

2 Timothy 2, Avoid Empty Chatter

by Richard Owen Roberts

This sermon delves into 2 Timothy chapter 2, emphasizing the importance of being vessels of honor for Christ. It highlights the need to die to self, endure hardships, and avoid worldly chatter to be sanctified and useful for God's work. The message urges believers to flee youthful lusts, pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, and to refuse foolish arguments. It emphasizes the role of God in granting repentance and the significance of being kind, patient, and gentle in correcting others to lead them to the truth.

Duration: 1:20:18

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:19, 2 Timothy 2:22, 2 Timothy 2:23, 2 Timothy 2:24, 2 Timothy 2:26

Topics: "Vessels of Honor", "Endurance in Faith"

Description

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Transcript

2 Timothy chapter 2, the Apostle Paul's second letter to Timothy. Chapter 2, beginning in verse 1. We'll read through verse 26 together. Paul writes, You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal. But the word of God is not imprisoned. For this reason, I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation

which is in Christ Jesus, and with it, eternal glory.

It is a trustworthy statement. For if we died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him.

If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. Remind him of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of its hearers.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some.

Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands. Having this seal, the Lord knows those who are his, and everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness. Now in a large house, there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor.

Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.

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. Well, some of us are much more alert and thoughtful concerning that last stanza that we just sang than others.

I, for one, of course, being included. You know, one of the most difficult things of old men like myself is being sure to quit in time and not to stay so long that we end up doing damage instead of good. I had a series of meetings in Kansas some while back and had to quit, couldn't finish.

Had to return home early. Now, the friends who brought me down last night and are with us this morning had invited me to lead a series of meetings in West Virginia, but I was afraid to say yes. And so I said to them, I've tailed in this work in Kansas, maybe it's time for me to quit.

But I do have a series that I've got to try and keep, a commitment in Texas. So I'll make no decision concerning West Virginia till I see whether the Lord has left me to myself in Texas. And by the grace of God, an incredible thing happened.

The evening attendance, night after night after night, as great as the morning attendance, and the Lord at work wonderfully. So I realized I'm not quite finished. And so was able to accept their invitation.

And they have kindly brought me down now to be with you just for today. But I've come, despite great weakness and difficulty, with a profound conviction that the word must yet speak to us and affect our lives profoundly. And we have still, across this nation, to discover the real reason why the Gentile church exists.

So it had been my intention this morning to call to your attention Romans 9, 10, and 11. But in praying and thinking over it, I realized it'll be best to do that tonight. And so I do urge you to come back and not to pretend that you're too busy to hear what the Lord has to say.

And this morning then, we're going to be looking at a portion of that wonderful chapter that was read to us already. So I'm inviting you to turn, please, at this time to the chapter that was read, 2 Timothy and the second chapter. Now, I honestly don't feel strong enough to give you my message on the whole chapter.

And though I don't intend to be brief, I don't want to scare you into thinking that you'll be leaving about the time most churches are over. But we're not going to try and deal with the whole chapter, but rather starting at verse 11. So will you look now carefully at the text and follow as I give you an outline of the intention that I have for this congregation this morning, which I believe to be God's intention as well as mine.

Starting, as I said, at verse 11. You will notice in verses 11, 12, and 13, and we will return to this in a moment, but those are a series of statements that are leading up to a text of incredible urgency. Then we have a warning.

Every one of us needs to be very alert to this warning because in verses 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18, an issue is addressed that profoundly impacts all of us. We are in constant danger of shooting our mouths off, of babbling, of saying nothing, or of saying the wrong thing. Some seem to have the conviction that when they think of a matter, they have to speak it whether anybody's paying any attention or not, or whether what they have to say is nothing but nonsense on that occasion or something that a party needs desperately to hear.

The control of the tongue is obviously one of the great difficulties every human being encounters. And then we have the text. In other words, what I'm doing is dividing this passage into five parts.

Let me repeat again, just for clarity, the first two. The great issues that lead up to the text. The danger that all of us face in never fulfilling what the text calls for because we never learn to control our mouths.

And then the text. And now let me read the text. Let me urge you to focus on the text.

This is found in verse 19. Pay close attention now. Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands.

Having this seal, the Lord knows those who are his. Now, an awful lot of people don't know whether they belong to the Lord or not. But the Lord knows who are his.

