

Vessels of Honour in God's House

By Rev. John Marcus

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: 2 Timothy 2:20-21
Preached on: Sunday, July 10, 2016

First Protestant Reformed Church of Edmonton

15911 107A Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta, T5P-0Z3
Canada

Website: www.edmontonprc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/edmontonprc

The Scripture reading this afternoon is found in 2 Timothy. We read chapter 2 again and our text is found in verses 20 and 21. 2 Timothy 2.

1 Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. 3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. 5 And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. 6 The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits. 7 Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. 8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: 9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. 10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. 11 It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: 12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: 13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself. 14 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. 15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 16 But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. 17 And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; 18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. 19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. 20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. 21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a

vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work. 22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 23 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. 24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, 25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; 26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

That far we read in God's holy inspired word and may God bless that word to our hearts.

The text that we consider this afternoon is 2 Timothy 2:20-21. I'll read those again at this time. 2 Timothy 2:20-21,

20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. 21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, in our houses we have all kinds of vessels. Some of those vessels are used for honorable things, some for dishonorable things. Some of those vessels are made out of beautiful crystal, we display them in the china cabinet, maybe use them for special occasions to put flowers in; and others have Imperial margarine written on them and stacked up in the cupboard for leftovers; yet other vessels we might even use for the storing of trash before we take it out.

The text that we consider this afternoon compares the members of the church to vessels. Some of those vessels are precious vessels made out of gold or silver, and others are made out of wood or earth or clay, and that comparison invites us to examine ourselves. What kind of vessel am I and what kind of vessel are you in the church of Jesus Christ? What kind of vessel would you like to be? Do you want to be a vessel of honor in Christ's kingdom? Well, our text urges us, by God's grace, to purge ourselves from that which is dishonorable so that we would be vessels that are meet for the Master's use; vessels that are prepared unto every good work to bring honor and glory to our Master.

"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour." So let's consider our text under that theme, "Vessels of Honour in God's House." Let's note the vessels of gold and silver; secondly, those vessels that are purged; and lastly, those that are useful. Vessels of honor in God's house.

You would expect in a kingly palace all kinds of vessels. That's the picture that the inspired apostle gives to us. Some of those vessels would be of gold and silver, and yet others of wood and clay. The picture that the inspired apostle wants to set before us is a

picture to teach us about the church. The inspired apostle is bringing a word to Timothy and to ministers but also to every one of us a word to encourage us in our labors in the church. In the context, the apostle makes it clear those labors must be done in the strength of Christ. The context is full of that. It reminds us of our gracious salvation in Jesus Christ; a salvation which the apostle says is not of works but according to God's purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began. That's chapter 1. He urges us in the context to be strong in the grace, that is, in Christ Jesus. Not strong in yourselves. He doesn't say, "Pull yourselves up by your own bootstraps," but, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

He reminds us that Jesus Christ rules. Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised again from the dead. He didn't stay in the grave after he gave himself a ransom for us. Now he is exalted. He rules from heaven to bring about our salvation. We serve a risen Savior. And in light of that, the apostle urges Timothy to apply himself; to be a workman, a workman that has no reason to be ashamed in God's sight. On the one hand, he says to Timothy, and that applies to all of us, especially to ministers but to all of us, he says to Timothy, "Study to show thyself approved. Be diligent in your work." And on the other hand, he tells Timothy to avoid profane and vain babbling because that will lead to more ungodliness.

He gives the examples of Hymenaeus and Philetus who, basing their ideas, basing their teachings on the ideas of men, denied the resurrection and, in that, denied the whole faith of God's people. That, in itself, would be a discouraging thing to the minister, to Timothy. That would have been discouraging to see that so the apostle encourages Timothy. "Don't be discouraged, but remember that the foundation of God standeth sure. The church built on that foundation is not in danger."

The text now continues that encouragement by giving a realistic description of the church. The visible church is like a great house, a glorious and kingly house. A huge palace might come to our mind and in that palace, maybe a palace like Solomon's, we would imagine all kinds of different vessels. Think of Solomon's house, how many servants he had, thousands of different servants so that when the Queen of Sheba came out to see Solomon, she remarked, "Behold, the half was not told me." Now Solomon's kingdom was a glorious kingdom. Solomon's house was a great house. How much more the church? The church is a kingly and stately house and if the Queen of Sheba spoke highly of Solomon's house and how Solomon ruled over his kingdom, how much more ought we to speak highly of God's house, to speak well of the church of Jesus Christ?

