Flee and Pursue

II Timothy 2:22-26

By Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III

Amen. If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to II Timothy, chapter two. As we've been working through this great book together, we've seen Paul in this chapter over and over give glorious directions, imperatives, to this young minister, Timothy. And we've seen that those directions are relevant to any age, any era of ministry.

But we've also seen that these instructions for Timothy are not just for Timothy, and they're not just for preachers, and they're not just for elders; but they're for the whole church—the whole of the people of God. Even when Paul is giving directions to Timothy, there is something for us to learn in those directions. Sometimes those directions have a direct application to us, wherein we are to have the same attitude or demeanor, or to do the same things, that Paul is calling Timothy to do. Sometimes those directions are indirect in their applications to us, in that we are, in light of what Timothy and other faithful ministers are instructed to do, we are to respond to them in light of the way that God tells them to carry out their work.

Now, in the passage today that we're going to look at (beginning in verse 22 and going down to verse 26, right at the end of the chapter) we're going to see eight of these imperatives... eight of these directions...that God gives to Timothy; but, understand that the message is actually simpler than that.

Paul's message to Timothy–God's message to you and me today–is that Timothy's teaching in the church is to have the focus, it is to have the aim, it is to have the design of promoting edification and unity in the local congregation.

All that he does in teaching and all that he does in responding to those who are teaching error in the church is to have as its goal, as its aim, as its end, the promotion of edification by the word of truth; and thus, unity in the local congregation.

Each of the specific commands that Paul gives to Timothy here fits in that larger design. Let me just walk you through those specific commands so that you can see them as we read, in just a few moments.

First of all, in verse 22 he tells Timothy to "flee...flee from youthful passions", or

youthful tendencies or desires.

Secondly, you'll notice again in verse 22 that contrary to that he tells him to "pursue righteousness." So, he's supposed to flee from youthful passions, but he's supposed to pursue righteousness.

Thirdly, notice in verse 23 he'll tell him to refuse something. What? Foolish speculations, or, foolish and ignorant speculations.

Fourthly, in verse 24, notice he says, 'Timothy, you are not to be quarrelsome.' Don't be quarrelsome—the fourth directive.

Fifth, again in verse 24, on the contrary, "...be kind...be kind to all." That's the fourth direction he gives him.

Then, sixth, 'Timothy, you must be able to teach.' And so he directs him to cultivate this kind of practical teaching ability.

Seventh, 'You are to be patient when wronged.'

Finally, if you look at verses 25 and 26, and the very first phrase of verse 25, 'You are to with gentleness correct those who are in opposition.'

So he gives these eight imperatives (or directives) to Timothy, but his goal is simply this: again, just as we saw last week, he desires Timothy to engage in a teaching ministry and in a correcting ministry that ultimately has in view the promotion of unity and edification in the local congregation.

We just have heard the choir singing some beautiful words which are a paraphrase, Isaac Watts' paraphrase of the Twenty-third Psalm. If you would look at the very end of that, and look at the petition:

"O may Thy house be my abode, and all my work be praise! There would I find a settled rest while others go and come, No more a stranger, nor a guest; but like a child at home."

And that petition of David's is to be a part of the edification that Timothy's teaching is supposed to promote. In other words, Timothy's edifying is not just giving you seven principles for this, or twelve steps for that, or five clues to this—but it is to cultivate an edification in you in which you more and more desire, more than anything else in the world, to have union and communion with God through Jesus Christ. That more than anything else in the world, you long to know God savingly, now and forever; and to live with Him, loving Him, loving His children, loving your neighbors. And so it is an edification which is focused on glorifying and enjoying God, and everything else falls into place when that teaching focus is understood.

With that as a word of introduction, let's hear God's holy word in II Timothy, chapter two. And before we do, let's pray and ask for His help.