If I may mention at this juncture, I frequently talk with children who are quite bewildered about their parents. Some of them don't know whether they actually belong in that family or not. And even some who are quite sure they belong in that family don't have the foggiest notion whether their parents love them or not.

Now, when we came in this morning and we met our dear and long-time friend, Anthony, I felt it appropriate to say, and how many are there now? He said five and one on the way, soon to arrive. Now look, those children will be affected by the same things that affect everyone else, plus their own personal difficulties. And we hope it won't happen, but it's not beyond the possibility that at least one of that six won't know whether they belong or not, and especially those for whom adoption is an issue.

And of those children, it is certainly possible that at least one of them who feels he belongs to the family may wonder whether he is really loved or not. But our text says there is a sure foundation, firm. It bears this seal.

The Lord knows those who are His. You may be bewildered yourself, but the Lord is not. And then, in addition to the Lord knowing those who are His, these very clear and explicit words that apply to every single one of us who is here.

Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from evil. Now do you catch what's happening in this passage? A series of statements starting at verse 11 that help to clarify very clearly the text. And then the verses that provide the warning of how our tongues can mess everything up for us.

Then the text. Then that's followed, look at verses 20 and 21. That's followed with an illustration.

Now it's an illustration that for most of us seems a bit dated because most of us are not acquainted with vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor. But we'll face that when we come to the example. And then the passage closes with a series of immensely consequential issues directly related to the text starting at verse 20 through 2 and running through verse 26.

Well, you have the outline and I hope that that will help you to follow with care what we're looking at this morning. Let's begin then with that series of statements starting at verse 11 and running through verse 13. It is a trustworthy statement.

Now look friends, not everybody believes that the word of God is trustworthy. Loads of people are anything but convinced of what is stated in verses 11, 12 and 13. But we begin with that simple but eloquent fact.

It is a trustworthy statement. And I must ask if the word of God to you is trustworthy or if you find yourself on occasion prone to argue with God. Well, I hope that for each of you without exception you are convinced of the trustworthiness of the word of God.

But I'm afraid to say that it's true. I meet a whole lot more people who argue issues than those who believe. And so I want to beg you to start out in the right position now knowing the trustworthiness of the word of God.

Now notice the first issue that is raised. For if we died with Him we shall also live with Him. Now nobody knows the correct figures but it appears to me that at least 80% of the church in America denies absolutely that truth.

But let's be sure it's fixed in our minds. Let me read it again. If we died with Him we shall also live with Him.

Now for a few that might require a bit of explanation or enlargement. It would be a pity, a tragedy indeed if someone should leave this morning not even knowing what is said. Now a few of you, perhaps not all, have heard this statement.

Those who are born once die twice. Those who are born twice die once. Now that's a statement I repeated earlier this week in speaking to a group of pastors.

But I do hope that it will be fixed in your mind thus I'm going to repeat the statement again and ask you to take careful note and be sure you got a hold of this. Those who are born once die twice. Those who are born twice die once.

Now for those who are befuddled by that let me simply explain what that little saying is really saying. Obviously every person in this room was born. If you haven't been, well now I'm going to back down a little.

That's not quite true. Our sister is bearing one with her who has not yet been born. But unless there's another pregnant girl somewhere in the group the rest of us were born once.

None of us had anything to do with our birth. I didn't say to my parents to come I would like dark hair. You might not believe it now looking at me but one time I did have very dark hair.

I didn't say to them in advance of my birth I want blue eyes. I didn't say to them I want a loud voice. What you see is what you get.

None of us had any input into our physical birth. It's a very strange notion that some have who when forced to admit they had no input into their first birth who think somehow they have input into their second birth. But I'm explaining a saying to you that some of you have heard but may not understand.

Those who are born twice die once. Those who are born once die twice. Now I reversed the order in that repetition but let's look at it now as we were doing.

The first birth occurred like it or not. But what's that phrase talking about when it talks about dying twice? How can one who is born once die twice? Well now if your brain is working you know that death is not cessation of existence. Death is separation.

When your body dies you're not dead. Your physical being is. But one who experiences the first death has still to face and they ought to be wise enough to tremor and fear over this.

They face the eternal separation from God that follows the separation of the body from the soul. Now I know it doesn't make one very popular to speak about heaven or hell and there are plenty of people who think they're Christians who refuse to believe significantly in the negative if not in the positive. But the Lord Jesus Christ spoke with frequency and plainness about hell.