Is the visible church a kingly house? God said that it is. Is it a kingly house? Then we ought to honor it by going to it cheerfully. How much better to be a lowly doorkeeper in God's house than to be in a most privileged position in the tents of wickedness?

Is the visible church a glorious house? Well, we ought to speak highly of it to our children. If I badmouth the glorious house, the great house of God, I shouldn't be surprised if my children want nothing to do with that glorious house. We ought to speak

respectfully of this great house. That's what the apostle calls it, in a great house, this house over which Christ rules, is a kingly and glorious house.

Then in that house, he says, there are many kinds of vessels. There are vessels of gold and there are vessels of silver. Precious vessels and disposable vessels. That's the contrast that the text brings out. Some of those vessels, the vessels of gold and silver, those are the vessels unto honor, and on the other hand, the vessels of wood and clay are vessels unto dishonor. Some of the vessels are meant for honorable purposes. Think of the king drinking out of vessels of gold in Solomon's day. All his drinking vessels were made out of pure gold. But then there were also vessels designed for dishonorable things. You wouldn't make a vessel of gold to store the trash before it was taken out. There were vessels for honorable and vessels for dishonorable positions.

In other words, in the church there are some elect vessels destined for heaven, destined for that highest honor, and there reprobate vessels destined for hell. That's the same teaching given to us in Romans 9. God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens whomever he wants to harden. He has some vessels that he wants to save and others whom he does not want to save, vessels he goes over, these reprobate vessels whom he gives over to their sinful desires and whom he hardens in their sins. That's Romans 9:21, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" God is the potter in the church and he sets both kinds of vessels, some are destined for heaven and some are destined for hell. Some in the church are Jacobs and some are Esaus, and yet they are all part of God's plan to glorify himself. How exactly God brings honor to himself through the Esaus? Well, he uses them in the kingdom but they are all part of his plan.

So the Holy Spirit is telling us by this picture that the visible church has both kinds of vessels in it, all of them put there by the Master and, therefore, we ought not to be surprised, ought not to be surprised when with the wheat there are tares. That's the context also when you think of Hymenaeus and Philetus who led others astray. There are wheat and there are tares. There are fruitful trees and there are barren trees in the same orchard. In the same river, there are good fish and there are bad fish. Jesus tells us of that reality over and over again. On the judgment day, the wheat will be gathered into the storehouse and the chaff will be burnt. Five virgins were ready for the coming of the bridegroom and five virgins were not ready. The sheep on the judgment day are set on Christ's right hand, and the goats are set on his left hand. A twofold seed. Scripture always presents that picture of the church.

Don't be surprised by the likes of Hymenaeus and Philetus who lead others astray. We mustn't expect the visible church to be perfect. We come to the church, we look at the church at times, and we can be discouraged but the Holy Spirit says this is the picture. This is the church in every age. The church is not perfect. The church is like a freeway, all kinds of cars on the freeway. There are some in the fast lane and there are some in the slow lane. There are some limping along the shoulder, and some are broken down altogether. There are some getting off of the freeway and there are others getting on the freeway. And there are some going the wrong way down the freeway.

The question is: how should you and I respond to that reality? That's the picture that the Holy Spirit gives us in the text, there are gold vessels and there are silver vessels, but there are also wood and clay vessels. How should you and I respond to that reality? First, we ought to be careful that we are not seduced away from the truth by the likes of Hymenaeus and Philetus, those who are going in the wrong direction. Don't follow them but rather, the inspired apostle says, shun profane and vain babblings which lead to more ungodliness. They don't have a good result. And at the same time in this great house with all these different vessels, realize that not all vessels are vessels of gold. Realize that not everyone who disagrees with us is necessarily a hypocrite. It may be that they haven't had the same exposure to the truth that we have, or it may be that they are correct and we are wrong.

