

Comfort and a Challenge

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[0:00] 2 Timothy 2, verse 14. Through the end of the chapter. Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words.

It is of no value and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved. A workman who does not need to be ashamed.

Who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter. Because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus. Who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place.

And they destroy the faith of some. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm. Sealed with this inscription. The Lord knows those who are his.

[1:00] And everyone who confesses the name of the Lord. Must turn away from wickedness. In a large house, there are articles.

Not only of gold and silver. But also of wood and clay. Some are for noble purposes. And some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter.

He will be an instrument for noble purposes. Made holy. Useful to the master. And prepared to do any good work. Flee the evil desires of youth.

And pursue righteousness. Faith. Love. And peace. Along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments.

Because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel. Instead, he must be kind to everyone. Able to teach. Not resentful.

[1:57] Those who oppose him, he must gently instruct. In the hope that God will grant them repentance. Leading them to a knowledge of the truth. And that they will come to their senses.

And escape from the trap of the devil. Who has taken them captive. To do his will. Well, we live in a fallen world.

A world where everything that we see is affected by sin. And so nothing that we are involved in will ever be perfect. Or without trouble.

This side of heaven. From our families. To our neighborhoods. To our schools. To our places of employment. The teams that we play on. To our church.

All of it is affected by sin. All of those things involve sinners. Who act according to their sinful nature. And when we sin, things don't go well.

[2:56] To put it mildly. So since we live in this fallen world every day. Everything that we're a part of. Affected by sin. What are we to do?

As God's children, we've received a high calling. We're not to live according to that sinful nature.

Any longer. Rather, we're to produce the fruit of the spirit. We're to be seeking to put to death.

Those old ways of the past. But even right here in the church. Where there should be people.

Committed to living for Christ. Honoring him. And all that they say and do. Even here in the church.

There are going to be problems. There is remaining indwelling sin. There are false professors at times in the church. Who claim to be Christians. But are not. Much of the New Testament is letters written to churches with problems.

And the letters had to be written to address those problems. You might think. We're here in the church. Perhaps we'll escape the problems that are so prevalent in the world because of sin.

[3:57] But no. They find their way into the church as well. And that was the case in Ephesus where Timothy was. There were fights. There were quarrels about words. There was false teaching.

There was godless chatter. And tonight as we consider these things again as we did last week. We want to see that there's comfort. Even though there's trouble in the church. And there's a challenge

for those who are in the church.

Comfort and a challenge. But last time we saw that there were troublemakers. And there were peacemakers. You remember. There were those people that were stirring up these problems. Arguing about words. Endless chatter.

Stupid arguments. That caused them to turn away from the truth. They even overturned the faith of some. They were progressing in ungodliness. But there were others in the church like Timothy. Who were not to be part of the problem. But rather part of the solution. Peacemakers. Those who are pursuing a life that's pleasing to Christ. Seeking to produce that fruit of the Spirit. Love and joy and patience.

[4:57] And peace in the church. They needed to be reminded. To be encouraged. There are people who remind others of the truth.

They give warnings when needed. They present themselves approved before God. Unashamed. They stay in the straight path of truth. They're gentle. They're kind. And so in the church you've got people that are trying to make trouble.

And you've got people that are hopefully trying to make peace. And the latter should be the larger group. But even the best efforts at being part of the solution by peacemaking still leave problems. So should Timothy give up? Should he quit? Should he despair? Should we give up when we see trouble? And the church not at all. Paul anticipates that potential from a Timothy who's already discouraged.

God anticipates it for us. And so he gives us a word of comfort and a word of challenge. God's foundation stands firm. His church isn't going anywhere. But there's a challenge.

[5:55] You who name the name of the Lord, turn away from wickedness. Flee youthful desires and pursue that which is good. So we start with a comfort tonight. Even though there's troublemakers that wreak havoc in the church, we find in verse 19, notice it again with me.

Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm. Sealed with this inscription, the Lord knows who are His. And everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness. When the psalmist in Psalm 46 writes, he puts it this way. Therefore, we will not fear. Though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though the waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the most high dwells. God is within her. She will not fall. God's church will stand.

There's trouble. It comes from attacks from outside from the world. Tonight, we're thinking about attacks that arise right within the church. But the church will stand. The faith of some has been overthrown, but you can't overthrow God.

[7:03] You can't overthrow His church. The effects of troublemakers can be devastating, but don't be afraid. The firm foundation remains.

And what a remarkable contrast we've got here. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm. What we've seen so far is not stable. It's instability. We've seen wishy-washiness.