So you see that saying when we look at it is indicating a person who knows nothing but a physical birth will experience death twice. The death of the body and then the death of the soul. Not that it ceases to exist but that there is an eternal separation from God and hell is theirs forever and forever and forever and forever.

No! And it's wise to be mindful that there are a few words that are never spoken in hell. No one in hell ever accurately says sooner or later God will come because just as heaven is a place marked by God's unbroken presence hell is marked by his unbroken absence. And then that other part of the phrase those who are born twice die once.

The first birth is obviously the physical birth. The second birth is the spiritual birth. Look at what we're seeing in 2 Timothy 2.11 If we died with him we shall also live with him.

For those who belong to Christ there is one single death. Now that may seem not so to some of you but remember the first line it is a trustworthy statement. It doesn't matter whether you understand these things or not.

They're true. It doesn't matter whether you like them or not. They're true.

If the only birth you know is physical then you're going to have to face death twice. And remember again I've tried to help you to see death is not cessation of existence but separation. So the death that the person who is born only once faces is dual, twofold.

The death of the body the death of the soul but the person who's been born twice faces, as I've been saying a single death. Not when, you know maybe you can't quite see I'll have to be careful here because I fall readily but I'll step down just to give you a closer up look. You see in front of you an old man and not far from the grave but when those who care something for me place me in the grave they're not going to say he's dead.

And indeed if they do they've spoken very foolishly and erroneously because he won't be dead. Some stumble all over this and have great difficulty Can you see alright? I mean I'm wanting you to have a look not that you want to but just in case you do I want you to have a close up look. When they place me in the casket and in time in the grave they'll speak correctly if they speak at all when they say he's asleep.

The believer never dies when he's buried. It's not that they're burying him alive but there's no death. You understand that don't you? And then at the time of the final judgment will the Lord say I got the sheep on one hand the goats on the other now you go off with the goats.

No, the Lord knows those who are His. And so having been born both physically and spiritually I only face one death. Well you said Mr. Roberts you haven't said a word about death.

You've just told us you'll never die. Why? Well you see our passage now makes it clear what that one death is. Look again at verse 11.

It is a trustworthy statement for if we died with Him we shall also live with Him. Now you see there are a lot of people who call themselves Christians who could not say I died with Him. Now what would be the sense of talking about regeneration when you're talking about a person who's alive? You don't bring to life that which is already alive.

You bring to life that which is dead. You see at the very heart of the Christian message we have this fact we must die to ourselves to our loves to the things that motivate and drive us. We must die with Christ.

So would it be out of the way for an old man to ask you tenderly and in love have you died? Have you died to yourself? Have you died to sin? Now perhaps you've seen this but haven't known how to interpret it. Again I want to get down here. I know it's as I said dangerous but I don't want anybody to miss this.

In this world there are two kingdoms. One kingdom thrives by knocking others down beating them to death even and standing on them. That's how the kingdom of this world functions.

Indeed I'm very sorry to say this but I must be honest with you. It's not only businesses that do that but churches do that and religious institutions do that. They advance themselves and what they think is the kingdom of God by destroying others.

But now think of the opposite of that. Did Christ advance the kingdom of God in that destructive way or did he advance it by death? He himself died in our place in order that his kingdom might thrive. Do you see how silly it would be to suppose that the kingdom of God would not require death of us? If our leader died surely we must die and is that not precisely what God has led the apostle Paul to describe? If we die with him we read in verse 11 we shall live with him.

Now it would be a sad mistake for me to simply focus on death and to say nothing of life and the statement is so clear. If we die with him we will live with him. Now we could project that sometime into the future and say that's merely a reference to eternal life.

Well it certainly includes that but it's not limited to that. Those who have died to themselves are here and now living with Christ and it's a wonderful thing to get to know a person who's got the very life of God in them. They thrive.

Everything they touch by God's will is blessed. They bring life wherever they go. I've listened to sermons that bring death and I've listened to sermons that bring life and the difference is a dead man brings death and a live man brings life.

But it would be silly to focus on someone else when we've got ourselves to deal with and wouldn't it be very appropriate if you ask do I live with Christ? Not do I hope to eventually but do I live with Christ now? Do I bring life because I have life? Well you can see now why I describe this as some points that are leading us to the text. Let me repeat the text at this time. Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands having this seal the Lord knows those who are His and let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness.

