

An Exposition of
2 Timothy 2:16-26

*Purging Oneself from Evil Associations
and Its Consequences*

*Number Two in a series on
the holiness of Christian fellowship*

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Preface

Resolving God's requirement for holiness in Christian fellowship with practical fellowship and unity among Christians raises serious questions and considerations in the minds of concerned believers. Perhaps the reader feels first pulled in one direction and then in another direction, wondering how to find the will of God in the matter. Perhaps you may have read the words of A. N. Groves, written in a letter dated March 10, 1836:

I would INFINITELY RATHER BEAR *with all their evils*, than SEPARATE from THEIR GOOD.

The man to whom these words were addressed, on the other hand, is the author of a famous tract:

Separation from Evil: God's Principle of Unity.

He, of course, was J. N. Darby. Now, evidently, 2 Tim. 2:16-26 has an important bearing on this issue, giving us God's mind in perfect holiness and love. Some of the questions that we do well to keep in mind are:

1. Does 2 Tim. 2:16-26 demand separation from professed Christians associated with certain evils?
2. What is the result to one who so separates?
3. What is the result to one who refuses to separate?
4. What should be done about one who refuses to separate? Should separation be extended to the person whose fault is, not the evil itself, but the refusal to separate from the evil?
5. What is the character of the separation -- is it both personal and ecclesiastical?

The great and inscrutable separation took place on the cross in those three hours of darkness when God caused the iniquity of us all to be upon the Lord Jesus Christ. He bore the separation for us, imparting to that work the infinite glory and value of His person, as God and man. And now we belong to Him. May we be enabled from the heart to say, "Thine [are we], David, and with thee, thou son of Jesse" (1 Chron. 12:18).

For the love of Christ constrains us, having judged this: that one died for all, then all have died; and he died for all, that they who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him that died for them and has been raised (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

My thanks are owed to D. P. Ryan for editorial work on this series of papers..

2 Timothy 2:16-22:

Purging Oneself from Evil Associations and Its Consequences

The Church on Earth

It is not the objective to enter into an examination of the nature and unity of the body of Christ, but let us briefly review a few points about it in connection with the subject of the holiness of Christian fellowship. Those who object to the thought of the “ruin of the church”¹ often do so from the standpoint of a certain conception of the church of God or, to state it more in accordance with their general mode of speech and conception, “the churches of God.” Thus, in their minds, “local churches,” being independent, are not necessarily ruined, hence there is no ruin of *the church*. Besides, since some allege that there is no such idea presented in the Scripture as “the church on earth,” they believe that the church is not in ruins because there is not such thing as “the church on earth” to be ruined. They fail to see, or will not see, that Scripture does view the church on earth in corporate responsibility and they fail to see that there is an aspect of the church that involves mere profession as well as reality. What is meant by the ruin of the church is the ruin of the church on earth as seen in responsible testimony.

Prophecy is occasioned by failure. The great NT book of prophecy is the Revelation; and Rev. 2 and 3 are a foreshadow of the history of the failure of the church on earth viewed in responsible testimony. That failure had already commenced before the writing of Revelation and the apostle John who wrote it had previously characterized the epoch of failure as “the last hour” (1 John 2:18).

The body of Christ is looked at as complete on earth in 1 Cor. 12. “If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). Saints in heaven

1. See J. N. Darby, “The Public Ruin of the Church,” *Collected Writings* 32:392-407; “What the Christian Has amid the Ruin of the Church,” *Collected Writings* 14:272-300; see also *Collected Writings* 3:270ff; 4:10; 1:169ff; “Practical Hints on the Ruin State of the Church,” *The Bible Treasury* 13:346-348. See also *The Ruin of the Church, Eldership, and Ministry of the Word by Gift*, Morganville: Present Truth Publishers.

are not suffering with us. They are *of* the body, but not *in the activity of it*. All of us will be displayed together in the glory in the day of manifestation, as the body of Christ. But let us not mix truths and times. Those who are *of* the body and are with the Lord are not in view in 1 Cor. 12 nor in Eph. 4:16 where we read of “the whole body,” which is clearly a reference to “the whole body” on earth. 1 Cor. 12 views the members as on earth and the body as complete at every moment. Gifts are not for heaven. They are given till we all arrive at the unity of the faith (Eph. 4:13). Gifts are for the body on earth. They are set “in the church” (1 Cor. 12:28) -- in which church? Apostles were not set in some local assembly. There existed on earth many local assemblies and there existed on earth something called “the church” into which were set “first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that . . .” (1 Cor. 12:28). This thing called “the church” was persecuted by Paul (Phil. 3:6, Gal. 1:13, 1 Cor. 15:9). He did this in many places (Acts 26:11).² He never said that he ‘persecuted the churches of God.’ Let us simply bow to Scripture about the unity of “the whole body” on earth and we will get more light.

In keeping with the truth that there existed something on the earth called “the church,” the Spirit divided men into three groups: “Give no occasion to stumbling, whether to Jews, or Greeks, or the assembly of God” (1 Cor. 10:32).

In Eph. 4:16 we read of “the whole body.” The men looked at as gifts (Eph. 4:11) are given with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ -- which is neither looked at in Eph. 4 as in heaven, nor is it the local assembly. It is “the whole body” of v. 16 that is edified. These gifts are given for the arriving at “the full-grown man” (v. 13). What? the local assembly will be a full-grown man? The truth is that Jew and Gentile were reconciled “both in one body” (not both in the “local assembly”), and so the two are formed “in Himself into one new man” (Eph. 2:14). It is “one *new* man” because the church did not exist in the Old Testament; and it will be a “full-grown man” when Christ comes.

“And He is the head of the body, the assembly” (Col. 1:18). This Scripture applies right now. Christ is not viewed as ‘a head’ of ‘a local assembly.’ This is the body on earth. Paul says, “And I fill up that which is behind of the tribulations of Christ in my flesh, for His body, which is the assembly” (Col. 1:24). This is not suffering for ‘a local assembly’ any more than the words “of which I became minister” (Col. 1:25) mean that he was minister of a “local church.” Nor was he suffering for those in heaven: neither was he a ‘minister’ (servant) of those in heaven.

2. The effort to set aside the truth of the unity *on earth* by pointing out that some of the members of the body are with the Lord (i. e., no longer on earth) ignores the fact that Paul persecuted the church after, for example, Stephen was killed (i.e., after some members were no longer on earth). Scripture teaches a view of the church on earth, and it was *that* which Paul persecuted. See *The Whole Body on Earth*, available from the publisher.

The notion that each assembly is ‘a temple,’ ‘a pillar and ground of the truth,’ ‘a house of God,’ ‘a body,’ is as untrue as stating that each church is ‘a bride of Christ.’ But each local assembly has these *characteristics*, and each assembly should be the faithful, *local expression* of these things.

We should observe also that 1 Timothy is filled with instructions for the maintenance of order in the house of God (which is viewed as on earth, and does not mean the local assembly, although the order of God’s house should be expressed locally). On the other hand, 2 Timothy contains instruction for the faithful amidst the ruin of the church on earth viewed in responsible testimony, which had occurred already in the apostle’s day.

We have only briefly touched on this line of truth, having noted enough so that certain false notions that interfere with apprehending our responsibility in the Christian fellowship, as given in 2 Tim. 2, might be removed from minds.

The Ruin of the Church on Earth Viewed in Responsible Testimony

In 1 Timothy we have directions concerning the proper *order* for God’s house, “which is [the] assembly of [the] living God” (1 Tim. 3:15). The word *order* has been emphasized because that is the characterizing thought³ brought before us regarding the assembly on earth viewed as God’s *house*. *His* order is to be maintained. Man’s order ruins what God has established.

Indeed, in 2 Timothy we find an altogether different character than in 1 Timothy, for by the time 2 Timothy was written, the church on earth, viewed in responsible testimony, had fallen into ruin, irremediably so. Above, we noted that the occasion of prophecy is failure; i.e., the reason prophecy comes in is failure, as is often illustrated in the OT. In the book of Revelation we characteristically have prophecy. And we see in Rev. 1 that the Lord has assumed the position of Judge among the assemblies. The fact that the book of Revelation was written is a standing witness to the fall and ruin of the church. Sadly, few Christians realize this, and many who have this brought before them reject this truth, for it does not fit in with their ecclesiastical notions and schemes. It is such ecclesiastical notions and schemes which have contributed to the character of what is likened to a great house. In 2 Timothy, then, we do not read about “God’s house,” but rather about what is compared to “a great house” (2 Tim. 2:20). **The difference in these two expressions accords with the characteristic difference in the two letters of Paul to Timothy.**

It is professing Christianity which is compared to a great house. The house

3. When we think of the church as the body of Christ, the characterizing thought is *unity*.

of God has received a character from the failure of the church on earth viewed in responsible testimony whereby the profession is here compared to a great house. It is greatly swollen in size, with features contrary to the holiness due God’s house.⁴ It is God’s house, though perverted from its proper character by the will of man:

He is likening Christendom to “a great house” -- He does not call Christendom “the great house,” it is an analogy. It is always the “House of God,” in its responsible place, because the Holy Ghost has not left it, even though wood, hay, and stubble have come in [1 Cor. 3].⁵

There is an order, but it is man’s order, not God’s, and in contrast to divine order it is really disorder. It is the expression of man’s will in the *organization* of evil rather than God’s order, which always rests upon separation from evil to the Lord. We see the progressive character of leaven, not in 1 Cor. 5 or Gal. 5:9, but in Matt. 13:33 (which speaks of the corruption of the food of God’s people). It is the spread of evil doctrine in Christendom where as a whole it becomes corrupt (cp. Rev. 3:16; Rev. 17 and 18). This leaven has worked; and its working has resulted in a change whereby the profession is likened to a great house. No longer does the house of God, as instituted in the beginning, meet the eyes of the world. No longer are the body of Christ and the house of God coextensive as they were at the beginning. What was instituted then has been generally corrupted (though the body of Christ abides real). The profession is likened in 2 Tim. 2 to a great house and that condition was there already before the apostle’s eyes. This is what is meant by the “ruin of the church,” namely, that the character of the profession has been irremediably altered and corrupted so as to be compared to a great house, with directions to the faithful concerning purging themselves individually from evil -- which does not mean, of course, trying to leave what is likened to a great house.

There are four leading, special marks of evil noted in 2 Timothy, one in each chapter.

1. Mark # 1 -- 2 Tim. 1:15 notes a general defection from Paul (not apostasy from Christ) involving a defection from “the testimony of the Lord.”
2. Mark # 2 -- 2 Tim. 2:16-20 speaks of the introduction of evil doctrine and of unbelievers, and the organization of evil.
3. Mark # 3 -- 2 Tim 3:8 shows how truth is withstood through imitation.
4. Mark # 4 -- 2 Tim. 4:4 calls attention to the result of these evils, namely, turning the ears away from the truth to listen to fables.

The last epistle that Paul wrote that is in the canon of Scripture, 2 Timothy, was written in view of the ruin that came in. In ch. 3 he spoke of the character of the

4. This is similar to the growth of the mustard seed in Matt. 13.

5. *Words of Truth* 4:112.

“last days.”⁶ Some Christians speak in a manner that indicates that they think that the last days began in the 20th century. This seems to be done so as to excuse themselves from being as faithful as they ought to be. “It’s the last days; what can you do?” they say. The answer is that 2 Timothy tells them what to do, but they do not want to do it. Moreover, the last days referred to in 2 Tim. 3:1 had already arrived when Paul wrote 2 Timothy to tell Timothy about its character and how to be here for the Lord in such a day. After describing the awful character of men characterized by the flesh, in Christendom, he directed Timothy: “from these turn away” (2 Tim. 3:5). The condition was present then already and Timothy was told to turn away from such. The time of the ruin of the church on earth, seen in responsible testimony, was coincident with what Paul speaks of in 2 Tim. 3:1-6. John said that “the last hour” was present (1 John 2:18). The ruin of the church, the advent of the last days of the church⁷

6. W. Kelly remarked: “Another form of the verb appears in 2 Tim. 3:1, where it is said that in the last days perilous times shall come. But even here, though future, not perfect, it does not mean ‘shall be at hand,’ but *actually there*.”

Again: “. . . 2 Tim. 3: ‘In the last days perilous times shall come.’ What does the Spirit of God expressly add? That these times were a long way off? On the very contrary, He enjoins, ‘From such turn away.’ Something of it, at least, was there then. There is no delay. Then, again, take worse than that -- the mystery of iniquity. It ‘already worketh.’ Where was the delay? Take even antichrists, the worst form of evil that can possibly be save one, the last of themselves: ‘Many antichrists are already come.’ Thereby the apostle knew it was the ‘*last time*’ (from, *The Coming and Day of the Lord*).

In his notes on 1 and 2 Timothy, regarding 2 Tim. 3:1, he wrote (*in loco*):

And this trying condition for the Christian is declared to ensue “in [the] last days.” . . . Greek regularly, far more than English, exhibits the anarthrous form when the design is to designate a characteristic state rather than a positive fact, place, condition, person, or date. The article here would have made the period too restricted; its absence enlarges the sphere, as the Holy Spirit intended, Who knew the end from the beginning. We in our tongue can hardly avoid saying, “The last days”; but the Greek could express himself more accurately than those who are compelled to use the same expression for what may be less or more definite.

Concerning the last days and latter times, see *The Bible Treasury* 16:249 and *Notes and Comments* 3:1

7. It is claimed that since Joel said “and it shall come to pass afterward” and Peter said, “and in the last days” (Acts 2), Peter, in Acts 2, thus claimed that the listeners were living in the last days. Peter made no such claim. His “last days” does not refer to the last days of the church on earth viewed in responsible testimony, in which we now live. While Peter was speaking, the last days of the church were not yet present. The last days, as regards the church as *viewed in testimony on earth*, began when the church fell into ruin -- and so fell before the apostles were all gone. When Paul wrote of the characteristics and persons of the last days, he told Timothy to turn away from such (2 Tim. 3:5). 2 Timothy contains instruction for conduct in the last days, which had arrived before the writing of the book. Peter warned of them (2 Pet. 3:3); and John pronounced that it was “the last hour” (1 John 2:8). The church was fallen, ruined, as *the vessel of testimony seen in responsibility on earth*. The writing of the book of Revelation is the standing witness to this fact, because prophecy is occasioned by failure -- and this was the failure, the ruin, of the church on (continued...)

and the advent of the last hour took place in the **first** century. There is no excuse for now saying that it is the last days, what can one do? Timothy was in the last days and he was told what to do. Since we are considering some issues in 2 Tim. 2, notice the following directions, concerning what to do, given in 2 Tim. 2:16-23:

- profane, vain babblings *shun* (v. 16);
- *withdraw* from iniquity (v. 19);
- *purified himself* from these (v. 21);
- youthful lusts *flee* (v. 22);
- *pursue* . . . with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart (v. 22);
- foolish and senseless questions *avoid* (v. 23).

Brief Summary of the Passage and Its Context

The following appeared in *The Present Testimony*:

In the second epistle, the assembly is still there; but it is viewed as a great house, in which vessels to dishonor are to be found. Here the truth, as with John, takes a prominent place -- that is the maintenance of the truth; individual faithfulness to the truth, and individual piety. He looks for devotedness and courage in the individual, in the man of God. Church privileges are not before his mind, he can dwell on the Jewish faith (the truth in their day) of Timothy’s mother and grandmother (and the mother had married a Greek), and that of Timothy, as all running in the same divine channel, and flowing from the same divine source.

We have two characters of the assembly. It is like a great house, it has vessels to dishonor as well as to honor, and it would have, in the perilous times, the form of piety but deny its force. As to the facts which gave occasion to this train of thought, they are evident. The Apostle had been deserted by the Saints, and was looking soon to leave the assembly, and he knew what would come in after his departure, and warns of it. “All in Asia had turned away” from him, he was glad to have one that cared for him in his prison! The Lord had, indeed, none. The brethren, some from worldly motives, some doubtless

7. (...continued)
earth, seen in responsibility.

The last days, or “end of the days” (Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; Hos. 3:4, 5; Micah 4:1) of which the OT Prophets spoke has the coming Kingdom in view. Recall that “this age” in the NT. means the age which began with the introduction of the law. **Christianity is not an age**. The “end of the days” of the prophets means the closing era of “this age” in view of the establishment of the Kingdom under Messiah. Joel, says “afterwards,” which Peter refers to as the “last days.”

Heb. 1:1, 2 -- “at the end of these days” -- has nothing to do with the last days as related to the church seen in ruin concerning responsibility on earth. J. N. Darby, in a footnote, wrote:

See Isa. 2:2. A Hebrew expression, as several here, for the end of the period of law, when Messiah was to be introduced.

for service, but at any rate all but Luke, had left him. They had not in their hearts to stand by him in his witness. They had not left Christ as to the faith, but they could not hold fast in such an exposed place as Paul's, -- so at his first answer on his trial, "no man stood by him," "all men forsook him," "but he knows whom he has believed." It was to Christ he had committed his happiness, and He would keep it safe for him. A crown of righteousness was laid up for him. He had fought the good fight, he had kept the faith. Thus, strong individual personal faith, with the sense that the assembly had failed and not held on to the ground on which his soul walked, is that which gives the character and key-note to this epistle. Still, unclouded personal courage is that which he looks for. But the state of the assembly on the earth may first occupy us, and then individual duty. It did not maintain church elevation in its position. Of this Paul was the representative, I doubt much if Timothy was at Ephesus at the time (Tychicus was sent there); but the Epistle to the Ephesians gives, at any rate, what I mean by church elevation in its position. We know how Paul was converted by the revelation of a heavenly Christ, accompanied by the declaration that all saints were one with Himself. How the fact that men, Jew as well as Gentile (for he was a pattern of a Jew), were children of wrath, that man was alienated from God, dead in trespasses and sins, that it was a risen Christ he knew, and did not know Him after the flesh, and that all in Him was a new creation, a second Adam, characterized the teaching of the apostle. How the elevation of his doctrine, which judged all flesh, and showed what the church really was, awakened the opposition of fleshly religion, and human pride. He had first been in bonds for this, he was now on the borders of death, but had kept the faith, "had indeed not counted his life dear unto him." But here the great body of the saints held back. It pressed them out too much against the world, and the world against them; and they shrank back; he was deserted as well as persecuted. It is this aspect of things which he had to contemplate . . . He opens his heart to Timothy, is mindful of his tears, desiring to see him that he might be filled with joy: he had served God from his forefathers; thinks of the piety and faith of Timothy's mother and grandmother; feels too his isolation, can speak of his cloak and books and parchments. He is, in spirit passing out of his ministry, in which he was sustained above all nature, into gracious and tender feelings (but not apart from nature), and solemnly commending the charge which Timothy was to take up to his care and responsibilities. He who had represented the Church in its higher character, and sustained it in his spiritual energy, was now in prison. This, for any, but especially for such a servant of God, is full of touching interest. But the Church had lost withal that character in which the divinely given elevation of his spirit could have found its sphere. He had his own place from God. He was a master-builder; and, however he could prophetically point out what was coming on, and give just warning as to it, one may justly ask oneself, how he could, such as he was, as given of God, have wrought in the declining state of things -- the rapidly corrupted Church -- which did not keep, we may say, a day after his death, the consciousness of the elevation of its position, or the clear doctrine of justification as risen with Christ. It sank down to its conventional place in this

world. No doubt the knowledge of Christ in that place made it incomparably superior to the world, to say nothing of individual salvation. But how could Paul have descended there? He would have been more than useless. He would have been in conflict with the whole Church, when it was falling -- not reviving -- or have sanctioned, helplessly, the state he disapproved of. No; God orders all things rightly. When the Church is just turning into a great house, all having abandoned the Apostle, the Apostle, called up of God, abandons the no longer applicable service, having fought the good fight and finished his course; and leaves to John, in his singularly blessed Ephesus, to record the abandonment of their first love, and to secure individual faithfulness, and walk, where corporate consistency had failed. Meanwhile, what is ever our duty in our place, he urges on Timothy devoted and courageous faithfulness whatever the state of the assembly may be, and shows the saint's united path in it . . .

Timothy was to endure hardness as a good soldier, be disentangled from the world; so Paul was enduring all things for the elect's sakes. But it was not merely those ministerially active who would suffer. There was another source of persecution, not Christianity now in itself, but seeking to live godly in Christ Jesus. The form of piety with abounding evil would prevail; but piety, the seeking to live godly, not to join the current of worldly profession, would be persecuted. The professing Church being in this state, the assembly in general would be a great house, and vessels to dishonor allowed in it. This leads to ecclesiastical direction, so to speak. Carelessness as to doctrine, departure from the truth, and a worldly, carnal state of the professing Church prevailing, in which the sense, that, risen already in Christ, we were looking for a resurrection {rather, the Lord's coming} to take us out of this whole state, was lost; and what called itself Christian settled into a recognition of man *this side death*. What was the Christian to do? Purge himself from these, so as to be a vessel meet for the Master's use. He could not leave the profession of Christianity, corrupted as it had become -- that is clear; nor was he to sanction the corruption, nor could he correct it as regards the public profession. Nay -- evil remained -- seducers would wax worse and worse. He was to *purge himself* from them. But his practice was to be equally exact. Avoiding lusts, he was to follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace. Was he then to isolate himself in his walk because of the evil, in thus pursuing godliness and grace? He was not. He was to recognize and distinguish those who called on the Lord out of a pure heart. If it be asked, how can he do this? My answer is, the apostle tells us to do it; he does not suppose we cannot. It was to be done. I may not be able to distinguish a person to be such. That is possible. I am not his judge; but he is not one of those who are pointed out as those with whom I should walk. The direction is very simple. The professing Church is characterized as a great house containing vessels to dishonor. In that state of things, I am not to rest satisfied with the dishonor; not to think of mending the house, nor of leaving it, but of purging myself from those who are so, and recognizing those who call on the name of the Lord, own, and

worship Him out of a pure heart, -- to walk with them.⁸

Spreading Gangrene (vv. 16-18)

FROM PROFANE VAIN BABBLINGS TO SPEADING GANGRENE (v. 16, 17a)

But profane, vain babblings shun, for they will advance to greater impiety, and their word will spread as a gangrene (2 Tim. 2:16, 17).