So we patiently deal with one another in the church, seeking to instruct one another, to open, if God be pleased, open the eyes of those who are straying; praying for those who are walking in error. That, and that's the context as well, verse 26, "that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

Deal with the church as it truly is, a great house with all kinds of vessels. The point is that different believers when we think of those vessels of honor, different believers are at different points in their pilgrimage toward heaven. To use the words of the text, there are some who are vessels of gold and some who are vessels of silver. That's the distinction that the Holy Spirit makes. When we look at the vessels of honor, there are some that are of gold and some of silver. That's not talking about levels of justification, as if some were more righteous than others in that sense. That's not what it's talking about. When God washes away our guilt with the blood of Christ, he doesn't wash some of his children more than others. He doesn't say, "You have 5% guilt remaining and you have 12% guilt remaining." No, he says to his people, "I see no iniquity in you. You have no guilt whatsoever, 100% guiltless." Or when we look at the other side of justification, when God imputes the righteousness of Christ into us, he doesn't give some a certain amount and others more of that righteousness when we're talking about justification. He says to his children, "You are 100% righteous."

The distinction between gold and silver does not have to do with our justification, it has to do with our sanctification. Why does the Holy Spirit say that some vessels in God's house are gold and others are silver? Because not all God's children are equally sanctified. What else could that distinction mean? It's not to do with justification, it must be to do with sanctification. Some, for example, have greater faith than others. When Jesus met the Canaanite woman, whose daughter was plagued by a demon, she came to Jesus pleading that her daughter would be healed and Jesus said to her, "I've only come for the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And she persisted, asking, begging Jesus to help her and then he says to her, "It's not fitting to take the bread and give the bread that's meant for the children and give it to the dogs." And she cries out, she agrees with him, "But the dogs still eat the crumbs that fall off the master's table." And then Jesus responds, "Oh, woman, great is thy faith."

There are some who have greater faith than others. Everyone in the church is at different levels of sanctification. That's the way God works. Not everyone has the same level of understanding of God's word. By God's grace, some have an easier time believing God's promises. Some have a greater understanding of spiritual truths, and some have a lesser understanding. Some struggle with laziness more than others. Some are better at encouraging others. Some have greater wisdom than others. Some are more generous with what God has given to them, willing to share in giving to the church. Some labor more diligently than others to increase the talents that God has given to them. And so Scripture speaks of those who are babes in the faith, others who are young men, and others who are seasoned veterans, not, beloved, so that we go and measure the differences, not so that we stack ourselves up next to others, that's not the point, but you know when you've met someone, when you've talked with someone, you walk away from talking with them and you say, "There is someone with a heart of gold." You go away from them, you walk away from them uplifted by the conversation. You see the fruits of God's grace working in his people.

And the simple truth is God gives greater measures of grace to some than he gives to others. Think of the worthy servants of David. David lists all these worthies and he lists there exploits, but not all of his worthies were equally strong. They didn't all accomplish the same feats. They all had a place, nevertheless, in his kingdom. And so it is in the church. God makes us all different. God gives greater gifts to one so that they can use their gifts. Then he gives other gifts to another one so that they may use their gifts. He makes us all different not so that we base our happiness on the degree of our holiness, but that we base and see and rejoice in the truth of our holiness. Not the degree. We mustn't go around saying, "But I have just a small beginning," and then we beat ourselves up wearing a constant frown because we aren't as holy as we ought to be. Then everybody would be walking around with a frown. Nor must we be jealous of others, thinking that they have greater gifts than I do.

But God makes us all different and we ought to rejoice, beloved, when we see God is working in us a work of grace; rejoice that the fruits of the Spirit are evident; rejoice that we have been called out of darkness into his marvelous light; rejoice that such a calling proves our election. If we can see the evidence of being called out of darkness, then we see, yes, we are God's elect. Rejoice that God has made us vessels of honor. Rejoice that God is showing mercy on us now and will show mercy on us on the judgment day.

