

We aim to reconcile people unto God through Christ

SERMON TITLE:	BECOME LIKE CHRIST - TRANSFORMED TO BE USEFUL
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Transformed to be useful

I think it is ever Christians desire to be used by God. This is a good and normal desire. God transforms us for a purpose, God always has a purpose for everything he does. Nothing he does is not for a specific reason. There is no greater thrill that to discover what God's purpose for your life is and then "TO DO IT". There is nothing that is remotely close in terms of excitement, satisfaction and fulfillment, than knowing you have been an instrument in the hands of the Almighty to do some of His work -- to change the direction of someone's life, perhaps, to prevent an injury, to resolve an argument, to answer a challenge, to help someone overcome a weakness or perhaps to turn a nation.

It is an awesome and humbling experience when you are used by God to transform someone's life or a group's effectiveness or a nation's destiny. You say well Roelof that is only for some people some extraordinary people not for a normal unknown person like me. It can happen to anybody. Being used of God is not confined to pastors, preachers or teachers. Anybody can be an instrument in God's hands. In the passage we are looking at today 2 Timothy 2:20-21 Apostle Paul describes what it takes to be used of God.

2 Tim 2:20

²⁰In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. ²¹If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

Every person in the church is a possible vessel for God to use, regardless of race, gender, background, political persuasion, current social standard etc etc. God does not have an elite chosen team He wants to use. He has a team which is called by His Name who has been saved through His Son.

There are some things God will accomplish and no one will stand in His place. Scripture reveals that God even uses His enemies to accomplish His work. God's sovereignty, His majesty, is such that no matter whom we may be or what we may be like, we can be used by him. In the story of the Exodus, in the Old Testament, we learn that not only was Moses the instrument of God but so was Pharaoh. In Romans 9, Paul says that Pharaoh was used of God to resist the departure from Egypt in order that the greatness of God might be manifest. The apostle says that God raised up Pharaoh, set him on his throne, and used him for His purposes. In fact, in the ninth chapter of Romans, the 21st through the 23rd verses, the apostle uses this very same figure about vessels of mercy contrasted with vessels of wrath. He says,

Rom 9 :21-23

²¹Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

²²What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:16 NKJV

Scripture itself supports the idea that God can use anybody, believer or nonbeliever.

In Isaiah we are told that Nebuchadnezzar was the servant of God (Jeremiah 27:6), even though he was a Babylonian pagan. Cyrus the Persian king is called "God's anointed one," (Isaiah 45:1). God speaks of him as "my shepherd" (Isaiah 44:28), though he too was an unbeliever. If we understand life from the Biblical point of view, we must know that all people can be used of God. So it is not a question of whether you are going to be used of God or not. As this passage points out, the question is, How does God plan to use you? What is he going to do with you? To what purpose is he going to put you in his program? Will it be a noble purpose, or will it be, as this version says, an ignoble? Will it be for good or bad, blessing or judgment? We need to clearly understand this fact.

There was a sign on someone's desk that said, "It may be that my whole purpose in life is to serve as a warning to others." Everyone needs a bad example as well as a good one. That may be the purpose God will use us for. The Scriptures do not teach that only the righteous people are used of God. No, God can use anyone. He used bad rulers in History and in our time to accomplish certain purposes of judgment and correction. We all are instruments of his work. God used Judas, placing him in the apostolic team. Jesus knew that he would betray Him. Judas fulfilled the Scriptures and the predictions of the prophets on that night when he lifted up his heel against the Lord and betrayed Him. So God can use anyone.

The great question, however, is to what end, for what purpose is he using you? Here the apostle is pointing out to Timothy that it is for one of two purposes. "In every house," he says, "there are vessels." That is true of all homes - we have "vessels for honor," i.e., dishes we eat from, pots and pans we cook in, decorated vases, etc., are all vessels unto honor. They are not only useful but they are preserved, they are permanent, we want to keep them. But every house also has "vessels for dishonor" -- we have garbage cans, wastebaskets, bed pans etc. We do not display them. They are useful, but they are not presentable. We may even intend to dispose of them, sometimes after only one use. Those are vessels of dishonor.

