

Vessels of Honour in God's House

By Rev. John Marcus

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Bible Text: 2 Timothy 2:20-21
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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 taken again from 2 Timothy 2. Our text is found in the last five verses, verses 22-26. 2 Timothy 2, beginning at verse 1.

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 and inspired word. May God bless that word to our hearts.

The text that we consider this afternoon is 2 Timothy 2:22-26. I read those again.

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.

Beloved congregation, in our Lord Jesus Christ as I meditated on this text this week, there are a number of thoughts that are found in the text but the unifying theme comes down to the service of the servant of the Lord, and that servant, the text says, must not strive. A church without strife is like a marriage without struggles, it doesn't exist. As long as marriages are made up of two sinners, there will always be struggles of various degrees in our marriages, and as long as members in the church are sinners, there will also be strife.

Timothy faced strife in the church in Ephesus. If you read the letter to the Ephesians, you find Timothy exhorting the congregation to, as this is the theme of our family visitation as well, Paul exhorts Timothy to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. He tells them that because, as all churches, there was strife also in Ephesus. And then we find similar exhortations that wouldn't take much to look at other epistles and find the same sort of exhortation in Galatians and other ones as well, Romans. So it shouldn't surprise us, beloved, that there is strife in the church but the question is, and that's what our text addresses, the question is: how will we deal with strife? Will we react as servants of the Lord to strife, or will we react as those who have been taken captive by the devil?

This epistle, 2 Timothy, was written to urge Timothy to be faithful in his calling and so the epistle certainly applies to ministers of the Gospel. It applies also to elders and deacons. But when the inspired apostle speaks of servants of the Lord, we ought to

understand that all of us are servants of the Lord. All of us have an office. We are all in the office, those who are God's children, are in the office of all believer, men and women, young and old, and if Jesus purchased us with his precious blood poured out on the cross, if he is our Lord, then we are his servants.

How would the Master have his servants react to strife? God's word to you and me today, this afternoon, concerns the service of a servant of the Lord, especially as he deals with strife. If you look through those verses, you find a number of references that point to strife so let's consider the text under that theme: the service of a servant of the Lord. Let's note his character; secondly, the activity of that servant; and lastly, the reason that he acts in that way.

The service of a servant of the Lord. Beloved, if we want to be faithful servants in Christ's kingdom, we need to see ourselves as servants. If we don't see ourselves as servants, then we will have the wrong motivation for service. It happens all the time that we forget we are servants of the Lord, and if we are not the servants of the Lord, the default of our old man is to be a servant of sin. If we are not servants of the Lord, the default will be to serve ourselves.

Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' 12 disciples, chosen by hand, followed Jesus throughout his whole ministry. He went, Judas did, he went preaching about the kingdom of heaven. He did that with the 70 disciples that went out preaching. Seemingly, he gave up everything to follow Jesus and as good as his service looked while he was with Jesus, as pious as he might have portrayed himself, even decrying the waste of precious ointment that was poured on Jesus, "this ointment might have been sold and the money could have been given to the poor," as pious as Judas made himself sound, he wasn't a servant of the Lord. He never was a servant of the Lord. He served himself. Such was his selfishness that he was willing to sell the Lord Jesus Christ for 30 pieces of silver.

But, beloved, that happens in the church too. It happened with Jesus but it happens in the church world as well. We can make ourselves look ever so pious. We can come to church twice on the Lord's Day, we can meet the budget with our offerings, we can join the school society, we can come to Bible studies, but if we're not serving the Lord Jesus, the only other option is we're serving ourselves. If we're not willing to bow to his will, then we are following our will and whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

God would have us see ourselves as servants of the Lord; see ourselves as those who have been purchased by his precious sacrifice, paying the penalty for all of our sins; see ourselves as his precious possession. Know that he owns us. That's the idea of the word "Lord," the title that is given to Jesus Christ. He is our Lord. He owns us because he bought us and as he bought us with his precious blood and as he has delivered us from the dominion of sin and made us his servants, now he also preserves us in the way so that no one can snatch us out of his hand. That's our confession. We belong body and soul to our faithful Savior. We belong. He is our Lord. That's the idea, and when we know that, beloved, that makes all the difference in the way that we live.