Our Lord and our God, if we are to be both hearers and doers of this truth, we need Your Holy Spirit, because it is one thing to hear the word read out loud; it is another thing to embrace it by faith, and then by Your Spirit and through the pursuit of righteousness to see that truth working out in our own lives. O Lord, we would be not just hearers, but doers. We would not be sermon-tasters, but we would be those who are looking to see Your truth worked out in our lives. To that end we ask Your help; we ask the help of the Holy Spirit: open our eyes that we may behold wonderful things in Your word. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hear the word of God.

Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue after righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition; if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

Paul wants Timothy to pursue in his teaching the goal of edification and unity in this congregation. Last week we saw how that involved avoiding false teachers, and those who would sidetrack the people of God with teaching that would lead them nowhere, that would provide no practical help in growth in grace, because it's not true. And truth is unto godliness, and, therefore, untruth is not unto godliness. And since Paul is concerned for a teaching ministry that leads to godliness in the life of God's people, he knows that you can't promote that godliness through false teaching; and so false teaching is to be avoided, he said in large measure and in repetition in II Timothy, chapter two.

But here he comes to a series of eight specific directives to Timothy, and I'd like to see if we can spend some time looking at these today. I won't promise you that we'll get all the way through them; we didn't in the first service, so we'll do the best we can.

I. The true minister (and growing disciple) flees from youthful passions.

Here Paul says, "Now flee from youthful lusts...." He's saying to Timothy that the true minister (and indeed, the growing disciple) of the Lord Jesus Christ—the true minister flees from youthful passions. He's saying, 'Timothy, as you deal with people that are opposing the truth, as you deal with people that are teaching false doctrine in the church, as you attempt to preach the truth that is unto godliness, you must avoid those youthful impulses and passions that will leave you vulnerable to headstrong behavior...to partiality, to intolerance, to quick-temperedness, to self-assertion.

The youthful passions which Paul is speaking about here are not simply the kinds of passions or lusts that we often first think of. Particularly, we'll think of sexual lust when we think of youthful passions.

Paul is thinking more broadly here. He's thinking about anger. Very often a young person hasn't learned how to manage or to check his or her anger. He's thinking of impatience, or impetuosity; of that tendency to rebellion or aggression; vanity, self-centeredness, self-will, obstinacy—and these passions are strong in youth for a variety of reasons.

Young people are not yet experienced self-managers. Sometimes you don't know yourself well enough to know that "I've got to watch out for myself in this particular area or that particular area."

Another thing is that young people haven't been burned by their own mistakes as much as a guy my age has! Why, I've burned myself so many times, I know that there are certain things that I need to avoid that are tendencies of mine, because I've burned myself by them. And when you get older, you've learned those things. And so, a youth is vulnerable to those kinds of mistakes.

Calvin speaks of these youthful passions as "those impetuous feelings and impulses to which the excessive warmth of youth makes young men prone." And we understand what he's speaking of. And Paul says, 'Timothy, you need to flee from those impulses, flee from those kinds of passions.'

You can see the context: a person is opposing the teaching of truth, and Timothy just flies off the handle! He gets angry. He yells at the person. He berates them; he hammers them. He's angry! He's impatient! He's intolerant of their struggling with the truth, and Paul is saying, 'Timothy, that's not how I want you to engage false teaching in the church. I want you to engage it calmly, gently, kindly; I want you to be solid as a rock; I want you to be faithful as the day is long; but, I want you to be gentle in the way that you do it. I want you to be kind in the way that you do it. Don't let your youthful passions carry you away.'

Now, friends, if Timothy—a godly young man and a godly and consecrated minister of the word—needed to be reminded not to let his youthful impulses and youthful passion carry him away, how much more do we need to be reminded of

that? Some of us are older, and yet sometimes our youthful passions get the best of us.

And there are many young people sitting here today who need to hear that direction: Don't let your youthful passion carry you away. And those impulses, those passions, can hit you from many different angles.

There may be something going on in your family life right now. Student, you're in the Day School, or you're in high school or in your college, or you're in graduate school. There may be something going on in your family life, your home life, and it's leaving you frustrated, and it's leaving you angry. You are in a vulnerable situation for that anger, for that youthful passion to carry you some place that you don't want it to carry you. The Apostle Paul is saying, "Flee!"