There's people saying this and people saying that. And it looks as though it's a very unstable picture, but then, no, no, there's comfort. God's foundation stands firm. It's not going anywhere. And the foundation is the church, which he calls the pillar and foundation of the truth back in 1 Timothy 3.15. And so even with trouble coming from inside, the church stands firm.

Not even hell itself. Satan and all his schemes can tear down the church. They can try. They can seek to overthrow it. They can infect it from within, but they can't overthrow it.

[8:03] And that should be a comfort to us. We're part of the one thing that God has promised to preserve to the end of the age. His church. The truth is not going anywhere.

Even when the truth is under attack, it doesn't change. It remains the same. It stands firm. Just like today. We've had all sorts of weather today. It was dark and stormy and cloudy.

And even though it was dark and cloudy and there were storms, the sun was still shining. You couldn't see it. But it was still there. And even though the truth may be under attack, like the sun was under attack from the clouds, it's still there.

It's still shining. Other times, it'll shine clearly, like the sun did this afternoon after that line of storms went down. There was sunshine for a moment. This truth, whether we can see it, whether it's under attack or not, is still there.

It's not going anywhere. And when a storm comes, you want to be in a shelter that can't be moved. You want to be somewhere with a firm foundation. When the wind blows like it's blowing right now, you want to be in a sturdy structure.

[9:03] When a tornado comes, you want to be in the basement. And in this ever-changing, shifting world, when arguments and false teachings arrive in the church, the best place you can be is in the one institution God has promised to preserve to the very end of the age.

The church. And when I say the church, I'm talking about something a lot bigger than this building. Something a lot bigger than the people in this building. Not just Grace Fellowship Church. Paul's talking about the universal church. All of God's church from the beginning of time to the end of time. Not just in Bremen, but all places around the world. The church is not going anywhere. Local churches, as we heard this morning, may come and go.

The church in Ephesus eventually died. It was gone. And one day Grace Fellowship Church could be gone. Don't make any mistake about that should we lose our grip on the truth.

But God's church as a whole, the universal church, will never fail. It will always be here. Until the end of the world. It stands firm. It has a firm foundation.

[10:06] And on that foundation, there's a seal with an inscription on it. And the first part of that inscription is, The Lord knows those who are His. The Lord knows those who are His.

God knows His own children and He won't allow them to be lost. And that's a comfort. There's things going on here in Ephesus. There's people coming up in the church that may be false professors.

They may have looked like the real thing, but they're not. They were deceived themselves or they intentionally sought to deceive the church. And Timothy may not know who they are, what the difference is, but God knows.

God knows the people who are His. And Paul is referring back to Numbers 16. And I want us to turn there. Keep your place in 2 Timothy 2, but turn back in the Old Testament to Numbers 16.

And Paul's going to illustrate for us what he's talking about. Yes, there's trouble. There's troublemakers among God's people. But God knows who are truly His.

[11:07] And He won't allow them to be lost. And Paul's going back to the account of Korah and Dathan and Abiram in Numbers 16. These three men were wicked men, a lot like the ones that Timothy was dealing with.

They were stirring up trouble in Israel. They were creating problems. They were starting arguments. They were spreading some false teaching. Notice it with me just in the first three verses of Numbers 16.

Korah, the son of Ishar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and Ahan, son of Peleth, became insolent and rose up against Moses. With them were 250 Israelite men, well-known community leaders who had been appointed members of the council. They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, You have gone too far.

The whole community is holy. Every one of them. And the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly? So they come challenging the authority of Moses and Aaron.

[12:05] And what they say has an element of truth. The Lord is with all of His people. They are holy as a people. And so they twist that and they say, Why should you elevate yourselves, Moses and Aaron?

Well, Moses and Aaron didn't elevate themselves. God put them there. But these men were rebelling. Sort of like what's going on in Ephesus. What could go on in any church? People start to sow seeds of doubt in the minds of the people.

They attack their leaders without any cause. There's trouble coming. But God knows who are His. And so notice verses 4-7. And listen for the quote from Paul.

The Lord knows who are His. Here it's the Lord will show who are His. Verse 4. When Moses heard this, he fell face down. Then he said to Korah and all his followers, In the morning the Lord will show who belongs to him.

And who is holy. And he will have that person come near him. The man he chooses, he will cause to come near him. You, Korah, and all your followers are to do this. Take censers and tomorrow put fire and incense in them before the Lord.

[13:04] The man the Lord chooses will be the one who is holy. You Levites have gone too far. See, they accuse Moses of going too far. And he flips it on its head.

He said, you're the ones that have gone too far. And we'll see about it tomorrow. You come with your fire and your pants. And we'll see who are the Lord's and who are not. The Lord is going to show.

