This is the reason we are to clearly communicate the message of the gospel in the right way. Over the last few weeks in 2 Timothy we have seen the great importance of sharing the message of the gospel correcting. If we get it wrong it is unable to save, it must be the complete and true gospel. There is much at stake here church. The souls of people who have been captured and ensnared by the devil to do his will. They are a slave to their sin. We want them to know the truth and we hope and pray that God would grant them repentance. That they would know that Christ died for the sins of all people, bringing them back into relationship with the one true God.

If you have a Bible will you please open it to 2 Timothy 2:20-26. It is on page 996 of the pew Bible. Please stand for the reading of God’s word.

2 Timothy 2:20-26 (ESV)
20 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. 21 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.

22 So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 23 Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant
controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. 24 And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Sermon in a Sentence: God is responsible for repentance, but we are responsible for our actions.

This morning we will be looking at our role and God’s role in gospel ministry.

Paul has made it clear in chapter 2 that Timothy is to entrust the gospel to faithful men and for him to draw his strength from the grace that is in Christ Jesus. He must be a good soldier that follows commands, be an athlete that competes according to the rules, and diligently work like a farmer. He must not be involved in the irreverent babble and controversies but work hard to rightly handle the word of truth. This is all part of what our role in gospel ministry is.

Verses 20-26 in chapter 2 are right in the middle of Paul telling Timothy how to deal with the false teachers who are upsetting the faith of some in Ephesus. This passage begins with an illustration of different types of vessels in a great house. The great house symbolizes the church in the broadest sense. This would include the false teachers that claim to know the gospel but really do not. There are a variety of people in the church, those that are honorable (gold and silver vessels) and those that are dishonorable (wood and clay vessels). We must cleanse ourselves from what is dishonorable and choose to be honorable vessels who are ready for the Lord’s service, who are set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, and ready for every good work, this is the end goal. As I said earlier we will look at two roles in gospel ministry and we will begin with our role.

THE LORD’S SERVANT SHOULD FLEE FROM SIN AND PURSUE HOLINESS.

We have two verbs in this main point and they come from verse 22. We are to flee and pursue. Let’s first look at what we are commanded to flee. Paul tells Timothy to flee youthful passions or desires. He does not tell Timothy to quickly power walk away from these passions but to flee from them. Fleeing involves running, to sprint as if a bear is chasing you, to move as fast as you possibly can. This is the way Timothy is to flee the youthful passions. We are not 100% sure what these passions and desires are but we have a lot of clues from the context of 1 and 2 Timothy. Remember as you read your Bible’s to be ever conscious of the context. What is happening historically when this was written, what is the literary context of the passage (what was written directly before or after in the book)? These are good questions to ask as you seek to discover context.

We know that verse 22 is in the middle of Paul instructing Timothy on what to do with the false teachers in Ephesus. Paul is telling Timothy to stay out of the irreverent babble and ignorant controversies. We can also gather information from 1 Timothy 6:4 when Paul instructs on false teachers as well. Paul says these false teachers are “puffed up with conceit and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy craving for controversy and quarrels about words.” Because Paul tells Timothy to flee youthful passions in the context of describing these false teachers and
their teaching, I am confident these passions are arrogance, being argumentative, or contentious. Timothy is young and is leading the church in Ephesus. Imagine a 25 year old who is gung ho and wants to do the work and lead the church well. Sometimes we don’t think through our actions all the way and just do them. I can make that statement because I am 25 and do that often. We must not be about winning the argument if it ruins those who hear it. There is no purpose in this and it produces nothing.

So far in the letter Paul has drawn a continuum of how the gospel is to be shared. On the one side is flight and on the other side is fight. We do not want to be on one side or the other, but right in the middle.

Paul made it clear that the Spirit God has given us is not one of fear in 2 Timothy 1:7 which says, “for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” We are not to be afraid or timid to share the gospel with people who do not know it. We should share it with boldness and confidence, but we must remember to do it with self-control. It must be done with a bold humility. There should not be a fighting spirit within us as we share the gospel. We must be people who are kind to everyone and are able to teach. Who patiently endure evil and correct their opponents with gentleness as they do it. This comes straight from verses 24 and 25. This is how we are to communicate the message of the gospel. We must not change it or water it down, but we must also do it in a kind and gentle manner. If we change the message it is not effective, but if we are argumentative when sharing it the message may not get across.