I don't say there's no struggle. A part of each one of us, a part of me still wants to serve myself. The Lord tells me his will and then my battle against the old man, there is part of me that doesn't want to do his will, and yet the new man implanted by God's grace wants to do his will; the new man wants to be subject to the Lord. By God's grace working in us, we have a beginning of the life of a servant of the Lord and in our heart of hearts, though we often fail, there is that new man that wants to be subject to his will.

Can you say that about yourself, beloved? Can I say that about myself, "I am a servant of the Lord"? Because when we see that about ourselves, then we will ask the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? What wilt thou have me to do?" To love my wife sacrificially. "What wilt thou have me to do as regards submitting to my husband?" the wives will ask. "Lord, how wilt thou have me to speak to my son or my daughter when they make an honest mistake? Lord, how wilt thou have me discipline my children? How wilt thou have me apply myself at work? Lord, how wilt thou have me use my money? How wilt thou have me treat my own body? How wilt thou have me respond to a brother or a sister who has offended me?" When I ask the question, now I put myself in the frame of mind, I am a servant of the Lord. I want to know what his will is for me.

Then when we fail, because we often fail, we will call upon the same Lord, the same Lord who bought us with his precious blood; the same Lord who paid for our sins. We will call upon him and we will beg of him, knowing that he will cover our sins. We will ask him to remove the guilt of our sins by pouring out again in our consciences, his precious blood and we will ask him, the same Lord who paid the ransom for our sins, we will ask him also to rule in us, to make us willing, to make us able to serve him.

Augustine is well-known for his quote, "Lord, ask what thou wilt and give what that askest. Ask me to do whatever you want to, ask me to do but also give me the ability that I may do what thou dost call me to do for I am weak." That's the idea. Wonderful Lord who owns us, who bought us, is not going to abandon us. He remains faithful so that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We are servants of the Lord who bought us, who owns us, who loves us. How fortunate for us to see that in every part of our lives. We are servants of the Lord. Fundamentally when we say that, and that's what the apostle implies about Timothy and also about all of us in verse 24, the servant of the Lord, when he uses that title fundamentally to say, "I am the servant of the Lord," is to leave off my will and to follow after his will. When my will and his will are at opposites, the servant of the Lord, the faithful servant of the Lord will say, "I cannot follow that will. I want to follow his will."

That's the character of the servant of the Lord or to use the words of our text in verse 22, the servant of the Lord will flee youthful lusts and will follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace. Flee youthful lusts. Youthful lusts are those strong desires that characterize us in our youth, not that only young people have youthful lusts, but these lusts do assert themselves more turbulently, you could say, in youth.

But what desires is the apostle talking about? What lusts? Well, the lust for pleasure in the first place, craving to satisfy the physical appetites that control us at times. Uncontrolled sexual desire would be a lust for pleasure. In that lust for pleasure, we say to ourselves, "I can do whatever I want with my body. I belong to myself." But if we follow the Lord's will, then we say, "No, my body belongs to the Lord." 1 Corinthians 6:20 stresses that very truth, "ye are bought with a price." Jesus Christ bought us with his blood. "Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God with your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Your body and your soul are God's. The lust for pleasure.

Youthful lust includes also a lust for power, wanting to be number 1. We fuel this lust by pride and by pride cometh contention. Lusting for power, we say, "My way or the highway." That kind of lust leads to contention. It leads to envy, to bitterness, to evil speaking and to strife, something Timothy was dealing with in the church of Ephesus. James speaks of that lust which leads to strife. James 4:1 he says, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" When we flee the lust for power, then we say, "I'm not number 1. My will is not the will that I must follow. The Lord is first." He rules.

And then lastly, youthful lusts, those lusts we must flee, includes the lust for possessions, yearning for things and for earthly glory, the earthly glory that goes with those things. The lust for possessions leads astray those, even God's children, leads us astray from seeking after heavenly treasure and so we find in 1 Timothy 6:9, "they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." When we flee from the lusts of possessions, we will say to ourselves, "Not material things are the things that will bring me happiness, but godliness is great gain. That's the gain I desire, godliness."