Profane, Vain Babblings Shun. “Profane” means that the babblings were unhallowed. Our speech is to be with grace, seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6). “Vain” refers to the empty quality of the babblings. Babblings refers to empty sounds. Discussions may have this character. Discussions may be dressed up as inquiries for more “light.” Lightness, casualness and froth in divine matters are offensive to God. Lectures and preachings, as well as books, may have this character. Shun such things; i.e., avoid them. Babblings rob souls of precious time that could be used for the ministry of the truth. Cp. Titus 3:9; 1 Tim. 6:20.

Conscience is the inlet of truth into the heart. We see this illustrated in the Lord’s way with the woman at the well in John 4. The soul is the dwelling place of truth, but truth must come in through the conscience being engaged with it as come from God Himself. Thus, the truth produces self-judgment, fleeing from all untruth, and enlarges the soul in the things of God.

For They Will Advance to Greater Impiety. We see from this warning that those babblings are called “impiety,” which we need to deny (Titus 2:12). In Titus 2:12, after “having denied impiety and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and justly, and piously in the present course of things . . .” The “negative” is stated first, as is characteristic of Scripture presentation of matters. Cp. Rom. 12:9:

Let love be unfeigned; abhorring evil; cleaving to good.

That is the way to get rid of the mountains of pretended love, and the overlooking of evil that passes for love, among Christians. Follow that order: “abhorring evil; cleaving to good.” And, say “no” to impiety and worldly lusts; and then (1) live *soberly*, referring to oneself, (2) *justly*, with respect to others in whatever relationship we stand, and (3) *piously*, with respect to our “great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” The “impiety” here is that vain babblings rob our God and Savior Jesus Christ of His place as preeminent minister of the truth, and it is seen here as part of a chain that leads to the undermining of fundamental truth.

The word “they” refers to persons who speak in such a manner. They may

8. *The Present Testimony* 13:187-190, 194.

have thought that they were advancing in truth. The fact is opposite to their self-deluding thought. What will happen?

And Their Word Will Spread as a Gangrene. “Their word” is not the “word of truth” of v. 15. Evil spreads and its spreading is compared here to the spreading of gangrene. Usually caused by a blood circulation problem, decomposition of body tissue as a result is called gangrene. It is used in a figurative way here to indicate an ongoing moral rot among professed Christians, that ends with fundamentally evil doctrine. The Apostle then gives two persons as examples of this.

OF WHOM IS HYMENAËUS AND PHILETUS (vv. 17, 18)

. . . of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; [men] who as to the truth have gone astray, saying that the resurrection has taken place already; and overthrow the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:17, 18).

Who As to the Truth Have Gone Astray. It was not a mistake about some truth but it was fundamentally evil doctrine. This may have been the Hymenaeus noted in 1 Tim. 2:19. Concerning that case of delivery to Satan, J. N. Darby noted:

Let me add that delivering to Satan is an act of power; putting out a wicked person is a duty attached to the faithfulness of the assembly. No doubt exclusion from the assembly of God is a very serious thing, and leaves us exposed to sorrow and just trouble of heart, and that from the enemy: but direct delivering to Satan is the act of positive power. It was done in Job’s case for his good. It was done by Paul in 1 Cor. 5, though acting in the gathered assembly, for the destruction of the flesh; and again, without reference to the assembly, in 1 Tim. 1, as to Hymenaeus and Alexander, that they might learn not to blaspheme. All discipline is for the correction of the individual, though to maintain withal the holiness of the house of God, and clear the consciences of the saints themselves.⁹

It turned out that the “wicked person” in 1 Cor. 5 was restored. So delivery to Satan does not prove that the person ensnared (cp. 2 Tim. 2:25, 26) is lost. As to what is said in 1 Tim. 1:19 concerning “made shipwreck as to faith,” J. N. Darby remarked:

Could it be that a Christian might not finish his course? In some respects it might so happen: or, at least, the course would not be finished in the way that was intended. Nevertheless such a case was foreseen in God’s counsels. Ananias and Sapphira furnish perhaps a similar instance. There are some who make shipwreck, who fail as to faith, as to the doctrine that faith receives, without its being said on that account that they had abandoned their faith. Having in view this danger, Paul recommended Timothy to maintain faith and a good conscience; to hold fast the truth of God as well as that uprightness of heart in which the soul judges itself, and abides in the presence of God, ever

9. *Collected Writings* 14:114.

open under His eye. If a good conscience fails, the enemy finds an entrance, and faith is in danger.¹⁰

The apostle then says, “Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly,” v. 18. It is always the snare of those who are occupied with the things of God continually, not to have a “good conscience.” No person is so liable to a fall, as one who is continually administering the truth of God, if he be not careful to maintain a “good conscience.” The continually talking about truth, and the being occupied about other people, has a tendency to harden the conscience. The apostle does not say, “Pray for us, for we are laboring hard,” and the like; but that which gives him confidence in asking their prayers is, that he has a “good conscience.” We see the same principle spoken of in 1 Tim. 1:19; “holding faith, and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck.” Where there is not diligence in seeking to maintain a “good conscience,” Satan comes in and destroys confidence between the soul and God, or we get into false confidence. Where there is the sense of the presence of God, there is the spirit of lowly obedience. The moment that a person is very active in service, or has much knowledge and is put forward in any way in the church, there is the danger of not having a good conscience.¹¹

Saying that the Resurrection Has Taken Place Already.

Hymenaeus (his name means “a wedding song”) and Philetus (his name means “beloved”) were men who had advanced very far along the road of impiety (2 Tim. 2:18). What may we learn from their names? It is this: our concern is not with how nice a man might sound or how nice he may be, but does he bring sound doctrine (cp. 2 John)? These two things often pervert the discernment of many, i.e., when one is pleasant to the ears (“a wedding song”) or when one is very personable and has an ingratiating manner (“beloved”). Why do we judge according to what suits US? It even seems that some think an ingratiating manner is the same as godliness! We usually have self at the bottom of such conclusions since our tendency is to judge with reference to how a person pleases self.

But error ever advances, and more error is needed to bolster previous error. The error concerning the resurrection, noted in 2 Tim. 2, should be well noted. Why is it singled out? I believe it is singled out because this KIND of error gives character to what is referred to in a subsequent verse as “a great house.” I say this *kind* of error because there are others, more or less potent, which tend to have the same effect. These men may have taught a “spiritual resurrection.” There are other ways of spiritualizing -- not that all other ways have the same degree of result (i.e., overthrowing the faith of some), but effecting many of the same results that this error would produce. W. Kelly said:

10. *Collected Writings* 27:176.

11. *Collected Writings* 28:104.

But the error of the resurrection already past is fatal to this endurance meanwhile. It would, if true, entitle us now to reign as kings, to take our ease, to enjoy present honor and glory; and thus it is directly framed and calculated by the enemy to thwart the will of our Lord, Who calls us to share His sufferings till we are glorified together. Hence it is false as a doctrine, it is ruinous for practice, and it destroys all communion with Christ, as sharing His affections in separation from the world. It would be hardly possible to discover any delusion more opposed to the truth in its character and consequences for the soul and the walk, as well as in counteraction of the moral glory of the Lord. Well can we understand therefore that its teachers “overthrow the faith of some.” And if it were so then, how much more widely extended and settled do we find the mischief now, when Christ’s coming is no longer before the saints as a constant living hope, and the resurrection of the body is practically nothing to them, satisfied that after death their souls go to heaven! The world becomes then a scene of present enjoyment. Association with a once dead and rejected Christ is unthought of. They flatter themselves that they have attained to a wisdom higher than was known by the apostles in those earlier days, now that they have learnt to enjoy the best of both worlds.¹²

Such a spiritual resurrection would appear to its propagators as elevated truth, a resurrection superior to a merely bodily one. Generally, evil doctrine comes with such type of claims. Allegedly it is superior in some way, or it protects the character of God in some way.

Presently, those known as full preterists, or complete preterists, say the physical resurrection took place in AD 70 (no one seems to have noticed its occurrence!). For Christians since then there will be no bodily resurrection. Surely this is gangrenous doctrine.

We should note that the context is ministry and the truth. Cut it in a straight line; avoid vain, profane babblings; for the final issue is doctrinal evil, i.e., fundamental error, called leaven in Gal. 5.

And Overthrow the Faith of Some. J. N. Darby remarked:

Those of whom the apostle spoke had already overthrown the faith of some, that is, their conviction as to the truth and profession of the truth.¹³

E. Dennett wrote:

“The faith” here is used for the thing believed; and thus these false teachers really turned souls aside from the truth, led them away from what they had previously professed to believe. It is not a question of salvation, but for the time, at least, these misguided ones surrendered the truth, becoming the prey of their deluded leaders. Can anything be more sad than to be used of Satan to

12. *An Exposition of The Two Epistles to Timothy*, pp. 227, 228. See also *Collected Writings* 20:371; *The Present Testimony* 13:190.

13. *Synopsis, in loco*.

lead the Lord's people astray?¹⁴

We certainly do not want to express any fellowship with such, anymore than the two named. On the other hand there is such a thing as "in meekness setting right those who oppose, if God perhaps may sometime give them repentance to acknowledgment of [the] truth, and that they may awake up out of the snare of the devil, [who are] taken by him, for *his* will" (2 Tim. 2:25, 26).

In concluding this section, another quotation from J. N. Darby will connect this section with what comes next:

Hymenaeus and Philetus had erred, overthrowing the faith of some. The whole passage refers to professed truth (see 15, 16, 17, 18, and 23 to the end), Satan subverting the soul by vain questions and false doctrine, the individual might or might not be a believer in heart, a member of Christ. It is not the question here. The answer to this unsettlement by error is, that the foundation of God remains sure -- the Lord knows them that are His.¹⁵

Purity in a great House (vv. 19-21)

Yet the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, [The] Lord knows those that are his; and, Let every one who names the name of [the] Lord withdraw from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and earthen; and some to honour and some to dishonour. If therefore one shall have purified himself from these, [in separating himself from them], he shall be a vessel to honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared unto every good work (2 Tim. 2:19-21).

YET THE FIRM FOUNDATION OF GOD STANDS (v. 19)

"Yet" refers back to vv. 16-18. Even though such things proceed, and evil teachers seem to have their way, and the faith of some is overthrown, there remains something immovable. For the day of ruin, the Christian is comforted and assured that there is that which is the firm foundation, indeed immovable. Whatever uncertainty the condition of the professing church may be in, as described in 2 Timothy, "Yet" indicates a divine certainty on which the soul can rest. The ruin has not, really cannot, cause the foundation to crumble. It stands, and we can rest on it. It has been suggested that the figure of the foundation is abstract.¹⁶ It would hardly mean the gospel message or the church.¹⁷ Nor is the

14. *The Christian Friend*, 1888, p. 72.

15. *Collected Writings* 20:335.

16. The accuracy of the translation of "the firm foundation of God" is noted by W. Kelly (as I suppose) who also rejected the notion that the foundation is the resurrection of Christ. It is figurative, used abstractly.

The position of the article proves that στερεός, "firm," cannot be a predicate, but is an epithet forming an integral part of the definition. The only possible meaning, therefore,

(continued...)

foundation the same as the seal which is described next. It is a foundation, not a building. If not an abstract figure, it would likely refer to what is noted in 2 Tim. 1:14:

Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us, the good deposit.

The epistles to Timothy are replete with the importance of sound teaching. Jude found it necessary "to write to you exhorting [you] to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." That certainly refers to the fundamental truths of Christianity. "The good deposit" in 2 Tim. 1:14 includes that, but goes further, including "the testimony of our Lord" (1 Tim. 1:8), which encompasses what is sometimes called "Paul's doctrine," thus incorporating the truth of the mystery of Christ and the church. The failure of the church as viewed in responsible testimony cannot upset the deposit, which has its source in God. The foundation being firm ministers comfort to the one who obeys the commands of the Lord. Cp. Hag. 2:3, 4.

This assurance follows closely after the sad recording of how some were moved from the truth of God concerning fundamental truth. (vv. 16-18).

HAVING THIS SEAL (v. 19)

This foundation has a seal; and thus the authority of God is bound up with this foundation, for this seal of God denotes His authority, and man cannot undo it. It is binding on us. Moreover, the seal is double-charactered -- by two complementary features.

[The] Lord Knows Those that Are His. The first feature of the seal affirms the comforting omniscience of the Lord concerning those who are the objects

(...continued)

is, "the firm foundation of God stands." . . . But I see no reason for giving it a special application, believing, with the translator referred to [JND], that the figure is used abstractly (*The Bible Treasury* 5:128). See the footnote to JND's translation.

17. Seemingly oblivious to the ruin of the church as viewed in responsible testimony, Philip H. Towner speaks of 2 Tim. 2:19-21 as "God's Permanent but Paradoxical Church." Of it, he says:

But here *God's solid foundation* describes God's people, the church . . . Paul might have cited Jesus' teaching about the wheat and the tares (Mt 13:24-30) to describe the mixed nature of the church, for the point is very much the same (*The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, 1-2 Timothy & Titus*, Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, p. 184, 1994).

Mixing these two things assists in obfuscating the force of 2 Tim 2; the Lord said the field is the world (Matt. 13), not the church. So the writer allows mixture in the church and tells the Christian that the church will not fail, and the Christian in this mixture must be "cleansed." "The pollutants in this case are false teachers and their teaching . . ., and God's servants must not be involved in them" etc. It is all an uncertain sound, without the true separation from evil unto the Lord being pressed in the passage and in the general context of the ruin of the church viewed in responsible testimony. No doubt it is unreasonable to expect much from "evangelical" expositors concerning this passage. Cp. Walter L. Liefeld, *The NIV Application Commentary, 1 & 2 Timothy & Titus*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp. 259, 260, 1999.

of divine election; He knows those that are His. We noted above that the man of 1 Cor. 5, whom the Apostle had delivered to Satan, turned out to be a believer -- one of "His." It did not appear so for a time. This might have been the case with Hymenaeus and Philetus, though at this time it may not have appeared so. Hymenaeus and Philetus were not acting on the second feature of the seal, however, namely departing from iniquity -- for their evil doctrine was iniquity.

Let Everyone Who Names the Name of the Lord Withdraw from Iniquity. The second feature is the solemn and peremptory command to every one who names the name of that Lord¹⁸ to fulfill the requirements of His holiness in accordance with this divine omniscience and election. To withdraw from iniquity is the only suitable, obedient, and compatible thing to do in connection with professing Christ's Lordship. God is light (1 John 1) and all that He does involves this fact concerning what He thus is in His nature. All that call on the name of the *Lord* should reflect that light -- which is incompatible with iniquity, and association/fellowship with iniquity. "Lord" denotes His authority, and where His authority is *truly* owned, this, His charge, will be obeyed. Do not say, "I am a believer and therefore truly call on the name of the Lord," and then not obey the direction to withdraw from iniquity!

We are commanded to "withdraw." The word has the meaning of turning away from, departing from; as in the case of an apostate who departs from the Christian profession, only that here the case is to depart from iniquity. This calls for separation from something. That something is "iniquity," or, as W. Kelly translated: "Let every one that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness." The word *αδικια* is not always, but usually, translated unrighteousness.¹⁹

Do you really think that if a congregation has a known "wicked person," as in 1 Cor. 5, and does not "Remove the wicked person from amongst yourselves" (1 Cor. 5:12), that that is not iniquity, i.e., unrighteousness (2 Tim. 2:19)? And also if a teacher of *evil doctrine*, called leaven in Gal. 5:9, is tolerated in an assembly, do you really think that is not iniquity on the part of those that tolerate it? What would you call it, if not that? Would you label it in some self-serving manner by making of it something that would be of no cost to you personally? -- to make your path easier at the cost of faithfulness to Christ? -- to keep a wider "fellowship"?

And is it not clear that this direction to withdraw from iniquity means

18. J. N. Darby remarked:

The Lordship of Christ is not the ground {basis} of gathering at all. Lordship applies to individual responsibility. The Lordship of the assembly is not scriptural, nor the Lordship of the body (*Collected Writings* 20:221).

19. See *The Englishman's Greek Concordance*, p. 14.

withdrawal from Hymenaeus and Philetus, and their disciples? -- and not merely rejecting their teaching while continuing fellowship with them?

As with everything else in the things of God, withdrawal from iniquity may be abused to serve self. This is done in two ways: (1) by refusing to call iniquity what really is iniquity; and, (2) by calling something iniquity that is not iniquity. Thus we can manipulate Scripture to serve our own selfish purpose. It is most important to keep in mind our self-serving tendency, and even conduct, hiding the self-serving by dressing it in an aura of holiness, a common thing, alas. So a certain slowness to suspect evil in others, and a quickness to suspect it in ourselves, might preserve us from self-importance and rashness. We are dependent, as always, on the guidance of God's Spirit, through the Word, to ascertain the mind of God for our pathway in the state of ruin of the church on earth viewed in responsible testimony.

Titus 2:11, 12 bears on our subject, as it does on all aspects of our lives:

For the grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men has appeared, teaching us that, having denied impiety and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and justly, and piously in the present course of things . . .

We are to live soberly, i.e., as *personally* characterized by sobriety. We are to live justly, i.e., righteously with respect to *others* in all our relationships. And we are to live piously, i.e., we are to live godlily, which refers to our attitude of holy reverence *towards God*. **Righteousness is consistency with relationship.** In God, His righteousness is consistency in what He is in Himself as light and love. In us, righteousness is being and doing right in our various relationships with others. Righteousness in the context of the Christian profession is what is particularly in view in 2 Tim. 2:19. Those who call on the name of the Lord should not be found in fellowship with what connects them with unrighteousness.

W. Kelly wrote:

If a man therefore finds himself involved in subjection to an unscripturally formed ministry, for instance, or, again, in any prostitution of an institution of the Lord (say the Lord's Supper), let him have done with it at once. The Lord does not warrant His servant's sanction of what is contrary to truth and holiness. Why should I, as a Christian, endorse any ministry which is not of God? Why should I be a party by my presence to a desecration of the Lord's Supper into a sacrament made a means of grace for the world, for anybody, for every one? He that possesses but little knowledge of God's word about either, knows perfectly well that they cannot be defended by Scripture, and that they frustrate the Lord's will in these grave matters. Am I then to abandon the Lord's Supper? Am I henceforth to do without the ministry of the word? Certainly neither the one nor the other, if wise and obedient. What one has to abandon is the abuse of these things. I am to have done with that which, as being without Scripture, is clearly to the dishonor of God. I do not give up Christian ministry, therefore, I do not give up the Lord's Supper; but I judge

according to the word of God, as far as enabled by His grace, what is His will in these respects. The same principle applies to every other. Do you think of worship, for instance? I must search the Scriptures to judge what is Christian worship according to God's word for us now, as a Jew used to do from the Old Testament. Am I not bound so to do? Am I not to follow His will? . . .

Nor is it, let me say, a question only of flagrant wrongs. The Church, being God's habitation, is intolerant of all that is unfit for His presence, though we have need of patience too; and who is so patient as God? But He will be sanctified in all that come near Him, among whom He dwells: everything contrary to His word must be judged. Supposing there be only, as men say, a little evil, am I to bind up His name and presence, not to speak of myself, with even a small evil? Be it far from us. Not that it is called for, of course, to separate for every fault; but we are never to partake in what is contrary to God, but always by God's grace to keep ourselves pure. At the same time, the manner in which this is done must be determined by the word of God. For instance, not every censurable brother, but those guilty of wickedness (1 Cor. 5), are to be put away from the Church; but in no case is a Christian bound to go along with that which he knows to be offensive to God. Again, we have to judge ourselves, lest we should be hasty in imputing evil. Slowness to suspect, to act, and speak in such circumstances God looks for from His children. Alas! how ready we are, because of the evil of which one is conscious within, to think of it in others.²⁰

J. N. Darby wrote:

I must depart from iniquity wherever I find it. Whatever the leaving it involves, I must cease all iniquity -- depart from it. If it be bound up with an ocean of good, I am not master but slave in my responsibility of conscience; I must depart from iniquity. That is a settled thing, a divine exigence which nothing can meet but acting on it. It is owning and abiding with God Himself in my conduct. Nothing can be so good, or doing so much good, as doing His will.