Isn't it interesting he doesn't say, "Timothy, stop. Analyze, reflect, work on managing..." No! He says, "Flee!" Run from it! Get as far away from it as you can! Don't let that have any kind of influence on the direction of your behavior.

Some of you may be in temperament aggressive, or even rebellious. Your parents tell you that you need to do something. It's wise. It's their command. It's in your best interest. But that's not what you want to do right now, and your temptation is to fire back, "I don't want to do that!" That's youthful passion carrying you away, and Paul is saying to Timothy, 'Don't let those kinds of impulses dictate your behavior.'

Or, it may indeed be in the area of sexual temptation. There may be a young girl who, in her impulses, wants to please her boyfriend—but in the wrong way. Or there may be a young man who wants to find gratification of his desires in his girlfriend—in an inappropriate way. And youthful passions are leading you in that direction. And Paul's word to Timothy is, 'Flee that! Don't think about it, don't meditate on it, don't think, 'Well, how can I...?' Flee it! Run! Get away from it!

A friend of mine worked at another Presbyterian church in another city, in another state. And after working there a couple of years, that town got a "gentlemen's club" — euphemism for strip joint! And that "gentlemen's club" put up a ginormous billboard on the highway, which was on the way from his house to the church. After driving past that billboard a couple of days, he was vexed! He would go to the church office, and he would think about what he saw on that billboard for half of the day! He realized there was only one thing he could do: go another way. Going another way meant fifteen extra minutes in his commute. He drove the fifteen extra minutes, because he was fleeing something rather than monkeying around with it. And I want to say that men very often, instead of fleeing these kinds of passions, slouch away slowly, hoping that the passions will catch up! And Paul is saying, "Timothy, don't let that happen."

Young people, that's what God's telling you in the word today: flee from those

impulses which may be either sinful themselves, or might lead you to sin. Flee from them. That's what Paul says to Timothy. He's doing it in the context of telling Timothy to be even-handed and calm in the way he deals with controversies in the local church.

And so, there's his first word: Avoid falling prey to youthful impulses. And if a young minister needs to be warned about those things, how much more do we all—and especially our youth?

II. The true minister (and growing disciple) pursues righteousness, faith, love, and peace.

He doesn't just say stop it; doesn't just say stop doing that; he doesn't just say don't do that; he doesn't just say, 'Just say no'. He says in addition, "Pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace [along] with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

In other words, he says the true minister (and again, the growing disciple) pursues righteousness and faith, and love and peace. Rather than being carried away by an impulsive passion to do something that's wrong, instead fix your eyes on pursuing righteousness.

When he says "pursue" he means make an all-out effort to reach a goal. Turn that excessive tendency of your own impetuosity or your own impulses into an energy that is wholly focused on growth in holiness. Pursue holiness. Pursue God in the company of the saints. That's what David's saying: he wants to make God's house his abode; he wants to dwell there, and he wants all his work to be praise. And Paul is saying, "Timothy, pursue God; pursue holiness, those virtues of righteousness, love, faith and peace. These things need to be cultivated."

And notice how he says to cultivate them. Look at the language. "...Along with all who call on the Lord from a pure heart." You see what he's saying. He's saying, 'You can't do this alone. You need God's people. You need God's people coming alongside of you if you're going to pursue single-mindedly love and faith and peace and righteousness. You need the help, the encouragement, and the example of God's people. He's not creating Lone Rangers here: we need one another. It's in the context of the local body of Christ that we have that mutual accountability, that mutual example, and that mutual exhortation so that we can live this life. And he's saying, 'I want you to pursue this with all those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.' In other words, these virtues have to be pursued and cultivated in the company of fellow believers.

That's such a vital lesson to learn. I've been miserable the last two Sundays not being here with you. Now, you might have been delighted! I had one guy say, "Boy, Ric Cannada did a great job. You might better watch out, being away; you

might not have a job when you come back!" Well, that's great! I'm glad you were blessed. I was miserable away from you!