In the church, there are vessels of gold and vessels of silver. I suppose Abraham and David, Moses, Paul, Stephen, Barnabas, would be vessels of gold, and weaker Christians would be vessels of silver. Not as precious, if you want to use the picture that the Holy Spirit uses. Not as sanctified, and yet still precious. I might not be a pillar in God's house but is it not a privilege yet to be a small brick in God's house? I might not be a golden candlestick but is it not still a privilege to be a broom in God's house? Is it not a privilege to be a doorkeeper in God's house?

In the church are vessels of gold and vessels of silver, those vessels of honor, and there are also, and the word in the original Greek is a contrasting word, but also, in contrast

there are also vessels of wood and of earth, vessels of wood and clay. These are the vessels of dishonor. We saw already the church always has those two kinds of vessels. The church always has the elect in her and the reprobate and there is a distinction also in the vessels of dishonor. They don't all manifest the same corruption. They are all totally depraved but they don't manifest the same corruption. Some sin against greater knowledge and they bring greater punishment upon themselves. Think of Jesus when he talked to Capernaum, he says, "Woe unto thee, Capernaum! If the works that had been done in thee," speaking to Capernaum, "if all these miracles that I did in your presence had been done in Sodom, they would have repented." And so Capernaum sinned horribly in rejecting Jesus Christ. He says to Capernaum that their judgment, that the judgment of Sodom rather, would be more tolerable than their judgment on the judgment day.

There are degrees of punishment because there are degrees of corruption. There are some like Hymenaeus and Philetus who preach heresy, who work schism in the church, and there are others in the church who simply make a false profession, pretending to be Christians for their own selfish reasons. Some are more profane than others but both are vessels of dishonor.

So what kind of vessel, beloved, are you and what kind of vessel am I? What kind of vessel do you want to be? In your heart of hearts do you say, "Oh, that I might be a vessel of honor! If I could even just be a vessel of silver. I don't need to be a vessel of gold. But oh, that I could be a vessel of honor in God's church!" Because in the church of Jesus Christ there are not only precious vessels of gold or silver, there are also profane vessels of wood and clay.

That brings us, beloved, to consider how we can know. How can we know what kind of vessel are we? What kind of vessel, am I a vessel of gold or silver? Am I a vessel of wood or clay? And the answer to that is given in verse 21, if you are a purged vessel, then it must be that you are a vessel of honor. "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour." The foundation of God's saving work is never in question. God knows who are his. He knows if he knows a person in love before the foundation of the world, he will predestinate them to the glories of heaven. If he has predestinated them, he will call them out of darkness. He will illuminate their minds and give them the truth. If he calls them out of darkness, he will justify them and everyone whom he justifies, he will glorify.

All of that is absolutely certain but the question is: how can I be certain and how can you be certain that you are one of those elect vessels of honor destined for the glory of heaven? How can we be certain? And that's the answer of verse 21, "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour." So we ask ourselves today not this, not this question: have I done enough to earn God's favor? That's not the question we ask. We don't say, "Have I purged myself enough so that God will accept me and make me a vessel of honor?" That's not the question but this question: can I see evidence of God's grace working in me that shows me Christ died for me? Am I purging myself?

We purge ourselves when by God's grace we put away the defiling company of men like Hymenaeus and Philetus; when we say, "I don't want to be by Hymenaeus and Philetus." We purge ourselves when by God's grace we avoid their polluting influences. We purge ourselves when by God's grace we turn aside from heresy. We purge ourselves when by God's grace we turn aside from immoral practices. The things we are to purge ourselves from are all those things that fill the vessels of dishonor, all those things that hypocrites and open unbelievers are filled with. We want to purge ourselves from those.

Are you purging yourself, beloved? I ask myself the same question. Are you putting off the old man daily? 1 Corinthians 5:7 has the same idea when it says, "Purge out." That's the same word in our text, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." Do you want to manifest yourself as a vessel of honor, a vessel purchased by Jesus Christ by his sacrifice on the cross? "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour." That is not saying purge yourself and then you will become a vessel of honor, but the idea is when you purge yourself, you will manifest yourself as a vessel of honor. Vessels of honor are those who purge themselves and the battle to purge yourself is the evidence that you are a vessel unto honor.