"To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Is any given thing iniquity? Is it wrong according to the light Christ has given me? I depart from it. I am told, "But you will lose opportunities of usefulness, of serving the Lord, of doing good; and you must leave other Christians. With whom will you go?" I answer, I know nothing of all this. That thing is wrong: I must depart from it; I dare not do otherwise. "But you will find wrong in everything." Not for me -- for a Christian -- to sanction. He may fail in doing right, but not deliberately accept any doing wrong, however small, if he fears God. I name the name of the Lord; I cannot abide in what is not right. It is destroying all responsibility, and denying God's authority over me to allege any motives for not departing from evil. None could have a better excuse than Saul when he lost the kingdom. There was one simple thing in the whole matter -- he did not obey. "He that will *serve* me, let him *follow* me" -- a

20. "An Habitation of God Through the Spirit."

weighty word of the Lord's.

But the confusion which evil has brought into the church, and the enormous system of evil which bears its name, may create difficulties in many a sincere soul, when what bears the name of the church of God is the seat of the power of the enemy. To this the apostle turns. "But in a great house," continues he, after speaking of these mischievous teachers, and the general principles which secured and directed the heart of the faithful. "In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth, and some to honor and some to dishonor." The professing church -- what bore the name of Christ in the world -- would become like a great house, where one finds vessels of every kind, and for all uses. What was to be done -- leave the Christian profession -- become unbaptized? That was impossible. There was no going out of the great house. Whatever state it was in, Christ was the Master of the house. We cannot be heathens, or Mahommedans, or strangers to Christian profession. What, I repeat, was to be done? Remain with those that dishonored Christ because they also were in the great house? Not so. "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel to honor, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." What defiled the house was worse, as such, than heathenism or the darkest ignorance.

Am I then to remain isolated in separating myself from these vessels to dishonor? Not so; I am to follow what becomes saints -- righteousness, faith, charity, peace *with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart*. Nothing seems to be plainer. Vessels to dishonor, I must expect would be found in the house; I must separate from these. But there are those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. With those I am to associate, and follow after every Christian grace with them. If the house, once builded on the earth of choice and goodly stones (I am not aware that it is ever said that God positively built and formed it, I do not think it is), has become a great house in which vessels to dishonor are found, my path is clearly traced for me. The extent of the evil does not affect the principle, and other guiding ones may come in for other points of conduct. But this I have; I separate myself from the vessels to dishonor. I associate myself with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.

It is not a question of local discipline, but of public and personal conduct. The responsibility of all in the house remains grounded on the place to which they pretend, in which they have outwardly stood. This is clearly taught in Matthew 24 where the evil is viewed as a whole (v. 48). "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken, the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites." Here the servant is treated as a servant, but as an evil one, as a hypocrite by the Lord. He considers himself so too. He says "My Lord"; he is so dealt with -- *the Lord of that servant*. What a lesson for the professing church, and particularly for the hierarchical part of it! What

makes this more remarkable is, that he is treated as the same servant, as *to position*, as the other who will be made ruler over all his Lord's goods. Nay, he is treated as the same servant changed in character, "But and if *that* evil servant, *o kakos doulos ekeinos*."

It is indeed a solemn thought for those who take the place of rulers in the church called of God. But my object at present is only to lay before the reader the view scripture gives of the church's responsibility, and the fact of the existence of that house in which vessels to dishonor are -- how scripture looks at it. We cannot, with impunity, lose any part of scripture truth, and especially on points which commit us to grave points of action. We *cannot* begin the church over again: God is not beginning it. We cannot accept any evil in what is called by that name; less than elsewhere. That is a matter of absolute Christian responsibility.²¹

THE CHARACTER OF A GREAT HOUSE (V. 20)

But in a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also wooden and earthen; and some to honor and some to dishonor (2 Tim. 2:20).

The illustration of a great house is now brought to bear on the imperative duty of everyone that calls on the name of the Lord to withdraw from iniquity. Pointing out that we read "*a* great house," not "*the* great house," while true, will not let us escape the responsibility. Nor does it change the fact that it is illustrative of the Christian profession in a different status than it could be viewed in the time before the fall of the church as seen in responsible testimony. Carefulness with words has its place, but what is important is the *thing*. The *thing* is Christian responsibility in view of the status of the Christian testimony which was at this point in time in what Paul called "the last days," and John called "the last hour." Do not be side-tracked from that.²²

It is exactly cases such as Hymenaeus and Philetus that serve as the occasion for the illustration in v. 20 and the following command (v. 21) to purge oneself out from such.

Timothy is not now instructed how to behave himself in the house {1 Tim. 3:15}, but exhorted to purge himself from the vessels to dishonor that are there. How much rather would the apostle's heart have rejoiced to dwell upon the order of the house of his first epistle, than on the disorder referred to as characterizing the house of his second. How painful for him to have to exhort his beloved son to purge himself from corrupters lodged within. Yet there is comfort: vessels to honor still remain, and are subjects for exhortation. Such are those who follow "righteousness," -- which it is important to see comes *first*, and leads on to the others -- "faith, charity, and peace," calling "on the Lord out of a pure heart."

21. *Collected Writings* 20:336-338.

22. "The household of faith" in Gal. 6:10 (reality) has no correspondence with what is likened to "a great house" (a mixture of reality and unsaved, as well as other things).

We cannot get out of this "great house," but the Holy Ghost has provided a remedy *in* it, in separation from all the evil that is around us. Still it should afflict our hearts greatly, and humble us in the dust as those who are connected with, and bearing its shame, that the "house of God" -- "the pillar and ground of the truth" -- of 1 Tim. 3:15, has enlarged in the "great house" of disorder and corruption, of 2 Tim. 2: 20.

Thus are we taught as to what the church was at the beginning: what it has become through human weakness; and what the Holy Spirit of God would have us to do as now being in it. We cannot root up the tares, they will continue to grow to the end, but we *are* bound to dissociate ourselves from all unsuited to His holy habitation, and to remember the word that says, "Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever" (Psa. 92:5).²³

Two Classes of Materials Named. In connection with the ruin of the church on earth viewed in responsible testimony, the profession of Christianity became such that it is here compared to a great house with various vessels and vessels in several states. Both the comparison to a great house and the vessels are of importance. What has given rise to such a comparison of the Christian profession with a great house? We saw that Paul laid the foundation and others build on it. He specifically warned, "But let each see HOW he builds upon it" (1 Cor. 3:10). He then described two classes of materials which might be built upon the foundation. I assume that the reader knows that PEOPLE are built upon the foundation. It is the professing church. But there are false professors as well as saved professors in that vast mixture which presents itself to the public eye as the church of God.²⁴ We are now considering the *professing* church composed of real and false, precious and non-precious, with evil doctrines and evil teachers, and good doctrines and good teachers. This is the professing church. A solemn case of profession without possession is given in Matt. 7:21-23. The five foolish virgins, who "did not take oil with them" (Matt. 25:3) serve as another example; as does what we see in Luke 13:25-27.

1 Cor. 3 views the church in the aspect of what is committed to man's responsibility. Man builds with two classes of materials:

- (1) Gold -- those who have divine righteousness.
Silver -- those who are redeemed.
Precious stones -- those who reflect the light of God.
- (2) Wood -- those who are a natural production.
Grass -- man according to the flesh.
Straw -- what man provides.

One class withstands the fire, but the other does not. It is the inclusion of the

23. *Words of Faith* 1882, p. 45.

24. For one example, read Jude. Also see 2 Peter and Rev. 2, 3.

latter class, *among other things*, that gives character to that superstructure which is likened to “a great house.” In 2 Tim. 2:20 we again see two classes of vessels: precious and not-precious. That which appears before the world, the professing church, once was composed only of believers, and was the true church, but false professors have entered the ranks of that which presents itself as the church; i.e., the church on earth seen in responsible testimony. This is one of the causes for the professing church to be compared with a great house with various classes of vessels and various states.²⁵ So corrupt has it become that in addition to wood, grass and straw, earthen vessels are mentioned. The first three grow in the earth; but now we see the world itself right in the professing church. The

25. J. N. Darby often pointed out the distinction between what Christ builds and what man builds. Here is an example:

And then he {Paul -- 1 Cor. 3} shows the effect of fidelity or infidelity in the work. Now in this we have the responsibility of man, and the instrumentality of man directly engaged in the work. Christ is not the builder. Paul is the masterbuilder and lays the foundation which is Christ; others build on it; nor is the building, consequently, fitly framed together. Wood and hay and stubble are not fitly framed in a building with gold and silver and precious stones: the work is, in such case, to be burned up: Christ's work never will. Now this gives, evidently, another character to the Church than that of Matt. 16 or 1 Pet. 2.

It is on this confusion and error that popery, Puseyism, and the whole high-church system is built. They have not distinguished between the building which Christ builds, where living stones come to a living stone, where all grows to a holy temple in the Lord (that is, where the result is perfect), and that which man avowedly builds, though as God's building, and where man may fail and has failed. I am entirely justified in looking at the outward thing in this world as a building, which in pretension, character, and responsibility is God's building; yet it has been built by man, and built of wood and stubble, so that the work is to be burned up in the day of judgment which is revealed in fire. Yea, more, I may see that corrupters have corrupted it; and that, if any have dealt with it in this character, they will be destroyed. In a word I have a building which Christ builds, a building in which living stones come and are built up as living stones, a building which grows to a holy temple in the Lord. I have also what is called God's building, as that which is for Him and set up by Him on the earth, but which is built instrumentally and responsibly by man, where I may find very bad building and even persons corrupting it. The foundation well laid, and a good foundation, but all the superstructure to be in question. Thus the whole professing church stands in the position and responsibility of God's building; the actual building or work is the work of men and may be wood, hay, and stubble, or the mere corruption of the corrupter. It is not that of which Christ says, “I will build.” It would be a blasphemy to say that He builds with wood, hay, and stubble, or corrupts the temple of God. Yet such the apostle tells us may take place; and it has taken place; and he who sets the title of God upon the wood, hay, and stubble, or upon the wicked corruption of His temple, dishonors God by putting (as far as they are concerned) His seal and sanction upon evil, which is the greatest of wickedness. What our path in such a case is, Paul (2 Tim. 2) tells us; but it is not my object to pursue this here, but to distinguish between those admitted by baptism and the body; and between the Church which Christ builds, and what man builds when God's building is entrusted to him. All that has been entrusted to man, man has failed in. And God has put all into his hands first, to be set up perfect in the second Man who never fails (*Collected Writings* 14:98, 99; see also pp. 81, 279; 20:304, etc., etc.).

wooden and earthen vessels represent unsaved persons. The one may be burnt and the other dashed in pieces. Note, then, that these two classes speak of what persons *are*, not their *state*. But besides the distinction between the precious and the not-precious, there is another kind of distinction.

Two States Explicitly Named: ²⁶ **Vessels to Honor and Vessels to Dishonor.** Besides the distinction of the precious and the non-precious vessels there is another distinction made:

1. vessels to honor, and
2. vessels to dishonor.

This does not refer to a high or menial character of service; i.e., the use to which a vessel is put is not meant. That is thought by many expositors, but it is false and often part of a view that undermines the meaning of v. 21.

What this *does mean* is a *state* of *suitability* for His use. It refers to the *state* of the person. The word “sanctified” in v. 21 indicates this *state*, as does the word “serviceable.” Moreover, “*prepared* unto every good work” also points to this being a matter of *state*. Whether or not God chooses to use such a vessel to honor is another matter. Our concern must be to be in such a state. Also, we should keep in mind that God is sovereign and in His ways can use a vessel to dishonor for His objective. Why, He can even use a Balaam! But the Christian's desire should always be that he be in a suitable state for God's use.

Concerning vessels to dishonor, JND remarked:

False doctrine, when it characterizes a man, is a vessel to dishonor; sound and exalted doctrine accompanied with unholiness, makes a man a vessel to dishonor; he who builds up sacramental corruptions, as Puseyites, Romanists, Greeks, are -- at any rate as teachers -- vessels to dishonor. I give these merely as examples; but it is left to spiritual discernment, according to the word, to judge what is and then to purge oneself from them . . . ²⁷

In a previous pamphlet we saw that in 2 John those who abide not in “the doctrine of the Christ,” i.e., in the fundamental truths of His person and work, such as, for example, the Eternal Sonship, the eternal, conscious punishment of the wicked, etc., are involved in “wicked works” (2 John 11). Such are like Hymenaeus and Philetus, vessels to dishonor. In 2 John and 2 Tim. 2, the issue is primarily doctrinal. But evil doctrine is leaven (Gal. 5:9) and this fact is the bridge to 1 Cor. 5 where what is often called moral evil is also called leaven.

26. Below we will see that an unpurged vessel who may be of the good *class* of vessel is not necessarily a vessel to honor. “Two States Explicitly Named” means that there are two states of vessels that are directly named: vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor. There is another state implied concerning unpurged vessels, namely, that they are not vessels to honor. You will err if you suppose that a vessel of the good class is necessarily a vessel to honor. That idea contradicts v. 21. See below.

27. *Letters* 3:174.

Certainly the man of 1 Cor. 5:13, called a “wicked person,” is a vessel to dishonor. There, he was purged out. Here, as we shall see, we must purge ourselves from vessels to dishonor. Note also that the man of 1 Cor. 5 was really a child of God (2 Cor. 2). A vessel to dishonor must not be defined as necessarily being an unbeliever.

When we consider the *affection* of the church for Christ, we properly speak of the bride of Christ. When we think of the *unity* of the church, we think of the body of Christ. When we think of the *order* proper to the church, we think of the house of God. When we think of the *holiness* of the church, we think of the temple of God. The truths concerning our membership in the body of Christ speak of our privileges. The house of God, however, brings in the responsibility side. It is His house and therefore His will and order should be carried out. He orders the service and the servants, and the relationships of those connected with His house. But man grossly marred the carrying out of this aspect of the church.

Now, that great structure which presents itself to the eyes of the world as the church (the professing church, seen in responsible testimony) contains (a) saved and lost, and besides that (b) vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor.²⁸ This awful mixture presents itself before the world as the house of God. I recall seeing the words “My house shall be called the house of prayer” engraved on a so-called “church” building, and on the billboard it said “card party,” “cake sale,” etc. etc. Obviously, the building is not the, or a, church, nor is it the house of God. But man has defaced the outward presentation of the truth of the house of God. Instead of God’s order, instead of the liberty of the Spirit of God to use whomsoever He will (1 Cor. 12 and 14), etc., man has introduced his own order and organization based on principles he thinks best suited to secure the ends that he judges are convenient to himself and suitable to God. Man orders the service and servants. Man sets up boards, authorities, societies; man ordains those who are then permitted to preach, and then the sheep vote for their shepherd. Man sets the ritual of worship. Man controls the ministry of God’s Word and will not give room to properly follow out 1 Cor. 14:29, Eph. 4:16-17, etc. Some call themselves Christian priests. And there is a mixture of Judaism and paganism with Christianity. It is not a question of weakness, but of the introduction of principles and evil doctrine subversive of God’s order and will. Indeed, the Apostle pointed out to the Thessalonians that “the mystery of lawlessness already works” (2 Thess. 2:7).

These are things that give Christendom a character likened to a great house. In such a house there is organization and control. But the illustration depicts a perversion of the order that should characterize God’s house. Man’s will is reigning there. This is the superstructure that man has built on the foundation

28. Below, we shall see that there is a third class of vessels.

laid by Paul (1 Cor. 3).

Christendom has become filled with false professors, sown with tares, become like a tree so that birds roost in its branches (compare Matt. 13:32 and Rev. 18:2), and leavened with evil teaching concerning the things of Christ (Matt. 13:33). This will finally issue into the great whore of Rev. 17 and 18, for which the groundwork is presently being laid, and then, upon the destruction of the whore, the revelation of the Lawless One and the advent of the final Antichrist of prophecy (2 Thess. 2), with the attendant public worship of the Triad. Meanwhile, there ought to be within us a great desire to be a vessel unto honor.

HOW TO BE A VESSEL TO HONOR (V. 21)

If therefore one²⁹ shall have purified himself from these, [in separating himself from them], he shall be a vessel to honor, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work (2 Tim. 2:21).

Purging Oneself from Vessels to Dishonor. There are persons who very much object to “[in separating himself from them]” in J. N. Darby’s translation, given here. The objection arises because they want to view the separation as a cleansing from things within oneself, rather than a separation from persons. Here is how Alfred Marshall translates in his *Interlinear Greek English New Testament*:

if therefore anyone cleanses himself from these [latter], he will be a vessel to honour, having been sanctified; suitable to the master, to every work good *having been prepared*.

“These [latter]” refers to the vessels to dishonor, who, quite clearly, are persons.

29. This is speaking about **you**, not some special servants of Christ. And, it is an individual matter. It applies to all who name the name of the Lord.

In the editions of J. N. Darby's translation during the 1800s (including the 1920 full note edition published by G. Morrish), the words in the brackets are there but not the brackets. In the 1885 edition of the NT, these unbracketed words ("in separating himself from them") have a footnote as follows:

ἐκκαθάρη ἀπό ἐκκ. is only found 1 Cor. 5:7, 'Purge out³⁰ the old leaven.' There it was to get rid of it out of the lump; here he has to purge himself out from among them (the vessels). Hence we have ἀπό, which with ἐκ, is rendered by 'separating from.'

This Scripture, here faithfully translated,³¹ tells us our duty. One does not purge himself out of what is likened to a great house, for that would be leaving the profession of Christianity. A man must separate, dis-associate, from where iniquity is. It is the converse of 1 Cor. 5:7, where the leaven is purged out. Here, a man purges *himself* out from vessels to dishonor. He is not told to determine the state of soul of the vessels to dishonor, but to purge himself from them.

It is *vessels* from whom he must purge himself. Note that well. It is withdrawal from iniquity and it is purging oneself from certain vessels.

A vessel to honor is one that honors the Lord in his associations. In order to be a sanctified vessel, a vessel to honor, we must purge ourselves from vessels to dishonor.³² ***It is only purged vessels that are vessels to honor.***

30. {*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says:

. . . to cleanse out, cleanse thoroughly, is said of purging out leaven, 1 Cor. 5:7; in 2 Tim. 2:21, of purging oneself from those who utter "profane babblings," vv. 16-18.}

31. Another wrote:

In his translation of this important text, J.N.D. sought to convey the full sense of the original words, as he explains in a footnote. He takes into account the intensive form of the verb and also the preposition *apo*, preceding the pronoun, "them," which refers to "the vessels to dishonor" mentioned in the preceding verse. The prefix to the verb indicates that the cleansing is to be done "thoroughly," or "utterly," while *apo* embodies the idea of separation or departure from. This is the usual sense of *apo*; thus "Joseph went up from [*apo*] Galilee into Judea" (Luke 2:4); he left one place for another. The sense therefore is that expressed by J.N.D. -- to purify himself thoroughly from the vessels to dishonor by separating himself or going away from them (*The Bible Monthly* 10:144).

32. JND wrote:

Another assertion you make is, I have evil in myself, and that I cannot leave, and therefore it is a hopeless thing to seek purity. This (forgive me for saying it) is an ugly argument. There is no hope: we will continue to do evil. But it is a poor piece of sophistry. I cannot leave the evil in my flesh, so I remain in the body. I can leave the evil around me, so I am to remain in that too. You will admit this is not very strong reasoning. But more plainly, the Lord says, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." He does not say, Come out from your body. The Lord says, "If a man purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel made unto honour, fit for the master's use." I cannot have done with my body, though I may

(continued...)

Keeping up outward unity with the toleration of evil within a fellowship of believers is evil -- and this adds to the character of what the Lord commands those who call on the name of the Lord to withdraw from. Commenting on such 'unity,' J. N. Darby wrote:

The unity of the assembly is so precious, it has such authority over the heart of man, that there was a danger, when failure had set in, lest the desire for outward unity should induce even the faithful to accept evil and walk in fellowship with it, rather than break this unity. The principle therefore of individual faithfulness, of individual responsibility to God, is established, and set above all other considerations; for it has to do with the nature of God Himself [as light], and His own authority over the conscience of the individual.³³

W. Kelly said:

When the assembly is in its normal condition, and an evil-doer, however gross, is among the saints, the word is, "Put away from among yourselves the wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:13). But here it is the converse. Evil may prevail in an assembly, and the moral sensibility be so low that the mass refuse to purge out the old leaven: the vessels unto dishonor have influence enough to remain in spite of all efforts for their removal. What then? The apostle commands that the God-fearing man should purge himself from them. This meets the conscience if it were of only one; but the self-same principle, it is plain, applies to all who discern the evil, after patient waiting on the assembly and every scriptural means also employed in vain to rouse the conscience. At bottom it is evidently the same principle of separation from evil which in 1 Cor. 5 is applied to put the evil-doer out. In 2 Tim. 2 it is a far more developed case where the well-doer, having striven without effect to correct the evils sustained within, is bound to purge himself out. Impossible that the Spirit of God would seal evil under the name of the Lord Jesus. We are unleavened as surely as Christ our passover was sanctified for us. "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor

32. (...continued)

mortify it and treat it as dead through grace and infinite mercy. The Lord says, "From such withdraw thyself": I cannot from my body. The Lord says, speaking (I believe you will agree with me) of these latter days-days it may be not fully ripened, still they are now the last days, "From such turn away." From my body I cannot turn away. The answer simply then to this is, that the Lord has commanded me to come out and be separate from the world; He has not commanded me to come out of my body. Is your argument really a righteous one in this?