But one of the nice tiny little things that I did get when I was away was to be with other men who love God, who love His word, who are wiser than I am, they're better preachers than I am, and just to be able to be around them and hear them talk about their love for God, their love for ministry, their love for the Lord Jesus Christ, their love for the gospel, their passion in pursuing it—it sort of stokes my fires. Being around them makes me want to get back into the game and do a better job than I'm doing, and pursue things that I might have drifted away from.

That's how it works in the Christian life. We need one another. We need one another to point us in the right direction, when we're going in the wrong direction sometimes. We need one another to encourage one another and to support one another.

When I was in high school, there were some times when I was pursuing God and pursuing righteousness, and there were other times that I was not. Whatever state I was in, there were always certain people there. They were part of my Youth Fellowship, and they were always witnesses to me, even when they weren't talking to me.

There was Hannah, who was crippled, who wore braces and walked on crutches—and not very well. But who came Lord's Day after Lord's Day to Sunday School with a huge smile on her face and excitement about learning the word of God. And, very frankly, on Sunday mornings when I came, not excited at all about studying the word of God and thinking a whole lot more about what had happened over the weekend, and what had happened at the football game, or the basketball game, or whatever else, her smiling face very often rebuked me. She didn't know it, but it did. Because I looked at her and I saw a woman who could have been bitter about her situation in life, and yet she loved the Lord Jesus Christ; and just being around her encouraged me to love the right things, to seek the right things, to want the right things.

There was a young man in our group who came from a broken home. And I saw in him at fourteen a genuine conversion, and he came to Christ and he loved the Lord Jesus Christ. And though his parents thought he was out of his mind, and though he had been bereft of a dad who would love and care for him, and be involved daily in his life, yet he loved the Lord Jesus Christ. He had far fewer advantages than I had, and yet he loved Christ. Being with him encouraged me. And you are meant to encourage one another in the pursuit of righteousness in just those ways. You cannot do it alone. You need the assembly of the saints.

Young people, if it is true that bad company corrupts good morals (and it is, because the Bible says it), it is also true that it is in the company of fellow believers that right living and right believing is cultivated. That's where you grow.

That's where you pursue righteousness: in the company of fellow believers.

III. The true minister (and growing disciple) refuses to hear foolish and ignorant speculations.

And then Paul goes on, if you look at verse 23, to tell Timothy to "refuse foolish and ignorant speculations." Now, I want to elaborate on this because Derek has spent some time focusing on this in the passage that you studied from verse 14 down to verse 21. But understand here what Paul is saying. He's saying, "Timothy, don't get caught up in un-instructive wrangling about false speculations." And there are two reasons why Paul says this: one, because they're false; two, because they're unproductive.

Remember again: if truth is unto godliness, then untruth is not unto godliness. Untruth does not produce godliness, and what does Paul want Timothy's teaching to produce in this congregation? He wants it to produce godliness. He wants to see people mature. He wants to see people edified. He wants to see people edified. He wants to see people loving God more, understanding the gospel more, sharing their faith, living the Christian life. He wants to see them built up, and therefore he says avoid anything that sidetracks you from that kind of sound teaching. He's emphasizing that Timothy shouldn't allow himself to be entangled in unfruitful theological squabbles.

Now, if it's true that the minister needs to make sure not to be sidetracked by that, and that the minister ought to be focused in giving edifying teaching, teaching that cultivates the Christian life, does that not also say to you that you need to be asking every time you're in a Sunday School class, every time you're in a small group, every time you're in youth group, every time you're at church, every time where you're under the teaching of the word you need to be asking yourself the question: What does the Lord intend this truth to do in me?