Flee youthful lusts. Flee the lust for pleasure, the lust for power and the lust for possessions because they all stand in the way of our faithful service to the Lord. No doubt Timothy struggled with all of them. Do you want to be a faithful servant in the kingdom of Christ? Do you want to be a faithful servant in the church and in your home and in the workplace? Flee, that is, be fleeing on an ongoing and continual basis. This is an ongoing battle the whole of our lives. Be fleeing youthful lusts. There is never going to be a day that I don't have to worry about youthful lusts; until the day I die, I will have youthful lusts. Be fleeing the lust for pleasure that makes you choose your pleasure before God's pleasure. Be fleeing the lust for power that is fueled by pride. Be fleeing the lust for possessions that distract us from what is truly important.

On the other hand, the servant of the Lord must not simply flee, he also will follow the Lord's will. He doesn't just flee his own will and put himself in a vacuum in neutral, but he follows the Lord's will. He follows after righteousness, faith, charity and peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Paul exhorts Timothy in the same imperative form, present imperative, the idea of ongoing following, he says, "Be following after these things. Keep on following these things because the battle will never be over until God takes us to glory."

In the first place, the servant of the Lord will follow righteousness. There is a sense in which we will, as the servants of the Lord, ever hunger after the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. We want that perfect righteousness to be imputed to our account so that God sees us as perfectly righteous. Then on the basis of that righteousness, he looks upon us with favor but here the emphasis is not that righteousness so much as the righteousness that is a right way of living and, indeed, that righteousness, the right way of living, grows out of the righteousness that is imputed to us. When we are justified, thankfulness responds to that justification, desiring to walk in righteousness. If we are servants of the Lord who belong to the Lord, the Righteous One, we will want also to walk in righteousness. You will want to do that which is right in all of our stations and callings in the church, in our marriages, in our families, in our workplace, wherever God places us.

We come back to that question: what shall I do? And the question what shall I do when we act as faithful servants of the Lord, the question what shall I do is answered not by whatever feels good. What shall I do is not answered by whatever gives me honor. It's not answered by whatever makes me richer or whatever works for me. What shall I do is answered by what will the Lord have me do? And for that we turn to his word. We read the Scriptures. We look for principles in his word. How would God have me to respond in this particular situation even though that particular situation might not be found in Scripture. Scripture doesn't tell us how to use the internet but it gives us the principles. What will the Lord have me do?

A servant of the Lord will follow after righteousness, seeking to walk in conformity to God's holy law. A servant of the Lord in the second place, will follow after faith. Faith is that heartfelt trust that looks to Jesus Christ as the only Savior. Faith sees the preciousness of the blood that covers over all of our guilt. Faith embraces the righteousness of Christ imputed to us as the only righteousness that will stand on the judgment day. Faith believes that we belong to the Lord, not because we loved him but because he loved us.

Faith believes that our Lord Jesus Christ will never leave us nor forsake us and, therefore, faith perseveres. When faith, when the child of God in faith faces difficulties in his life, he doesn't throw away all the promises of God and say, "What's the use?" Faith perseveres and never gives up on Christ.

How do I follow after faith? Well, by holding in the first place, holding these truths of the Gospel, cherishing them as someone might cherish their gold. A person with a box of gold might put his hand in the box and take those coins up into his hand and run them through his fingers and let them fall and hear the sound of them falling because he cherishes that kind of treasure, but if we cherish the treasure of salvation, we will think of it often. As a precious jewel, a pearl of great price, we will, as it were, take it in our hands and look at it from every possible perspective knowing that it is worth staking our lives on.

Following after faith is not just building up head knowledge. Following after faith is rejoicing day by day in the truths that God revealed in his word and how they apply to

our lives. Then, secondly, following after faith is protecting those truths. When they are attacked by the devil, we don't just say, "Well, as long as that error is out there with that person, I don't have to worry about it because I believe the right way." No, to follow after faith is to defend the truth and to seek to overcome error through the teaching of the truth. Protect those truths as they are attacked by the enemy, even if that means persecution.

Then in the third place, following after faith is to do as the heroes of faith did in Hebrews 11: they followed after faith. By faith, they served God faithfully because they believed the promises of God. Follow after faith.

The servant of God, then in the third place, will follow after charity, and the other word for that is "love." He will follow after love. Love is a giving of ourselves, giving of ourselves to the Lord, giving of ourselves in the church, giving of ourselves wherever God calls us to give of ourselves. I can speak all kinds of words but if I have not love, I am like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. I might understand doctrine inside and out, but if I do not have love, I am nothing. I might give money to the poor, I might even give my body to be burned, the apostle says, but if it's not out of love, it profits me nothing.

Love is not just an attitude, then, but love gives. 1 Corinthians 13 goes on, charity, that is love, suffereth long and is kind, and as we read through these, we can ask ourselves: am I pursuing love? "Charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Does that describe our love?

A servant of the Lord will follow after love and then lastly, a servant of the Lord will follow after peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Peace, you understand, is not just an absence of war, peace in a marriage is not when a husband and wife have stopped arguing with each other, peace is more than just quiet, peace is fellowship and friendship. Peace is harmony. God has brought us to peace with himself through the blood of the cross and now if we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, does it not make sense that we also in the body of Christ ought to have peace amongst ourselves?

A servant of God will follow after peace with God's people, those who worship him out of a pure heart. We will flee youthful lusts and we will follow after righteousness, faith, love and peace. That's the character of the servant of God. Does that describe you and me, is the question? If you and I, beloved, are servants of the Lord and we recognize, of course, that we fall short, but there also will be certain public activities that are evident in our lives. That comes out in the text what the servant of the Lord does in his personal life, he flees those youthful lusts and he follows righteousness, faith, charity and peace, and I realize there is overlap too, there are some public parts of those things that he follows, but also these activities will be evident in the servant of the Lord.

First, the text tells us what the servant does not do publicly. The servant of the Lord must not strive. He mustn't engage in heated disputes, in fighting, in quarreling with others.

How easily we do that in our families, in the church, questions that have no significance other than proving, "I am right and he is wrong." So somebody says, "This happened on Friday." And the other one says, "No, it happened on Thursday." "No, it was Friday." And they go on and on. Does it really matter? There might be a time when it really matters and then if it matters, yes, dispute it. If it matters. We can argue so easily over insignificant things. The truths are important but sometimes instead of arguing about the truth, we argue about definitions of terms. So one defines this term this way and another one defines it that way, and we can go back and forth, "Well, I think it should be this way. Well, I think it should be that way." But is it not more important to discuss the truth behind the terms instead of being sidetracked?

So the apostle tells Timothy but foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. Back then they had questions in the church about angels and generations of angels and all sorts of questions that were not based on Scripture. We might have questions today like did the Apostle Paul write the book of Hebrews. I believe he did, but Scripture doesn't say. The Apostle Paul doesn't say at the beginning of the book of Hebrews, "Paul, the apostle, to the Hebrews." He doesn't say that and if Scripture wanted us to know who wrote, for example, the book of Hebrews, he would have told us. Avoid, that is, refuse to get into the discussion. Avoid foolish and unlearned questions. Refuse to argue about them.

A servant of the Lord must not strive, instead, he will be this way, he will be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves." He will be gentle with those who have troubled minds and wounded consciences. He will supply them with the precious promises of the Gospel. He will seek to restore those who are wandering and he will do it in a spirit of meekness. But that gentleness, beloved, doesn't just apply to those who are weak, it also applies to those who oppose the truth and, therefore, who also oppose themselves. From a human perspective, and we'll talk about that more in a moment, mild and kind instruction will go a lot further than the harsh instruction.

He will be gentle, in the second place this servant of the Lord will be apt to teach. He should be willing to teach both the ignorant and the obstinate. He will use the abilities that God has given him to teach. And of course, the Holy Spirit knows, beloved, when we seek to teach others. He knows that we are likely to be discouraged. He knows we are likely to throw our hands up and say, "What's the use? I talked to him about it once. He still doesn't get it."

He knows. The Holy Spirit knows we are likely to be discouraged so he says the servant of the Lord must be patient. Patient. That applies to parents too. It seems that we tell our children hundreds of times, "Do this. Do this." And we think to ourselves, "Will it never sink in?" But beloved, we are all that way. It takes a long time, at least usually, a long time for things to sink in. Be patient. Be willing even to bear evil without resentment. Be patient whether a minister or elder or parent or brother or sister. Be patient.

A servant of the Lord ought to be patient and that's the way God would have us give instruction to those who are ignorant and to those also who are obstinate. A servant of the Lord ought to give instruction with an attitude of meekness. That's the service of the servant of the Lord. He wants God's people to grow in understanding. He wants them to acknowledge the truth, not so that he wins the argument, but so that God would be glorified as the truth is confessed. The servant of the Lord is all about bringing the truth to light.

Why must the servant of the Lord be meek in his instruction? Now I want to say a little bit more about that. The reason for that service of the servant of the Lord, you must be meek because that approach, we said, will go a lot further in a proper discussion. It's true God is able to give instruction that is given in pride. There may be a proud instructor, God is able to use his words. It's true God is able to use harsh words that crush our opponents or that crush our children. God is able to use those. God is able to use a lot of things. He's able to use the words of a donkey as well as he did with Balaam, but the Holy Spirit tells us to use meekness. Why does he do that? Because harsh words usually will put up barriers. Harsh words will polarize; instead of bringing people together, they will cause them to divide.

Even Jesus when you think about how he addressed his disciples, he didn't use harsh words for his disciples. He did speak to them plainly. He did say to them, "Oh, ye of little faith." He did say to them on another occasion, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." But he didn't use harshness and I could be corrected on that if you find an example. The harshness that Jesus used, however, was for those who clearly rejected him and his message. There was no question whatsoever, they had rejected Jesus and then he said, "Woe unto you, ye scribes and Pharisees! Woe unto you, Bethsaida," and so on.

Not only that, when the servant of the Lord uses even the slightest degree of harshness, what does the devil do with that? He can take that little spark and cause that to turn into a huge flame, even a forest fire from that little spark. People can take offense and we do that too. We take offense where no offense was given. How much more will they take offense when we give offense?

The servant of the Lord must use meekness if he wants to be useful in instructing those who err. The goal must be to win over those who oppose themselves. They are called that, verse 25, "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves," they are called that because they oppose the truth, and as they oppose the truth, they actually are hurting themselves. When they have the wrong position, they are hurting themselves and so the goal of the servant of the Lord is to instruct them for their own good.

A servant of the Lord should have pity on those who walk in error and that's the emphasis of the text as well. The desire of the servant of the Lord ought to be to recover them. If perchance or "if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." That's the one side, they acknowledge the truth, but to acknowledge the truth, they need to be delivered from the snare of the devil, "And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." God may, he

doesn't always, but God may and that's the prayer of the servant of God, that God would, in fact, use our instruction to deliver those who have been taken captive by the devil according to his will.

We ought to take that seriously, the snare of the devil. The devil entraps us. He presents part truth and then he adds his error and he entraps people that way. He entraps God's people that way and he never rests. The devil always goes about seeking whom he may devour. He's always seeking to sow division and strife. He has lured some into traps and they cannot extract themselves, but by the grace of God. What a privilege, though, the servant of the Lord to be used by him to deliver some from the devil's hostile control over them.

A servant of the Lord. The question as we look at these verses and how they all deal with strife in one way or the other, the question is, beloved: how will you, and how will I, deal with strife? Will you be, and will I be a servant of the Lord? Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, thou knowest how weak we are. Thou knowest how thou hast called us out of darkness, that thou hast bought us with the precious blood of thine only begotten Son, and yet thou knowest how often we have not served thee faithfully; we have not acted like servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we pray that thou forgive us and grant us thy grace that we may serve thee; that we may ask the question: what will the Lord have us do? And then give us, O Lord, the grace that we may follow after that way. We ask these things not because we are worthy, we ask them for Jesus' sake and we pray in his name. Amen.