

Title: Freed by the Word we Strive For

Text: 2 Tim 2: 19-26

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2 Timothy 2: 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.

Sometimes, a true believer finds himself in need of repentance. Sometimes, it is because he has become ensnared, striving over the very word, he is trying to defend. Then by God's grace we are "Freed by the Word we Strive For." As the Holy Spirit used the apostle Paul to instruct Timothy, he declared some things of utmost importance for every preacher, even every witness of God, to remember.

FLEE

First, we are told what to flee and what to follow after. He says, "Flee also youthful lusts." (1 Tim 2: 22) It is true that those given a new heart by God's grace will flee youthful lusts such as: sinful thoughts and deeds, uncleanness, and worldliness. But remember, the key to understanding scripture.

First, who is speaking: the apostle Paul. Secondly, to whom is he speaking: to Timothy, a young preacher. And we can apply this to each believer because every believer is a witness of Christ to one degree or another. Thirdly, what is the context: he has been speaking about not striving with men over the gospel, especially about unprofitable, unanswerable things.

2 Timothy 2: 14:...strive not about words to no profit, *but* to the subverting of the hearers....16: But shun profane *and* vain babblings:

It is profane and vain if it is not according to the word of God. He does not say repeat their babblings or engage men about them. He says shun profane them.

2 Timothy 2: 16: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. 17: And their word will eat as doth a canker:

That is God's word on what the end will be. He goes on to remind us

2 Timothy 2: 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.

We should avoid getting into strife and debate about errors and heresies or we will be found to be like the men who promote them. If you wrestle a skunk, you may win. But you will end up smelling like a skunk.

So in the context, the youthful lusts we are to flee are the lusts involved with striving to make men understand, and especially over vain babblings. It does not have to be a young man who pursues "youthful lusts." But when a problem arises young men are quick to speak up, to strive with their own wisdom and strength, to become ruffled, or to get hot under the collar. The Holy Spirit of God says through Paul, "Flee youthful lusts!"

Brethren, we have to remember, each of us as believers still has a deceitful heart in our old man of flesh. It is possible for a believer to begin seeking the glory of God but end up seeking vain glory; begin seeking glory and praise be given to Christ alone, but end up lusting after applause for ourselves; begin seeking for Christ to have all preeminence but end up turning all eyes away from Christ to us. He says, "Flee these lusts!"

FOLLOW

Then he tells us what to follow, “but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2 Tim 2: 22) Christ is the person of each of these graces.

“Follow after righteousness.” Christ our Righteousness. Christ is the Head of his church. He knows them that are his. He taught us to never try to separate the wheat and the tares. He calls strife and debate and youthful lusts iniquity. But to follow him, obey him and wait on him is to follow after righteousness.

“Follow after faith.” Do we believe our Savior is Faithful to accomplish God the Father’s will for his people? He fulfilled the law by his faithfulness, justified us by his faithfulness, declared God just and Justifier by his faithfulness. He is faithful that promised. Do we believe Christ is Sovereign, ruling all men and all things for the good of his church? Do we believe Christ has put his pastor in place? And Christ ministers to us through the gospel? Do we believe Christ has power to instruct his child in the heart? Then the Holy Spirit says, “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.” (Ro 14:4)

“Follow charity.” “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him.” (1 Cor 8: 1-3) Listen to how important love is and what love does, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; 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. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.” (1 Cor 13: 1-8)

Christ is Wisdom. There is none so wise as our Redeemer. He is the Wisdom and Power of God! And Christ is also preeminent Love. He is the Love of God. What did preeminent knowledge, together with preeminent love do toward needy sinners? He was firm to those who were in vain religionists. But he was so tender toward his people who were sincerely learning of him. He fulfilled this prophecy, “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.” (Is 42: 2-3)

“Follow after peace.” Christ is the Peacemaker. God and his people were divided—our sins separated us from God. Christ came as the only Mediator between God and men. He took all the sins of his people on himself. All our wrongs and injustice and iniquity, all our hardness, our being puffed up, our vain ways is the sin Christ bore. He said put it all on me and lay it all to my charge. Christ bore the just penalty his people deserved. He stepped in the gap and drank up the fierceness of the wrath of God toward his people for our vain knowledge, vain righteousness, our vain teaching, even all our vainness. Doing so, Christ reconciled his people to God. He made peace between his people and God. Now, he says he is our Peace. And that is how you follow after peace. So now follow after peace. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

With whom does he say do these things, “with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Are they sinners? Yes. Will they err? Yes. But have they been given a pure heart by God’s grace? Yes. Do we doubt them when they err? Do we want God doubting us? No. There are plenty of folks outside of the church who strive against us, who doubt us, who would kill us if they could. Isn’t that enough without us striving and dividing with our brethren within?

