

“Vessels Unto Honor”

There are two questions of great importance which a person must ask in their lives. No one is really able to escape these, because ignoring the questions is still an answer, whether a person admits this or not. The two questions are, “Will I become a Christian?” and “What kind of Christian will I be?” God’s word does not leave us deficient in searching for an answer. It will guide us in considering these questions and hopefully will stir us to answer according to God’s will.

Everyone must first answer the question of whether or not to become a Christian. Obviously, the Bible persuades us to obey God. Jesus said in Luke 11:28, *“Blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it.”* When the lawyer approached Jesus and asked Him what the greatest commandment was, He replied, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*

This love implies a deep commitment. When Peter told Jesus three times in John 21 that he loved Him, Jesus gave him a commandment of service in all three instances. It is clear that obedience is required to be acceptable to God. Becoming a Christian is also commanded because rejection of God will result in eternal punishment (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Revelation 20:10). This is a serious question!

The main question a person faces after becoming a child of God is “What kind of Christian will I be?” This question must be before the minds of all those who want to please the Lord. The Bible amply warns about “faithful” brethren who can fall away (Hebrews 3:12; 6:4-6; 1 Corinthians 10:12). In 2 Timothy 2:20, Paul impressed upon Timothy the reality that differing attitudes can affect usefulness of Christians.

In order for Paul to get his point across, he used the metaphor of vessels in a great house. Paul undoubtedly was speaking about the kingdom of God. The vessels of honor were those Christians who did the will of God, while the vessels of dishonor were those who were wicked in the kingdom of God. Jesus taught in Matthew 13:36-43 that God would purge the stumbling blocks and lawless from His kingdom. In our day, the metaphor might be considered as fine china for the honorable vessels and a slopjar or animal dish for the dishonorable vessels.

The discussion of Hymenaeus and Philetus in 2 Timothy 2:16-18 evidently spurred Paul’s remarks in vss. 19-21. The stewardship of God’s message is laid in the hands of God’s people. This obligation is a solemn one. Some-

times we get carried away in our exegesis and explanation of the Bible and forget about our responsibility to pass on God's word through teaching (2 Timothy 2:2, 14). The responsibility is so important that Jesus gave us instruction to exercise prudence in our teaching (Matthew 7:6). Christians are to not allow those who reject the invitation of Christ to treat precious things as cheap.

Christians need to learn how to make themselves useful. In 2 Timothy 2:21, Paul described the sanctified Christian as one who had "*cleansed*" himself. This word means to purge out or separate from whatever is dishonorable (the word is also used in 1 Corinthians 5:7). When we cleanse ourselves, we become a vessel that is in a state of readiness for service to God. The Hebrew writer said, "*Pursue ... the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord*" (12:14).

One who would be a vessel of honor will shun or avoid youthful lusts. The context shows that Paul had more in mind than simple sexual desires. "*Youthful lusts*" can include impatience, assertiveness, arrogance, disputing, etc. In vs. 23, he encouraged the young preacher to "*refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.*" The same sentiment is expressed in vs. 14 and 1 Timothy 4:7. These were untrained, uneducated "guesses" about religious matters. These dangerous speculations produce quarrels or "begin battles."

Paul goes further in vss. 24-26 and states that the child of God must be a servant. Being a servant means being patient and gentle when opposed by false teaching. This conclusion relates back to what was said in vs. 22 when Paul told Timothy to "*pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*" Clearly, Christians must concentrate on higher affairs.

The Lord's servant, as a vessel of honor, is urged to keep company "*with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*" This is a heart that is free from the pollution and evil corruption of sin. Just as we must purge or separate ourselves from the vessels of dishonor, we must associate with the vessels of honor who have a pure heart. This agrees completely with Paul's instruction to Titus in 1:15, "*To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.*"

How do you stand on these questions? Have you obeyed the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9)? What kind of a Christian are you? You had better think carefully about these questions, for they, through

the scriptures, lay us bare to our Lord and God who will judge us in the end (Hebrews 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Kyle Campbell