
So Flee Youthful Passions

2 Timothy 2:22a

Introduction

War has been declared upon each of us. And the stakes are high. To go down in this battle will foil the perseverance of our souls and the preservation of the gospel. The text for tonight makes clear that *victory over battles outside us is largely determined by the success over battles within us*. This is, in effect, the apostle Peter's concern when he said, "I urge you... to abstain from passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul".

Last Sunday night, Pastor Greg compellingly called us to flee idols; flee from worshipping the creation rather than the Creator! He said that an idol is anything we desire so much that we will sin to get it or will sin when we do not have it. He developed this thought by mentioning that idolatry occurs when the heart is controlled by anything other than God.

Tonight we take the next step in our *Flee & Pursue* series. We will again be reminded that the battle field in our pursuit of holiness is in the heart. We will examine a ruling desire which does not take "NO" for an answer too easily. The desire-driven flesh must be stopped. We will look at a specific strategy the apostle Paul gives us to escape from what Dr. Powlison calls "disordered loves hijacking our hearts" from the call to love the Lord our God with all our hearts.

And so, to arrive at the destination of 2 Timothy 2:22 it seems good to get Paul's general idea in mind. What is Paul talking about in 2 Timothy? Why is this theme so important for Timothy to embrace? After we trace his line of thinking, I will preach 2:22a with one hope; namely that all of us will "flee youthful passions" so that we will persevere amid suffering and that the gospel will be preserved amid false teaching.

An overview

Throughout this letter, Paul urgently beseeches Timothy to remain loyal to himself and his gospel in the midst of suffering. These hardships came in two forms. On the one hand, the false teachers were gaining some ground (2:16-18). Timothy was to stay the course and not be swayed. And on the other hand, Timothy was to remain loyal to Paul and the gospel in the midst of increasing defections (1:15; 4:10,16). There were people whom Timothy undoubtedly knew by name who were actually turning their backs on the gospel and changing sides. Timothy was to be immovable; always abounding in the work of the Lord.

This personal letter of Paul to Timothy starts with an appeal. V.8 is the essence of the first part of his appeal. “Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God”. Paul, in the face of hardships and defections, urges strongly his protégée to not be ashamed of the gospel nor of Paul’s suffering. Rather, he was to “share in suffering”.

Paul’s thought can be clearly traced. He says in effect, “Stay loyal amid hardship by the hope of the gospel (vv.9,10) and by noticing both the examples of endurance (i.e. Paul, vv.11-14; Onesiphorus vv.16-18) and the examples of abandonment (i.e. Phygelus and Hermogenes v.15).

He then goes on to the second half of his appeal found in 2:1-13. In this section he reflects the urgency of 1:6ff by calling Timothy to fulfill his ministry by entrusting it to others (v.2) and by wholehearted devotion to service amid suffering (vv.4-5) while keeping an eye upon the prize beyond the hardship (vv.5-6). For emphasis, Paul repeats this general appeal in a slightly different way in vv.8-13.

To summarize the first half of the letter we can say that for Paul who was dying (cf. 4:6) Timothy in the face of hardship was to not be ashamed but rather to carry on in faithful ministry. How he was to do this and what it should look like is the theme of 1:6-2:13.

Thus Paul takes specific commands and places them within the more general command of 2:1.

Now Paul guides Timothy’s focus back to the hard realities of Ephesus. What the nature is of the false teachers and how Timothy is to respond in light of them are topics in 2:14-3:9. Three concerns seem to dominate Paul’s thinking.

1. The exposure of the false teachers and their teaching.
2. An appeal to Timothy to resist these false teachers and their teaching.
3. A concern that the rest of the church not give in to the influence of the false teachers and their teaching.

The main point of vv.14-19 is simple. Avoid godless, foolish discussions that lead to more and more ungodliness. (v.16) The false teachers with their teaching can and do ruin the church. Paul’s appeal for Timothy to keep away from this dangerous activity rings throughout this paragraph. Paul is zealous for the protection of God’s people and the gospel itself.