Now how can you abstain from wickedness if wickedness is your life? I mean what is sin but self? And if all you've done is to foster your self-life, feed it all these days, honor it, place it above everything else, it's silly to talk about life. So when we're using such phrases as regeneration or the second birth or the new birth, we're talking about persons who have died to self and been raised to life in Christ Jesus. And I'm asking you personally whether your religion is an attachment or your true being, whether you live with Christ or merely blunder along like a religious idiot.

But let's take up the next phrase in verse 12. If we endure, we shall also reign with him. Well now, we meet a lot of folk who don't know anything about endurance.

I'm grieved to say this but nonetheless it is true. Most of the fellows that I went to theological seminary with didn't endure. They got caught up with something else.

Oh, a few of them are in the ministry but they're ministers of death not of life. But it's silly to call yourself a Christian because you had a religious experience somewhere along the way. Endurance is mandatory.

It's not enough to have a good beginning. It's the glorious ending that really counts. Have you fixed in your mind these words? If we endure with him, we shall also reign with him.

Do you see how important it is not to be stupid and say I'm going to heaven but because in heaven everybody there is reigning with Christ. See how stupid it is to say I'm a Christian and yet there's no reason to think that you have any endurance at all. Now, what is needed by way of endurance? Well, we're not going back to the fourth part of the chapter but you can reread that again.

Did you notice that as our brother Anthony was reading that passage he not only made it clear that Paul was in prison but he was there as a criminal. Now, was Paul a criminal? No. But those who hated Christ treated him with the kind of contempt with which they treated criminal.

When the passage talks about enduring with Christ it's not talking about getting on a glory cloud and drifting gaily to heaven. It's talking about an awful lot that you might wish didn't happen but does. Now, this doesn't hardly matter in a sense to you but it does to me.

My dear wife, she and I have been married 55 years. She went to a church meeting where somebody got angry, jumped up, plowed into my wife, broke her back. So for two years she's been suffering horrible pain and finds everything of huge difficulty.

But I've been noticing how that sweetened her walk with Christ. I would have to say she's enduring hardship as a good soldier of Christ. Now, I don't mean to say that every person here is going to have their back broken.

How do we know what's in front of us? Well, we most certainly don't but we do know that calling on the name of Christ requires endurance. And I'm asking, does that characterize you? But there are some other things here we want to be sure that we pay attention to. If we endure with Him, verse 12, we'll reign with Him.

If we deny Him, He will also deny us. Now, does that mean that a person stands on the street corner with a loudspeaker and shouts, I deny Christ! Well, it could. There are some that way.

But for most of us the denial of Christ doesn't involve the street corner and the loudspeaker. When we know we should take a stand, we take a seat. When we know we should be heard for Christ, we blabber about something else.

An awful lot of people of my acquaintance could not be described as those who openly obey Christ but who deviously deny Him. And again, my concern is to ask you to weigh this carefully concerning yourself. What would be the point of saying that you've died to self when self is still reigning? What would be the purpose of saying I endure and will reign with Him when in a variety of private ways I'm denying Him? And then, if you will, verse 13, if we are faithless, He remains faithful for He cannot deny Himself but you can deny Him.

Do you see why the apostle was led by the Holy Spirit to introduce this incredible text with these very carefully chosen words? So, before we move to the second section, I must ask again, do you really have evidence that you belong to Christ, that you've been born again, that you have an enduring spirit, and that you will follow Him no matter what it costs? It's not enough to believe that He's faithful and won't deny Himself. That's called for, of course, but that's not all that's involved. You must die to yourself and live with Christ.

Well, as I suggested, we then have a section in which the great frailty of each of us is brought to light. And so, verse 14 starts with the words, remind them of these things and solemnly charge them in the presence of God. Now, maybe somebody's thinking to themselves, I don't think that's a very nice sermon.

And I say, the text of Scripture tells me that my job is to solemnly charge you. Now, if I know you don't like it, would that keep me from doing it? Quite honestly, I've never been able to keep track, but I've preached in thousands of places to vast numbers of people, some of which loved it and some of which hated it. But it

doesn't make a particular difference.

It's necessary that in the presence of God, and surely that's the case here, in the presence of God, you're being solemnly charged. And that charge in particular, as stated here, is a charge not to wrangle about words which are useless. And that's what a lot of the church is doing.

Some of the conferences that are held are deliberately conferences to wrangle about words. And I must say, that's not going to profit anybody. And so we're instructed in verse 15, Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed.

