

Useful To The Master? – 2 Timothy 2:20-26

2 Tim 2:20-26

21 – That’s the crux of this paragraph

That as the Lord’s servant (24), we are useful to him

That’s what it comes down to; That’s where the rubber meets the road

Enough of the theological nuances of election and salvation

Enough of the great truths of the gospel

Enough of the soldier, and athlete, and farmer analogies

Are you *useful* to God? Right now; Useful to the Master

- It’s a universal desire

Deep down every single one of us wants to be useful

To be significant; To be a part of something bigger than ourselves

Problem is, most of us aren’t willing to do the things necessary to get there – to *be* useful

I can’t count the number of teammates over the years who wanted to be a star, but didn’t want to do the work

Friends who wanted to be great piano players, but didn’t want to practice

Businessmen who wanted to make lots of money, but couldn’t stay off the golf course

And the same is true of Christians

Everybody wants to be useful to the Master, but few are willing to do what it takes

They either don’t know how, or they lack the desire

If that’s you, I pray that this will be a very simple, but very powerful push . . .

Toward usefulness to the Master

And the first criteria here from Paul, is to . . .

Clean up your act (v20-21a, 25b-26)

If you’re going to be of any use to the Lord, the Master . . .

You *have* to clean up your act

Notice in v20 where he refers to a *great house* – he’s not talking about the moral quality of the house, but it’s size

And the gold and silver vessels he’s talking about would have been those cups and

bowls in the larger and wealthier homes of Paul’s day . . .

That were used to entertain guests, and throw parties

Much like China is used in our day

Whereas vessels of wood and clay were commonly used for garbage and the disposal of human waste

That’s the kind of picture he’s painting when he says that there are some vessels for honorable use, and some for dishonorable

- And when you get to v21, you realize that he’s drawing a comparison between houses we *live* in, and the house of *God*, the church

To say that there are both clean and unclean people found therein

Those who are living right, and those who aren’t

Those who are genuine, and those who aren’t

Which is confirmation that the church is and always has been, a mixed bag . . .

Filled with those who are useful, and those who aren’t

Just like the vessels in a large house

If that’s not the case, you’re either fooling yourself, or they’re fooling you

- And instead of grumbling about such a combination in our church, we s/b thankful . . .

B/c there’s no better place to clean up

No better place to wash in the redeeming blood of the Lamb

To get right with God; To repent as v25 alludes to, and embrace the truth

That’s the way God made it – for the church to include both clean *and* unclean people

But he *never* intends for it to stay that way; ever

He never intends for us to remain in the snare of the devil (26), or to continue to do his

bidding, all the while, *playing* church

He intends for those who are unclean, those who are indulging in sin, those who are useless to the Master – to clean up their act

To confess their sin, receive God’s forgiveness, and stop it

Believer and unbeliever alike

- I don’t care how long ago you made a profession of faith

I don’t even care if it was genuine or not

B/c if you’re not living right – you’re dirty either way

And you *need* to clean up your act

It’s the only way to turn the *lead* of your sin, into the *gold* of God’s righteousness

It’s the only way to make the switch from a dishonorable vessel, where the garbage of *sin* reigns in your mortal being . . .

To an honorable one, where God *himself* reigns in you; *Truly* reigns in you

It’s the only way that you can be set apart as holy and *useful* to the Master, instead of *useless*

It’s the only way you can be ready for every *good* work, instead of the *bad* ones you’ve been doing

Every good work, instead of just the ones you *feel* like doing

You’ve gotta clean up your act

- And there’s no better place, and no better time – than right here, right now, in *this* house

Whether you need to come clean for the first time in your life, or the 51st time – wash *up*

Repent of your sin, confess it to God, and make a commitment to *turn* from it

Before we’re done, I’m going to give you some time to do that

So that you can leave this house cleaner than you came in

Useful to the Master, instead of *useless*; That’s where it starts

But that’s definitely not where it ends; You also need to . . .

Pursue what’s good (v22b, 24b-25a)

This takes us right back to the athlete in 2:5 who *competes according to the rules* – who does the right thing

But here, Paul takes it one step further and tells us specifically *what* to do

As in v22 where he says – *pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart*

Pursue it – as in don’t wait for those things to come to you . . .
Don’t wait for them to just *happen* – go after them

- But doesn’t the Bible say that God gives us those things? Yes
He gives us the very righteousness of his Son – that’s justification
He gives us faith; He pours out his love within us; He brings peace to our souls
But we must also *pursue* those things – the text is clear

As in – earnestly endeavor to acquire, with a sense of urgency
Like when Paul says in Phil 3:14 – *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
I earnestly endeavor to acquire, with a sense of urgency, the culmination of my salvation, namely, eternal life
Same word that he uses here in 2 Timothy

- And the interesting thing about it, is that it’s also the same word most commonly used in the NT for *persecute*
Isn’t that interesting? Pursue and persecute are the same word
It’s the word “dioko” in Greek

Like in Mt 5:11 when Jesus said – *blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you*; that is, have you within their grasp or control; same word
Or 2 Tim 3:12 – *All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*
“Dioko’d” if you will; Pursued earnestly, with the intent to have you for lunch

The point being – we should be pursuing all that is good with the *same* fervor, and the *same* sense of urgency, as those who sometimes pursue us, for all that is bad

- So how are you doing in that?
Are you following *hard* after *righteousness* these days? (22)
Is it your passion to live an upright, virtuous life for the Lord Jesus?

And how’s your *faith*?
Are you consistently pursuing a greater and greater measure of trust in the Lord?
Are you doing everything you can to grow in your convictions and devotion to God?

What about *love*?
Are you actively cultivating an increasing care and concern for others?
One that compels you to lay down your *life*, and *your* interests, for *theirs*?