As we come to vv.20-21, we see a change in pace. Paul brings a metaphor into his line of argument. This metaphor seems to be used to make clear the second quote in v.19. Having asserted the certainty of God’s

work, Paul mentions God's requirement for His people. Those who name the name of the Lord are to depart from iniquity. He now elaborates this command in the form of a metaphor.

The application of this metaphor found in v.21 appears to tie directly to v.19. In effect, Paul says to anyone who calls themselves a Christian that they are to depart from iniquity. The iniquity to which he refers is the false teaching and its enticement to squabbling.

We come now to the paragraph under investigation. It's this paragraph which contains the title of the message; 'So flee youthful passions'. The commands introducing this section flow directly from the application of the v.21. Timothy is again urged to avoid the foolish arguments of the false teachers which only lead to quarrels. On the contrary – and this is his new theme – he is to try to rescue people from their entrapment by error. What are Timothy's responsibilities in light of the false teachers? One word summarizes the answer: PEACE. False teachers love quarreling (cf. 1Tim.6:4). God's teacher is to seek peace.

The two imperatives we come to; i.e. flee and pursue, relate mainly to vv.19-21. "departing from iniquity" and "cleanses himself from what is dishonorable" correspond to the command on which we are focusing tonight; namely flee youthful passions.

The question which velcroed my attention is, "why here is Timothy told to do this? The phrase "youthful passions" is not found any other place in the Bible. What is Paul's goal by introducing this phrase here in his flow of thinking?

It seems that by pinpointing the main source of temptation for Timothy (i.e. youthful passions), Paul fortifies Timothy against the outside attacks. In other words, Timothy will go on through all the distress, defectors, dissension, disappointments, difficulties as he recognizes the nature of the battle; the heart of the matter. Success in this battle will ensure Timothy's perseverance and the gospel's preservation.

And so, to that end – the perseverance of our souls and the preservation of the gospel – let's set out to understand and apply the following four questions.

Four Questions

What's the problem? (a look at "passions")

The apostle Paul saw something under the surface of Timothy's difficulties which concerned him. He knew that left unchecked this problem would harm Timothy and ruin the church and its message; the gospel. We noticed

earlier that Paul appealed to Timothy to endure in the face of hardships and defections. We also noticed that Timothy was to respond to the false teachers in a certain way; namely to not get caught up on wrangling over myths and teachings which would lead to further ruin.

But now Paul locates his concern squarely upon Timothy's heart. The problem we see in this command is passions. The word used here (ἐπιθυμία) conveys strong desires. The idea is one of longing after something with passion. However, a question arises at this point. What's wrong with strong desire? What's wrong with passion? Last week, Pastor Greg made clear that the term "desire" is a neutral term. In fact in Luke 22:15 we come across this term describing the Lord Jesus. He strongly desired to eat of the last supper with His disciples before he died. Surely, we would not think that the writer of the N.T. was ascribing something evil to Jesus. Furthermore, we even come across places in the Bible where God commands his people to "strongly desire" (cf. Matt.22:37; 1Pet.2:2).

We must ask, therefore, what kind of desire is Paul addressing. What dictating desire does he have in mind?

What kind of problem is it? (a look at "youthful")

This leads us to the second word under consideration. The adjective describing passions faces us in the direction in insight. This word is "youthful". It distinguishes what type of passion Paul is talking about. It is telling the readers that the passions from which Timothy was to flee were evil.

General definition

"Youthful"? What's wrong with being youthful? Commentators varied as to the precise meaning. But all agreed that it had to do with vices characteristic of the youth. Staying sensitive to the context in which we find our verse (Hint: arguments, bickering, self-focused conversations, an attraction to novelty, desire to be seen as one who wins an argument; etc.), we might say that the concern about which Paul is talking is a temptation to be impatient and stubborn; desiring novelty, foolish conversations and arguments leading to quarreling with no thought of its effect upon others.