Now how can you present yourself to God as a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed if your mouth runs? If you don't have control of your tongue, you're certain, on occasion at least, to say something damaging. Some of you know something about parents whose mouths run. My son has a daughter who is violating the precepts of Christianity.

And he was burdened. Every time I see her, should I tell her, she's disobeying the Lord. And I want to be careful and speak this kindly, but his wife thinks it's important to tell the daughter constantly that what she's doing is wrong.

So my son was asking me, Dad, what do you think? Now this is a tremendously vital thing. There are families here. What if a child goes astray? Is it the parent's duty to tell them on every occasion they meet that they're doing wrong? Will that help? And when my son asked, I said, Look, son, what did you put in writing that what she's doing is wrong? And make it clear.

You're not going to make a big to-do about this. You're not going to mention it again. You just want her to know that you're permanently convinced that what she's doing is wrong.

And then leave it alone. Well, now, I don't mean to say that that kind of advice suits everybody perfectly, but bring this matter of your tongue before the Lord and say, Now, Lord, how do you want me to behave myself? How do you want me to allow my tongue to function? And I know that for the most part, professed Christians don't pay any attention to this, and they babble, babble, babble, babble. And I want to say this kindly, but women, you're in particular danger because most men don't like talking women.

I don't know why that's true. I just know it is true. And I think I'm old enough to say this in a very strong fashion.

So everybody needs to learn to govern their tongue, but the women in particular. But let us understand. When we do wrong, does Christ thrash us every time we do wrong? Well, most of us thrash ourselves, and the Lord doesn't say anything.

In fact, because the Lord tends to remain silent, some of us become abusive of Him. And we think because He hasn't knocked us down that we can do it again and get away with it. Well, I'm not going to go further in this matter.

I'm just hoping and praying that this is no waste of time this morning because you have such a love of blabber that you'll blabber no matter what. So let's move along. In verse 16, a fact is pointed out and enlarged in verses 17 and 18, and we want to be sure we've got the message.

Avoid, this is verse 16, avoid worldly and empty chatter for it will lead to further ungodliness and their talk will spread like gangrene. And then he gives us a couple illustrations of persons where that was so. And he says in verse 18, men who've gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place and they have upset the faith of some.

In other words, friends, letting your tongue roam isn't an innocent, innocuous matter. It's dangerous. It does great harm.

It's like gangrene. And if you've ever studied medicine in any way, you know what a dangerous thing gangrene can be. But now let's move to the text and let me restate again the text.

Verse 19, Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands. Having this seal, the Lord knows those who are here. And let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness.

How could you possibly abstain from wickedness if the most dangerous part of your body is without control? But let's face now the reality of what is said in verse 19. Christianity is not an assortment of miscellaneous with a go nowhere nature. Christianity is as solid as the greatest of rocks.

There are many absolutes. Two are named in this passage. Let us be sure we've got a hold of these two.

And I alluded to this already. Some of us don't really know whether we belong to him or not. But he knows those who are his.

And it's not really so important that I claim to be his as it is that he claims me as his. But it also surely suggests that if he knows absolutely who belongs to him, then we ought to know whether we belong or not. So anyone here this morning who is uncertain in this matter should face the reality something's wrong.

Now we don't earn our way into the kingdom of God and it would be utterly ridiculous to suggest that if we do everything we're told, we're all right. But if we are absolutely certain when Christ died, he died for me because I needed his death. I am such a wicked sinner that I would perish in hell forever if it were not for Christ and his grace and goodness.

We surely can know that. Obviously, when you look over the Christian church, you see various stages. You see some who act like infants and their Christianity is full of mess.

And then you see some who act at least mostly as they are. But then you get to know that person well and you can find some area where that person isn't nearly as good as you thought. But Christ doesn't usher us in and out of his kingdom on the basis of our behavior.

It's when a person is convinced they need Christ and they respond to him by a deliberate attempt to crucify themselves and to live forever to the glory of God. Now look, I'm going to come down again. I guess this may be magnetic.

I like folks and I like to get closer when I speak. But here's an old man standing in front of you. But listen, friends.

With some frequency, I say to the Lord, I told you long ago I was a sinner and needed a savior and I've just gone and proved it again. It's not that I love my sin, but I fear that as long as I'm here, I'm still going to sin. But I've never wondered if I could save myself.

