

A business consultant by the name of James M. Bleech of Jacksonville, Florida (a few years ago)... took a most interesting survey among 110 American corporate executives. The purpose of his survey was to determine what the number one excuse is that employees try to pass off to their employers. Here are the top three:

1. "IT'S NOT MY FAULT"
2. "IT WAS SOMEONE ELSE'S RESPONSIBILITY"
3. "SOMETHING ELSE CAME UP"

But Christian (!) Excuses will **not always** be as effective as the way we may have seen them work for us. ... Imagine yourself before God:

"It's not my fault, God, for ignoring my spiritual gift that You uniquely selected and gave to me"... "It was someone else's responsibility"... "Something else came up, Lord."

The message that I bring today... will not at all be beneficial to you... UNLESS you have come to the settled conviction that that our petty little excuses simply won't work before God. ... In fact it probably won't make any sense to you. This message is for those who want to be used of God... and hear Him say: *"Well done My faithful servant."*

But to be brutally honest... if there is anyone listening to me today who does **NOT** want God to use them... that is probably a sign that your heart has **never** been regenerated. (You see)... a desire for God to use us is the normal posture of every true believer.

A heart desire for being used of God is not confined to pastors... missionaries... or Bible teachers. ... Anybody can be an instrument in God's hands... and He puts that desire in the hearts of those who are truly His. ... So... today... I will be talking about what to do with that desire.

In the passage we will be looking in Second Timothy (Chapter 2... beginning with Verse 20)... the Apostle Paul describes what it takes to be used of God.

2 Tim 2:20

This is not simply a matter of better versus everyday vessels (like fancy china versus clay buckets and jars). The distinction is (rather) that some vessels are used for purposes that have different images of dignity. The purpose of some household vessels carry an overtone of “dishonor,” “disgrace,” and even “shame.” (You see)... Some vessels were designated for removing stinky garbage - and human excrement.

I am not trying to be overly gross... but I would like us all to catch the full impact of Paul’s analogy. ... Before the advent of indoor plumbing... households used a vessel called a “*chamber pot*.” It was reserved for human waste. Rather than brave inclement weather in the middle of a cold night... to go outside and use the outhouse... a person would use a chamber pot... cover it with a lid... put it under the bed... and then empty it the following morning. ... Paul is about to liken the false teachers in the church where Timothy had been... as chamber pots. (“Timothy, you are fine china... in house - or a church - that also has chamber pots!”)

We are to understand that the Christian community contains both “noble” and “ignoble” vessels (that is... both believers and false teachers.) Jesus taught exactly the same thing when He described the mixed nature of the church... in the story of the wheat and the tares (or weeds.) ... (Matthew 13:24–30).

The Christian community is... (and has always been)... a “mixed bag.” ... In fact... that is the answer to those who avoid church because it contains hypocrites. ... Of course it does! No one should be surprised. Jesus and Paul both warned us.

(But here is something else that we need to know.) Scripture reveals that God uses His enemies (even the devil)... to accomplish His work. ... God’s sovereignty... His majesty... is such... that no matter who we may be... or what we may be like... we can be used by Him.

In the story of the Exodus (in the Old Testament)... we learn that not only was Moses the instrument of God... but so was Pharaoh. ... In Romans 9... Paul says that Pharaoh was used of God to resist the departure from Egypt... in order that the greatness of God might be obvious. ... The Apostle says that God raised up Pharaoh... set him on his throne... and used him for His purposes. ... In fact... (also) in the ninth chapter of Romans... verses 21 through 23... the Apostle uses this very same figure about vessels of mercy contrasted with vessels of wrath. He writes:

Romans 9:21- *“Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?”*

So... Scripture itself supports the idea that God can use anybody (believer or nonbeliever.) ... That is why Cyrus the Persian king is called “*God’s anointed one,*” {Isa 45:1}. God speaks of him as “*My shepherd*” {Isa 44:28}, even though he was an unbeliever. ... (LISTEN) If we understand life from the Biblical point of view... we must know that **all people can be used of God.**

So... (Are you listening to me?)... It is not a question of **whether** you are going to be used of God or not. As today's passage points out... the question is: **How** does God plan to use you?...*What is He going to do with you?...To what purpose is He going to put you in His program?... Will it be a noble purpose, or will it be, shameful? ...Will it be for good or bad, blessing or judgement? Will you be fine china or a chamber pot? ...*(And) Yes... this is YOUR call!