The book of Proverbs says much about "youthful passions" (cf. Pr. 12:15; 28:26; 30:32; 18:2; 1:7; 15:5; 14:16; 29:11; 13:19; 12:23; 20:3; 29:20; 26:11; etc.). In his book *Bold Love* Dr. Allender citing verses from the book of Proverbs said that traits of a fool... "are anger (disproportionate, impulsive and repetitive), self-centeredness (prideful, easily satisfied, morally and pragmatically stupid) and hatred of discipline and wisdom". He goes on to say that... "What seems to thrill the soul of the fool more than drugs, sex, food or any other quick-filling addiction is the sound of his own

voice...transported by the sound of their own intoxicating babble (pp.256-68).

Particular description

Now if we were to locate this “youthful passion” in our own lives what would it look like? In our Bible class on Sunday morning we will hear Dr. Welch describe this type of behavior as “The Wantsees”. Want, want, want is the drip of the faucet of the human soul. Are “youthful passions” operating in our hearts? Do you hear your own heart say...

I want...

➤ To be right

Are you concerned with how people view you? Do you have a desire to be RIGHT in theological debates or conversations with your spouse or parent? Do you find yourself engaged in conversations in which you do all the talking so that you will get in the last word?

Is there a *youthful passion* embedded in your heart from which you need to flee?

➤ To be accepted

Maybe it is not an all-consuming desire to be seen as winning an argument. Perhaps for you it is “I want to be accepted”. This is a youthful passion which says that life is found in other people’s opinion of me. I cannot maintain joy unless I’m received by my friends, family, boss, colleagues, elders, etc. Is there a youthful passion driving you to become a chameleon who will scrap convictions in order to be liked? Are you fearing man over against God? Is there a *youthful passion* in your heart from which you need to flee?

➤ Something new

Another possible reflection of a passion characterized by youthfulness is this desire for something new. Novelty can dazzle the soul. In Paul’s day there were myths and new teachings which held sway over some people’s affections. What about you? Do sameness and steadiness and evenness and stability in doctrine and practice bore you? Are you ever questing for something innovative? Do you find in your heart restlessness that is calmed when you are enjoying change? Does the black and white movie of your life need Technicolor so that your heart will sing? Do you want something (anything) to spice up an otherwise bland life? Is there a *youthful passion* in your heart from which you need to flee?

➤ **It now**

If these general descriptions of a *youthful passion* do not resonate with you, perhaps this last one will. Impatience is not characteristic of me as long as I do not have to wait for what I want. Do you believe that time is yours? Are you marked by a ravenous want for attention or vindication or promotion or character change or healing or good relationship or ministry success or obedient children or perfect vacation? Do you find it unacceptable when the waitress does not attend to your wishes now? Do you sense in your heart anger when the cashier appears to be incompetent? Is there a *youthful passion* in your heart from which you need to flee?

What are we to do about this problem?

A look at "flee"

So far, we've covered Paul's object of concern. We've seen that the heart of the matter is the heart itself. When an inordinate desire hijacks the heart and takes it to the demanding attitude of "I want...", what are we to do? Is there hope for forgiveness and change when we see a *youthful passion* living in our soul and manifesting in self-centered pursuits?

Help and hope are found in the next word of our Title for this evening's message; FLEE. The definition of the verb is easy to get to get at. To sketch out what it means to flee, we may find it helpful to look at it from two angles. First; its attitude and then its actions.

Its Attitude

Flee means to escape from, to break out of, to run as fast as one can away from. Paul had many words he could have used in this command; words like avoid, shun, reject. But he didn't. He used a word charged with velocity. The term connotes urgency and importance. It senses danger. It looks at youthful passions as a threat. Therefore, it longs for safety. There is no such thing as a casual escape or a unhurried dash away from peril. The verb "flee" carries with it seriousness and earnestness. Instantly it responds to imminent danger. No loitering. No lingering. No leisure. Laid-back loses this battle.

And so, the way we are to respond to our own youthful passions is an attitude of seriousness and intensity. There is nothing trifling about this type of sin. Youthful passions will seek to kill, steal and destroy our perseverance of faith and the preservation of the gospel. It will snuff out the pursuit of holiness and will eclipse our message. The attitude is war-like!

Its actions

The second way we can look at what it is we are to do when faced with youthful passions is to notice its actions. How are we to carry out obedience to this specific command?