I've known for a long time that Christ and Christ alone was my hope. Now I'm not urging that you do things my way. I'm just urging that you not be silly and pretend that you're perfect when you aren't.

And when you've proven that you're not, instead of being evasive and fussing around making believe, just come right out and say, Jesus, you're my hope. But especially this passage, having focused on the tongue, is something we've got to pay attention to because notice these words once more. Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from evil.

And be honest now with yourself. Can you truly say, I hate sin? I don't really like to see it in others, but where I really hate it is in myself. I have named the name of Christ.

I've said to you already years ago, I've said, Lord Jesus, I'm rotten, no good, a wretched sinner, deserving hell. If you don't save me, that's where I'll go. That's where I belong.

And I went and proved it again by what I just thought, or said, or did. And if I never sinned again in the rest of my life, I'd be delighted. I love holiness.

I often think to myself, wouldn't it be glorious if I could go an entire month, never ever in that month sinning against the Lord. I think that the issue about heaven that I find immensely alluring is that in heaven we won't sin. But some of you love your sin.

You may sneak behind a closed door to commit it. You may pretend that nobody else knows what you've done, but you know it's a terribly foolish thing to think they can pull the wool over God's eyes. That you can pretend in a way that he thinks you're better than you really are.

But now let's think of the very words of this text, and look at them carefully, and ask yourself, now, is this really me? I named the name of Christ, and the text is, let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from evil. And look, isn't it right to make a resolve, even if you don't keep it perfectly? Would it not be appropriate, in honesty before God, to say, I know you are my only hope, and I want, oh, how I want never to defame your name. I stand.

As I've already said, you may not come anywhere near perfection, but the Lord knows about resolves. But then I indicated to you at the forefront that there was an illustration, seemingly not altogether relevant to our day, but let me read again verses 20 and 21. Now, in a large house, there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood, and of earthenware, and some of honor, and some to dishonor.

Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Well, as I said, the illustration involves something that most of us have no first-hand acquaintance with. Nonetheless, we can understand what is being said.

So you've got two major pots in your house. One you use for garbage and human waste, and one you use for flour. Not a very good description, perhaps, but maybe it will help.

Now look, you've got to choose whether you'll be a vessel of honor or a vessel of dishonor. America has become a wretched land. I live near the city of Chicago that has the strongest gun laws of any municipality, and in the first nine months of this year, 900 murders.

It's insane to think that you can pass a law that's going to affect the lawless. A hundred thousand new laws will have no impact whatsoever on the lawless ones. But friends, each of us needs to make a

determination.

Oh, I wished, I wished somehow I could plant this in your heart. When I was a boy of 12, God spoke to me. These things became amazingly clear, and I decided, by God's grace, to be a vessel of honor.

I haven't succeeded perfectly. I've made an awful lot of dumb mistakes. But right now, sir, if I may speak to you firsthand, there's nothing I want more than to be a vessel of honor.

Not because I'm craving distinction, but because I believe my Lord deserves the very best. Every one of us, without exception, must face the fact that in the church, there are vessels of dishonor. I could give you an endless list of people who I know who call themselves Christians, who are doing damage everywhere they go.

I honestly believe that the biggest thing that's wrong with America is the church. I believe the church has led the nation into the moral and spiritual poverty that we're now faced with. But nonetheless, every one of us, without exception, can choose to be a vessel of honor or of dishonor.

Now it's absurd to be making the choice to be a vessel of honor and making it impossible for any real progress. If you haven't learned to control your tongue, you can't possibly be a vessel of honor. My wife and I, I just said to you a moment ago, we've been married 55 years, but there are certain things that never seem to get quite straight.

And many a time, my wife has said to me, you knew what they needed to hear. Why didn't you tell them? And I said to her, because nobody was listening, why should I speak important words to people who don't wish to hear them? I've got to learn the place of words. I've got to learn to control my tongue so that when I'm feeling urgent about saying something, I don't say it unless I know it will do good.

And sometimes what we say sounds like outsiders to be the wrong thing. Let me just try to give you an illustration of this. I called on a family, and the head of the household, the father, said to me, well, we'll bring children to Sunday school, but we won't attend ourselves.

I went at time of two as a kid, but I'm not going to waste my life going to church. So I said to the man, do you consider yourself a Christian? And he answered, yes, certainly. Oh, I said, now on what basis? Well, he said, I keep the Ten Commandments.