What does the Lord intend this truth to do in me, because I know that the Lord's purpose *is not* for me to come out with seven more facts that I didn't know before. The Lord's purpose *is* for that truth to shape my life, to change me, to grow me up, to make me more like the Lord Jesus Christ. So if the preacher or the teacher isn't doing a very good job of applying that truth to my experience, then I need to be saying, "Lord, what does that truth mean to me? What do You intend that truth to produce in me? Am I to glorify You more? Am I to think of Your sovereignty more? Am I to be more assured of the forgiveness of my sins? Am I to be more loving to my brothers and sisters in Christ? Am I to witness to Christ more?" I'm to be asking: "What do You intend Your truth to produce in me, Lord?" If the preacher is to be concerned for a kind of teaching that promotes godliness, then we also need to be concerned to make sure that we are asking ourselves as we sit under the faithful ministry of the word, "Lord, produce in me by Your word

IV. The true minister (and growing disciple) is not quarrelsome.

Then again, he goes on to say that the true minister is not quarrelsome. The Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, and if that's true of the minister, it's also true of the growing disciple. He's saying that true servants of the Lord love edification, not fights. The true minister of the gospel is not licking his chops to get into a theological fight with somebody. What he loves is edification. He deals with disagreements not because he loves disagreements, but because he loves edification; and disagreements get in the way of edification.

Let me explain how. You have a congregation member who does not believe in the perseverance of the saints. You have a congregation member who believes that you can have salvation and you can lose it. And you have another congregation member who believes the biblical doctrine that you cannot fall away from your salvation, who believes in the perseverance of the saints. And that person is struggling with assurance, for one reason or another.

That one congregation member who doesn't believe in the perseverance of the saints can't minister to that congregation member who is struggling with assurance but who does believe the Bible's teaching about the perseverance of the saints. In other words, what they believe actually short-circuits their capacity to minister to one another in that regard. So the Apostle Paul is reminding Timothy here that when you correct the brother who has the misunderstanding about that truth, you're doing it not so you can put him in his place...not so you can cram something down his throat...not so you can get him thinking straight and sitting quietly over in the corner; it's so that he can edify the brother. So, he has a shared concern for the edification of the brothers and sisters in the church.

This reminds us too, doesn't it, that unity does not "just happen" in the church. If we are not preaching and teaching for the edification and unity of the church, it will not happen. Unless we long for it and aim for it, and work for it in our teaching, unity and edification doesn't "just happen." It's not an accident. It is the consequence of deliberate effort on the part of the ministry of the word, and we need to remember that as well, as we deal with one another in theological disagreements.

V. The true minister (and growing disciple) is kind.

Then he goes on to say that the true minister is kind. Look at verse 24: "The Lord's bond-servant must be kind to all...." In other words, the true Christian minister, the growing Christian disciple, is going to have a demeanor that promotes edification and unity.

Now, I have run into people in the course of my life who reject certain biblical teachings, I am convinced, not so much because those teachings are in and of themselves repulsive to them or implausible to them, but because somebody has attempted to cram those teachings down their throat in a way that was offensive to them, or they have heard somebody teach those things for whom they do not have respect when they look at that person's life. And consequently, they've gone sour on the teaching. And isn't it interesting that Paul says, "Look, Timothy...your character, your demeanor is to be a demeanor of kindness and love." And not only is it hard to argue against love...you know, isn't it hard to hate somebody that you know is evidently loving you? Even if you disagree with them, and you see them... "The reason that they're talking to me about this is because they love me"...it's hard to get-"Umh!"-mad! And so Paul says your demeanor of kindness and love, Timothy, is going to be the way, the context in which you're going to promote this truth that is unto godliness. And so the means by which guarrels can be avoided and unity and edification promoted is precisely going to be the teacher and preacher's character and demeanor.