He's going to demonstrate who His people are. So there's some back and forth that goes on. Moses talking to God and so on. But come down with me to verse 23. See what happens.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Say to the assembly, Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Moses got up and went to Dathan and Abiram.

And the elders of Israel followed him. He warned the assembly, Move back from the tents of these wicked men. Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins.

[14:01] So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing with their wives, children, and little ones at the entrances to their tents.

Then Moses said, This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things, and that it was not my idea. If these men die a natural death and experience only what happens to men, then the Lord has not sent me.

But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt.

As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them with their households, and all Korah's men, and all their possessions. They went down alive into the grave with everything they owned.

The earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community. At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, The earth is going to swallow us too.

[15:03] And fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense. So there's this great demonstration that the Lord knows who are His.

And those who are not, who claim to be His, but who are not, He destroys. The earth opens, and they're consumed. Fire consumes the other 250.

You say, I thought this was supposed to be a comforting part of the message. You said, There's a great comfort for us in the church here. And this talks about the earth opening up and swallowing people. The comforting thing is that only those ones who were guilty were swallowed.

They were swallowed with their families, but it appears their families had every opportunity to get away from those tents too, and they did not. The Lord knows who are His. He will preserve them. He will keep them. He will guard them to the end. And even when we find troublemakers in the church, we don't have to be afraid, because God is still on the throne. He knows who are His.

[16:06] He'll preserve them, and He will deal with the troublemakers. And that's a great comfort for the minister, for Timothy. When there are problems in the church, it weighs on the pastor. If what was going on in Ephesus was going on here, let me tell you that you would have three burdened pastors if there was bickering, and fighting, and quarreling, and godless chatter, and stupid arguments.

That weighs. But Paul, and Paul speaks of that pressure. His concern for the church is that's real, but so is God's promise that He knows His own. And so one commentator says, As sad as the episode of Korah's rebellion was, it did not devastate the congregation of Israel.

And false teaching will not devastate the church. The truth will stand. God's church will stand, even though it comes under attack. Some wicked individuals may be exposed and brought down, but the church will remain.

God knows who are His. They know Him. They know His voice. They respond to it. John 10, I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one shall snatch them out of My hand.

If He knows them, He'll preserve them to the end. And if God knows you tonight, then you can be comforted. If you know God, and you're confident that He knows you, then you can rest assured that you are in the hand of God, and nothing can touch you there.

[17:22] He will preserve you in this life until He takes you home, and then He'll keep you with Him for all of eternity. He knows you. But if He doesn't know you, do you see the end?

The outcome? You see what happened to Korah and Dathan and Abiram. They were destroyed. So I have to ask you tonight, are you one of God's own?

Are you one that He knows? Are you one of the troublemakers in the church? If you're part of the problem, and you remain so without repentance, He'll say to you in that day, depart from Me.

I never knew you. You might deceive yourself for a time. You may deceive the church, but you cannot deceive God. He knows those who are His.

And you'll know. Do you love His voice, or do you fight against it? Do you love His Word and His people? Are they a burden to you that you want nothing to do with? Do you make every effort to pursue the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, or do you secretly find it a good thing when there's a little discord in fighting in the church?

[18:26] God knows your heart. The Lord knows who are His. It's a comfort for His people. It's a frightening thing for those who are not. The second part of the inscription, remember there's this firm foundation.

There's a seal on it. It's imprinted. The Lord knows who are His. Those who are His. And the second part of that inscription is this in verse 19. Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

Here we see that God's given us a way by which we may know who belong to the Lord. There will be evidence. Those who name the name of Christ, those who profess to be a follower of Christ, will turn away from wickedness.

And so if you say, Me, I'm a follower of Jesus. You know what? It'll look like in your life. You'll turn away from the way of wickedness. And so Jesus says, Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. If they've turned away from their wickedness, we'll know them to be God's children. Now we don't have infallible knowledge. That becomes very clear to us. It's why we have to have church discipline because we'll receive someone to the church that deceived us.

[19:29] And it'll look for a time like they turned away from wickedness. But they didn't really. But it's also why we evaluate people before we add them to the membership of the church. We review their testimony.

We see if their life matches the profession of faith. We make sure they're in agreement with our confession of faith. And if they name the name of Christ, there should be something to show for it. We don't knowingly admit people into the church that are going to destroy the church.

The Lord knows who we are His and He's given us a way that we can know. It's that they've turned away from wickedness. And that's what we're going to do tonight in our meeting after the service. We're going to pass out some testimonies of people that are seeking to join the church.

And you can read their testimony. You can see if their life matches. And evaluate so that we can add God's people to His church. But that second part of the seal is also part of the challenge.

So we're going to move from the comfort to the challenge. Comfort is that God's church isn't going anywhere. Even if there's problems that come up within, the church stands firm. And God knows who are His and He will preserve them.