The encouragement, beloved, for all of us as we look at ourselves and say, "But I have such stains yet. I sin against God daily. I fall so far short"; the encouragement for the child of God who sees our sins and our sinfulness is not that we need to see perfection in order to be encouraged, then we would never be encouraged. It's not that we have to reach a certain level before we can be encouraged, but we need to see a battle to put away the sins that so easily beset us. And when we fail to purge ourselves from dead works, we go to Jesus Christ for purging. In other words, it's a persevering in the purging process. We go to the fountain of the cross, to the blood of the cross, and we look to Christ to purge us of our guilt, to wash away the guilt that troubles our consciences. And then we go to the cross and to the strength of Christ to give us grace so that we would continue in the battle because if he died for us, he's not about to abandon us. He's not about to abandon us when he sees that we have failed again, because we are not perfectly clean. But he knows our frame and he remembers we are dust. The question that we ask ourselves is: are we purging, not are we fully and perfectly purged, but are we purging by God's grace? Are we fleeing from sin and seeking after righteousness?

If we are vessels of honor saved by grace, then we will purge ourselves, giving evidence that we are elect children of God, and then we will also be useful vessels in Christ's kingdom. That's the message of the text. "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." It's not, beloved, that we have made ourselves useful for the Master by sanctifying ourselves. That comes out in the original. But we are sanctified, that is, God sanctifies us. It's God's work. So when God builds upon his immovable sure foundation, when he regenerates his elect people by the Spirit of Christ, then he also sanctifies us. He makes it manifest by that process of sanctification that we are vessels of honor. He sets us apart from the filth of the world and devotes us to his own service. He weakens the principle of corruption that ever clings to us and he strengthens us by his infused grace

and by that he makes us useful in his kingdom so that now we seek his glory, now we seek one another's good. He makes us fit for the master's use, meet for the master's use.

Are you a useful vessel in Christ's kingdom? Is Christ using you to build up this congregation? Is Christ using you to encourage other members? Is he using you to draw others closer to Christ? Is he using your words for good? What a privilege to be used by God, to be used by the Master. What a privilege. We ought to give thanks that God, even if we are used in the smallest way, what a privilege that God would make us vessels of honor. And although the Master will use both vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor for his purposes, he will, only the vessels of honor will be useful in a good way. I didn't say that quite right. God uses both vessels and he will use them for the good of the church, but only the vessels of honor will be prepared unto every good work. Not just prepared for one work but the text says "prepared unto every good work."

When Jesus Christ sanctifies us, he takes his elect, he regenerates us and he sanctifies us, when he sanctifies us, he will make us fit to pray to him. He will make us fit to hear his preached word. He will make us fit to read and meditate upon his word. He will fit us to deny ourselves, to afflict our souls. He will fit us to suffer for his sake. He will make us fit to apply ourselves to obey his commandments because his foundation is sure. When he begins to build on that foundation, it will not be undermined so that he will cause us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Whom he makes vessels of honor, he makes useful, prepared unto every good work.

Do you see your usefulness in the church of Jesus Christ? Do you love God's word and love his children? Do you desire the strength to do his will? Do you desire to be useful? Do you seek to walk in his commandments? In short, do you see the evidence that God has made you vessels of honor in his house?

The point of the text is not to encourage us to make ourselves vessels of honor but to manifest that we are vessels of honor. God is gracious and he gives his Holy Spirit to those who ask him for the Spirit and for his grace, and he gives his grace and Holy Spirit who are thankful. Are we praying for his grace? Are we praying that he would make us vessels of honor, useful in God's house? Then be thankful. Be thankful that God has begun that work. Don't be discouraged but be thankful that God has begun the work and then press on.

That was the message for Timothy as he was discouraged in the church of Ephesus. The apostle tells him that's the way it is in the church but press on and seek to be used by the Master for his honor and glory. God grant to us that we might be vessels of honor in his kingdom. Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee that thou hast put us in this congregation and we pray, O Lord, that thou wouldst make us, each of us, useful for the sake of the body and for the glory of thy great and holy name. Grant, O Lord, that we may be prepared unto every good work. Grant that we may purge ourselves by thy grace that we

may be fit to be used by thee. Thou knowest how far we fall short, yet continue with us, we pray, even for thy name's sake. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.