2 Tim 2:21

I am sure the person merely wanted a laugh rather than to be profound when they placed a sign on their desk that read, *"It may be that my whole purpose in life is to serve as a warning to others."*

Everyone needs a bad example as well as a good one. That may be the purpose God will put us to. The Scriptures do not teach that only the righteous people are used of God. No... God can use anyone.

God uses the most immoral of men. We all are instruments of His work. God used Judas... placing him in the apostolic band. Jesus knew that he would betray Him. Judas fulfilled the Scriptures and the predictions of the prophets on that night when He lifted up his heel against the Lord and betrayed Him. ... So... God can use anyone.

The great question (however)... is to what end... (for what purpose)... is He using you? ... Here the Apostle is pointing out to Timothy that it is for one of two purposes (honor or dishonor).

It might be as equally true in your home (as it is in ours)... that our pots and pans and serving dishes... have no choice - as to what they are going to be used for. (And neither do husbands. Can you believe it?)... but we

have to get our wife's approval before we can use "HER" crystal salad bowl to change the oil in our car.) In my house... Patti has the largest say. (But least of all the vessel does. The vessel certainly has NO say what-so-ever.) ... But here in Paul's analogy... the vessel DOES have a choice. Verse 21 says: *"If anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be vessel for honorable use."*

NOW- REASON THIS OUT. THINK THROUGH THIS WITH ME FOR A MOMENT... we have **no** choice of whether we are **going** to be used of God or not. ... The choice we **have**... is... what God is going to use us for. That us up to **us**; it is put in our hands.

Choice determines the way God uses us, *"If anyone cleanses himself"*— that means WE have something to do with it; we must purify ourselves.

God will never set man's will aside and use him for a good purpose without his being **willing** to be used. One of the most remarkable things about the Scriptures is how they preserve for us what we regard as our highest dignity (which is the right to exercise our own will.) God does not **force** us to be used of Him; it must always be a **willing** choice our part.

But don't read too much into this. When it says... he must *"cleanse himself,"* that does not mean that we have the power to deal with our own sins (to cleanse our own lives.) ... We do not have that power.

What this does mean... is that we are responsible to use the cleansing that has been provided. ... (After you have finished using the crystal salad bowl to change the oil in your car)... your hands will be dirty. So you go into the bathroom to clean yourself up with soap and water. Perhaps you have a special kind of soap for taking dirty oil off your skin. This is what you use

and it works great. Coming out of the bathroom you say: “*Ahh... I’ve cleansed myself.*” ... But it was not you that did the cleansing. (It was the special soap.) You simply used what some manufacturer provided.

That is what this is teaching us. We have a responsibility to use the redemption that has been provided in Jesus Christ (to lay hold of His provision for the forgiveness of sin.) Scripture tells us our sins are not forgiven unless we are willing to confess them: “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,*” (1 Jn 1:9). ... You can go into a bathroom with dirty hands and there is soap and water there. But if you refuse to use them... you will come out just as dirty as you went in. You cannot blame the bathroom for that. **You** are to blame.

You can come to church and hear the truth of the Word of God...but if you do not **apply** it to yourself... it does you no good. You cannot blame God because He did not give you all the good things that He promises to those who come to Him... if you have not come to Him. ... Even as a Christian you cannot expect to have active in your life the tremendous provisions that God promises. You cannot expect to be used of God in beautiful and wonderful ways - unless you are willing to purify yourself... and use the instruments He has provided for cleansing.