[20:29] He'll watch over us. He'll keep us to the end. But secondly, a great challenge for God's people. And the first part of the challenge is to turn away from wickedness. Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.

It's not optional. You can't say, I'm going to name the name of the Lord and live however I want. And the church better receive me that way. No, you must turn away from wickedness. If someone who professes to have called on God and to have been saved, they continue to name His name. They're followers of Christ. That's their profession. And if that's the case, we see it here. They will turn away from wickedness. We've seen it in the book of James. There will be fruit. There will be fruit that demonstrates their faith.

The Lord knows those who are His. And we will know them because they turn away from wickedness. And this too goes back to the story of Korah's rebellion. You don't have to turn there again, but in Numbers 16, verses 26 and 27, Moses warned the assembly, move back from the tents of these wicked men.

Turn away from the wicked. Turn away from wickedness. That's what Paul is saying here. Get away. Don't even be associated with them. Even if you hadn't rebelled against Moses and Aaron and you were too close to the tents of Korah and Dathan and Byram, you would have gone down into the earth that day.

[21:47] Get away from them. Be separate from them. Don't do the things they do and don't associate with those who do. So he says, move back from the tents of these wicked men.

Do not touch anything belonging to them or you will be swept away because of all their sins. And so they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Byram. They backed up. They got away from wickedness. And this has to be true for ministers, mothers, students, workers, fathers, children, anybody who names the name of the Lord.

We don't have a different standard for children here and for adults over here. No. Every one of us must turn away from the Lord. It's not a different standard for the preacher and for the people in the pew. No.

We all must turn away from wickedness if we name the name of the Lord. And so, many here tonight profess to know the Lord.

Have you turned away from wickedness? Are you turning away from wickedness? Have you really shed yourselves of all evil? Or do your lives have so much of the world wrapped up in them that it's hard to tell the difference between you and the wicked world around you?

[22:55] Are you that close to the world? I'll just be close. I want to see what happens to Cora, Dathan, and Abiram. So I'm going to get real close to their tendency. Are you flirting with wickedness like that?

Getting as close to it as you can? Or are you turning away from it altogether? Sometimes Christians claim to follow Christ, but when you look at them, you can't see any difference between them and the world around them.

Charles Spurgeon says, shall saints be shams, fakes or fraud, shall saints be shams when sinners are so real?

Shall Baal have worshippers that cut themselves with knives and leap upon his altar in the frenzy of their lust? And shall Jehovah have only a faithless company who as yet are halting between opinions and do not know whether he is God or not?

Oh, for a church of God that shall shake itself loose from the world. If we had but once such a church, there were hope for our age. God send it. A church that doesn't look like the world, but that is separate from it.

[24:05] We must turn away from wickedness and our close association with the world. We've got to move back from the tents of the wicked. Yes, we live in this world. We're called to live in this world, but we're not to be of it.

And I think too often, Christians spend so much time defending, we've got to live in this world that they become of it. And they become like it. And it becomes indistinguishable whether or not they're one of God's children or one of the world.

Well, let me tell you that the Lord knows and will be able to know by the way they live. They'll have turned away from evil. Let there be no mistaking whether we're of the world or followers of Christ who gladly name His name and turn away from wickedness.

God knows who are His and if we're living this way, everyone else will know too. The problem with these troublemakers and with you if you are such is that you're not turning from wickedness.

If the church looks just like the world, there's a problem. And in our day, many churches look just like the world around them. There's fighting. There's bickering. There's quarreling.

[25:05] There's no being united around the truth. There's all of the things that you see going on in the world. Many church business meetings, praise God it's not this way here, look no different than in a quarrelsome business meeting with a bunch of businessmen in a conference room.

It's ugly. And it ought not to be that way. It's a great challenge for us. Have nothing to do with the wicked way. Are you identifiable as a follower of Christ?

Is our church identifiable as something that's different from the world because we've turned away from wickedness? Don't get as close as you can. Get as far away from it as you can. And so be a witness by the way you live.

There's a challenge for you. Turn away from wickedness. People of God. But then he goes on.

Notice verses 20 and 21 again with me. He gives us a picture. A picture of a house.

And it's a big house. In a large house, there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay. Some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes.

[26:11] Made holy. Useful to the Master. And prepared to do any good work. There's a big house. And the house, again, here, I believe is the church.

And in that house, there are articles or vessels. And those vessels are the people that make up the church. You're part of the church tonight. You're one of these vessels. And some vessels are of wood and clay.

And they are for dishonorable or ignoble purposes. And some are made of silver and gold. And they are for noble, honorable purposes. And in this illustration, you don't want to be wood or clay.