One only remark, I believe, remains in this part: your objection to ceasing to do evil before we know to do good -- taking, as you call it, a leap in the dark. Is it taking a leap in the dark for a Christian ceasing to do known evil, because he does not yet know all the Lord's subsequent will concerning him? Are we to say, I will not act on what I do know, till you tell me all my course on to glory? (*Collected Writings* 14:198, 199).

33. *Synopsis, in loco.*

the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8). The assembly which professes to be of God cannot bind Christ and known evil together. If any therefore bear the Lord's name, who, under the plea of unity, in the love of ease, or through partiality for their friends, tolerate the evil which scripture shows to be hateful to God, a godly man has no option, but is bound to hear the divine word and purge himself from these vessels to dishonor.³⁴ ♦

It is not the question of discipline -- dealing with evil ways; but here we are in a state of things where we are in danger of being mixed up with vessels unto the Lord's dishonor. Nothing can sanction this. I am not at liberty of course to leave Christendom, I dare not get out of the great house at all; indeed I cannot (at any rate without becoming an apostate) leave the house of God, however bad its state may be. This is evidently not the true remedy -- to abandon the confession of Christ: only an apostate could think of it. On the other hand, it is unholy to tamper with evil. Therefore it is incumbent for the Christian to look to this gravely, -- never to be dragged by the fear of breaking unity into accrediting what dishonors the Lord. Now this is in particular a difficulty for saints, when they have revived before the soul the blessedness of maintaining the unity of the Spirit. It can never cease to be a Christian's duty to maintain the unity of the Spirit; but it is not maintaining the unity of the Spirit to couple with the name of the Lord that which is fleshly and sinful. It is well to be exclusive of sin, but of nothing else. It is well to maintain the largest heart for everything that is really of Christ. But we must exclude that which is contrary to His name; and the very same desire to prove one's love, one's faith, one's appreciation of Christ, will make one anxious not to be dragged into that which is not for His glory.³⁵ ♦

Separation from evil is the invariable principle of God, modified as to the manner of course by the special character of the dispensation. So Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the prophets generally. Is Christianity less stringent? It is now on the contrary that it becomes more urgent and absolute. "If a man purge himself from these [the vessels to dishonour], he shall be a vessel to honour." Put away the wicked (1 Cor. 5); if this be no longer possible, purge yourself out from them. There is nothing man dreads and feels so deeply. You may protest, you may denounce, and it will be borne by the world as long as you walk with it in the main; but "he that departeth," now as ever, "maketh himself a prey." Act on your convictions, and the most honeyed courtesy turns sour; your desire to please God at all cost will be branded as pharisaical pride and exclusiveness. It matters not how gently and lovingly you purge yourself from the vessels to dishonour; the pain, the

34. *An Exposition of the Two Epistles to Timothy*, London: Hammond, p. 233, third ed., reprint, 1948.

35. *Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Epistles of Paul the Apostle*, London: Broom, p. 403, 1869.

grievance, lies there, and nothing can sweeten it, above all in the eyes of those it condemns. Indeed it is more felt, the more graciously it is done, provided it be done thoroughly; for then evidently your motive is not disappointed feeling but desire to be wholly subject to Christ, with a heart perfectly happy in what they know nothing of and could not enjoy.

All this is an unpardonable affront in the world's eyes. Add to this, that separation is claimed in 2 Tim. from the religious or Christian world. "The Christian world!" what a phrase! what a contradiction! as if there could be the smallest possible alliance between Christianity, which is of heaven and Christ, and that outside world which crucified Him. No wonder that in this epistle we read of perilous times in the last days. What greater peril than, after they have known the truth, going back into substantially the same conditions of evil as were found in the heathen world before Christianity entered it. Compare 2 Tim. 3 with Rom. 1. How painful the resemblance! The difference is, that some of the grosser characteristics of heathenism have been replaced by subtler evil. The comparison is most instructive . . .

If there, what ought you to do? It is a solemn question for the believer. He has no hesitation about the profane world; but the world bearing the name of Christ is a difficulty to him. Seeing that the Christian profession is there, am I not setting myself up and virtually condemning the excellent of the earth? But will you name any evil thing that has not had a good name attached to it? I do not speak now of such fatal poison as Socinianism or the like; but take Romanism, or the Greek church, or even sects known to be heretical, and yet by the malice of the enemy and the subtlety with which he has concealed his work some children of God have been entangled. It is too plain therefore that, whatever good men may do here or there, the only real inquiry is as to the will of the Lord. It is not a question of making others walk in your light, but you must *not* walk in their darkness. This is the great point, not occupying ourselves with others, prescribing what they must do, but feeling my own sin, as well as the common sin, yet by grace resolved at all costs to be where I can honour and obey the Lord. Is not this a true plain imperative duty, an undeniable principle of scripture, that commends itself to your conscience? It may be that you do not act accordingly; but you cannot deny that it is a right thing and what you ought to do.

But you are tied and have difficulties. Perhaps you have a family and friends you cannot bear to grieve; perhaps you have hopes for your children if not for yourself. Can a heart purified by faith thus set aside the Lord's word? Do you think He does not know your wants and does not feel for your family? You know the Lord loves yourself: cannot you trust Him for a bit of bread? You, who are trusting Him for eternal life and for heaven, cannot you trust Him to take care of you in the face of these trials and obstacles of every day? Perhaps you are too comfortable, too anxious about what is respectable for yourself and your children. Let the Lord deal with

you; I am sure He will not harm you, but only do what is most loving and tender towards you and yours. Impossible for any heart to be beyond the Lord's love and wisdom and generous considerate care. If you really believe in Him, why not cleave to His word without compact or condition, and come forth at His bidding? You do not know what the next steps may be. It is enough that you know you are doing contrary to the word of God now. In vain we talk of loving, if we are not prepared to follow His word. Do you say you do not know what next to do? The Lord does not ask you: it is not His way to show all at once. Act on what you see from the word, and trust the Lord for what will follow; He is worthy of your confidence, and will give you more when you have taken the first step. But leave for ever that which is condemned in God's word. "Remember Lot's wife," and look not back, but go forth at His word wherever it points, and you will find that "whosoever hath, to him shall be given." And as regards the way, to the Lord rough or smooth is alike, deep or shallow, great or small; it may make a great difference to you, but the greatest difficulties only become the means of proving what the God is that we have found.³⁶

In 2 Timothy, then, the meaning of purging is the same as in 1 Cor. 5, i.e., removal. However, the ruin had come to the point that, to be a vessel to honor, one might find himself in circumstances where he would have to purge HIMSELF from . . . This shows that a change had taken place in the general condition of the professing church and that the Christian might find himself in fellowship with evil that is being tolerated. In this condition, the purging has in view how a person may be a vessel to honor.

Rightly purging out oneself from vessels to dishonor involves self-judgment, not self-righteousness or pride.

If . . . He Shall be a Vessel to Honor. The issue is how to *be* a vessel to honor. The fact that a vessel is composed of precious metal (a child of God) does not mean that he is therefore a vessel to honor. There is an "if," a condition to be a vessel to honor (v. 21). If the purging is not done, then the vessel is not a vessel to honor. Let us be clear in our minds about this important fact.

Dis-association First; Then Association. It is intended by this heading to emphasize the fact that in v. 21 we have dis-association from vessels to dishonor, while in v. 22 we have instruction regarding association. This order follows a pattern that we see in Scripture. For example, let us consider a text from each Testament:

. . . cease to do evil, learn to do well . . . (Isa. 1:16, 17).

Let love be unfeigned; abhorring evil; cleaving to good . . . (Rom. 12:9).

And this brings up the question to be addressed next.

What About Unpurged Vessels? The following quotation brings into sharp

36. From *Lectures on the Church of God*, London: Morrish, pp. 251-254, n.d.

focus the matter of unpurged vessels:

Let it be assumed that this must set us to work to separate from evil men, such as Hymenaeus and Philetus. But then it is surely simple and plain, that if it does refer to such, it can refer to *none but such*, and that if we separate ourselves from any who are not clearly "vessels to dishonor," we can find no justification whatever in this scripture.³⁷

The reader should realize that this statement rejects standing separate from persons who are not expressly designated vessels to dishonor. That is, we are not to separate from persons who *are associated* with vessels to dishonor. Note then:

1. Persons associated with a Hymenaeus or Philetus come under the ban of 2 John 10, 11. Greet them as indicated there and you are a partaker of their "wicked works" of spreading evil doctrine. The effect of the above quotation is that if one does not stand separated from those who willfully violate 2 John 10, 11 there is no justification in 2 Tim. 2 to separate from him.

2. Persons non-separated from these men are leavened (Gal. 5:9).

3. Leaven in the assembly must be purged out or else the assembly is constituted a leavened lump (1 Cor. 5).

4. In 2 Tim. 2, if not purged out from such persons, the non-purged out are *not* vessels to honor, sanctified. What are they then? They are a third class of vessels; namely, unpurged, leavened, and partakers of "wicked works" of propagating a false Christ.

5. Do you seriously think that 2 Tim. 2:22 applies to those who refuse to act on 2 Tim. 2:21, who refuse to purge themselves from vessels to dishonor? Do you seriously think that v. 22 refers both to vessels to honor who did purge themselves and to those who refuse to purge themselves from the vessels to dishonor and are thus not themselves vessels to honor?

Unpurged Vessels Are a Third State of Vessels. We have seen that what is likened to a great house has two classes of vessels regarding constitution, precious and non-precious; and regarding state, vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor. A requirement to be a vessel to honor is that the vessel must be purged from vessels to dishonor (v. 21). Reader, that is what the text says! Let us read it again:

If therefore one shall have purified himself from these in separating himself from them, he shall be a vessel to honor, sanctified . . .

Are you going to insist that if one shall not have purified himself from these, not

37. *The Faith and the Flock* 1:411 (1910), edited by Russell Elliot, who circulated among whatever Open Brethren would receive him.

separating himself from them, he is a vessel to honor anyway? ³⁸

So, a precious vessel that has not purged himself from vessels to dishonor is an unpurged vessel -- a third state of vessel (or, otherwise, the only alternatives are that all unpurged vessels are vessels to dishonor, or they are all vessels to honor).

It appears that the objective in the above quoted statement is to lessen the consequences of refusing to purge oneself out from the vessels to dishonor, while saying that one *should* do so. But if you do not obey, the writer of the statement will go on in fellowship with you just the same; i.e., those who hold such a view will ignore the fact that you are not a vessel to honor, sanctified. They will, for all practical purposes, ignore it. So here we must anticipate the instructions to the one who has purged himself out from the vessels to honor, as given in v. 22 concerning his relationship to other vessels. The vessels to honor are instructed to “pursue” with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart, i.e., with the other vessels to honor, i.e., with the purged vessels. Thus the unpurged vessels are excluded from the right path of association in the midst of what is likened to a great house.

The Unpurged Vessels Are Neutrals. The unpurged vessels have in their hearts indifference to Christ. They are neutral. A solemn instruction is afforded us concerning the rise of evil and its awful results in Judges 17-21, which is a moral appendix to the book of Judges and shows the origins of Israel’s sorrows. In chapter 20 we see a solemn lesson concerning the self-judgment that should accompany discipline. The eleven tribes sought to carry out discipline without self-judgment and were humbled, but in the end God showed Himself with them in judgment. Benjamin well knew of the infamy, for they had been notified by the sending of the pieces of the woman. Besides, they willfully refused to dissociate from the men of Belial. They all thus came under the sentence. Not only that, but in Judges 21 we read that the NEUTRALS of Jabesh-Gilead were also subjected to the same sentence. God hates neutrality in divine matters (Judg. 5:23).

The purged vessels are not breaking bread with unpurged vessels since these are not vessels to honor. The unpurged vessels do not call on the name of

38. F. C. Jennings, once expressing fellowship with F. W. Grant, went to Open Brethrenism, and held that the gold and silver vessels were vessels to honor, and could not be vessels to dishonor, and those of wood and earth were vessels to dishonor. He wrote:

Some, shrinking from this apparently {from concluding that unseparated vessels are therefore vessels to dishonor}, have suggested a “third class,” neither to honor or dishonor, but there is surely no vestige of basis for such a suggestion in the Scripture itself, however much a mistaken interpretation may necessitate it (*What Is, and How to be, “Vessel to Honor . . .*, p. 2).

Whether his triumphant words, “no vestige of basis,” are true, the reader will judge.

the Lord out of a pure heart. Indeed, as not being purged from such vessels to dishonor (as leavened persons like Hymenaeus and Philetus), they are not pure; they are impure (cp. 2 Cor. 7:11; Gal. 5:9). These unpurged vessels form a third state of vessels.

No Breaking of Bread with Unpurged Vessels. Someone wrote:

I cannot, however, accept v. 22 as a guide in any way as to those with whom I may break bread, because I do not believe this is the subject of the passage at all. ³⁹

There are cases of “I cannot” because *I will not*. Be that as it may, the passage *is* about our associations, our fellowship, in what is likened to a great house, i.e., the Christian profession. The passage *is* about separation from vessels to dishonor and about pursuing . . . with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. ⁴⁰ In one case it is *no* fellowship with, and in the other case it is fellowship with. It has to do with persons in both cases. So is the breaking of bread about our fellowship:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not [the] communion {or, fellowship; *koinonia*} of the blood of the Christ? The bread which we break, is it not [the] communion {or, fellowship; *koinonia*} of the body of the Christ? Because we, [being] many, are one loaf, one body; for we all partake of that one loaf (1 Cor. 10:16, 17).

The well-know teacher of a past generation, W. Hoste, wrote, in defending Open-Brethrenism:

We totally reject the collateral theory of defilement. ⁴¹

Perhaps he wanted collateral fellowship without the possibility of collateral defilement? “Lay hands suddenly on no man, nor partake [*koinoneo*] in other men’s sins. Keep thyself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22); “. . . and greet him not; for he who greets him partakes [*koinoneo*] in his wicked works” (2 John 11).

The breaking of bread is, among other things, the practical expression that we are one body. We give expression to that unity in one body in breaking bread together, expressing the fellowship of one body. The Lord Jesus made provision for the evil day; for, as few as two or three could be gathered together to His name (Matt. 18:20).

The toleration of leaven in an assembly involves breaking bread with that tolerated evil. God sees that as fellowship with the leaven. A little leaven leavening the lump means that the status of the lump changes from an unleavened lump to a leavened lump. It is thus characterized by wicked

39. *Faith and the Flock*, 1908, p. 443.

40. If I am to pursue . . . with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart (v. 22), then I am responsible to know what a pure heart means and to recognize who are meant.

41. *Rejudging the Question*, Pickering and Inglis, p. 21.

indifference to the evil. The way Open Brethren seek to evade this is to say that the assembly only becomes leavened when everyone in the assembly is personally doing the evil. Such unholy teachings give their character to what is likened to a great house. “Let every one who names the name of [the] Lord withdraw from iniquity.”

Let the reader be clear about it: the unpurged is not “a vessel to honor, sanctified.” The state of the unpurged, therefore, is different than the state of the purged. Let the reader be clear about it: the state of an individual is affected by whether or not he purges himself. It is a fabrication of the flesh to say that I may wittingly be associated with evil, but if I do not engage in it personally, my association with it does not affect my state. Why, *such reasoning exposes a state of soul!* It is just such a state that leads to the unholy association. It arises out of the heart and leads one to do the unholy thing. Such are not calling upon the name of the Lord out of a pure heart; and we are instructed to pursue . . . with those that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. In a letter dated Dec. 18, 1849, J. G. Bellett wrote:

The few who call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart form the church ruins (2 Tim. 3 [sic]), where I must be found. And it is a holy question for us, beloved, Are we upholding merely Christian fellowship? or are we dwelling according to the holiness of God within the precincts of a Church ruin . . .

SANCTIFIED (v. 21)

Verse 22 deals with features of what we may call sanctification, but of sanctification which is internal, inside of us. Here, sanctification is connected with the purging oneself out from the vessels to dishonor. This brings before us external sanctification because of an internal separation unto the Lord that judges the evil of indifference to what is due Christ, and judges the inner tendency to neutrality in what is due Christ. In v. 22 we have moral features of internal sanctification. An evil external association displays an evil indifference and neutrality in the heart.

Who can say, then, that a man’s own condition may be godly, while in open-eyed association with ungodliness around? The second Epistle of John is no plainer than the second Epistle to Timothy is here. Both say we are responsible for, and partakers of, the sins of others, with whom we knowingly associate ourselves. Concord between Christ and Belial there cannot be -- this will be granted. Then for half-hearted following, which would in effect unite them, toleration there cannot be.⁴²

Clearly, the vessels to honor are persons as the words “he shall be a vessel to honor (v. 21) shows. Clearly, then, the vessels to dishonor are persons also. The vessels do not represent doctrines, or unrighteous acts, or noble/ignoble uses. The vessels signify persons. To be personally clear of holding evil doctrine is

42. *Words of Faith*, 1882, p. 10.

insufficient.

It is true that we must flee from our own lusts. It is also true that this is not the meaning of “purified himself from these”; not merely because that is obviously just a way to try to escape the purging of oneself from what is meant by vessels to dishonor, but because, *in addition to purging ourselves*, we are also to flee youthful lusts⁴³ (v. 22). It is plain that the vessels are persons and that the word “purified himself from **these**” refers to persons,⁴⁴ not to youthful lusts, however much we are to flee them. Indeed, all of the vessels are persons. Some are believers and some are unbelievers. In addition, there is another character which marks vessels: some are to honor and some are to dishonor. However, only those purged from the vessels to dishonor are vessels to honor. Moreover, if a man who purges himself from vessels to dishonor is thereby a vessel to honor, then a man who does not purge himself is not a vessel to honor. Thus, being associated with vessels to dishonor does indeed affect a man. Do we understand that? The evil association marks a state of soul, a state of indifference to the Lord’s honor and authority, a state of neutrality regarding this. This is the same state of soul as is found in vessels to dishonor. There is a moral compatibility in the states of the souls between the vessels to dishonor and the one who is not separated from the vessels to dishonor. God looks at them as morally linked.⁴⁵

This involves that little-known (and often, where known, despised) doctrine of guilt by association. For this truth please refer to: 1 Cor. 5; Gal. 1:8; 5:9; 2 John 9, 10; 1 Tim. 5:22; Rev. 18:4; 2:14-16; Luke 11:47-51; 2 Cor. 6:17 with Num. 5:1-4; 1 Cor. 10:14-33; Haggai 2:11-14; Lev. 13-15; 2 Tim. 2.

‘Spiritual power in an evil day is manifested in separation from evil unto the Lord.’

I suggest that there is a distinction between withdrawal from unrighteousness, which has to do with acts, practices and doctrines, and purging from vessels to dishonor, which has to do with persons.

We can see that Hymenaeus and Philetus, mentioned in v. 17, certainly

43. W. Kelly remarked:

It is of high moment, especially in the circumstances of clearing ourselves from what ensnares many a saint, and perhaps had ensnared ourselves too more or less in times past, that we should not give occasion to them that seek it. In vain do you testify against that which is ecclesiastically offensive to God, if you fail in conduct plainly enough to be seen by those virtually censured by you. Hence the care of Paul to urge earnestly on Timothy to beware of that which might hinder or trouble, and the rather then and thus. Lusts youthful must be shunned, not only worldly or carnal but “youthful,” such as impetuosity, self-confidence, levity, impatience, or the like (2 Timothy, *in loco*.)

44. Views of Evangelicals on this are given in Appendix 1; views of Open Brethren concerning this are given in Appendix 2; and the *Lake Geneva Conference Report’s* view is given in Appendix 3.

45. See JND on moral identification in *Letters* 2:219, 220.

were overthrowing the faith of some. Certainly they were vessels to dishonor. Those who teach evil doctrines are vessels to dishonor and that term applies also to persons who have the character of the wicked man of 1 Cor. 5. Furthermore, we have just seen that in order to be a vessel to honor we must be separated from the vessels to dishonor; therefore this Scripture compels us to separate from those who teach evil doctrines as do Hymenaeus and Philetus. A professed Christian who continues with a Hymenaeus or Philetus is a partaker of his wicked works (2 John 9-11), and so hardly can be a vessel to honor, SANCTIFIED. He is not sanctified in practice. This is sanctification in practice -- separation from evil unto the Lord. Purging is part and parcel of this sanctification. Refusing this, he is defiled, made dirty, leavened by an evil association, made a partaker of wicked works (2 John).