As we flee from these youthful passions we must “pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (v. 22). When I read the word pursue it reminded me of my friend Clint Guth from high school. Clint is a country boy to the core. He would tell me about going raccoon hunting on the weekend with his bloodhounds. These dogs would recklessly pursue that raccoon until it climbed up a tree. If there was brush in the way, they would go up and over. Those dogs ran as fast as they could after the raccoon. This is the mentality we are to have as we pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. These are four characteristics of a person who is being sanctified by God. We must remember that God does the work in our lives, we do not work our way to him but we do have a responsibility to pursue and follow Christ.

These four things to pursue are in contrast to what the false teachers are doing. We must be righteous people who act in an upright correct way. These false teachers are not doing that at all, they are being sneaky, the opposite of being upright. We will learn more about this next week in chapter 3:1-9. They are the opposite of a righteous person. We are to pursue faith in the Christ, constantly reminding ourselves that Christ’s death on the cross for our sins has made us right with God. Remember that we have been saved by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus Christ raised from the dead. These false teachers do not have this faith and are not seeking to pass it on to others. It says they are actually upsetting the faith of some in verse 18. The third word in this list is love. Jesus commanded us to love God with all we have and our neighbor as ourselves in Matthew 22:37-40. This is the love Paul is writing about here. He wants Timothy to pursue love for God and others. To seek out their well-being and what is really best for them, which is a message that leads to repentance. The final word is peace. We are to pursue peace in all that we do. This is the opposite of being contentious or argumentative with people. We want people to see the peace that Christ gives in our lives.
The command to pursue these four qualities goes along with the quote from verse 19, “Let those who name the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” If we claim to be those who believe the gospel we must flee the sin in our lives and pursue Christ and his holiness. By doing this it will help to adorn the gospel message when we share it with others. This is the gospel conduct or behavior that Josh spoke about 2 weeks ago. If our lives have righteousness, faith, love and peace in them our message to others will be adorned like a beautiful flowerbed accents and adds to the look of a house. They show how the gospel has changed our lives and how it is truly good news. Our goal in all of this is for people to repent. We faithfully teach God’s word so people will repent and turn to the Lord. We correct people with a gentle and peaceful spirit so they will repent and turn to the Lord. We must remain faithful to the gospel, to pass it clearly down to others in the church and to pass it on to others who have never heard it. But sorry I am getting ahead of myself here, we will get to that in a few minutes.

I want to tell you that this passage is mainly directed at elders and those who are leading the church. But that does not mean that the rest of you are of the hook. Take a closer look at the commands Paul give here.

- Flee youthful passions
- Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace
- Don’t be quarrelsome
- Be kind to everyone
- Able to teach

All of these with the exception of being able to teach apply to all people in the church. We are all to flee from sin and pursue holiness, to be kind to all people, and not be quarrelsome. D. A. Carson said that, “what is remarkable about the requirements for elders is they’re not that remarkable.” These are the things we should be doing as followers of Christ, as servants of the Lord who are set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, and ready for every good work.

We must however not seek to do all of this on our own. We are not meant to be righteous people who put their faith in God and peacefully love people in isolation. Verse 22 says we are to do this with others who are doing the same. Peer pressure can work both positively and negatively on us. Usually we think of peer pressure as a negative and awful thing, but in this instance it is a positive thing. Following after the Lord with others helps you to continue on and to persevere through difficulty. I ran a marathon after my senior year of high school and let me tell you it was really hard. The only thing that made it possible was doing it with my friends Kevin and Vernon. Without their help I would have crashed and burned after the first 6 mile run. They motivated me to get out and run and to keep going when I wanted to quit. Our Christian lives should also be this way. We should live connected to the local church and be filled up and encouraged by others. Are you following after the Lord with others or are you doing it by yourself? Are you living in isolation, just you and Jesus? If you are I would encourage you to begin doing it with others. Proverbs 27:17 tells us that “as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

These are the ways the Lord’s servant should act. Our role is to flee from sin and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace. Being an honorable vessel is not the end goal, but rather the work that God will do through us after he has cleansed us from the dishonorable. We are set
apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, and ready for every good work. There are many reasons that we should do this but there is one main reason from this passage. We do it so that God may perhaps grant repentance to people who have strayed from the gospel. This is God’s role. That God may perhaps grant repentance to those who have never heard the gospel. That God may perhaps grant them repentance and they would be led to a knowledge of the truth.