This isn't like the picture of the church of the body where every part has its place and function no matter how seemingly lowly it is. And this isn't a picture of jars of clay that contain the treasure of God's message where a jar of clay can be a useful thing.

In this picture, wood and clay vessels only achieve dishonorable purposes. That's not what you want to be. Only the gold and silver here are things that are good and used for honorable purposes.

[27:13] It's sort of hard to come up with an example because in our houses, we typically only have things that are for good purposes. Everything, theoretically, serves its purpose.

And it doesn't matter what it's made out of. And we'll take it if it serves its purpose. But imagine that you brought something into your home with the intention that it would serve a good purpose. You buy a vacuum cleaner and you expect that it will vacuum your carpets and keep them clean.

That's an honorable purpose for that utensil, for that vessel, for that article in your house. But after about two uses, you realize that the thing fills up. It's got to be emptied every two minutes and sometimes it actually spits dirt out instead of sucking it up.

Well, that vacuum cleaner is no longer serving its purpose. It's serving a dishonorable purpose. It's accomplishing the opposite of what you want it to do. Or maybe you go out and you buy a gaming system.

You get an Xbox 360 to make your kids happy, to provide some entertainment for them. But now, it's a noble purpose. But now it's all they do. Their brains are falling out.

[28:20] It's keeping them from getting their chores and their schoolwork done. It's keeping them from ever going outside, being healthy and exercising. It's keeping them from social interaction. And that thing that you bought for a noble purpose has now proved itself to be ignoble, dishonorable.

And so it is in the church. We receive into membership those that, as far as we can tell, are vessels of gold and silver for honorable purposes. We do our best to discern and we receive them into membership.

But sometimes we're deceived. And sometimes they just look like a gold vessel. Really, it was clay or wood just with a thin veneer of gold. And so in God's house, it's a huge house.

It's a big house. In a house that big, there's going to be both kinds of vessels. We shouldn't really be surprised to find dishonorable vessels, false professors in our midst. I should rather think we'd be surprised if there weren't some like this.

It has always been this way. That there have been some false professors that have slipped through. And Spurgeon, in his poetic way, takes us back. He says, the first family had a cane.

[29:28] Cain and Abel had a wicked cane in the first family. And then the few people in the ark that were preserved. There's a wicked ham. And in the household of Abraham, the father of the faith, there's an Ishmael.

And in Isaac's house, there's an Esau. And with Jacob and Israel, how many could we name that go astray? Farther down there, there's Korah, Dathan, and Abiram that we've looked at. There's Nadab and Abihu. There's Hophni and Phinehas.

There's always these ones who profess to know the Lord, but in reality are wicked. It comes down into the New Testament. Even the twelve handpicked by Jesus. Among them, there's a traitor, a false professor of faith.

The early church had its Ananias and Sapphira. Simon the sorcerer, who was baptized by the apostles themselves. You'd think they'd have some pretty good discernment, be able to tell the difference. But you don't have a true believer and a false one.

But even they weren't perfect. They weren't infallible. And so, who are we to think that will always get it right? We do our best. We look at the evidence that's before us. But sometimes, there will be vessels for dishonor.

[30:28] And it's these sorts of people, Hymenaeus and Philetus, that are now stirring up problems in the church. It's a big house. This is just...

It's a side note. This is for free. It's a big house. And we should know more about the house than our little corner of it.

Grace, this isn't the extent of God's house. This is one tiny little room in the great, great big house. That house extends all over this country and all around the world.

And it's why we seek to inform ourselves about other churches and missionaries around the world. Also why it's important to know about the history of the church. The house extends way back into time.

And if we're ignorant of that, if we don't know about how the church has dealt with false professors in the past and how it's dealt with false teaching and problems in the midst in the past, and if we don't see the great saints in the past, and Spurgeon's got a great quote, we just don't have time for it, about looking at the polished pillars in the house, these great trophies of God's grace and mercy and how God has worked in their lives and see how He can work in our life and see the mistakes the church has made and how we can avoid those.

[31 : 42] If we don't know something more about the house in our little room, then shame on us. In your house, you don't stay in one room, do you? You don't just guard yourself away in a corner and not the least bit curious about what's going on and you want to know what's in the whole house and we should be that way with God's great big house, the church.

And so I hope you don't despise the history of the church and learning about churches all around the world. We can learn much from them about vessels of honor and dishonor by knowing more about the whole house.

And so anyway, we've got this large house and there's honorable vessels and dishonorable ones. Well, what are we to do? Well, Paul makes it clear to us, verse 21, if a man cleanses himself from the latter, from these ignoble, dishonorable purposes or even the vessels.