Paul chose an intensified form of the verb... meaning the vessel must be *thoroughly scrubbed and disinfected* before it can be used for a noble purpose. ... Just imagine how long and hard you would scrub and scrub a chamber pot... before using it to serve stew to guests! ... (Even more than that crystal salad bowl after the oil change, huh?) ... (Seriously...) If you want God to use you – take this self-purification seriously!

Confess any known sin... (but that is not all.) Then run from youthful passions (flee or fall) and pursue things that will help you maintain holiness.

2 Tim 2:22a

The word “flee” is the word fugw in the original language of the New Testament. We get our English word “fugitive” from it. That, in fact, would be a fitting translation for how Paul used the word here. Continually be on the run... in order to escape being captured by youthful lusts. ...The faithful Christian flees them...they do not stop and ponder them. They don't play with temptation to see how close they can get... without actually getting burned. They flee (like a fugitive.)

Everybody who reads “*youthful passions*” immediately thinks of strong sexual urges. ... It **does** *include* that. ... Youth is the time when sexual drives are the strongest. (And) certainly in a sex-oriented society like ours... these passions can become very powerful... very compelling... driving us... occupying our minds. ... The world is (everywhere) telling us to pursue them... “*They are perfectly alright*” ... “*No harmful results will ensue*”... Yet these are things which Scripture tells us are wrong... hurtful... destructive... and evil in the sight of God. ... So... this verse does include that.

But “Youthful passions” would also include quite a bit more. The following verses give no emphasis to sensuality but rather stress qualities that spring from a youthful temperament... that is headstrong... harsh... and impatient. Here is what Paul (who knew Timothy very well... including his weak spots)... is warning him to avoid. Think through these with me. Are you

fleeing these things in your life? Are any of these dangerous weak spots for you?

- ⇒ *The desires of the flesh*: youth desire the companionship of the opposite sex. Timothy was not a teenager... but was probably in his 30's. But he would still need to control this passion.
- ⇒ *The desire for acceptance*: youth want friends. They want to fit in with their peers. They want approval, and they want to be recognized. This is normal, but it can lead to compromise—the compromise of one's values and morality and of the truth. It can also lead to rebellion against authority.
- ⇒ *The desire to achieve*: youth desire to be successful, to find their place in the world. However, this can lead to seeking authority and power over people and to the manipulation and using of people for one's own ends.
- ⇒ *The desire for recognition*: youth desire to be the *top gun*, the star, the best looking, the smartest, the most popular. They constantly picture themselves as winning the game in the last second; winning the beauty pageant; winning the contest; being the one most recognized, and a host of other daydreams. This can lead to either pride and arrogance or to a sense of inferiority and low self-image. It can lead either to the hurting of the less gifted or to the downing of oneself.
- ⇒ *The desire to act and to act now*: youth, bursting with energy and idealism, want to see things done now. This can lead to impatience and to the mistreatment of people: bypassing and disregarding the peace and security of other people.

⇒ *The desire to be original and creative*: youth want to have the new and fresh idea, the better thought, and the better way for doing things. This can lead to a critical and argumentative spirit. It can also lead to cheating in order to be recognized. It can lead to the restating and rewording of things and ideas and claiming that they are creative ideas.

If you want God to make you an effective instrument of His working in this world throughout your life... that is where you have to start. You have to say “No” to those assertive... dogmatic... prideful... conceited positions that are exploited all around us today — and which are often applauded by Christian groups — if you want God to use you. ... Then (once you have done that) the positive is possible.

2 Tim 2:22b

The word is *pursue* it (go after it... go for it.) ... What is wonderful about those four things is that every one of them is presented in the Scriptures as a gift from God. (Only God can give us those things.) ... But what is interesting is that... though God **wants** to give them... you will not get them *unless you pursue them*. You have to claim them; you have to go after them. You have to assert yourself along these lines. Receiving those things must be the result of your **deliberate choice** that you do the things that make for righteousness... faith... love... and peace.