Concerning evil teachers, their partisans, and those merely misled, J. N. D. remarked:

But in 2 Tim. 2, those who were overthrowing the faith of some, only said that the resurrection was past already, and the apostle calls on the faithful to purge themselves from them (2 Tim. 2:17-21). It is no charity to set people at ease who are teaching or receiving what "eats as a canker." I make a difference. With a teacher I could have nothing to do. It is the duty of positive testimony against him, "knowing such are perverted," if his doctrine touches "the faith of God's elect." With those misled I can make a difference; those deliberately in it I should avoid, they support the evil and sustain it; some are merely misled, and while I had hope of recovering them, I might not wholly repulse them, but evil communications corrupt good manners; it is danger to one's own soul to have to say to what the devil teaches, unless called upon by God to meet it. I should not dare to do so. And even with those misled, it is no kindness to go on as if nothing was the matter, when they are really led of the enemy. I do not want to set them at their ease there. As to the word "God speed," [2 John 11] it is associating oneself with their work. He is speaking of those "deceivers" who were "gone out into the world," and going about with this false doctrine; and wishing him well on his journey, was associating oneself with them in it. Such I would not receive into my house [2 John 10]. I trust I have made plain to you what I desired to say from the word. It is one of the great evils of the day to the truth. "Whom I love," says the apostle, "in the truth" and for the truth's sake. None urge this point more than John, whom men count as the apostle of love.⁴⁶

A Christian magazine once came to hand in which the writer stated that he has long questioned the term "vessels to dishonor" and also the teaching that separation is demanded. He attempts, by quoting certain modern translations and certain "scholarly teachers," to show that *dishonor* has not the thought of disgrace, but rather lowly use or ignoble use; the contrast is *prominence* and *obscurity*, he thinks: thus proceeds the palliation of evil. The attitude is certainly

46. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:326, 327.

up to date, however false, unholy and Christ-dishonoring.

Ask, from what are we to purge ourselves -- from vessels doing menial tasks? Can anyone deny that v. 21 tells us how to be a vessel to honor? Let us suppose that it means a "prominent" vessel, as one of this author's scholars indicates. Are we being told how to be a "prominent" vessel? -- rather than an "obscure" one? And how does it tell us to do this? By purging ourselves from "obscure" vessels? In any event, the notion that we are being instructed in how to be a prominent vessel is beneath sober Christians, not to say *humble* Christians. Compare this false notion about seeking to be a prominent vessel with Phil. 2:5-8.

The whole idea is an effort to overthrow the true force of this Scripture. The following Scriptures are all the verses, besides 2 Tim. 2:20, as far as I am aware, that use the word *atimia* (see *Englishman's Greek Concordance*, p. 90), "dishonor."

"For this reason God gave them up to *vile* lusts; for both their females changed the natural use into that contrary to nature . . ." (Rom. 1:26).

"Or has not the potter authority over the clay, out of the same lump to make one vessel to honor, and another to *dishonor*?" (Rom. 9:21).⁴⁷

"Does not even nature itself teach you, that man, if he have long hair, it is a *dishonor* to him?" (1 Cor. 11:14).

"It is sown in *dishonor*, it is raised in glory" (1 Cor. 15:43).

Through glory and *dishonor*, through evil report and good report: as deceivers, and true" (2 Cor. 6:8).

I speak as to *dishonor*, as though we had been weak; but wherein anyone is daring, (I speak in folly) I also am daring" (2 Cor. 11:21).

The reason that the plain meaning is questioned and refused is that we love our own will and ways. We want Christ AND FLESH. We wish to spare SELF and not separate from evil to the Lord, and so, not content with being disobedient, the Scripture must be forced to yield a (false) meaning to soothe the conscience of the self-pleasing, disobedient ones in order to make them feel comfortable in their defiled associations -- and with all that, to denounce those who do act on these Scriptures. Let every one that names the Name of the Lord depart from iniquity! Another reason for refusal to obey was answered by J. N. Darby:

When he tells me that "it is impossible to distinguish those who are truly faithful from those who make an outward profession," and the apostle says, Let him who names the name of the Lord withdraw from iniquity, and tells me that I must purify myself from the vessels to dishonor and follow after

47. In *Faith and the Flock* 1:479, F. C. Jennings argued from this text that in 2 Tim. 2 the vessels to honor are made by God. Rom. 9:21 has nothing to do with our subject. In 2 Tim. 2 we have two classes of materials. In Rom. 9:21 there is only one material, clay. This character of reasoning marks his writings in general.

Christian graces with those that call on the Lord *out of a pure* heart -- how can I listen to one who tells me that it is not possible to distinguish? If he tells me that there may be many souls, known by the Lord, whom I do not recognize; I reply, undoubtedly: the Lord knows those that are His. But I have directions for my conduct in this state of things which contradict yours. I am to recognize and associate myself with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart; consequently to distinguish them. I am to purify myself from the vessels to dishonor; consequently to distinguish them. I am to turn away from those who have the form of godliness, but deny the power of it; I must then clearly recognize those who are such.

Further, it is a frightful principle to say that we cannot distinguish between the children of God and the people of the world -- besides it is not true -- a frightful principle, for it is said, "By this shall all know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another": now, if I cannot discern them, I cannot love them, and the testimony which God would have is lost. In the next place, it is not true practically, for we enjoy brotherly fellowship, and every faithful Christian makes a difference between a child of God and one who is not. There are some that we do not discern and that God knows: this is not denied. But in this respect the passages which I have quoted from 2 Timothy guide us. What would become of family affection if a father were to say to his children, You cannot tell who are your brothers and who are not; you must associate with everybody, without any distinction whatever? ⁴⁸

The result of such godly purging of oneself is fourfold:

1. he shall be a vessel to honor;
2. he shall be sanctified;
3. he shall be serviceable to the Master; and
4. he shall be prepared for every good work

F. G. Patterson wrote:

Now, in an evil day, when the faithful endeavor, through His grace, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, the *practice* of the fellowship and unity of the Spirit is necessarily a narrow platform, entirely apart from evil, and excluding evil from its midst, while, in the breadth of its principles, it contemplates the *whole Church of God*. Wide enough in principle to receive every member of Christ, all over the world; narrow enough to exclude evil most carefully from its midst. Anything short of this breadth is a sectarian principle, and ceases to be of the Holy Ghost; while the breadth of the principle contemplates every member of Christ. Those gathered thus in the unity and fellowship of the Spirit, necessarily are jealous, with godly jealousy, lest anything should be admitted, either of doctrine or practice, or witting association with such, that would put those who admitted it practically out of

48. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:98.

the fellowship of the Spirit. ⁴⁹

SERVICEABLE TO THE MASTER, PREPARED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK (v. 21)

Christians associated with vessels to dishonor (for example, this may be because of fellowship with evil teachers, or doctrines, fellowship with unbelievers in service or worship, or fellowship with unrighteousness) are not prepared for **every** good work. Perhaps there are some 'good works' which they are ready to do. In this passage, the first work that they should be ready to do is to obey the Lord's command. It is a question of being prepared for whatever the Lord may call upon us to do, which surely ought to be the desire of everyone that calls on the Name of the LORD, thereby professing to do His will in all things. This is more than being ready to serve the Lord. Many who are in all sorts of evil associations are professedly ready and willing to serve the Lord. It means rather that one is in a proper, usable condition. *Fitness* is the point. It would be better if we were more exercised in soul to be in a usable *state* of soul than being merely concerned about being used. Cp. 2 Tim. 3:17, where one is *equipped* by the Scriptures for every good work (and 2 Tim. 2:19-22 is Scripture).

As to God's sovereign use, He may do as suits Him. He can use Balaam's ass, if it please Him. He can save souls when the gospel is proclaimed in a grossly disobedient way. I recall a "campaign" held in New York City by Billy Graham, in which Henry Van Duesen, on whom the mantle of the famous modernist Harry Emerson Fosdick fell, participated on the platform. Well, the "campaign" was sponsored by many of the New York City churches. There was a brother in Christ who was on the "steering committee" who later got clear of such doings (he kindly gave me five books by Arthur Pridham). He told me that he was standing next to Billy Graham when a girl came up to him and said that she had just become saved and was going to become a nun in the {Roman} Catholic church. The brother told me that Billy Graham said to her, "God bless you, dear sister." It burned into my soul. The unspeakable compromise of one who had learned the meaning of 2 John 10, 11 at Bob Jones University is most distressing. So what? you say! souls are saved and that's what counts? Yes, God is sovereign and saves souls. And also in this very chapter in 2 Timothy, He said:

And if also anyone contend [in the games], he is not crowned unless he contend lawfully (2 Tim. 2:5).

God is as good as His word.

WE CANNOT GET OUT OF WHAT IS LIKENED TO A GREAT HOUSE

49. *Collected Writings of F. G. Patterson*, Present Truth publishers: Morganville, p. 104. 1998 reprint of original.

We are to conduct ourselves in the midst of ruin with respect to that which cannot be ruined. The body of Christ, composed of all those on earth who are indwelt by the Spirit, remains: but alas, how the display of this truth has been marred! We are part of this ruin. But we are not told to separate from the thing which is likened to a great house. We cannot. It would be to get out of the profession of Christianity. But we must separate from the vessels to dishonor found in that profession and then “pursue” with the purged vessels. And such purged ones will not pretend to be *the* church of God, because *the* church of God includes all sealed saints. And they will have a deepened sense of the ruin and the dishonor to God in it all.

Nor, note, are we called upon to purge this ruined profession. We must purge ourselves.

But think, dear reader, have you ever shed as much as one tear in the presence of God, because of the dishonor done to His Name and for the condition of ruin brought by man’s will upon what He instituted at Pentecost? Ought we not to have the spirit of Daniel in Dan. 9:1-19, and of Ezra in Ezra 9?

*The Path of Fellowship in a Day of Ruin
with Those that Call Upon the Lord
Out of a Pure Heart (v. 22)*

But youthful lusts flee, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace, with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22).

YOUTHFUL LUSTS FLEE

Youthful lusts⁵⁰ will obstruct the carrying out of the direction to “pursue.” The direction to flee youthful lusts is not an explanation of the meaning of “these” in v. 21. Not only would that be wishful thinking to get around the necessity of separating from vessels to dishonor, the word “but” indicates an additional thing.

It is not only youths that pursue youthful lusts; older persons do so also. Thus, implicit in this direction is the need for self-judgment, purpose of heart, and continuance in divine things. As F. G. Patterson said:

I have to watch my own heart, lest the enemy find an open door, to ruin a path of outward separation from evil by inward unholiness . . . “Continue thou in the things thou hast heard of me,” &c. Paul’s “doctrine” is the resource, and

50. We have instruction on possessing our vessel (body) in sanctification and honor in 1 Thess. 4:3-8. But “youthful lusts” is more general. Just think of the silly way in which many youths act and dress, and the foolish activities in which they engage. It is disheartening to see silly older brothers (as well as silly older sisters) trying to look young with artificial means and certain dress, for example.

never to be surrendered: and we can endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and such action will have all His members in view, though they may have no intelligence of their privilege and responsibility. If walking in the truth together, the action is not merely towards each other; our action radiates towards, and has reference to every member of Christ, no matter in what association he may be found.⁵¹

We are instructed to flee youthful lusts. The word ‘lusts’ is translated ‘desire’ in Luke 22:15 and Phil. 1:23, but generally ‘lust.’ Older people often have youthful desires as well as youth. Such desires are an expression of our own will and are contrary to calling on the LORD. And allow me to draw my reader’s attention to what is a very noticeable thing and much needed. THE NEGATIVE IS PRESENTED BEFORE THE POSITIVE. Flee; then pursue. The order is, if Scripture is given to govern our thoughts, “cease to do evil, learn to do well.” I believe it was C. H. M. who said somewhere that we have a holy precept, namely, “Cease to do evil,” and *after we have learned to do that* we have another, namely, “Learn to do well.” The reader will note this order in many Scriptures. “Abhorring evil; cleaving to good” (Rom. 12:9). What do we learn from this? Just this; we shall not learn to do well while staying with the evil: we will not pursue until we flee. The thought is not that one will pursue and thus automatically flee. Many thus think. If Scripture is to govern our thoughts and attitudes, we will bow to the divine order as the path that wisdom has decreed.

I once heard young Christians being ignorantly taught through an illustration concerning monkeys. A trap may be laid for a monkey by putting something in a jar. When the monkey seizes the bait inside the jar, it cannot remove its paw, now clutching the bait, through the narrow opening and it will not let go, thus being caught. However, offer it something better and it will let go the bait and remove its paw to seize the other object. Now, this is supposed to be a lesson for Christians. Do not condemn the bad, but offer something better.⁵² Many are taken in with this line and hence there is not true separation from the evil to the Lord. Self-judgment is not learned in this manner. Scripture teaches this order:

For the grace of God which carries with it salvation for all men has appeared, teaching us that, having denied impiety and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and justly, and piously in the present course of things . . . (Titus 2:11, 12).

The very GRACE of God should have warned against the idea in the above illustration. Grace is GOD FOR US IN ALL THAT HE IS. He is light and He

51. *Collected writings of F. G. Patterson*, present Truth Publishers: Morganville, p. 264, 1998 reprint of his works.

52. Lo, some 35 years later, he who used this illustration is a signatory of the *Lake Geneva Conference Report*. See Appendix 3.

is love. The cross was where God has fully expressed His abhorrence of impiety and worldly lusts. There He was satisfied by sacrifice and thus saves the sinner. And He wants, His grace teaches, a positive rejection of impiety and worldly lust. Cease to do evil! Learn to do well! Else the monkey will be forever going back to bait in jars because he never learned first to judge the evil of putting his paw in the jar and in due time will do it again.

Separation from the evil to the Lord involves one's attitude. It is necessarily a judgment of the evil and any complicity with it. It is the deliberate abandonment of the evil. Holiness is separation from evil to the Lord!

And truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey. And Jehovah saw it and it was evil in his sight that there was no judgment (Isa. 59:15).

PURSUE

To be rightly associated we must first be dissociated from that about which the Lord has warned us. Dissociation here precedes association. The 'negative' is first, then the 'positive' (cp. Rom 12:9). That is a divine order. Then, those who have purged themselves from vessels to dishonor are told to "pursue . . . with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." This is not a sinless heart. It very evidently signifies that we are to "pursue" with purged vessels and therefore it is possible to recognize who are such. We morally cannot "pursue" with unpurged vessels or vessels to dishonor. It is casting into the eyes the dust and dirt of unholiness to say that the Christian cannot judge (cp. 1 Cor. 5:12,13). That is pretending to a 'piety' that is really a cover for unholiness, and which unholiness but adds its character to what the Lord is condemning in this passage. Obviously, the passage is not an exhortation to go on with all Christians. It is a directive concerning separation from some and association with others.

Before the ruin came in, we read in 1 Cor. 1:12, ". . .with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." After the ruin came in, we read, "with those that call on the Lord *out of a pure heart.*"

How are we to find these? How are we to test the heart? Why, by the *ways*. And I find my companions as I walk myself in the path of righteousness, and faith, and love and peace to which I am called . . . *Leaders* I may own, and rightly if, and only as, they can show me the path they lead on has these marks. But I must be shown the marks or refuse the path, no matter what else may commend it to me.⁵³

There may be circumstances where the obedient may have to walk alone, but that should not be because of a desire to do so. JND remarked:

If the first part only is taken up (the departing from iniquity and purging from

53. *Words of Faith*, 1882, pp. 10, 11.

vessels to dishonour), the conscience may be upright; but a spirit of judgment and of self-righteousness will be engendered. If the latter only (to seek to walk with those pure in heart), without the former, conscience will be loose, and faithfulness to Christ, and obedience, more or less lost. The heart must be engaged in the love of God's people and fellowship with them, and the conscience be pure and faithful, as having done with evil, when evil is all around and allowed.⁵⁴

The motive is not merely a desire for companionship with others, though we should have a desire for the Lord's companionship. In the context of 2 Tim. 2, separation from evil unto the Lord is the motive; and to pursue . . . with those likewise separated. And that might result in walking with others also. There are four things we are to pursue with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart (i.e., with the purged vessels).

RIGHTEOUSNESS

The **first** of the four things that ought to characterize those who withdraw from iniquity is righteousness. An unpurged vessel may be constitutionally of precious material (gold/silver), but he who is not purged from evil associations is not sanctified practically. How, if he has not withdrawn from unrighteousness, are we to pursue righteousness *with him*? Righteousness is consistency with relationship. If one separates from unrighteousness (v. 19), then righteousness ought to characterize him. And this needs particular notice in a day of increasing ecumenicity, a day when we see the foreshadows of the formation of the whore of Rev. 17 and 18, that great "church" system that remains after Christ comes for His saints. The force at work in the ecumenical movement is unity under the pretense of "love," and *that* at the expense of righteousness. It is right and well that we should keenly feel the dishonor done to Christ by the ruin and sects (called denominations to cover up the shame of sect) that are everywhere. But ecumenicalism, (on large or small scale) inter-denominationalism, joining in services or preaching, or associations of brethren, are not God's program. The path of God's choosing, the place of His appointment, is not found thus.

What is the first thing brought to our attention and for our pursuit in a day of ruin? *Righteousness* ought to characterize God's saints. One has the impression that some of God's people have a difficulty in reconciling righteousness and love.⁵⁵ These two things don't need to be reconciled; they

54. *Collected Writings* 23:199.

55. Have you ever been subjected to the unholy use of "be not righteous overmuch" in Eccl. 7:16? What is the point the person is making? -- be righteous but not too righteous? Eccl. 7:17 says, "be not wicked overmuch." Does that mean be wicked, but not too wicked?

The interesting thing is that these two expressions do mean just that, but the application to a Christian of either of them is awful. Eccl. 1:13 gives us the key. Solomon searched out by *human* (continued...)

should each have their proper place. But it is obvious that many of the Lord's people have the wrong idea about this. For example, "Love covers a multitude of sins" is read as if it means "Look the other way and hush it up"; whereas, it denotes an action with regard to sins in order to correct it, the heart going out in love and care for one's brother, seeking the Lord's honor and his good. There is a vast difference between covering it and cloaking it.

Efforts to neutralize righteous acting by using other passages that speak of love are of an unholy character, and such efforts present righteousness and love as if they are in conflict. God is light and God is love, and He never acts inconsistently with His nature. Righteousness and love need their proper relationship, not reconciliation, because they never were antagonistic. There is a wholeness in both together. But the majority will press what it calls "love" at the expense of righteousness. How do we know this? We know it because, in view of the ruin that has come upon what ought to be the vessel of testimony, the call comes to depart from unrighteousness. It is unrighteousness which characterizes what is likened to "a great house," and those that acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord are to withdraw from unrighteousness so that they may pursue righteousness. And what do we see all around being pressed? "Love" at the expense of righteousness, which is therefore not the love found in the Word of God. It must follow, therefore, that those who practice this Scripture are going to be called righteous overmuch, division makers, troublemakers, etc. and unloving to their brethren. Unloving to their brethren?

Hereby know we that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments (1 John 5:2).

FAITH

Thus faith is mentioned next. It is faith for the path of separation from evil unto the Lord. One must have confidence in God, wrought by the Holy Spirit, in order to walk in such a path. There must be faith wrought by God that it is the path of His choosing. And this path must control our associations; our associations must not control or modify the path. Faith sees, and has to do with, a living God. It is faith in a great God, and He is our blessed resource in the

55. (...continued)

wisdom concerning what is done *under the heavens*. It is man's wisdom and man's view for man's benefit that we have in Eccl. So the advice to the natural man is: Do not be too righteous, do not be too wicked. Temporalize. If you are too righteous, you will destroy yourself (see v. 15). You may get in the way of the wrong people and it will not go well with you. "Overly righteous" people are not liked. Do not be too wicked; avoid gross excesses and extend your life (see v. 15). "He that feareth God cometh forth from them all" (v. 18). The fear of God ought to caution you against excesses and thus you will profit yourself and live longer.

What we have, then, in these verses is man's wisdom for man's benefit, viewed from under the sun. It is inspired, as all the rest of Scripture is, but is not a guide for the *Christian* concerning righteousness and wickedness.

path, the One upon Whom we may stay our minds. This path, then, is a path of faith; and thus it is not a path of self-will, which self-will characterizes what is likened to a great house.

LOVE

Now we are ready for the third thing, love. "And now I beseech thee, lady, not as writing to thee a new commandment, but that which we have had from [the] beginning, that we should love one another. And this is love, that we should walk according to his commandments" (2 John 5, 6).

Another has said, "There is no love apart from obedience, and therefore love of necessity makes us walk in faith and righteousness." It is the opposite of love to walk with those who go on with unrighteousness, for three reasons. The first and most important is that it dishonors God. Secondly, it only confirms those who so walk in their course (after protest, ignorance cannot be claimed). Thirdly, it renders the Word powerless in the souls of those who knowingly go on with unrighteousness. Another wrote:

Faith then requires God's word to justify it, in a path whence self-will is absolutely excluded. It thus guards the "love," of which the apostle next speaks, from being taken for the "liberality," so miscalled such on every hand. True love finds within the sphere which the word thus marks out for it, its amply sufficient field of exercise. "Seeking not its own," it teaches no soul to do its own will, or to show large-heartedness by setting aside, even for a moment, its Master's constant claim. It supposes no possible accomplishment of good to others by swerving from the good and the right way oneself; this whether it be in one line of things or in another: "faith" having taught it, there is, and can be, no matter of "ecclesiastical policy," if you will, or anything else which affects His people in any way which He, who has thought of the covering of a woman's head, has not thought of and provided for. To swerve from His mind by way of accommodation to others, or for whatever purpose, would be but the unseemly "liberality" of a servant in things that appertain to his master, -- not liberality, but carelessness or worse.

Righteousness and faith however being maintained as to our course personally, "love" is next surely to be followed -- safely, under these conditions. Our hearts are to embrace not only the brethren, still less only those whom we find walking on the path with ourselves, but, as in "fellowship with the gospel," all men. There is nothing however in which we are so apt to make mistake as we are with regard to "love": there are so many and subtle imitations. We *like* people who please us, who minister to our selfish gratification, and we call *that* "love." And if these are the people of God, this may help still more effectually to deceive us. How often does this kind of feeling betray itself by fermenting, on occasion given, into the most thorough animosity! True love, seeking not its own, holds fast its objects with a pertinacity of grasp which never fails: "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." We may be forced to

separation, forced to walk alone, forced to judge and condemn the ways of those whom nevertheless we cling to before God with desire which will not admit of giving them up even for a moment. Thus if judgment be passed, it will be expressed as the apostle, “even weeping”: truest and most solemn judgment, where it is not that of an enemy but of a friend; and blessed they who in the spirit of mourners find themselves thus in company with the “Man of sorrows.”

We must be content here to point out the order, and the meaning of the order, in which “love” occurs in connection with our path. It does not *form* this (*divine* love has formed it for us, not our own): it is the spirit which is to animate us rather in the path -- not the rail but the motive power -- and here, of course, love to God first, as that from which all other springs.⁵⁶

PEACE

All of this will result in peace. This is a peace which has to do with our collective character. It is peace concerning the path. Those who act on this Scripture may very likely be accused of the thing which God hates, i.e., sowing discord among brethren. In this way is Scripture abused and twisted. It is plain that true peace is the end result of the three previous things, and the sowers of discord are those who will not obey.

“Peace” closes the catalogue. It is the necessary issue to which all this tends. “The fruit of righteousness is peace.” Faith walking in wisdom’s ways finds that “all her ways are peace” [;] while love seeks the peace of the objects of it, and satisfies itself with what it finds in blessing for them. Every way peace is reached; and only here as the end of the rest -- guarded and defined by what precedes it -- can it be true or safe as an object to be sought after. Here it comes in seemly order and place. May God grant us more attainment of it, such as it is here presented.⁵⁷

Were the Scripture followed, all would pursue these four things. This is the way of peace. The thing which God hates is brought about by those who will not thus act. The wisdom from above is **first** pure, **then** peaceable . . .

Ed. Dennett wrote:

How different is this teaching from that which is now current, to the effect that in a day of confusion like the present it is impossible to walk in the path of separation from evil! This word of the Apostle’s is the answer to all such reasoning . . .⁵⁸

WITH THOSE THAT CALL ON THE LORD OUT OF A PURE HEART

Mocking words such as “who are you to judge?” are condemned by this command of the Lord. You cannot obey this if it is not possible to discern who they are who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Such mocking does not come from a pure heart. And those who

will not separate from vessels to dishonor do not call on the Lord out of a pure heart. This separation, flowing from obedience to the Lord upon whom we call, is of the first importance. Failure in this weakens all else. And those who have fellowship with those who will not separate from vessels to dishonor really make themselves morally one with them in this indifference in their hearts to the Lord upon whom they call. There are other considerations also which this is not the place to enlarge upon.

The reader should discern that this results in a Scripture-directed, practical *circle of fellowship* excluding fundamental evil, in the time when the Christian profession is likened to a great house. Such saints may be found in different localities. They will express unity as found in the Word, acting as *one body*, locally expressed; being gathered together to Christ’s name (Matt. 18:20) on the basis that there is one body (Eph. 3, 4), expressed in the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 10:16-18). There are Christians outside of assemblies that express this separation from fundamental evil in this way in their practice, yet are such as call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart. However, they may be in a wrong ecclesiastical position and thus not identified with the practical circle of fellowship thus formed by these Scriptures. We can only touch on this briefly here, with some words of J. N. Darby, reserving the subject of reception for another paper:

The question you put as to receiving is to me always a delicate one. The point is to conciliate sound discipline, and being wholly outside the camp, which is of increasing importance, and avoiding being a sect, which I should as anxiously do. Receiving all members of Christ’s body is not a sect clearly, and that is the principle on which I unite, but they must walk orderly and be under discipline, and not pretend to impose conditions on the church of God. If therefore they came claiming as a condition liberty to go elsewhere, I could not allow it because I know it is wrong, and the church of God cannot allow what is wrong. If it was ignorance, and they came bona fide in the spirit of unity, to that which is the symbol of unity, I should not reject them, because they had not in fact broken [with it], but I could not, accept what made us part of the camp, nor any sort of claim to go to both, to be inside and outside. This is equally pretentious and dishonest . . . But I receive a person who comes in simplicity, with a good conscience, for the sake of spiritual communion, though they may not yet see clearly ecclesiastically; but the assembly is bound to exercise discipline as to them, and know their walk and purity of heart in coming whenever they do. They cannot come in and out just as they please, because the conscience of the assembly is engaged in the matter, and its duty to God, and to Him at whose Table they are. Looseness in this is more fatal than ever now. If a person practically says I will come to take a place in the body of Christ when I like, and go into sects and evil when I like for convenience or pleasure, that is not a pure heart. It is making their own will the rule of God’s assembly, and subjecting the assembly to it, and that cannot be -- is clearly wrong. May the Lord’s grace and gracious keeping

56. *Words of Faith*, 1882, pp. 12, 13.

57. *Words of Faith*, 1882, p. 14.

58. *An Exposition of Second Timothy*, Oak Park: Bible Truth Publishers, p. 36, 1969.

be with you all.⁵⁹ ♦

In this country (Canada) we have acted on the principle of refusing those belonging to bodies who allowed heresies, having nothing to do with B., but denying the immortality of the soul, and the results have been blessing, and the state of things around us every way confirmed us in the need of faithfulness. I shall own no gathering once in connection with B. {Bethesda} and its supporters, which had not given it up, nothing more simple; they are indeed formally inside the camp. I have already spoken of cases of ignorance, but if a person deliberately chose to continue in connection with loose principles, I could not own him; he has not a pure heart in his worship. It is a mercy to himself that he should learn it. It soon comes distinctly out, if there is faithfulness.⁶⁰ ♦

I know of a case, where two persons got into the brethren's meeting at Vevey. I had not the slightest idea of the Vevey meeting being defiled because these persons had deceived the assembly, and the assembly had received them in good faith; but if a meeting, knowingly and wilfully, accepts the wicked person it is not a new lump, if I am to believe 1 Cor. 5. If the meeting judges the evil, or even if it has been admitted ignorantly -- in such a case it may be that there has not been sufficient vigilance -- but the assembly is not defiled, because the conscience has not been engaged in it. But if the evil is there, and brought to light, the assembly must show itself pure in the matter, otherwise it is not a new lump; it is impure, none of the members call upon the Lord out of a pure heart, unless there is real ignorance of the fact; and this is true *ad infinitum*, two, or two million, meetings do not alter the matter.⁶¹ In every case the question is: Has the

59. *Letters* 2:212.

60. *Letters* 2:220.

61. The reference to *ad infinitum* needs some comment. J. N. Darby remarked:

As to "*ad infinitum*," it is a mere bugbear; whatever associates itself with evil, be it three or three thousand or three million, is on the same ground. If I associate myself with a principle of action, what matter how many assemblies are engaged in it, if they are so? Besides, it is a denial of the unity of the body. I know of so many assemblies, discipline in one is discipline in all, and the denial of this shows plainly enough where you have all got. This is the whole question. B. is partaker thus in the guilt in question, if another gathering is in communion with it, receive from it as it is, goes to it, they are one: if fifty do it, they are one. I cannot own them as assemblies of God as a guarantee for integrity in one coming from them. I can make a difference between misleaders and misled, and allow for ignorance, but that is not the question (*Letters* 1:224).

All that is said of "*ad infinitum*" is merely the repetition of what we have too often heard, and has no real sense the moment the Church is known to be one. The question is, Does the person come from a place which has identified itself with the refusal to judge evil? It little matters to me how many steps a person is from the first who had the typhus fever in the country; five or fifty is all alike, if a man has got it. Evil is judged as evil wherever it is, and the argument is simply a denial of the church, and the unity of the body. If a gathering accepts fellowship with these one or fifty who have refused to maintain the

(continued...)

assembly, knowingly and wilfully, admitted what is impure? Has it willingly associated itself with that which is impure? If so, it is itself impure, and so are those forming it.⁶² ♦

REGULATING THE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE

There are Christians who say that the outside of a person is not so important as long as the inside is all right. The truth of the matter is, however, that if the inside is all right the outside will show it by being regulated by the Word of God. This also applies to the matter of association with vessels to dishonor. Purging (v. 21) is spoken of before a pure heart is mentioned (v. 23). Someone may think that his associations really are not so important as long as the inside is all right. But how does the inside express its condition? A child of God of a by-gone day knew that "by Him actions are weighed" (1 Sam. 2:3). We show love to God by keeping His commandments (John 14; 2 John). This includes the outside, the external, as well as the internal. "The highway of the upright is to depart from evil" (Prov. 16:17), "and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey" (Isa. 59:15). It costs something to regulate the external by the Word of God. How easily the deceitful heart may delude itself into thinking that only the inside is important. The inside cannot be right where the Word of God concerning the outside is set aside.

61. (...continued)

glory of Christ, it is contaminated as such (*Letters* 1:219).

The Open Brethren applied the term *ad infinitum* to caricature and mock the truth of separation from evil unto the Lord. Numbers have used this expression, as, for example, J. R. Caldwell, *Exclusivism*, Glasgow, 1882, p. 10; G. *The Exclusive Brethren: Their origin and Discipline*, 1867, pp. 17, 22, 57; *The Northern Witness* 12:154; but W. Hoste expresses it in another way:

As for the "Exclusive" doctrine of collateral and congenital defilement to the thousandth degree, and from generation to generation . . . (*Rejudging the Question*, London: Pickering and Inglis, p. 26).

The fact is that such persons refuse *the first degree!* And what is "congenital defilement" other than unholy sarcasm?

The Lake Geneva Conference Report says:

It has been commonly held that an individual or group can be contaminated (defiled) by the sins of others simply by coming into contact with them. This view creates a "chain of defilement" which suggests that contamination can be transmitted even through individuals who -- though personally innocent -- are in contact with others who are engaged in flagrant sin (p. 40).

What is meant by "contact"? And do you think that the signatories used the word "contact" in the same sense both times? It is a blatant and perverse misrepresentation to say "it has been commonly held."

A comment on *ad infinitum* is found in a quotation below, from *The Bible Treasury* 6:154.

62. *Collected Writings* 33:25. Godliness in walk, by one in an orthodox sect, is required for fellowship.

The Path of Service in a Day of Ruin (vv. 23-26)

But foolish and senseless questionings avoid, knowing that they beget contentions. And a bondman of [the] Lord ought not to contend, but be gentle towards all; apt to teach; forbearing; in meekness setting right those who oppose, if God perhaps may sometime give them repentance to acknowledgment of [the] truth, and that they may awake up out of the snare of the devil, [who are] taken by him, for *his* will (2 Tim. 2:23-26).

Let us close our study of 2 Tim. 2:16-26 with these words from E. Dennett:

The word translated “strive,” as that also in the preceding verse rendered “strifes,” should be rather “contend,” and “contend” in the sense of fighting, coming into conflict in an evil way. While therefore the servant of the Lord must maintain the truth, in spite of all opposition; withstand his fellow-servant to the face, if need be, as Paul did Peter when the truth of grace was in question, and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, he must never descend from the platform of the truth, as a positive revelation from God, and as entrusted to him as a witness, to engage in conflict with those who raise foolish and unlearned questions. He, on his part, should come out from the presence of God with the authority of the truth established in his own soul, and thus enabled to proclaim it dogmatically in the midst of all the uncertainties of human contentions, from entering into which he will also carefully guard himself. With a message for all, he ranges himself on the side of none in their conflicts, for he should speak to all alike in the name of the Lord.

Moreover, as to his own spirit, he is to be gentle unto all; undisturbed by the passions which govern men in their party contests; calm, as in the enjoyment of the presence of God; governed in all his thoughts and feelings by that mighty grace of which he has been made the subject, and thus, strengthened through the operation of the Spirit of God, enabled to present the gentleness of Christ to all to whom he is sent, and with whom he may have to deal. He is also to be “apt to teach,”⁶³ for with questions raised on all sides affecting the word of God, he should be ever ready to explain and affirm its meaning. Next, he is to be patient, or rather “forbearing,” in the sense of suffering any and everything that may come in the path of service from the hands of opponents. It still refers to the spirit of the servant, as may be seen from the use of the word in the exhortation, “Forbearing [or bearing with] one another in love” (Eph. 4:2). And hence the apostle proceeds, “In meekness instructing [or setting right] those who oppose themselves”; that is, who oppose themselves to the truth of God. And to sustain the servant in such a spirit, he is ever to remember the possibility of the recovery of opponents. The enemy of to-day may, in the grace of God, be the friend of to-morrow; and never losing sight of this, he is to go on

63. There is no doubt that this word is sometimes used in the sense of being teachable, but it is more in consonance with the context to render it here as in the text.

meekly instructing, and looking to God to give the opposers repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil.

The last clause of this verse (v. 26) has occasioned considerable discussion. The point raised is, whether “his will” is God’s will or Satan’s. If the former, the meaning is, “that they may recover themselves” (or come to their senses) “out of the snare of the devil” (who are taken captive by him) for His will -- that is, for the will of God -- the object of their recovery being that they might for the future be governed by the will of God. If the latter, it must be taken as it stands, and then it means that these opposers are taken captive by Satan to do his will.⁶⁴ Whichever view may be adopted, the solemn teaching of the scripture cannot be resisted, that those who oppose the truth are the instruments, as being in the snare, of Satan, and that as such they have been taken captive by him as his prey. Such is the revelation here made -- that all who resist the truth of God, who refuse it, however eminent they may be in the world of intellect or science, are nothing more than the poor slaves of Satan, led of, if not inspired by him, even as the servants of the Lord are led and taught by the Spirit of God.⁶⁵

Our Present Path

Our present path is a very simple one. There may be all sorts of evil here and there, and even God’s people are so mixed up with it, that we may not be able to say who are His and who are not. “Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.” But we have also a word to act upon the conscience: “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” If you say, I know what I am in is unscriptural, and I am constantly involved in what is wrong, but I see nothing better; I answer that you must not go on with that: “depart from iniquity.” We are told to purge ourselves from vessels to dishonour -- that he who does, “shall be a vessel unto honour,” sanctified and meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work. Then, it may be urged, you will have to go alone, or lead in some new thing. But not so; I have to “follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” In these days, however, a great deal of patience also may be needed, as, indeed, Paul proceeds to remind Timothy in his day. Jeremiah was indignant at the state of things he saw around him; but he received the word, “If thou shalt

64. {Comments on this point made by W. Kelly are found in *The Bible Treasury* 14:31 and 15:12, as well as in his *Exposition of the Two Epistles to Timothy*, in loco, where he says: “but to bring in “the Lord’s servant” here seems as forced as the reference to the enemy is simple and consistent . . .” He discussed some alternate views. These three references are quoted in D. Ryan, *Two Nineteenth Century Versions of the New Testament*, Present Truth Publishers: Morganville, p. 611, 1995.}

65. *The Christian Friend*, 1888, pp.96-98.

take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth.” (Chap. 15.) So, at present, one might be provoked to abstain from having anything to do with persons in the sects, &c.; but we have to remember that there are true saints of God in these associations, whose good we are to seek for the Lord’s sake, and deliverance from all that is offensive to Him. If it be argued that, in this case, we ought to go with them, the answer is, “Let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them.”⁶⁶

Appendices on 2 Tim. 2:19-21

Appendix 1: Evangelicalism’s Failure on 2 Tim. 2:19-21

Besides the footnotes quoting “evangelical writers,” the following quotations indicate prevailing views. Many will not have it that this is a directive to every Christian regarding separation from persons. Donald Guthrie has concisely stated some of the prevalent views:

The action has been interpreted in two ways. Either the purging relates to false teachers, especially Hymanaeus and Philetus, and the words mean that Timothy is to take strong action against them (Bernard); or else it denotes inward purification (Scott).⁶⁷

Notice how, in these two proposals “Timothy” is substituted for the words, “If therefore one shall have . . .”

Here is an example of acknowledging that *separation from persons* is involved, but it seems to apply only to Timothy. The meaning given by J. N. D. Kelly is this:

Stripped of its metaphor, Paul’s advice to Timothy is that he should sternly separate himself from teachers like Philetus and Hymenaeus. In this way he will prove of real use to his Master . . .⁶⁸

The Bible Knowledge Commentary by the Dallas theological seminary tells us essentially the same (p. 755). On the other hand there are those who profess that the meaning could hardly involve separation from individuals. Robert Govett brazenly stated:

Nor is this a caution against *getting defiled* by vessels to dishonour. Those addressed are *already defiled*, and needing cleansing. And separation is not

66. *Letters of J. N. Darby* 1:385.

67. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, The Pastoral Epistles*, Grand rapids: Eerdmans, p. 152, 1983 reprint.

68. *A Commentary of the Pastoral Epistles*, Grand Rapids: Baker, p.188, 1978 reprint.

cleansing.⁶⁹

Gordon Fee also perverted the meaning:

Thus **if anyone** (probably ambiguous as in v. 19, but now certainly moving back to include Timothy) **makes himself clean** (lit. cleanses himself”; using the language of the ritual cleansing of vessels) **from all those evil things** (the false teachings), **he will** become “a vessel for honor” . . .⁷⁰

Why is “if anyone” ambiguous? Concerning “the language of ritual cleansing,” in reality it is the language of 1 Cor. 5, used for “purge out.” It is a denial of the truth presented in this passage: the purging out of oneself from the vessels to dishonor in order to be a vessel to honor.

The well-known evangelical Anglican, John R. W. Stott wrote:

It cannot mean that we are to cut adrift from all nominal church members whom we suspect of being spurious, and secede from the visible church, for Jesus indicated in his parable that the weeds had been sown among the wheat and could not be successfully separated from them until the harvest.⁷¹

No matter that the Lord stated that “the field is the world” (Matt. 13:38). Just apply the passage to the church! Is the church the world? Alas, it seems so, judging from what it has become. But that is not the Lord’s will, and those that name the name of the Lord need to stand in separation from such practice in their associations. He sets up a false dilemma; but is holy separation to “secede from the visible church”? He has thus expressed a teaching that *fosters* the mixture. And to make it sure that you do not do what the text says to do, he wrote:

What we are to avoid is not so much contact with such men as their error and their evil. To purify ourselves ‘from these’ is essentially to purge their falsehood from our minds and their wickedness from our hearts and lives. Purity, then -- purity of doctrine and purity of life -- is the essential condition of being serviceable to Christ.⁷²

So, it is all within oneself -- internal separation. Note the self-deception here. What is advocated is not, in fact, true internal separation. If the inside is right before God, the external will be regulated by God’s Word. True internal separation is bound up with the external separation. The rejection of the external separation betrays a heart that is not separated to God. There is in the heart indifference to the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is manifested a heart of neutrality in divine matters. The soul is defiled.

Two “evangelicals” who are much closer to the truth of the matter and contradict the above views will be found in the next Appendix.

69. *The Last Days; and the First Resurrection; or, Thoughts on Paul’s Last Epistle, in loco.*

70. *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, p. 211, 1984.

71. *Guard the Gospel, The Message of 2 Timothy*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, p. 72, 1973.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Appendix 2: Open Brethrenism's Failure on 2 Tim. 2:19-21

William Yapp began and edited the magazine, *The Golden Lamp*, from 1869 to his death in 1874. While he was editor there appeared the following in which appear explanations of 2 Tim. 2:19-21. He will not have it that the word “these” refers to persons:

To show the need of rightly dividing the Word, the writer alludes to another oft-quoted passage in 2 Tim. 2:21, from which very much is frequently deduced, by perverting its meaning, as if it read, “If a man *separate* himself from these,” &c. . . . the word “purge” in this verse refers to cleansing that which is *within the person*, not to separating from those without; and that the Greek word used, *εκκαταίρω*, “I cleanse *out*,” removes all doubt on the point.⁷³

Apparently the Apostle did not do this, because he said, “evil is present with me” (Rom. 7:21). Moreover, at Corinth they had to purge out by removing the wicked person (1 Cor. 5:13). *That* must also be weakened. While Henry Groves, son of A. N. groves, was editor, an answer to a question on 2 Tim. 2:1 said:

No one can *purge* himself *out* (as the Greek implies) from other persons. It might be said of a church that it purged out certain persons; but here it is “if a man,” or “if any one.” The same word occurs elsewhere in 1 Cor. 5:7: “*Purge out* therefore the old leaven,” and there it refers to the putting away of “the leaven of malice and wickedness.”⁷⁴

He is, in actuality, denying that in 1 Cor. 5, the purging refers to a person! He continued:

It appears therefore that, in 2 Tim. 2:21, by the word “*these*” the apostle refers to the leavening principles and practices of which he had already spoken in verses 14-19, and more or less throughout the epistle, all of which would be included in that “iniquity” from which everyone that nameth the name of Christ has to depart.

Not only did he not tell his readers how to “depart” he also did not mention the two persons in vv. 14-19. The same line of things was brought out again in answer to another question:

Does “these” in v. 21 from which the man of God is to purge himself, refer to persons? We unhesitatingly refer the pronoun to the *things* alluded to in verses 16, 17, 18; and the apostle’s words in v. 22 . . .⁷⁵

Well, the self-will is set on having it that no purging out from association is meant (notice how he omits the *persons* in v. 17) -- and thus he helped on the

73. *The Golden Lamp* 4:83, 1872; see also 3:227.

74. *The Golden Lamp*, New Series 4:47, 1881.

75. *The Golden Lamp*, New Series 9:48, 1886.

character of what is likened to a great house.

To understand the perspective from which W. Yapp. views this passage, keep in mind the infamous statement of William Hoste, who was well-known among Open Brethren, a statement in keeping with the infamous *Letter of the Ten* from Bethesda:

. . . we totally reject the collateral theory of defilement . . .⁷⁶

That means that one person cannot be defiled by another. To help see the practical bearing of this, note what J. S. Oliphant quoted from William Yapp:

In a tract published by Mr. Yapp, entitled “The Church of God According to Scripture,” I find the following statement:

“Meetings of believers can not be defiled by the allowance of false teaching in them.”⁷⁷

Another Open Brethren publication, *The Northern Witness* 11:142, also asserted that the purging was “from babblings, from foolish questions, from iniquity of every kind; he must “flee youthful lusts” (ver. 22). In *The Witness*, New Series, 1:16, slight progress was made where three persons responded to a question.

Some Open Brethren who have recently written on 2 Timothy do say that we must purge ourselves from persons who are vessels to dishonor; but, interestingly do not comment on the state of Christians who do not do so, unless to say that such become “defiled,” whatever that may mean; and the consequences upon fellowship with such is not discussed.

But let us see how the well-known teacher among Open Brethren, F. F. Bruce, gets rid of the real meaning of this:

If it is people like these [Hymenaeus and Philetus] who are meant, then not only is it expedient for those who might be contaminated by their teaching to maintain their purity by keeping them at a distance; it is desirable that the Lord’s servant, a person of sufficient maturity not be [sic] so liable to contamination (someone like Timothy himself), should deal with them wisely, so as to bring them to a better understanding of the truth and help them to ‘escape from the snare of the devil’. This passage has been made the basis for an ecclesiology of separation, but it simply contains sound pastoral advice on the course to be taken when the truth is denied. There is nothing here about leaving the church and forming a purer fellowship.⁷⁸

Well, perhaps that is why he wrote an introduction to Dewey Beagle’s attack on

76. *Rejudging the Question*, p. 21.

77. *A Letter on Bethesda Fellowship*, London: Morrish, p. 21. W. Yapp edited the Open Brethren magazine, *The Golden Lamp*, begun by him in 1869 and edited by him until his death in 1874, upon which Henry Groves and another assumed editorship. W. Yapp was the inventor of the Yapp edge on Bibles. See also references in *Collected Writings* 20:256 and *Letters of J. N. Darby* 2:215.

78. *The Harvester*, May 1986, p. 13. *The Northern Witness* became *The Witness* which became *The Harvester* which became *Aware*, which is no longer published.

the inerrancy of Scripture in *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility?* or, an introduction to Budge's, *The Fire that Consumes*, a book that promotes the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked? Let us hear a little more:

But for ordinary Christians the best way to 'depart from iniquity' is to cultivate the society of those in the church whose teaching is wholesome . . . Separation from evil is a good thing, but it is not 'God's principle of unity' [this is a jab at J. N. Darby. See the *Collected Writings* 1:353-365; 20:335, 346; 1:350; 14:215] . . . So far as fellow-Christians are concerned, it is far better to take the noble line of Anthony Norris Groves: 'I would infinitely rather bear with all their evil, than separate from their good'. So far as the purity of the church is concerned, it is not for me to decide who among my fellow-members is a true believer and who is not: 'the Lord knows those who are his.'⁷⁹

Donald L. Norbie, of Open Brethren, did not deal with any consequences of disobedience:

So the one who would be useful to the Lord must keep himself morally and doctrinally pure. To associate with false teachers is to defile oneself (2 John 10-11).⁸⁰

Others from Open Brethren wrote:

But how can we become such vessels: By keeping ourselves away from all unclean, defiling persons in verses 14, 16-18.⁸¹

Observe that sometimes Open Brethren forget that their *practice* is according to the teaching that association with evil does not defile. They forget themselves when coming to certain Scriptures, or do they? for then they mitigate and obfuscate the full force of them.

The massive one volume commentary of Scripture edited by three Open Brethren (C. G. D. Howley, F. F. Bruce, and H. L. Ellison) states:

That 'departure from unrighteousness', rather than separation from individuals, is Paul's intended meaning is plain, because vessels could hardly 'purge' themselves from other vessels . . .⁸²

On the face of it, it is *ludicrous* to say that one person cannot purge himself from other persons. Moreover, in 1 Cor. 5 a wicked person was to be purged out of the assembly -- and I suppose that the assembly was composed of persons. "Remove the wicked person from among yourselves" (1 Cor. 5:13). On the other hand we have something from William MacDonald, of Open Brethren (I have the impression he was among some "exclusive brethren" when young):

79. *Ibid.*

80. *2 Timothy and Titus*, Kansas City: Walterick, p. 42, 1992.

81. Philip F. Sykes and Robert H. Sykes, *Timothy and Titus*, Scarborough Ont.: Everyday Publications, p. 44, 1986.

82. Alan G. Nute, in *The New Layman's Bible Commentary*, Grand rapids: Zondervan, p. 1567, 1976.

If a man keeps himself free from evil associations, he will be a vessel for honor . . . Not only is Timothy to separate from iniquitous men . . .⁸³

One more quotation from this end of the Open Brethren spectrum of thoughts on this matter comes from the Ritchie New Testament Commentaries series, *What the Bible Teaches*:

To "purge" is to "cleanse out" thoroughly; "from" is "away from" (*apo*). The same verb is used in relation to the need for moral purity of the assembly at Corinth (1 Cor. 5:7). The idea is to avoid defilement and so keep one's self pure. The object of such "out-purging" is to be a vessel unto honour, i.e. clean and therefore suitable for honourable use.

The main interpretative problem in this verse lies in the meaning of "these." Various Greek scholars have pointed out that the word is a genitive plural, which could refer to persons or to what has been taught or to inanimate things. Wuest sees the term as describing men under the term "vessel to honour" {sic} and referring back to vv.16-17. He believes it is the obligation of pastors to refuse to fellowship in the work of the ministry with another pastor who is a modernist.⁸⁴

An overall view of the preceding context would support the fact that Paul is calling for separation not only from evil, but from evil teachers. It has been observed that the unholy babblings of v.16 are seen in the individual of v.17 and the withdrawal from iniquity of v.19 must include not only the evil taught, but the bearers of that evil. "These" is therefore a comprehensive plural including both. The perfect tense used here signifies a past action on his part of separating himself from such and his present practice of maintaining that separation.⁸⁵

Neither of these last two expositions tell us the consequences of disobedience and the ramifications involved. It follows from the last two statements that if a man does not keep himself free from evil associations, he is *not* "a vessel to honor, sanctified . . ." In Open Brethren meetings, as well as other places, where known evil is tolerated, that place has no vessels to honor, since the congregation is not free of an evil association. Whether or not they intended that, or believe it, is not that the effect of what W. MacDonald and J. R. Baker have written? And do not their words mean that an evil association affects the state of the person associated with evil? Well, that is what 2 John 10, 11 also states, where we read that "he who greets him partakes {*koinoneo*} in his wicked works." In 1 Cor. 10:16 we read, "The bread which we break, is it not the communion {*koinonia*} of the body of Christ." And 1 Cor. 5:6 states that a

83. *Believer's Bible Commentary, New Testament*, Nashville: Nelson, p. 935, 1990.

84. {We may be happy for as far as K. Wuest goes, for it admits that the passage is about separation from vessels to dishonor. But the words "If therefore one" (v. 21) do not have clergy in view; moreover, the separation required covers much more than "modernists."}

85. J. R. Baker, *2 Timothy*, p. 353 -- Kilmarnock: John Ritchie, 1983.

little leaven leavens the lump, as does Gal. 5:9. Yes, the state of soul of the person who will not obey is neutral with respect to the evil; it is *indifference to the Lord's honor* that is in the heart. That person is thus defiled in his heart, from whence come many evil things. He is not "a vessel unto honor, sanctified" (2 Tim. 2:21).

But of what practical bearing does this have on Open Brethren reception? Assuming that they do not allow a teacher of fundamentally evil doctrine to remain in their fellowship, nonetheless they will all receive a person that comes from an assembly where evil is tolerated, if the person to be received has not personally imbibed the evil. That is a *sine qua non* of Open Brethren from one end of the above spectrum to the other. It is an "exclusive" teaching to exclude from fellowship those who, even if they do not personally imbibe the evil, remain in fellowship with evil. This is the 'horror' of "exclusivism" in the eyes of objectors -- who, as we are seeing, set aside the bearing of the Scriptures we are considering. Such partake (2 John 11; *koinoneo* -- make one with) the evil, the wicked works, the leaven. So, all the talk about excommunicating an evil person from an assembly does not result in keeping an assembly of persons clear of the evil *as called upon by Scripture*. In the two sets of two quotations just given we have the opposite ends of the spectrum of Open Brethren views, yet even the better statements are insufficient, as the Open Brethren practice of reception demonstrates. And, keep in mind that not all Open Brethren believe in discipline for evil doctrine.

Hector Alves of a circle of Open Brethren, sometimes referred to as "tight" (in contrast to loose), i.e., of the Gospel Hall circle, wrote an answer to a question on 2 Tim. 2:20, saying that the "great house" is not Christendom, but only an illustration, and he then remarked:

All children of God may be "vessels to honour"; but all may not, like Timothy, be "sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work." The word "these" in verse 21 would refer to what is said in verses 16 to 18.⁸⁶

Verse 21 does not make the distinction between the vessels to honor and the sanctified that he imports into the passage. But then we come to another comment of his in answer to a question:

We believe the word "these" in this verse refers to both evil doctrine from which we are to purge ourselves, and to persons who teach it, from whom we are to separate ourselves.⁸⁷

In this circle of Open Brethren, it appears to me that they would receive a person from an assembly that tolerates an evil teacher as long as the one to be received is personally sound. They may not share the view that according to

86. *Truth and Tidings* 16:200,1964; he wrote to a similar effect in 22:59, 1971.

87. *Truth and Tidings* 20:159, 1968.

2 Tim. 2 such a person is not a vessel to honor. Re-examine the first of the two quotations from him. Between these years he wrote:

The word "these" embraces both the evil doctrine and the evil doers. The child of God is to keep himself clean; separated from evil, teachers of error, and from those who practice it. It would be a mere sham to separate from evil, but remain in the company of those who practice it.⁸⁸

"A sham" only? It would mean that they were not vessels to honor. And notice the contradiction about "to separate from evil" and yet "remain in the company of those who practice it." Another wrote:

"These" we understand is in the genitive plural and could refer to persons, principles and things. The context would suggest it refers to false teachers (Hymenaeus and Philetus) with their vain babblings who we feel are vessels of dishonour. However, the child of God in the pathway of service must avoid anything that would defile in order to be a vessel unto honor. Sanctified is a condition of purity that is to be maintained in the pathway of service.⁸⁹

Well, then false teachers are to be avoided in order to be a vessel to honor. And if in an Open Brethren assembly a known teacher of fundamentally evil doctrine was tolerated, those in that assembly would not be vessels to honor. Yet those persons guilty of that toleration would be received by other assemblies.

In answer to a question regarding the meaning of separation from "these," we read:

. . . On the face of it, it would seem that "things" must be meant. You cannot cleanse a vessel by separating from other vessels -- but by removing its own uncleanness, and this is held by many.⁹⁰

G. H. Lang,⁹¹ of Open Brethren, has a severe problem:

How a *man* can cleanse himself from vessels is incomprehensible . . . "These vessels" yields no possible sense, but makes the picture absurd. Is not the true antecedent to be found in "wood and earth"? Such baser elements are in every man by natural birth . . .⁹²

So a man is to cleanse himself from the "baser elements," wood and earth, which are in every man by natural birth. The desperation to get rid of the truth is quite evident here, and that is the source of the "incomprehensibility." One needs to

88. *Truth and Tidings* 18:178, 1966.

89. Philip Harding, *An Exposition of Second Timothy*, Glasgow: Gospel Tract Publications, reprinted from *Truth and Tidings*, 1975, 1976.

90. *The Believer's Magazine*, New Series 33:47, Jan. 1932. This magazine from Scotland seems to be of the same circle as *Truth and Tidings*.

91. G. H. Lang complained about "Exclusive Brethren" that "they require assent to what are deemed by them fundamental truths . . .," and while he affirmed that he believed in the verbal inspiration of Scripture and "the everlasting conscious existence in punishment of the impenitent," he rejected discipline for denying these teachings (*Departure*, pp. 114, 115).

92. *Departure*, p. 15. F. C. Jennings, *Studies in Isaiah*, Neptune: Loizeaux, p. 607, 1966 reprint of 1935, takes the same line.

do something to be a vessel to honor -- which shows that these vessels are persons. We can all see that the text also speaks of *vessels* of wood and earth, not of baser elements in the vessels to honor. Moreover, the “antecedent” is patently “vessels to dishonor.”

I am glad to find that George W. Knight III, contradicting some other “evangelicals,” dealt with this point in an objective manner:

The implication is that there may indeed be vessels like the false teachers in the professing Christian community, but their activity indicates that they are dishonorable . . . The antecedent of the plural τούτων {these} is most likely the nearby plural relative pronoun phrase in v. 20b, ἃ . . . εἰς ἀτιμίαν, some to dishonor, which, as has been seen, speaks by implication of the false teachers . . . The condition is that one cleanse oneself from the defilement of fellowship with “these” and the effects of their teaching and actions (cf. 3 {sic} John 10, 11) . . . To be an honorable vessel one must depart from wickedness by departing from those who practice such (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11, 13; 2 Cor. 6:14 - 7:1).⁹³

The writer does not comment on what our responsibility is regarding those who are not vessels to dishonor, but are not vessels to honor either because they associate with evil. Be that as it may, it is really evident from the passage that these vessels to dishonor are the “these.” The vessels are persons. A man is to purge himself out from “these” persons. G. H. Lang’s absurd remarks result from his refusal to rightly separate from evil.

The fact is that refusal to purge oneself from vessels to dishonor shows a state of soul that is defiled by indifference due the Lord. It shows neutrality is governing the soul. In order to keep oneself from this requires a state of self-judgment and purging from the vessels to dishonor. Did the editor (J. R. Caldwell) of an earlier Open Brethren magazine really go any further than the above quotation?

And the word here rendered “purge” signifies to “purge out,” or to “cleanse by separation.” One who purifies himself from the evil doctrines must needs be separate from those who hold them, for as a canker they will eat, and there is no purity or safety but in separation.⁹⁴

What does “needs be separate from those who hold them” mean? He did not tell the reader that if he does not purge himself out from the vessels to dishonor, he

93. *New International Greek Testament Commentary, Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 418, 1992. William Hendriksen also was correct on this point:

Thus a person must “effectively” or “thoroughly” cleanse himself “from these,” that is, from evil men (“utensils for dishonor”) and their defiling doctrines and practices; from such men as Hymenaeus and Philetus and their disciples, and from their false teachings and evil habits (*The Epistles to Timothy and Titus*, London: Banner of Truth Trust, p. 271, 1959).

94. *The Northern Witness* 14:144, 1884.

himself is not a vessel to honor.

In answer to questions concerning 2 Tim. 2:20 and 21, G. F. T. {George F. Trench?} avoided purging out from persons this way:

It is not mainly, or primarily, an instruction to purge ourselves from evil persons, though that may be involved, but from evil things.

This is really shuffling about persons. He could not bring himself to deny it, but played it down in this way, and then he went on to say:

It should be translated (Dr. Alford notwithstanding), “If a man purge himself from these *things*” . . . there are just seven of them.

He then lists *these* seven things, and behold, evil persons is not named among the seven. Is that surprising?

In answer to a question, after evacuating 2 Tim. 2:20, 21 of its meaning, C. F. Hogg⁹⁵ wrote:

And whether a servant be of the known and honored, or of the unknown and unhonored, “if he purge himself from these” things condemned by the Apostle in the context, the “profane babblings” which produce ungodliness and act as a canker on the soul; the youthful lusts, and strife engendering questions, “he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, meet for the master’s use.”⁹⁶

He forgot himself in the same sentence. He had defined the vessel to honor to be “the known and honored” servant and the vessel to dishonor as “the unknown and unhonored”; yet, by following what he says, one would, in effect, be a known and honored servant.⁹⁷ His sentence clearly exposes an agenda to get rid of the real thrust of 2 Tim. 2:20, 21. He did not even include purging from such persons as Hymenaeus and Philetus.

And now we come to F. F. Bruce, one of the most widely known of Open Brethren. As C. F. Hogg left out reference to separation from persons, so does F. F. Bruce. His answer to a question on 2 Tim. 2:20 and 21 included this:

How may a Christian become such a vessel? “By cleansing himself from *these*,” says Paul. What are “these”? Not the unhonoured vessels (a vessel is not cleansed from another *vessel*), but those things which stain and defile -- those things against which Paul has been uttering warnings in verse 14

95. A review article of C. F. Hogg’s paper, *The Traditions and the Deposit*, appeared in *The Believer’s Magazine*, New Series 32:43, 44. The review appears to be written by the editor, W. Hoste. He concluded, “We cannot recommend this tract as a safe guide.” He did all but expressly accuse C. F. Hogg of holding a Kenotic view.

96. *The Witness* 69:87, 1939.

97. Rather, a vessel unto honor means that the honor is paid to the Lord Jesus Christ when that vessel purges himself from vessels to dishonor (and continues to maintain such separation. The honor is not paid to the vessel but to the Lord. Thus, the state of the purged one is a state that honors the Lord.

and following; in a word, all aspects of that iniquity from which those who name the Name of Christ should depart. The short “parable” of verse 20 is introduced for the sake of one detail -- the vessels unto honour. Paul does not enlarge upon those unto dishonour, although a natural inference would be that they represent Christians not fully cleansed from the things which stain and defile, whom therefore the Master *can* use, if at all, only for less honourable purposes. But Paul is not concerned to tell us how to be “vessels unto dishonour”; he exhorts us rather to be “vessels unto honour,” and tells us how we may be such.

There is no thought of ecclesiastical division in this Scripture, although J. N. Darby read his watchword, “Separation from evil God’s principle of Unity,” into it -- one of the rare occasions where his normally accurate if inelegant *New Translation* goes quite astray.⁹⁸

Again, reference to such as Hymenaeus and Philetus is omitted. Note well that they are not vessels to dishonor in the view he presents. Can you think of why this is so? The ploy of “unhonored vessels” is also used, as well as that v. 20 is given for only one detail. The agenda is to contradict J. N. Darby. Really, such comments serve as a cover-up of undermining this Scripture.

What about the well-known W. E. Vine, who wrote books jointly with C. F. Hogg? On 2 Tim. 2 he says:

The lesson we are to receive is that we are to keep ourselves pure both in doctrine and practice. Only so can we be vessels unto honor, sanctified, meet for the Master’s use, prepared unto every good work.” To endeavor to maintain a union between the Name of Christ and evil is to dishonor the Lord, discredit the Christian faith, and ruin our prospects of reward.

The apostle warns us to be careful to avoid identifying ourselves with evil, morally or doctrinally, and this necessarily means a path of separation from those who are guilty in either respect. This is not Pharisaical aloofness, but intense loyalty to Christ.⁹⁹

That is the substance of his comments. This goes a little further than C. F. Hogg, but in the final analysis, it does not make a practical difference.

Well, it is plain enough to see that unholiness is at work all through the so-called Open Brethren. What we see at work is really inclusion of evil in associations rather than exclusion of evil in associations.

Comments in The Faith and the Flock

The Faith and the Flock is a magazine that was edited by Russell Elliot, who circulated among some Open Brethren. Walter Scott who went to the Open

98. *The Witness* 73:194, 1943.

99. *Exposition of the Epistles to Timothy*, London: Pickering and Inglis, pp. 77, 78, 1925.

Brethren position, contributed to this magazine. Some articles appeared on the subject we are considering and after some time the editor printed a number of writers on this subject under the title, “Symposium on 2 Timothy 2,” and then he himself wrote a summary of what he thought was made clear. Before coming to the summary, we note what one of the writers (a W. H.) said:

“If a man purge himself from these” does not mean one or more servants of Christ separating from other servants, for that would tend to fill with pride and conceit for the separatists, besides contravening Rom. 14:4 -- “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.” Neither does it mean one or more or many of the children of God separating themselves from other *children of God* -- the subject of association of *persons* not being under review in the context. What *is* reviewed, however, is the servant of Christ’s own moral and spiritual *condition*, as in 1 Tim. 5:22 -- “keep thyself pure,” and as in the context, “shun profane and vain babblings” (v. 16).¹⁰⁰

The brazen impudence of this defiant contradiction of the apostle’s injunctions has led the writer into perversion of Rom. 14, which has to do with patience on the part of Gentile Christians with Jewish converts who still have a conscience concerning certain things from Judaism, a system once sanctioned by God. I suggest reading W. Kelly’s comments on Rom. 14 in his exposition of Romans. Moreover, consider his self-congratulating, gratuitous, and insolent assumption he paints to frighten his reader, that the “separatists” will “tend” to show an attitude. Do you think that JND, J. G. Bellett, E. Dennett, etc. had such an attitude? How many have shed tears on having to act on these Scriptures!

The Scripture-contradicting statement, “association of *persons* not being under review,” has the character of what reigns in the very thing that is compared to a great house -- namely, the self-will of man, here set forth in a cloak of piety. The writer did not cite all of 1 Tim. 5:22, especially “nor partake [*koinoneo*] in other men’s sins.” “If any one come to you and bring not this doctrine, do not receive him into [the] house, and greet him not, for he who greets him partakes [*koinoneo*] in his wicked works” (2 John 10, 11). “Come out of her, my people, that ye have not fellowship in her sins, and do not receive of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4).

He has also perverted “shun profane and vain babblings” by implying that it means that Timothy is personally to utter none such. Now, of course he was not to utter such, but that is not the meaning. Hymenaeus and Philetus are cited by the apostle as examples to shun. Notice that the apostle says “of whom is . . .,” thus making it clear so as to leave no excuse for this unholy paragraph by the writer. Why, it is *unrighteousness* to put forth such corrupting teaching for the *children of God* for whom he professed concern.

100. *The Faith and the Flock*, 1908, p. 445.

We come now to the summary of what the editor thought best. These he stated under six points: ¹⁰¹

1. That verse 20 is only a figure (though, of course, a figure of something) and we must not treat it as if it contained a doctrinal statement. As one correspondent points out, it is helpful to read the passage first of all as if that verse did not occur.

Reading the passage first as if v. 20 did not occur breaks the point that the purging in v. 21 is from the vessels to dishonor in v. 20.

2. It is important to observe the wording of this verse when referring to the vessels “to” honor and “to” dishonor not “of” honor, etc. It is their *use* here, and not what they are. A vessel of wood or earth may be put to just as honorable a use as one of silver or gold.

In v. 20 we should see that there are two classes of vessels and also two different states. We keep in mind that the vessels denote persons. It is *not* the use of the vessel yet, but rather their *state* before the Lord. Verse 21 makes this clear. A vessel to honor is a purged vessel; that is his *state*; if not purged, he is not a vessel to honor. That is *state*, not use. Furthermore, if purged, “he shall be . . . sanctified, serviceable to the master, prepared for every good work.” That indicates a *state* of preparedness for such use. His point 2 is worded to prepare the reader for what follows. Only a part of point 3 need be quoted.

3. . . . a question . . . of conduct and service. And we cannot follow with all who may, nevertheless, be found to be children of God. So in v. 21 it reads “he shall be a vessel unto honor.” Not “of” honor, as if every child of God were that. Therefore, the material of which the vessel is made, whether of gold, silver, wood, or earth does not in itself decide whether the vessel is unto honor. So with persons. A man unto honor is decided by whether he purges himself.

When we considered v. 20, the view taken is that the wood and earth vessels do not represent believers. Here, the writer acknowledges that not all of the children of God are “vessels to honor,” whatever he means by such vessels. We now come to what the purging means.

4. What it is to purge himself is made clear. This has often been taken to mean the outward separation from other persons. It means just the reverse. The man is exhorted to purge *himself* out. The very language must refer to something *within*. That this is the force here is corroborated by a reference to 1 Cor. 5:7, the only other place in scripture where the expression is found, where the meaning is that the Corinthians were to purge themselves from the old leaven, and this refers to a good deal more, as the context shows, than merely getting rid of the wicked person. *Their own state was in question*. “Your glorying is not good,” says the Apostle. And again, “ye are puffed up.”

No doubt their own state was in question, but the writer stressing that in this context is attempting to shift the focus away from separation from persons. *That*

101. *The Faith and the Flock*, 1908, p. 447.

is what is disliked and resisted in these many different ways we have been reviewing. Whatever “a good deal more” may be, the fact is that in 1 Cor. 5:13 the explicit instruction was to remove the “wicked person.” Moreover, in 1 Cor. 5:10 the Apostle speaks of persons as characterized by sin, that require purging out of the assembly. No doubt the Corinthians needed to judge themselves, but 1 Cor. 5 is clear direction to remove certain persons -- out of the assembly. 1 Cor. not only does not “corroborate” his notion, it opposes his notion. There, the assembly must put the wicked person out. Here, the condition contemplated is such that one’s recourse is to purge himself out from the vessels to dishonor. But, point 5 will inject yet further darkness into this matter.

5. Some light, too, is thrown upon what it is we are to purge ourselves out from if we are to be vessels to honor. The “these” can hardly refer to the vessels, for if so (as has been pointed out) grammatically it would include the vessels to honor as well, besides being a rather mixed metaphor. It surely means the *individual* separation from all that is covered by the word “iniquity.” “Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity,” and includes the “profane and vain babblings,” evil doctrines, etc. Timothy, for instance, is exhorted to flee youthful lusts. These are within surely.

Strange it is that such outstandingly capable Greek scholars as J. N. Darby and W. Kelly missed the grammar! It is surprising to me that the Anglican Henry Alford, Dean of Canterbury, was correct about this point:

If then (then deduces a consequence from the similitude: this similitude being taken for granted) any man (member of the church) shall purify himself from among (shall in the process of purifying himself depart from among) these (viz. the latter mentioned vessels in each parallel; but more especially the vessels to dishonor, from what follows), he shall be a vessel for honour . . . ¹⁰²

Is it really so difficult to understand that purging oneself from the vessels to dishonor is meant? that separation from certain persons is meant? Or is it a problem of unwillingness?

And did you note the omission of the two persons, Hymenaeus and Philetus?

6. Then having thus purified himself, he is to “follow righteousness, faith, love, peace,” and this, first of all for himself; and in addition have as his associates those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart! Here again it is a question of what is *within*. In fact, the whole passage is intensely moral and ethical. To make it primarily ecclesiastical (whatever *remote* bearing it may have upon church relationships) is to miss the whole point.

Yes, there is something “within.” What is manifested as “within,” in these six points, resists the responsibility to the Lord to purge oneself from the vessels to dishonor; and disguises this *inner* resistance (this resistance “within”) by pious talk about purging things that are “within.” It manifests the indifference, the

102. *The New Testament for English Readers*, Chicago: Moody, p. 1406, n.d., reprint.

disobedience, the neutrality, that is “within.” Thus there is moral contact in the association with evil. It comes out of the heart, from “within,” from whence proceed many evils.

Observe also how “remote” he desires an ecclesiastical bearing to be. Yes, that is the objective. Of course the passage is meant to foster and encourage individual action -- but in separation from vessels to dishonor. And when the passage is viewed properly, the ecclesiastical bearing is plain and *close*, not remote.

Appendix 3: The Lake Geneva Conference Report’s Perversion of 2 Tim. 2:19-21

THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE SYSTEM

The principle methods used in the *Lake Geneva Conference Report* to get rid of defilement/leavening by association/fellowship are:

1. a misuse of the Lord’s words in Matt. 15 and Mark 7, in order to assert that there is no such thing as defilement by contact, contact being viewed in their way,¹⁰³ rather than as *moral identification of the soul with the evil* by

103. *The Lake Geneva Conference Report* says,

... the Lord confronted the Pharisees who had constructed elaborate interpretations of the Law concerning the nature and mechanics of defilement which placed undue emphasis on externals while disregarding the motivations of the heart (Matthew 15:1-20; 23:25-28; Mark 7:14-23).

... His teaching effectively reversed the commonly held, but erroneous perception that a man was made unclean by his exterior contacts. Instead, the Lord establishes that a man is made unclean by what emanates from his own heart (p. 41).

... James (1:13-15) reflects the same perspective as he states that sin flows out of a man’s own heart, thus negating any attempt to blame outside influences for the sins which originate within ... Therefore an individual or assembly is not held accountable to God as a result of proximity to those who sin, but for sin in their heart (p. 42)

The purpose in their remarks is given in the last sentence. Why did they say “proximity to those who sin” instead of ‘fellowship with those who sin’? They substitute external touching and proximity for the real meaning of fellowship (*koinonia*), to ‘make one with.’ They try to escape the issue: *moral contact and identification with the evil in another person*. The paper is filled with semantic juggling and assumptions in order to overthrow the holiness of Christian fellowship. If, for example, the signatories would separate from one who denies the eternal Sonship, etc., and separate from assemblies where they have fellowship with such a one, let them say so. Do not expect them to do so. They have used James 1:13-15 as if it demonstrates their false position. But James shows the starting point from where this effort to have a wider fellowship at the expense of the due holiness comes. He refers to “lust” in the heart which “gives birth to sin.” In what we are examining, there is a system of teaching that fosters the sin of fellowship with what we know to be

(continued...)

the *neutrality* to what is due Christ, *indifference* to Christ’s honor, *toleration* of evil, etc., that is *present in the heart* of those willingly associated with, in fellowship with, fundamentally evil teachings regarding the person or work of Christ;

2. and a corrupt definition of *apostasy*, whereby they can define away responsibility for fellowship with those holding fundamentally evil teachings (see below for amplification about this);
3. and this false definition of apostasy is accompanied by redefining what we know from Scripture is evil, redefining evil as “error,” or mistake,¹⁰⁴ in order to avoid being required to separate from it;
4. and so making things requiring separation from evil unto the Lord to be merely ecclesiastical differences which can be ignored, especially as we found no evidence in Scripture of a person who was

103. (...continued)

leaven, fostered by perverting the holiness of Christian fellowship. James traces this to the heart. And it is in the heart that there is moral contact with the evil tolerated. There is neutrality and indifference to the honor of Christ in the heart that causes the acts of fellowship with evil.

Moreover, concerning the audacious claim about not being held accountable, read this:

But I have a few things against thee: that thou hast there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a snare before the sons of Israel . . . so thou hast those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes in like manner. Repent therefore . . . (Rev. 2:14, 15; see v. 20).

Well, in the hands of the signatories, Scripture is like putty to be molded to their wilfulness. The sin is in their hearts and they have propagated leavenous teaching. The teaching of the paper partakes of the character of what it allows.

The signatories are very concerned to make those who adhere to the truth about associations and fellowship appear to hold a doctrine about defilement by mere physical contact, while at the same time they pervert the force of various passages so that they do not appear to teach that there is moral contact. In this series of papers on the holiness of Christian fellowship, it is repeatedly pointed out that fellowship involves moral contact and that fellowship (*koinonia*) means to ‘make one with.’ 2 Cor. 6:17 illustrates the matter: “. . . and touch not [what is] unclean,” language borrowed from Isa. 52:11, and applied in a moral way by the Apostle. Surely he did not speak about putting one’s finger on something unclean. It is not a physical touch; it is morally touching -- a moral connection and link to what is morally unclean. Moreover, we are thus taught how to use the types in the OT, which the signatories, in their systematized effort to overthrow what we know to be the truth regarding holiness in fellowship, also reject as having a use (pp. 10, 11, 40-42). If the Lord will, these types will be considered in the fifth paper in this series.

104. J. N. Darby wrote:

I make a difference between a person not rightly dividing the word of truth, and positively teaching on the part of the enemy what dishonours the Person of Christ, or saps any fundamental truth (*Letters* 1:378).

The word “error” can be used for ‘mistake’ or for ‘evil’; therefore we must take care in cases like the present inquiry into the holiness of Christian fellowship not to let those who resist that holiness obfuscate issues with words and with evil definitions foisted on Scripture statements. We want to understand the *thing*. Words, words, and more words have always been used to make a fog for the mind.

excommunicated or barred from fellowship on the basis of a difference of ecclesiastical practice . . . (p. 37).

So we see from the quotation in point 4 why they attempt to reduce everything they think that they can, to “a difference of ecclesiastical practice” -- because *they* found no Scripture for ecclesiastical separation. Then, things that appear to point in the other direction are *arbitrarily defined* as apostasy and apostates, with which we have nothing to do, and that leaves persons holding any number of fundamentally evil teachings¹⁰⁵ as fit for fellowship, because they are believers, not apostates. Note once again the obfuscation involved in the words “a difference of ecclesiastical practice.” Does that mean using a different hymn book? Does it mean a difference in seating arrangement, women on one side of the room and men on the other side, as in some cultures? -- and so on. In any event, it is clear what they are trying to accomplish and that is an inclusiveness that includes fellowship (do they know what that is?) with fundamentally evil teachings, other than the denial of the fact of the incarnation. If they are wrong on the inclusiveness of fundamentally evil teachings (which to them are not evil, of course), their system not only falls, it is in itself evil.

Let us think of a congregation of Christians who have the ecclesiastical practice of allowing the teaching of the denial of eternal conscious punishment of the wicked in their congregation. Or they have the ecclesiastical practice of allowing the teaching among them that the Son was not eternally the Son, etc. *The Lake Geneva Conference Report* signatories “found no evidence in Scripture of a person who was excommunicated or barred from fellowship on the basis of a difference of ecclesiastical practice . . .” Their system is to define such evil doctrines as errors (or, mistakes?), not evil, and the toleration of errors is merely a difference of ecclesiastical practices -- and they found no bar to fellowship in ecclesiastical practices, and thus persons coming from such tolerant congregations must not be barred from fellowship; and, of course, they may go there.

In 1 Cor. 10:16 we learn this:

The bread which we break, is it not [the] communion {*koinonia*} of the body of Christ?

Koinonia means fellowship, *to make one with*. It is the word found in 2 John 11: “he who greets him partakes {*koinoneo*} in his wicked works.” Not only does one thus make himself one with the “wicked works” of propagating a false Christ, but just think of breaking bread with such teachers of evil doctrine concerning the person or work of Christ. Disobedience to these Scriptures results in the soul’s moral contact with the evil by there being in the heart such

105. How they get rid of the true meaning of “the doctrine of the Christ” (2 John 9), reducing its meaning to only a denial of the fact of the incarnation, is dealt with in the first paper in this series, *Exposition of 2 John*.

awful neutrality and indifference to the honor of the Son of the Father. See the first paper in this series on 2 John, which deals with the evil perversion of it in *The Lake Geneva Conference Report*. Such evil doctrines are leaven (Gal. 5:9) and if leaven is not purged out, then the assembly becomes by that evil toleration a leavened lump. This is developed in the third paper in this series -- on 1 Cor. 5. In the present paper we have seen how 2 Tim. 2:19-21 bears on this issue.

As the Pharisees twisted the Word and made it of no effect -- though there were so many explicit commands in the law -- so likewise the signatories to this wicked document do with regard to the principles we have in the New Testament regarding the holiness of Christian fellowship. The signatories are guilty of “systematized error”:

in order that we may be no longer babes, tossed and carried about by every wind of *that* teaching [which is] in the sleight of men, in unprincipled cunning with a view to systematized error . . .” (Eph. 4:14).

This is not “error”¹⁰⁶ as they use the word for mistake in order to mitigate the fact of evil. From the standpoint of the holiness of Christian fellowship, as taught in the Word of God, *The Lake Geneva Conference Report* is a revolting work of “systematized error” to undermine and set aside that holiness. Let us now review how they perverted the Scripture truth concerning “apostasy” as part of this systematized error.

PERVERSION REGARDING APOSTATES

Before quoting their section on 2 Tim. 2, we should look at some quotations concerning apostasy because they define Hymenaeus and Philetus as apostates:

. . . e.g. Hymenaeus and Philetus (2:17) were both apostates; cp. 1 Timothy 1:20 (p. 18)

In their section on apostates (pp. 34-36), characteristics are listed and some comments are made upon these characteristics which I need not quote:

“An apostate is motivated by hostility to Christ.”

“An apostate mirrors the character of the evil one.”

“An apostate is enslaved to sin.”

“The scriptural evidence suggests that an apostate is not a believer at all.”

“An apostate is necessarily barred not only from expressions of fellowship, but from all contact. Like the man in Corinth, an apostate cannot participate in *koinonia* because he fails to evidence the prerequisite life in Christ” (p. 36).

106. The word for error here, *πλάνη*, is used in 1 John 4:6, 2 Pet. 3:17, Jude 11, 2 Thess. 2:11, etc.

In their attempt to mitigate the true force of 2 Tim. 2:19-21, the signatories tell us that Hymenaeus and Philetus were apostates and that “the scriptural evidence suggests that an apostate is not a believer at all.” Besides the *assumption* about them being apostates, if the delivery of Hymenaeus to Satan (see 1 Tim. 1:20 to which they direct us) shows that he is an apostate, then the man of 1 Cor. 5 was an apostate too, because he also was delivered to Satan. Yet they acknowledge that:

It is very significant to note that the man *was* a believer, a fact later established in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 (p. 34).

The result of this fact for their system (to which they are blind) is that a believer may be an apostate and a believer at one and the same time, while Heb. 6:4-6 shows that “it is impossible to renew again to repentance . . .” an apostate. Yes, indeed it *is* significant -- signifying the evil of their self-serving views of apostasy forced on Scripture to support their evil views of ‘fellowship.’ The signatories no more know what apostasy is than they know what the holiness of Christian fellowship is.

Furthermore, since the man of 1 Cor. 5 was a believer and was leavened, a person may be a believer and leavened by fundamentally evil doctrine (cp. Gal. 5:9), which, of course, this system will not have since it is deliberately inclusive of what we should know is fundamental evil concerning “the doctrine of the Christ.”

We see from this system that a man who holds all the so-called fundamental doctrines of the faith, but denies the eternal Sonship, is not to be excluded from fellowship.¹⁰⁷ The same is true for the one who only deviates by affirming the annihilation of the wicked. And so we may proceed on. If they are wrong about this, then what is the real character of their teaching? It is *leavened teaching*.

What apostasy according to Scripture really means is the abandonment of the profession of Christianity. The apostasy of Christendom will not take place until the middle of Daniel’s 70th week when the Lawless One is revealed. The day of the Lord cannot come “unless the apostasy have first come, and the man of sin have been revealed” (2 Thess. 2:3). *Then* the profession will be thrown off. Meanwhile, there are apostates who go out from the profession of Christianity. Hebrews gives us two characters of apostasy in which Jews who professed Christianity might act:

1. apostasy from the presence and action of the Spirit (Heb. 6); and,
2. apostasy from the blood (Heb. 10:26, 27).

107. They do not expressly state that, but it is the necessary consequence of what they have said concerning 2 John, that the only evil teaching there is the denial of the fact of the incarnation. See the paper, *Exposition of 2 John*.

Besides that we have those that John speaks of as having gone out from among us because they were not of us (1 John 2:19). Those who crept, in Jude, into the sphere of orthodoxy, and those in 2 Pet. 2, who bring in “destructive heresies,” are, speaking after the order of Scripture, not apostates, for apostates leave the profession of Christianity. The distinctions which Scripture makes do not suit the signatories so they lump many Scriptures together, as that suits their purpose in building their evil system.

WHAT IS 2 TIMOTHY ABOUT?

2 Timothy 2: The useful servant. We further noted the teaching of 2 Timothy 2:19-21, which the context applies specifically to Christian workers serving against the backdrop of apostasy. Paul counsels Timothy -- himself a Christian worker -- to preserve his usefulness as a servant (a vessel) of the Lord by distancing (cleansing) himself from those servants of ignoble character (e.g., Hymenaeus and Philetus (2:17) were both apostate; cp 1 Timothy 1:20) (p. 18).

These two were not apostates. They did not leave the profession of Christianity. They were within what is likened to a great house.

At any rate, their view, in effect, means that those Campbellites (Church of Christ), and others, who teach that the resurrection took place in AD 70 (full preterists) are apostates, if Hymenaeus and Philetus are apostates, having taught that the resurrection was past. The signatories’ dilations upon apostasy is an artifice in order to broaden the limits of fellowship *vastly* beyond what Scripture advocates. Their system is stratagem and maneuver, unholy and unfaithful, an unmitigated assault on the holiness of Christian fellowship. Thus, for the signatories, 2 Tim 2:14-21:

. . . describes how improper relationships can compromise the credibility and effectiveness of their ministry. Timothy is warned against any relationship with individuals like Hymeneas and Philetus - apostates who had introduced heresy to¹⁰⁸ the churches . . .

The instruction to Timothy to turn away from such wickedness, and to cleanse himself from these ‘dishonorable vessels’ reflects the reality that the failure to condemn these men and their teaching would imply a tacit endorsement of their heresy. His continued tolerance of this heresy would therefore nullify his ministry by compromising the Lord’s willingness to use him (p. 43).

This is most interesting. They have not said that if Timothy did not do so he would not have been a vessel to honor. Moreover, the passage says nothing about imbibing the teaching of the vessels to dishonor, though it is (erroneously) claimed by the signatories that this is “tacit”¹⁰⁹; just as we saw in the first paper

108. {Note the choice of the word “to” instead of “in” or “into.”}

109. Observe that “tacit” means understood or implied without being stated.

in this series (on 2 John) that they say that 2 John 11 means that one would necessarily have imbibed the evil teaching. These are things read into these texts (*eisegesis*) by the signatories, and they must necessarily do so to bolster their evil system. All is reduced to apostasy or non-apostasy, and if you are bad, but not yet *apostate*, they can go on in fellowship with you.

The views set forth in this *Report* are helping on what has given ruinous character to what is likened to a great house. This *Report* virtually gives a new definition to “evangelical” unholiness in Christian fellowship -- though I am happy to say that there are some evangelicals in the USA who separate from modernists and those who have fellowship with them.

Let love be unfeigned; abhorring evil; cleaving to good (Rom. 12:9).

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