VI. The true minister is apt to teach (and the growing disciple is teachable and loves the teaching)

But he continues in verse 24 and he says the true minister is "able to teach." The growing disciple is thus teachable, and he loves the teaching. Look at it again, what he says: "The Lord's bond-servant must be able to teach." Now, when Paul says to Timothy that he must be able to teach, he's not just saying, "Timothy, you have to know stuff that your student doesn't"-although that's true. To be a teacher, you have to know at least one thing that your student doesn't, so there are certain things that teachers need to know: that's true. That's not what Paul is talking about. He's not even saying, "Timothy, it's really important that you be an interesting teacher", though that's good, too! It keeps them from falling asleep! What he's saying is, 'If you are able to teach, Timothy, then your people will show your teaching in their lives.' In other words, the effect of your fruitful ministry used by the Holy Spirit as He works grace in the hearts of your hearers will be godly living. They won't just go away knowing seven more things that they didn't know before they heard your message: they will go away living differently, believing differently, thinking differently, and having a bigger view of God, a bigger view of grace, a bigger view of Christ, a bigger view of God's plan. They'll be changed in the way they think, the way they believe, the way they live, the way they respond to the truth of God, by your faithful teaching. Being apt to teach focuses here on the teacher's capacity to promote godliness in his students, so that the true Christian minister is not just wanting his people to "know stuff", or to know "more stuff", or to know "more stuff than other Christians", but to be transformed by truth. He wants that truth to take hold of their lives so that they not only know things that they didn't know before, but that the things that they come to know change everything. He's looking for life-transformation.

Now, if that's what the true minister is doing, then, my friends, the growing Christian, the growing disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ...when he or she comes to sit under the teaching of the word, then the first thing that person is is teachable. They're coming and they're saying, 'Lord, teach me from Your word because You've appointed Your word to search me out and to grow me up. So do that, Lord, through the word.' And then that person loves teaching. Teaching isn't something that seems to be boring and irrelevant to life; it's the very stuff of life, because it's designed to change me from the inside out. And so the true Christian loves biblical teaching and wants to see it change his or her life.

And Paul is saying to Timothy, "That's what I want you to aim for in your teaching: edification, which is going to promote unity in the church around that truth."

VII. The true minister (and growing disciple) is patient when wronged.

Then of course, he says in verse 24, and you're to be "...patient when wronged." In other words, the true teacher is going to show that his aim is for the edification of the body by not being sidetracked when a member of the congregation gets mad at him about teaching the truth; when he's wronged by someone who says, 'Well, I object to that. That really bothers me...' and the person is perhaps maligned by that congregation member...he's not going to be easily offended. He's going to be patient with wrong; he's going to manifest a forgiving spirit when he's responded to wrongly. Why? Again, because his goal is edification! His goal is not to silence all objections, to save face, to build up his reputation; his goal is edification. If that's what it takes to get there in the life of that person, he's willing to get there.

VII. The true minister (and growing disciple) is gentle in correcting the misguided.

The last thing you see in verses 25 and 26 is simply this: he's going to be gentle in correcting those who are misguided. In other words, in this passage look at the language: "...with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition; if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." Did you ever realize that? All true teaching...when you receive it, all true Christian teaching will require some repentance on your part.

When we learn how great God is, when we learn that God is far greater than we have ever realized before, that calls for repentance, because we thought of God as smaller than He is.

When we've thought that our behavior squared up with the demands of God's

law, and through the faithful teaching of God's word we find out that it doesn't, it calls for repentance.

And so, true teaching always aims at engaging someone in order that they might be led to repentance and faith. All growth in Christian knowledge entails repentance, and Paul just wants to prepare Timothy for that. He wants to prepare you for that, too, because growing in the knowledge of the Lord can be painful sometimes, because we find things about ourselves that are disturbing; and we find out things about God that disturb us about ourselves. But the way we grow is to embrace that truth, to repent of our sin, and then to go back to the Savior and long to fellowship with Him, whom to know is life eternal.

Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, Your word is truth, and we have barely scratched the surface of the significance of this passage for the way that we live. I pray, Lord, that You would call us to be disciples who flee from sin, and that You would make us to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, who, in arising and putting our armor on, would indeed with all our might and main strive, pursue after righteousness, faith, love and peace. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Congregational hymn: Soldiers of Christ, Arise]

Grace be with you all, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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