That is the way God sees humanity. If we want to understand life as it really is, we have to look at humanity in that way. God sees all of us as useful vessels, but some only for good purposes; others must be used to accomplish wicked things, judgmental things, hurtful things to others, because of the evil in human society.

At this point someone is sure to raise the question Paul raises in Romans 9, where, in dealing with this subject, he says,

Romans 9:19

¹⁹One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"

That is, if God uses everybody to serve His purposes, why does He then turn around and blame people for doing what he himself used them to accomplish?

Many nonbelievers will raise that question about the sovereign justice of God. Paul answers that in Romans 9. I am not going to deal with it fully today, except to point out that in this passage in 2 Timothy it is clear. In our homes pots and pans have no choice as to what they are going to be used for -- that is entirely up to the householder -- but in Scripture it is very clear that, when this is applied to human beings, a choice is involved.

We see that in Verse 21: "If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use." We have no choice of whether we are going to be used of God or not; the choice we have is what God is going to use us for. That is up to us; it is put in our hands.

Choice determines the way God uses us. "If a man purifies himself" -- that means man has something to do with it; he has to purify himself. God will never set man's will aside and use him for a good purpose without his being willing to be used and willing to be purified. God does not force us to be used of him; it must always be a willing choice on our part. But we have to do something about it. He does not use us, willy-nilly, against our wills, for good things. He will do that for evil, for ignoble purposes, but not for good; there the choice is up to us.

Every individual has the responsibility to cleanse him or her-self through the means provided. If you have been working on your car or in the garden and your hands are dirty, you go into the bathroom to clean yourself up with

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soap and water -- you deliberately choose to use the soap and water provided -- when you have done so you say, "I've cleansed myself." It was not you that did the cleansing (it was the soap and water), but you used that which was provided.

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

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

Notice that not only is the choice up to you, but, according to this verse, the separation from evil, the cleansing, precedes the consecration. It is never the other way around. Everybody wants to be used of God if he is a Christian at all, but you cannot be used of God for good purposes unless you are willing to say "No" first. That is the point this makes. You must say "No" to the wrong before God will say "Yes" to the right.

Now notice the result: "If any one purifies himself ... he will be," Paul says, "a vessel unto honor, consecrated and useful, ready for any good work." He will be "consecrated." That is a word that has a permanence about it: One is permanently set aside in God's mind for useful purposes, for thrilling, exciting, adventurous discoveries of being used by God. Furthermore, he is useful, profitable, and effective. God uses him in ways that accomplish something.

Finally, he is "ready for any good work." He becomes adaptable; God can use him in many different ways. Life becomes a tremendous adventure as you discover the innovative ways in which God can use you.

This is the proper interpretation, and it is proved by the way Paul specifically applies this to Timothy. In Verse 22 he says,

So shun youthful passions... (2 Timothy 2:22a RSV)

This is the way you turn away from wrong things: "Shun youthful passions." The word is *flee*, run away, get away from them.

Everybody who reads this immediately thinks of strong sexual urges. That is what the words "youthful passions" raise in our minds. It does include that. Youth is the time when sexual drives are the strongest. In a sex-oriented society like ours, these passions can become very powerful, very compelling, driving us, occupying our minds, touching almost everything we do. We oftentimes find ourselves in the grip of tremendous forces that urge us on to do things that the world is telling us are perfectly all right; no harmful results will ensue, we are told. Yet these are things which Scripture tells us are wrong, hurtful, destructive and evil in the sight of God. So this verse does include that.

In this context the apostle is referring to something more than sex. He is writing to a young pastor here and so he would also speak to Timothy about regarding other temptations that a young person may face; pride, to self-importance, snobbery, to stubbornness, inflexibility, to arguing, touchiness, backbiting, anger, bitterness, the display of his own wisdom, stand up for your rights. Claim all your privileges. Get your share of the glory." In other words, "Timothy, cool down, shut up, and back off." That is what this is talking about.

Paul said Timothy "purify yourself from that which is ignoble in order that you might be put to noble use".