Oh, I said, I'm delighted to hear that. Now tell me what the Ten Commandments are. He looked a bit sheepish, and he said, well, I don't think I could give you all ten.

Oh, I said, let's not concern ourselves with all ten. Just give me the first one. Well, no, I don't think I could do that.

Then I said, surely you won't object if I tell you something of importance about yourself. He said, what's that? I said, you're a liar. Now how many people do you win to Christ by calling a liar? Didn't sound like the right thing to do.

But then this man, as I stood, stood with me. He walked me to the porch, and as I was leaving, he said, don't be surprised sometime if I come to church. And he started the next Sunday.

He has two sons in the ministry now. Do you understand what I'm saying? Sometimes what we do say doesn't seem right, and yet we've said to the Lord, now Lord, I don't know what to do here, but you do, so

help me to say the right thing. So I choose whether to be a vessel of honor or dishonor, I have chosen by God's grace to be a vessel of honor.

Maybe talk with my wife. She'll make it plain. He's not near as good as you think, but still the choice is the same.

Have you ever chosen to be a vessel of honor? And that means you can't just do whatever you think of. You can't say what pops into your head. You can't be attracted by that which attracts others.

There's got to be a higher principle in your life that's governing. And then, I know you're not used to speaking or listening as long as I'm used to speaking. I've known Anthony a long time, and I'm grateful for him, but I know he has a little more control than I do in this regard.

But I want to close without finishing the passage. I'm looking at that fifth part that I outlined, those issues much related to the text. And notice that in verse 22, the very first thing that's mentioned is, Now flee youthful lusts.

Now that comes pretty close to home to the majority who are here this morning. The majority of you are under 35. Maybe you've read your Bible too carelessly.

But in 1 John, there's a passage that talks about the love of the flesh, the love of the world, and the pride of life. And it's a passage arranged chronologically. The first great wave of temptation that every youth faces is sex.

And here is the injunction. The Lord knows those who are huge. Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

But you can't do that if youthful lust grabs hold of you. Now, I don't mean to imply that if you do the wrong thing, God will forever hold it against you. The grace of God is wonderful.

But if you're going to be a vessel of honor, you can't ruin everything by giving way to the desires of the flesh and of the mind. So flee youthful lust. And a very significant way to do that is to pursue righteousness.

If instead of letting righteousness be an accident in your life, you make it a matter of personal pursuit, that will help a lot in dealing with youthful lust. Then he urges us to pursue faith, to pursue love, and to pursue peace. And especially, as he says, with those who call on the name of the Lord.

So this intentional pursuit of that which really matters goes a long way in helping us to conquer that which makes us vessels of wrath. And then we're advised again in verse 23, Refuse foolish and ignorant speculation. Oh, maybe you get all heated up about some great issue, and everywhere you go, you're boasting and blasting away with your tongue on that great issue.

We don't win the world to Christ by blasting away on some big issue. This is explained in verse 24. The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome.

My job is not to win an argument. Your job is not to win an argument. But as a vessel of honor to display the glory of Christ.

So the Lord's bond-servant must be kind to all. He must be able to teach. He must be patient with wrongs.

He must with gentleness correct those who are in opposition. And all of this with the hope. Did you notice these words? All of this with the hope that God may grant them repentance.

Now look, I don't like being so far from you, especially on a critical matter like this. I don't give repentance to anybody. That's not my assignment.

It's God who grants repentance. Now, if you manage to win the argument, that's not going to help. You've done something God had no intention of you doing.

You've made it more difficult for that person if you win the argument. But if you refuse foolish, ignorant speculations that produce the quarrels, then there's a chance, a possibility, that God may grant repentance. Just look, friends.

Here's an old man walking in front of you who is perfectly well aware that if anybody this morning repents, it will be because God granted them repentance. And what could be more lovely than the awareness that by the grace of God you were an instrument, a vessel of honor that the Lord used to help someone to receive the gift of repentance that he gave. And that that gift of repentance, as the text says, led them to the knowledge of the truth.

I want to end now, and I hope it will not hurt you, by again speaking personally. As a boy of 12, I set my heart to be a vessel of honor. And as an old and dying man in my 80s, God graciously prompts people all over the English-speaking world to send little notes saying, while you were proclaiming Christ, I was given repentance.

I'm not likely to meet you on earth, but I look forward to meeting you in heaven. My dear friends, do not understand. God knows those who are here, and he's made it mandatory that all who name him as Savior abstain from all evil.

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