Righteousness means right behavior. There are times when every Christian is called upon to choose between what he knows to be wrong and what he knows to be right. You have to say “No” to what is wrong, and “Yes” to what is right. If you have not learned to say “No,” if you drift along with whatever

the crowd is doing... you will never be an instrument used by God for honorable purposes. You have to say “No” to unbelief and “Yes” to faith.

Some of the worst advice I have heard one Christian offer another has to do with whether or not to take a questionable action. “*Go ahead and do it. You can always ask forgiveness later...*” No! A person who pursues righteousness respects the sense of hesitation. It wants to only do what is right.

I know a lot of people who struggle with little faith. The reason very often is because they have never sought those things that **awaken** faith. The Scriptures tell us that “*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God,*” (Rom 10:17). The more you are aware of what God says the more your faith is aroused, awakened, and stirred up to lay hold of what God says.

Those who never have time for the Scriptures... who never read the Word of God... who never listen to it unfolded for them and are never stirred up to lay hold of what God wants to give them will never have it forced upon them. ... God is not going to drop it on them until they are ready to lay hold of it... to ask for it... to seek it.

We must deliberately choose love. We often are exposed to the choice of how we are going to react toward someone who, perhaps, has irritated us, who has done something that makes us upset or angry. want to be used of God, you cannot give way to that. You have to say “No” to that.

Instead... you deliberately give a soft answer that will turn away wrath... or apologize for having given offense... for... even though your stance was right... you said it in a way that was wrong. Or you must reach out and see

him not as your rival... someone who is trying to take something away from you... but as one who is feeling upset and troubled himself... and in need of help and encouragement. ... So, love reaches out.

Then...you have to deliberately seek for peace. Sometimes you must initiate reconciliation. If somebody is angry at you... although you are not to blame... you just cannot keep that within you and let it fester away... upsetting you and creating frustration in your heart. According to the Scriptures... you have to go to that person and let him know what the trouble is.

Initiate a reconciliation. Sit down with him and say, *"I don't know what happened, but something has come between us. It's not right and I don't like it, so let's sit down and talk it out. Tell me how you feel and what it is that is troubling you."* Seek peace. Aim at it. Pursue it. That is what the apostle says. And third, surround yourselves with those who encourage you along this line.

2 Tim 2:22c

pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Those with pure hearts are not sinless saints. (They are not holy Joes who have never done anything wrong. They are not the kind of people who look down their noses at everyone else who gets into trouble.) No, *"those who call upon the Lord with a pure heart"* simply refers to those who aren't relying on excuses... but who seek to be used of God just like you. They have applied God's cleansing power and actively pursue righteousness... faith... love... and peace.

Find those Believers who are committed to knowing and serving the Lord- and attach yourself to them- rather than Believers who not excited about serving the Lord. Turn away from sluggish believers and turn toward those who are serving Him with all their heart.

There you have it. God **will** use you for either honor or dishonor....but He will use you. The good news is that **you** decide which of these it will be. If it is a vessel of honor that you choose... then you must cleanse yourself.

That process of cleansing involves three things:

1. FLEE FROM YOUTHFUL LUSTS
2. PURSUE GODLY CHARACTERISTICS
3. SURROUND YOURSELF WITH SINCERE BELIEVERS

I am trusting that God is speaking to many hearts this morning. Several are under the conviction of God (right now)... about becoming a vessel of honor... (ready for the Master to use.)

So as we close... I am going to ask everyone to remain seated... except for those to whom God has been speaking through the message in 2 Timothy. If that is you... then please stand as we all pray for this choice of yours... to be a vessel of honor... who God will use in more significant ways. ...

Please stand... and let me pray for you... and for what He wants to do here at Living Water. You will be committing yourself to **Him** (not to us.)

BUT THE FIELDS ARE WHITE FOR HARVEST AND WE ARE GOING TO ASK THE LORD OF THE HARVEST TO SEND FORTH **HIS** HARVESTERS.

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