THE WORD OF GOD ONLY

Secondly, he tells us we must stay out of the way and use the word of God alone, “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.” (2 Tim 2: 23-25)

The purpose for God’s preacher not striving, for being gentle, patient and meek is so that God’ word take center stage. We never want to convince men to believe by our wisdom.

1 Corinthians 2: 1: And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. 2: For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3: And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. 4: And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: 5: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

We must be “gentle” because the gospel is offensive enough. God sovereignly chooses whom he will and passes by whom he will is offensive—it takes away man’s choice. Christ perfected his people by his own obedience and blood; this takes away man’s righteousness which is of the law. The Holy Spirit regenerates and sanctifies his people, making us fit to be partakers with the saints in glory from the first hour we are sanctified; this takes away man’s works for making himself more and more sanctified and holy. The gospel declares no man can do one thing to save himself. But salvation is of the Lord. And that is offensive. Paul said if I gave men one thing to do then I would not suffer. If Paul gave sinners something to do to save themselves then the offense of the cross would cease, “And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.” (Gal 5: 11)

We must be “patient” because God works in his time, not our time. Natural men cannot believe, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor 2: 14) Only God can reveal Christ in a sinner and God does so in his time, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called *me* by his grace.” (Gal 1: 15)

We must be “apt to teach” because God does this work through the preaching of the gospel alone. But it is not by wisdom of words, by striving and debating with men. Paul said,

1 Corinthians 1: 17: For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. 18: For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 19: For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 20: Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21: For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

We must use “meekness”, chiefly, toward Christ and also toward our fellow believers and unbelievers because when men oppose us they oppose themselves, “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.” (2 Tim 2: 25) But if we strive, rather than being gentle; if we strive, rather than trusting the preaching of God’s word; if we strive, rather than being patient, if we strive, rather than being meek then we are proud and leaning to our own wisdom and strength. Understand, this is so when we speak to those who believe the gospel but are in error, the same as when we speak to those who are yet unbelievers.

Take for instance, a believer who thinks we ought to use wisdom of words when speaking to unbelievers—to tone down the gospel, to take the edge off. He is in error. He is not obeying this very word of God. But if I oppose him and strive with him trying to make him to understand the truth, rather than trusting Christ to teach him through using my pastor, preaching the gospel to him, then I have fallen into the same error as my erring brother. Sometimes, a true believer finds himself in need of repentance. And sometimes, it is because he has become ensnared, striving over the very word, he is trying to defend.

ONLY GOD GRANTS REPENTANCE

The reason we must use the gospel alone is because only God gives repentance, “if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” (2 Tim 2: 25-26)

Lost sinners no matter how religious or true believers who have fallen into error—both are the snared captives of the devil. The devil can only do what Christ permits him to do. But when sinners are captive we have no ability to free ourselves. The only way they will be freed is if God give them repentance.

What is repentance? Repentance is a change of mind so radical that it makes the sinner renounce and forsake all his former religion which he thought was gain or all his former error that he thought was right. At the same time, repentance makes the sinner put all confidence in Christ alone.

Before God gave him repentance, Paul thought gain was the religious ceremony his parents performed upon him when he was an infant, the stock and tribe he was from, his religious denomination, his obedience to the law, and his religious zeal. While that was the case, he opposed Christ and every minister of the gospel. It was all he could do. He thought he was right. But after God granted Paul repentance, he renounced those things as dung, counting it all loss, that he might have Christ.

Philippians 3: 3: For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. 4: Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6: Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7: But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8: Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, 9: And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

How did Paul have this repentance? Christ sent Ananias to him and to tell him what Christ had done for him. But remember Ananias did not want to go. He was afraid of this man. But the Lord told Ananias to trust the Lord—to not strive, to be patient, and meek toward the Lord, to go and teach Paul the word that Christ sent him to declare:

Acts 9: 15: But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: 16: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake. 17: And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. 18: And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

Christ granted him repentance through the word delivered by Ananias. So having experienced this power of God through the gospel, Paul taught Timothy to preach the word and wait on God. He said in another place.

2 Corinthians 4: 1: Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2: But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. 3: But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 5: For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and

ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 6: For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7: But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

How come, you and I who have been granted repentance sometimes find ourselves striving with men who oppose us? Even striving over the Power of Christ to work this work through the clear preaching of the gospel? How come when we do, we end up in all sort of ungodliness, division and it is like a cancer is eating us away? It is certainly not because Christ has let go one for whom he died. But sometimes, when we turn from Christ and strive with men, Christ allows Satan to take us captive at Christ's will, that Christ might set us free through the preaching of the gospel—just to remind you believer that repentance is granted through Christ's word not through our striving. As much as we might like to free an unbeliever or free an erring brother, as much as we might like to give them this change of mind, only God can. God grants repentance one way, through the declaration of the gospel.

Therefore, “the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”

Amen!