How about *peace*?
Are you quick to lay down your pride as well, in order to be right w/ those around you?
Or are you content with strife and conflict?

And finally, are you doing all that in community with other believers?
With those *who call on the Lord from a pure heart*? (22b)
Those who genuinely align themselves with God?

You should; In fact, if you’re going be useful to the Master, you must
22 – pursue these things *along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart*
God designed this Christian life and the pursuit of all that’s good, to be done in community
We’re never more useful when we do, and we’re never more *useless* when we don’t
We need each other

- That’s the *first* part of all that we s/b pursuing in this passage
The second, is to pursue those standards of good *leadership* in v24-25

Like being *kind to everyone*; Everyone
I don’t know about you, but that’s not something that comes naturally for me
I have to *pursue* it; And I’m pretty sure you do too

And what about cultivating your ability to *teach* – that’s pretty crucial if you’re in a leadership role

And then there’s *patiently enduring evil* – this is a biggie
Referring to the sin and growth areas of those you *lead*, not the injustices in the world at large
As a leader in the church, you’re obligated to do that – that’s the word *must* in v24

You’re obligated to patiently endure the sin of others
I’m obligated to patiently endure your growth areas – obligated; patiently
Not to mention the evil and adversity that often surrounds my own life
That’s part of the *good* that we are to pursue, as leaders in the church

- And finally, there’s the gentle correction of *opponents* (25a)
And I don’t know about you, but I don’t *want* to correct my opponents w/ gentleness . . .
I want to correct them with a ton of bricks
But as a leader before God, I don’t have that luxury, and neither do you

And I’ll tell ya, I’ve seen fruit from my obedience in this, that I *never* thought possible
And unfortunately, a lack thereof from my *disobedience*

Even when I’ve been grudgingly gentle, I’ve seen God do exactly what v25-26 say
They see their sin more clearly; He grants repentance
He brings about an awareness of truth; And he provides an escape from the devil’s snare

Which serves to emphasize, that if we pursue what’s *good*, even when we don’t feel like it, the Master will use us

Pursue what’s good; And third . . .

Flee what’s bad (v22a, 23)

If you’re going to be useful to the Master – clean up your act, pursue what’s good, and flee what’s bad
Including youthful passions; See it there in v22 – *Flee youthful passions*

And he prefaces it with the word *so*

Meaning, that the *way* you clean up your act, is to flee what's bad and pursue what's good

It's not just an internal thing, but an external one as well

IOW being useful to the Master is *real life stuff*

- Like fleeing *sensual lusts* – I think that's part of what *youthful passions* means here
Sensual lusts that lead to things like wayward eyes, pre-mature dating, physical infatuation, pornography, masturbation, sexual experimentation, and on and on
And Paul's like – *run* from that; no matter how old you are; literally if necessary

As in – get out of the room; change the channel; get off the computer
Don't walk down the magazine aisle
Throw the Victoria Secret catalog, soft porn that it is, in the garbage
Or better yet, have your wife do it before you ever get home

Look the other direction when immodest women walk by
And if you can't, if you're in the same room, make sure your thoughts are in check
And refuse to look at pictures that are passed around at work
I had to do that repeatedly in the trading pits
Guys would come in with photos of things that were unimaginably graphic/disgusting
And after getting wise to it, I refused to even touch them, let alone look at them

Let me tell you something, when it comes to the sensual lust of youthful passion – *real men run*

- But there's more to this term than just sensual lusts – it also includes *impatience*
Where you're rash and hasty with no regard for those around you
Or you get mad at the slightest delay; Two words – traffic jam
You're not useful to the Master when you're like that

And finally, there's the *contentious spirit* of youthful passion
Where everything's an argument or a debate
Complete with dogmatism, and an unwillingness to even *consider* the views of others

It's the very thing about which Paul elaborates in v23
A contentious spirit breeds more contention, more fighting, and more quarrels
Often about foolish, ignorant things
If you're going to be useful to the Master, it's a youthful passion you *must* flee

- I'll never forget a little exchange I had with Becky's grandfather, early in our marriage
They had come out to visit us from CA, to just help us around the house
And one of the projects they wanted to do was re-upholster our dining room chairs

So they picked out some material, and asked me if I liked it
And I said, "Ya, it looks great"
And then he asked, "What about Becky, do you think she'll like it?" (she was off on an errand or something)
And I said, "I don't care what she thinks; just do it"
And as you might imagine, that didn't go over very well
It was impatient, harsh, and contentious

So nothing more was said, and they quietly disappeared
Which was totally lost on me due to my self-absorption – another youthful passion

But later that day he confronted me on it, and calmly but firmly brought me up short
Which made me mad as nails at the time, but glad later on – much later on
B/c it revealed my youthful passions, and the need to *flee* from them, if I was to ever be useful to the Lord

- How about you? Have you been doing that? Regularly?
If so, keep on – you're a vessel for honorable use, fit for the king's house
If not, you're dirty, and you need to clean up your act

You need to get right with God by . . .
Confessing your sins and asking him for forgiveness
And making a commitment right here, right now – to pursue what's good and flee what's bad
That's repentance – and should you desire it, God will grant it

- And if you've never done that before – if you've never taken that first step of faith and repentance . . .
If you've never trusted Jesus to save you from your sin, and cleanse you from all unrighteousness . . .
If you haven't embraced him as Lord of your life . . .
Do it now

Admit your sin and separation from God – b/c you *are* sinful and separated
Believe that Jesus died in your place to save you from eternal damnation – b/c it's true
And *commit* to live for him, his way, the rest of your life – b/c you should, he's worthy
Admit, Believe, and Commit – simple, but not necessarily easy