And I think there's two things in view here. One is you've got to get rid of the dishonorable vessels. Church discipline has to be a part of a healthy church. And this has fallen by the wayside.

That's why it's such a great challenge. It's not something that's easy. It's not something that's pleasant. It's painful. But Paul says, you've got to remove these things. He handed Hymenaeus back in 1 Timothy.

[32 : 49] He said he handed them over to Satan. He put them outside of the church. We've got to cleanse ourselves from these things. And the word cleanse is used that way in 1 Corinthians 5. There's the wicked man in the church at Corinth.

And Paul says, get rid of. And that's the word. Clean out. Clean out. Cleanse yourselves from the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast as you really are. Get rid of that old man. His wicked influence, his sinful habits and behaviors should have no part in the church.

You might have to throw out the vacuum that you bought if it's beyond repair. You might have to lock up the Xbox or throw it out if it can't be used for noble purposes.

Get rid of it. But the other thing that could be in view here. Cleanse yourself from these things.

Cleanse yourselves from these dishonorable purposes is that if you see the marks of troublemaking in yourself.

Here you are. You're in the church. You believe that you're a vessel of gold. But you see yourself characterized by the things we saw last week about troublemakers. You're doing too much godless chatter.

[33 : 56] You're stirring yourself up. You're stirring others up with false teaching or sowing seeds of doubt. You begin to see these things. Or others warn you because they see them in you.

Then cleanse yourself from these things. Get rid of them. Turn from your wickedness. And such cleansing can only be through Christ. It's only through the power of the cross that we can be washed clean.

It's interesting, I think, this word article, this word vessel here is the words that's used in the Old Testament for all of the utensils that were used in the tabernacle and in the temple. And the only way that those things could be used or they couldn't be used until they had been cleansed with the blood of a sacrifice.

And so we read in Hebrews 9 verses 21 and 22 in the same way He sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies.

And that's our word. It's ceremonial vessels. Everything used was cleansed with the blood of a sacrifice. In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleaned with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

[35:06] Only if we're washed in the blood of Christ will we be honorable, noble vessels that are holy, useful to the Master, able to do His work. And that's who we seek to receive into the membership of the church.

Those who have been washed in the blood of Christ. And if you're here in the church and you're seeing some of these tendencies, go back to the cross. God forgive me for my godless chatter. Forgive me for sowing seeds of doubt, for stirring up arguments.

Go back to the cross. Be washed afresh so that you might be useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Seek forgiveness through Christ. Or if you've never come to Christ tonight, you're sitting there and you're going, I am a vessel of wood and clay.

The church wouldn't receive me right now. There's no turning away from wickedness. You know what? You can go to the cross and you can be cleansed right where you sit tonight. God, be merciful to me, the sinner.

The blood has been shed. The sacrifice has been made. The work is done. All that remains is for you to run to the cross and to trust in Jesus. And He will save you.

[36:08] He will cleanse you and He can make you a vessel for useful purposes in His house. What a blessing that just like chaff can become wheat, wood and clay vessels can become gold and silver ones through the cleansing work of Christ.

And when that's the case, we'll be holy, useful to the Master, prepared to do any good work. And that's what we want, isn't it? A church full of people useful to the Master, willing to do good work. And so we're going to flesh that out just briefly as we look at verse 22. What should we be prepared to do? What good works? Well, flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Here's the last part of our challenge for tonight. We're to turn away from wickedness. We're to cleanse ourselves from dishonorable purposes. And now we're to flee youthful desires. In the context of the church with troublemakers that look so attractive to some with their exciting speculation and their interesting arguments and their godless chatter, your challenge is to get as far away from that garbage as possible.

There is something to flee. There's something to get away from. And there's something to pursue. You flee. You've seen the damage that such behavior can leave in its wake.

[37:35] We see it, what it did in Ephesus and other churches throughout history. And we say we want no part of that. So we're going to flee from those tendencies. We're going to run as though our lives depended on it. We're going to run like a man trying to get to the city of refuge in the Old Testament.

You remember the cities of refuge? You're chopping down a tree with your axe and the axe head flies off and it strikes someone and kills them.

It's an accident. But their brother wants to avenge his death. And so he comes after you and you run. And man, they had robes that they wore back then.

And so you talk about girding up your loins. You hike up that robe and you run. You run because there's a man behind you with a knife and he's going to get you. Until you get to the city of refuge where there can be justice, there can be a trial, we can figure out if it really was an accidental killing. There's something to run away from. You want to get away from that avenger. But there's also something to run towards. There's a city of refuge that's waiting for you. You want to get there where you're safe. Where we leave those evil desires.