**GOD DESIRES TO BRING PEOPLE TO REPENTANCE THROUGH THE WORK OF HIS SERVANTS.**

God is in the business of changing people’s lives and bringing them to repentance through the work of the Holy Spirit and his word. The amazing thing is, He is responsible for repentance but he chooses to use us in many ways to make this happen. God has used both honorable and dishonorable vessels for his work. He used Assyria and Babylon to pass judgment on the nation of Israel, but for the most part he has used people who serve him and follow after him as his tools. Such men of faith as Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, and Paul to name a few, not to mention many of you here this morning. He used these men and you who have been presented before God as honorable vessels that were ready to serve to do his work. They were deeply flawed but they were cleansed for every good work, just like you have been.

We must remember that we are not the ones who are doing the work, but we are the tools that God uses to get the job done. God is the one who grants people repentance. Last week Josh did not have a chance to get to verse 19 in much detail during 2nd service. It reads as follows, “But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let those who name the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” These are quotations from the Old Testament. The first one, “The Lord knows those who are his” comes from Numbers 16. This is the story of Korah’s rebellion against Moses and ultimately against God himself. Korah was a member of the tribe of Levi and was questioning Moses leadership and words which were also God’s words. Moses told Korah and those who were rebelling with him, that God would show those who were his because he knew who they were. In the end the earth opened up and swallowed Korah and all of his household. These men were not followers of God and were justly judged according to their actions. Moses did not decide what would happen to Korah and his followers, God did. God did not grant them repentance. But we are told in our passage today that God may perhaps grant people repentance.

The battle for the souls of people is bigger than we are. These false teachers and others who do not know the gospel are caught in the snare of the devil. I don’t know if any of you have ever used snares to trap small game but they work like this. The animal steps on or goes through the snare and the wire wraps around the animal’s leg. As the animal pulls the wire gets tighter and tighter. The animal has two options – to die or wait for someone to set it free. The devil’s snare works in the same way. No matter how hard we pull and tug the snare will be on our leg, we cannot release ourselves from it. God is the only one who can set us free. Let me repeat that, God is the only one who can set us free from the snare of the devil. He has done this through Christ’s life, death on a cross, and bodily resurrection. When God has freed them, as he has freed many of us in the room this morning, they will have a knowledge of the truth, knowing the gospel and the good news that it is.
It is not our job to make people repent or to force them to repent. We have no power to do that. God is the one who grants people repentance and he uses those who have chosen to serve the Lord to make this happen. One of the reasons we seek to present ourselves as honorable vessels and depart from iniquity is so we will be holy and useful, ready for the good work God has planned. We want to be this way and act in the way we should so people will repent and know the truth. We want to be people who preach the gospel, but also adorn it with the right words and lifestyle.

This morning we have seen that God is the one who is responsible for repentance, but we are responsible for our actions. Our role is to faithfully share the full, unchanged gospel. The good news that we are sinners and deserve God’s judgment, but that Jesus Christ, God’s one and only Son, came to earth to die for our sin. He satisfied God’s wrath and took the punishment that was meant for us. Those who accept this grace through faith will have eternal life. This is the only way to eternal life. We must share this message but we must also share it in the right way. We must share it in a kind, gentle, and patient manner to those who are in need of correction. This is our role in gospel ministry. The other role is God’s. God is the one who is in charge of repentance. He knows those who are his and he is able to free sinners from the snare of the devil. He uses his servants to make this happen. We desire to be honorable vessels who are set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, and ready for every good work, because these are the vessels that present a well adorned gospel message to sinners in need of repentance.

Benediction

Hebrews 13:20-21 (ESV)

20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen