

Grasping and understanding this passage is essential if Christians are to carry on a clear and practical testimony to God's masterpiece, the Church (Assembly), in the last days. When Israel was obviously rejecting Him as their Messiah, the Lord reveals to Peter that He was going to found something **new**, His Assembly. This would be founded upon Peter's bold and confident confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," Matthew 16:18. That was the first hint of anything different in God's Plan for the ages. It was totally new, not previously mentioned anywhere in the Scriptures. It would be established within the Kingdom of Heaven, something anticipated in the Old Testament and already announced in the New. But rather than a Kingdom for the rejected, rightful King, it would be known as, and function as, "My Assembly." Later after the Lord had died, risen and ascended He sent the Holy Spirit form this new thing, the Assembly. On the day of Pentecost all believers were baptized into one body by the Holy Spirit, 1Corinthians 12:12-13. This body is distinct from the nation of Israel and is unique. It is itself the permanent temple of the Holy Spirit. It comprises all believers, whose personal bodies are also each temples of the Holy Spirit. This company is the House of God the Church (assembly) of the Living God, 1Timothy 2:14. As we learned in Thessalonians, the Assembly is awaiting the Rapture when Christ returns secretly from the glory to raise all of the dead (asleep in Jesus) believers. The Old Testament believers will go to heaven then as well, Hebrews 11:39-40. While we await this marvelous hope He has sent us with a twofold task. First, to preach the gospel to every creature making disciples. Second, to carry on a testimony to the world of the uniting power of Christ's death and resurrection, replacing the Nation of Israel as the people of God. While Peter and others were the first exponents of this new era, the full details of God's mind for us were not made known at first. The stoning of Stephen marked Israel's final rejection of its opportunity to receive its crucified Messiah then. This opened the way for the God of grace to make known the fulness of His Plan. He chose Saul of Tarsus to do this. The narrative of Acts and Paul's Epistles document and preserve the ministry given us from Christ through Paul (Saul). Now as he writes his closing epistle he sees his beloved brethren already forsaking him and his unique ministry received directly from the ascended Christ. Ministry regarding the Unity of the Body of Christ, the sanctity of the Bride of Christ and His love for her.

As we noted last week there were some huge issues arising for Timothy to face. Paul awaited his last opportunity to proclaim the gospel of grace to the highest powers in the Roman Empire before they executed him. Some were teaching false things, others quarreling about irrelevant issues, and apparently some assemblies were not exercising their authority and responsibility to maintain the holiness suited to the House (Temple) of God.

Psalm 93:5 Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever,

Ephesians 2:21 . . . a holy temple in the Lord,

Holiness, separation from evil, is to always characterize God's House. Unbelievers are to be excluded, although faithfully given the gospel. Spiritual believers are to seek recovery and restoration of any who strayed. If ignored or unheeded, the assembly is responsible, after pleading, to exclude the wicked persons from any level of fellowship with the believers in the House of God, Matthew 18:15-20. (Also in our own homes, 2 John.)

Paul, through the Spirit, anticipates a problem. What is the individual saint to do if the local assembly, the company of believers where God's word had placed him, becomes unclean? A mix of believers and unbelievers, of vessels unto honor and vessels unto dishonor? (The term "vessel" speaks of individual persons themselves, individual believers and unbelievers.) Although God's original plan was for a holy temple visibly comprising only believers, unbelievers are allowed to openly infiltrate the assembly, contaminating it. As Haggai 2:11-13 tells us, mixing dirty things and clean things makes the clean things dirty, but mixing clean things with dirty things doesn't make dirty things clean. It's a one way street. (The whole creation is witness to this principle.) Unbelievers and wicked persons (though professing to be believers) at the Lord's Supper are not disciplined as directed by the Lord in Paul's epistles. They are allowed to continue to socialize and partake of the emblems of Christ's death in the assembly.

What is a faithful saint of God to do? Virtually everything taught in the New Testament encourages unity at all costs, certainly at all personal costs, e.g. Ephesians 4:1-4. In 2Timothy, virtually at the last minute, Paul is given the solution to this dilemma. He, the apostle of Jesus Christ, authorized the individual to purge himself from the vessels unto dishonor that had been allowed into the house. Now that which was called House of God is known as "a great house." A house of Christian profession, but now of mixed composition. Within this great house remain vessels to honor and vessels unto dishonor. Some of the vessels to honor have obeyed Paul's call to depart from iniquity and have separated from the vessels unto dishonor. As only some vessels to honor have purged themselves out from the vessels unto dishonor there remains a mixed group of vessels some unto honor and some unto dishonor. Two groups result. One comprising vessels unto honor, **sanctified**, and the other a mix of vessels unto dishonor and vessels unto honor (but unsanctified). The gold and silver vessels are persons whose saving faith in Christ makes them of intrinsic value to their owner. If they should be soiled they can be cleansed, polished and with the defilement removed they become fit again for the master's use. The wood and earthen vessels do have some usefulness in a house, to hold refuse, etc. but they are like porous and

perishable material which can never be made suitable for the personal use of the master of the house. There is more here. A vessel unto honor may indeed become dirty. These need to be kept separate from those that are still clean or they will get the clean ones dirty. Paul's illustration is so apt! When one washes dishes the washed dishes are placed in a clean place separate from the unwashed dishes. This part of the illustration is only about vessels to honor. Vessels unto honor are to be separated from vessels unto dishonor and from vessels unto honor that are dirty (wicked). So there are actually two situations that may result in vessels unto honor being separated from other vessels. Separation from unbelievers and separation from wickedness.

This word translated "purge" is used only twice in the New Testament, both times in regard to sin tolerated amongst the congregation of believers, 1Corinthians 5:7 and here in 2Timothy 2. Here it is "purge out himself from these." The command, yes command, is to purge yourself out from these. The point here is not to **purge sin out** of me, or even to **purge sin out** from the assembly as is commanded in 1Corinthians 5. I am to **purge me out from sin** knowingly and purposely tolerated in the assembly.

- * those being allowed to continue practicing wickedness,
- * those justifying wickedness in the midst of the assembly,
- * self declared unbelievers in the assembly.

The Corinthians were commanded to **purge out** the old leaven of malice and wickedness, 1Corinthians 5:6-8. When that was written it was unimaginable that any assembly would not obey, out of love for Christ and for recovery of the errant one. But a decade later the possibility, yes the reality, that the assembly might not so act is addressed by Paul. We are not left to be caged in a den of iniquity on the basis of maintaining outward unity. Unity with something that calls itself by the name of the Lord, but insults His grace by accepting unrepentant sinners and wicked persons into its fellowship. If the assembly refuses to act and obey in the face of irrefutable facts, I am authorized and compelled to leave it. In Paul's day this was the only scriptural reason to leave a local assembly. Has anything changed between then and now? (Except that conditions are much worse and sin tolerated in the midst is largely institutionalized.) But even godly believers somehow feel they have liberty to come and go as they please. NOT SO! Unless there is a scriptural reason for a believer to leave where he now meets, scripture does not grant anyone the authority to leave one gathering and go to another in the same locale. Exception, moving away for a job change, or the like. Frankly, I was startled when I realized this. Am I right? Search the scriptures.

So we have the grace of God providing release and escape for the Christian who finds himself in an intolerable, compromised situation regarding wickedness in the assembly, whether **doctrinal, moral or ecclesiastical**.

The apostle provides further blessing. Anyone who

does finally conclude he must obey the Lord and leave is not left alone and isolated in the world. While rightly experiencing deep feeling in taking this action he might be tempted to succumb to various temptations and go too far. Beware! Flee youthful lusts. Don't throw the baby out with the dirty bath water. Don't toss everything overboard, give up your faith, stomp away in a huff. Don't fall into lusts such as frivolity, anger, grudge, hatred, revenge, railing, that characterize the immature. One danger is to rebelliously swing away into immorality of all sorts. To burn his bridges behind him as if there is never any hope of return. Immerse oneself in something besides the Lord. To forsake discipleship and service. To go fishing as Peter did.

He who has left unrighteousness, is now free. Free to follow righteousness, free to walk by faith within the bounds of righteousness. Free to love others found on the same path of separation, those who call upon the Lord out of a pure (undivided heart). Peace from frustrating contacts with wickedness harbored in the assembly, and peace with other believers in the Lord. There will still be ample opportunity to exercise love in keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, Ephesians 4:1-4.

But there is more. Paul has given the **course** to be taken if all else fails. Now he goes back and admonishes as to our **attitude** and **manner** when faced with such conditions. How we do things is just as important as what we do. In a word it is **Gently!** What a marvelous thought, Gently. Focus on the essential avoid the foolish and ignorant questions that are sure to be generated. The servant of the Lord must not strive, but avoid arguments. Simply go over the scriptures with anyone opposing them. Be gentle to all, apt to teach (not scold or condemn), super patient, instructing in meekness, letting the word speak for itself though the power of the Spirit, for it is His sword, Hebrews 4:12. **The goal is their repentance.** Only God can give it but we must be sure to work with Him in such a manner we don't offend someone with unwise words or insults. Repentance will be recognized by a frank acknowledging of the truth. They have been dupes of Satan, taken captive to do his will, dishonoring Christ and wounding their fellow saints. They will not realize this until they are recovered. One who separates from them, who purges himself out from them, should do so only after every gentle attempt has been made toward bringing about repentance.

So Paul has marked well the path and the way to walk in it. It's not to be taken lightly. It's not easy, and usually entails suffering, isolation, breaking natural relationships and friendships, persecution and rejection with the people of God, Hebrews 11:24-27. God give us grace to choose and persevere in the path of separation from evil He has given us as a resort in the last days until Jesus returns for His pure bride

By Ron Canner, July 5, 2006