[38:37] That's the fleeing we do. It's fleeing with a purpose. And in the context, the evil youthful desires are the things that so easily ensnare the young. In the context, it's these arguments about words.

Godless chatter. False teaching. And that's the case in a young person. There's a desire for that. An eagerness. To quarrel about words. To demonstrate your great knowledge.

Oh, I've got something good here. And I'm going to see what somebody else thinks. And you're going to ask them the question and see if they take the bait. You're going to stir up a little argument here. There's this tendency to godless chatter among the young.

And the desire for the argument. The pride that comes from feeling as though you have so much knowledge. It's easy for a young, enthusiastic person to run wild with a teaching that has a semblance of truth.

To grab a hold of that and then to run to places that aren't true. Youth are prone to empty, hot-headed foolishness. Godless babble and on and on about nothing. I think these are the youthful desires of youth that Paul has in mind.

[39 : 37] Given the context, that's why I wish this had been part of my very first part of seminary training. I think that would be a great way to start in seminary. 2 Timothy 2. So dear young people tonight, flee these youthful lusts, these tendencies to argue and fight and quarrel and the godless chatter.

Take heed to the warnings we've heard from James about the difficulty, actually the impossibility of controlling your tongue. Apart from the power of Christ, you can do so much damage with your tongue. If you open your mouth, make sure that it's truth that comes out.

And make sure that it's truth that's profitable and not divisive. Make sure that you don't give your tongues to speaking and your ears to listening to hours upon hours of empty talk.

Remember why you're here. Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven that don't look like the world, don't talk like the world, don't argue like the world, but rather, like followers of Christ, flee those things, flee that wickedness, and walk, speak the truth in love.

So you run away from those things, you flee those things, but what are you pursuing? See it there in verse 22, pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on God out of a pure heart.

[40 : 52] Pursue that which is good. Those good works that you're prepared to do, you've been cleansed, useful to the Master, pursue that which is good. We're running towards something.

Matthew Henry says, the exciting of our graces will be the extinguishing of our corruptions. The more we follow that which is good, the faster and the further we shall flee from that which is evil. Running from the avenging, running to the city of refuge. We're running away from empty, foolish, evil desires of youth and towards righteousness.

A life of holy service to God. He says in His Word, if you love Me, you will obey what I command. That's a life of righteousness. A life of love to God demonstrated in obedience to Him.

It's a life of faith. One of trusting in Christ. We can't do these things apart from Him without being cleansed by Him, without Him enabling us. So we have faith in Christ.

[41 : 48] We trust in Him. And without love, we cannot do this. We pursue love. We could say so much about it. Just see this morning's sermon. Love and truth.

How they go hand in hand. We're to love God and we're to love our neighbor as ourself. We're even to love our enemies and we're to show that love in action, not just in words. We show it by refraining from leading others astray by our words.

From starting fights with them. We are to pursue love. And we are to pursue peace. Isn't that the goal? We're pursuing peace in the church. There's troublemakers and there's peacemakers. We want peace in the church.

And so we're going to be marked by the things peacemakers are going to be marked by and we're going to pursue it. We're going to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. We'll be pursuing the things that bring peace and unity.

Every good work. Romans 14.19 says, Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. And if we're pursuing these things, here's just a little glimpse from the Scriptures of what that will look like.

[42 : 53] We'll remember that love covers a multitude of sins. That'll promote peace in the church. We'll remember that a harsh word stirs up anger. So we're going to flee from harsh words.

But a gentle answer turns away wrath. So we're going to pursue gentle answers. The next time you're provoked, don't respond in kind, but respond in kindness and gentleness.

We're to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. So we flee. It's so easy. We're so prone to love ourselves and to do things thinking first and foremost about ourselves, our own comfort, our own well-being.

Number one, we're good at that. But we're to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. So we flee that. But in humility, consider others better than yourselves.

Imagine. Imagine. A church full of people cleansed from their old way of life so they don't want to pursue self anymore. And they're prepared for the good work of considering others better than yourselves. And they're serving one another.

[43:51] They're loving and demonstrating that love by their actions. They're pursuing that. That's good work that God has prepared for us. We are looking to the interests of others.

Honoring one another above ourselves. That's hard to do when we think we're the most important. But if we've been cleansed of that, we'll be glad to honor others above ourselves. We will share with God's people who are in need.

We will practice hospitality. Many of you had an opportunity to show that kind of love. To promote that kind of peace by taking meals to various people that have been sick or have had babies.

Thank you for showing that kind of love. Pursuing peace. For being a useful vessel for the Master in that way. If we want to promote peace, we'll remember to mourn with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice.

Have you rejoiced with the cooks at the birth of their new baby and with the pools at the birth of their baby? Have you mourned with the Wessners at the loss of a father and grandfather? If you want to promote peace in the church, you want to be useful to your Father, your Master, who's in Heaven, then you'll do these things.