You never start with wanting to be used of God; you have to start with refusing to be used by the wrong. If you want God to make you an effective instrument of his working in this world throughout your life, that is where you

have to start. You have to say "No" to those things that dishonors Him, but which are often applauded by Christian groups -- if you want God to use you. Then, once you have done that, the positive is possible. Paul says,

Aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, (2 Timothy 2:22b RSV)

The word is *pursue* it, go after it, go for it. You will not have righteousness, faith love and peace unless you pursue it. You have to claim them; you have to go after them. You have to assert yourself along these lines. Receiving those things must be the result of your deliberate choice that you do the things that make for righteousness, faith, love and peace.

Righteousness means right behavior. There are times when every Christian is called upon to choose between what he knows to be wrong and what he knows to be right. You have to say "No" to what is wrong, and "Yes" to what is right. If you have not learned to say "No," if you drift along with whatever the crowd is doing, you will never be an instrument used by God for noble purposes. You have to say "No" to unbelief and "Yes" to faith.

A lot of people struggle with little faith, the reason oftentimes being because they have never sought those things that awaken faith. The Scriptures tell us that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," (Romans 10:17 KJV). The more you are aware of what God says the more your faith is aroused, awakened and stirred up to lay hold of what God says. Those who never have time for the Scriptures, who never read the Word of God, who never listen to preaching, who stay away from church whenever they don't feel like it. They will not have faith awakened in them instead the opposite will happen, their faith will wither away, their usefulness will diminish.

We must deliberately choose love. We often are exposed to the choice of how we are going to react toward someone who, perhaps, has irritated us, who has done something that makes us upset or angry. Our flesh tells us, "Tell him off. Hit back. Get even. Let him know how you feel. Make him squirm." But, if you want to be used of God, you cannot give way to that. You have to say "No" to that. Instead, you deliberately give a soft answer that will turn away wrath, or apologize for having given offense, for, even though your stance was right, you said it in a way that was wrong. Or you must reach out and see him not as your rival, someone who is trying to take something away from you, but as one who is feeling upset and troubled himself, and in need of help and encouragement. So love reaches out.

You have to deliberately seek for peace. Sometimes you must initiate reconciliation. If somebody is angry at you, although you are not to blame, you just cannot keep that within you and let it fester away, upsetting you and creating frustration in your heart. According to the Scriptures, you have to go to that person and let him know what the trouble is. Initiate a reconciliation. Sit down with him and say, "I don't know what has happened, but something has come between us. It's not right and I don't like it, so let's sit down and talk it out. Tell me how you feel and what it is that is troubling you." Seek peace. Aim at it. Pursue it. That is what the apostle says. And third, surround yourselves with those who encourage you along this line.

[Seek] peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22c RSV)

Those with pure hearts are not sinless saints; they are not holy Joes who have never done anything wrong; they are not the kind of people who look down their noses at everyone else who gets into trouble. No, the word is not "pure," but "cleansed," past tense; those with a cleansed heart; those who have already known what it is to be where you are. They do not put you down, they encourage you. They say, "I know how you feel. I've been there too, but God picked me up. I know what it means to lay hold of his great, forgiving love." So one of the necessities of being used of God is that you keep company with those who are aiming in the same direction.

We are not made to live all alone. We are made to live with others; we need the support of others. Those who surround themselves with a non-Christian view of life and with friends who still remain that way are almost certain to go back at last into that way of thinking and that way of living. So if we want to be used of God, the apostle urges us to seek the companionship of those of like mind. This does not mean that we are to avoid contact with non-Christians, to have nothing to do with those who are not of the same faith as ourselves; that is another mistake, another extreme. But it is equally bad if we do not seek out the fellowship of those of like mind with ourselves. Here the apostle is dealing practically with how you can be an instrument in God's hands to vitally and mightily affect the world around you.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
John 3:16 NKJV*

Paul advised Timothy "Timothy, if you want to be an instrument of God, if you want to be used of God in that situation, begin by saying "No" to all the wrong things in your life, and then say "Yes" to the things God wants to do with you. He will then pick you up and use you in ways you would never dream of."

We do not have to plan how God is going to use us. All we have to do is be usable by means of this process. I hope this will help us as we face the possibilities and the challenge of our world today.