[45:01] We'll serve one another in love. We'll be kind and compassionate to one another. We're forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you. Church full of people that are willing to forgive.

We're a church full of sinners. Still influenced by our sinful nature. And that means that we're going to sin against one another. And you know what needs to happen when somebody sins against you? You need to bear with them in love. You need to remember the times that you've sinned against others. And you need to forgive them as Christ has forgiven you. And you might have to sacrifice your sense of self-righteousness and your sense of justice to forgive.

And won't that promote peace in the church? If you're carrying around a grudge on your shoulder, a chip on your shoulder, people are going to see that. And they're going to want to know why. And you're going to be willing to do a little chatter to tell them why.

And it's going to promote disharmony and quarreling in the church. And so we must be a people that forgive. That's one of the good works that these vessels prepared for use for the Master will be about.

[46:04] Forgiving one another. Encouraging one another. Building one another up. Spurring one another on to love and good deeds. Not slandering one another. Loving one another deeply from the heart.

Having fellowship with one another. These are things that promote peace. These are the things that useful vessels, useful people in the church will do. And so you see, there's a great challenge before us.

To turn away from wickedness. To flee the evil desires of youth and to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. Along with those who call on God from a pure heart.

That's the other people in the church. I've been talking with the young people in Sunday school about the fruit of the Spirit and how those things are relational. They're not done in a vacuum. And neither can you promote peace in a vacuum.

You can't pursue these things all on your own. You do it together with the rest of the church. With those who call on God. On the Lord out of a pure heart. We need the church. We need the other honorable vessels around us.

[47:02] Working with us. Remember the power of a church full of people committed to being peacemakers. Committed to turning away from wickedness. To cleansing themselves from dishonorable purposes.

To fleeing evil desires. To pursuing righteousness. And peace. Can you imagine a church full of people like that? That is an awesome thing. When pursued collectively by God's people.

That is a church that will, by God's grace, avoid some of the problems at Ephesus. That will avoid some of the problems that you see in the history of the church. If we're pursuing these things.

And tonight, I want to say thank you. Thank you for meeting the challenge. for turning away from wickedness.

Pursuing righteousness. May God give us grace to excel still more. Maybe you say, why these messages? We don't have problems like this. Well, God loves His church too much not to give us the warning.

[48:02] He knows the potential. We've seen it happen in the past. It could happen here. God loves us too much not to warn us. I love you all. I love this church too much not to warn us of the dangers that are there to encourage us to do these things that will avoid us.

We don't want to have an obituary written for our church in 20 years as our brother spoke of this morning. The church of God will stand to the end of the age. But local churches may come and go. I don't want Grace Fellowship Church to go anywhere. I want it to stay here standing in the truth. And that will only happen if by God's grace we are a people committed to peacemaking. We are people committed to living up to this challenge.

We go in the comfort that God gives us. He knows His people. His church stands firm. And we go willing to meet this challenge. Until He comes there will be problems in the church but praise God for His firm foundation that He knows His children and may He strengthen us to meet the challenge. To turn away from wickedness. To be clean. To flee useful lusts. And to pursue good. Let's pray together. Father, we thank You for Your Word.

[49:12] We thank You that You have given us comfort and that You give us challenge. And we pray that You would give us grace to meet that challenge. We are insufficient in ourselves. And so we thank You for the blood of Christ that has cleansed us, that has washed us clean, that has made us useful for service in Your house.

Give us grace to do that service. To do those acts that are pleasing to You, that are useful, that are beneficial for Your people, for the advancement of Your kingdom. Help us to live that kind of life. And wherever we see in our own heart some of these sinful tendencies creeping up, we pray that You give us grace to put them to death. Go back to the cross for forgiveness. If we see them in our brothers and sisters, give us grace and gentleness to warn them.

And if someone warns us, give us the grace and gentleness to receive that warning. We pray that You would guard Grace Fellowship Church. We thank You for the promise that Your church will stand to the end of the age.

We pray that You would guard this local visible church until the end. That You would preserve us. That You would keep us faithful. That You wouldn't let us become a church full of backbiting, arguing, empty, chattering people that once professed Your name but now are not walking the truth.

[50:25] We don't presume to be better than the church at Ephesus. We don't presume to be better than other churches throughout the ages that have experienced these problems. Guard us.

Keep us. Make us humble. And make us to pursue these things with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and strength so that You might be praised. We want Christ's name to be honored in the church.

We want this to be a beautiful church of Christ that bears His name well before the world. Keep us from ever being anything less than that. We ask it for Jesus' sake and in His name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.