1. *Know that Jesus Christ came to save sinners and that His grace is sufficient for our needs* (cf. 1Tim.1:15; 2Tim.1:9; 2:1). To flee our strong evil desires requires first the grace of God found in Jesus Christ. We must behold the Lord Jesus in the Bible long enough for His grace to saturate our hearts (cf. 2Cor.3:18).
2. *Don't flee alone* (Ecc.4:9-10; 2Tim.2:22). In Ecc.4:9-10 we read, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down his friend can help him up". Fleeing strong desires cannot be done alone. Good intentions will collapse should we not escape passions with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. That is exactly what we find when we read the rest of v.22. "with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" modifies both the pursuing aspect of holiness as well as the fleeing aspect.
3. *When fleeing help others to flee too* (cf. 2Tim.2:24,25). Isn't that the sense of the new theme Paul introduces in vv.24,25. We see others who are captured by Satan and must escape (or flee from) the snare in which they are caught. The means of grace for these people to escape is through people who are not mastered by youthful passions. Rather, they flee these passions and demonstrate progress in holiness through a non-quarreling, patient-speaking, risk-taking ministry of reconciliation (cf. 2Cor.5:15ff). There is no private pietism in view here. When we are fleeing we must engage others to assist them in fleeing their entrapment.

What motivation will empower my obedience? (a look at "So")

With that as a quick overview of youthful passions and what to do about them, the message comes to an end. But I cannot end without lighting your fire to apply what you just heard. I'm about to give you two appealing reasons for obeying this command so that none of us can leave tonight without a desire for change.

This takes us to the fourth and final word in the Title of the message. "So" gives the reader insight into the relationship between the metaphor of vv.20-21 and the command of v.22. That is, what strong, compelling, utterly motivating reason are we given to carry out with zeal the command of v.22? The answer is found in v.21. I see at least two reasons or motivations for our obedience to "flee youthful passions".

I will list these reasons in the order we see them in the text by opening each reason with the statement “We resolve with all our hearts to flee youthful passions because we desire...”

1. *to be pleasing and useful to the Master in holiness* (cf. v.21; see also 2:4; 2Cor.5:9; Col.1:10; 2Tim.3:16,17)

To be a dedicated vessel set apart in the Temple of our Holy God to be used by him ought to send chills of joy down our spines. And couple this truth with the parallel idea in 2:4, we can be confident that in obedience by faith we can please the one who enlisted us in his army. Oh, the thought of pleasing the Commander in Chief of the Universe is a thought powerful enough to elicit obedience. All we need to do is by faith flee youthful passions. We will position ourselves by faith in a place of effectiveness. God through us may grant repentance to others whose lives are ensnared by Satan. Can we think of anything more worthy we can involve ourselves in than this? Oh, beloved, flee youthful passions.

We resolve with all our hearts to flee youthful passions because we desire...

2. *to be ready for every good work.*

Secondly, to be ready for every good work is a stimulating motivation. Prepared for any problem at any time in any context is a promise overwhelming. Can you imagine the impact this promise will have on our poise and boldness? Can you fathom this type of peace? We will fear nothing. We will shy away from zilch. Cowering in uncertainty amid hardships and perplexing ministry will be a thing of the past. You want this reality for yourself and family don't you? You desire to be equipped for spontaneous ministry don't you? What change will overtake our families, jobs, schools, our neighborhoods, the Chapel as we obey by faith the command “flee youthful passions”. Oh beloved, let us together flee youthful passions.

Conclusion

- ❖ Examine your heart.

Pay close attention to what you are thinking and wanting. Notice this, however, when you are around people who are unpleasant. As you interact with people who are unkind or who do not hold your views, examine your thoughts. Is there a “youthful passion” found in your heart?

- ❖ List the youthful passion(s).

Journal your discovery. Write down what it is that you are aware of. Use biblical terms and language. Be specific. Be complete. Be honest.

- ❖ What will a biblically-motivated, grace-empowered “flee” look like?

Reflect on our talk over “flee” tonight. What are the means of grace necessary to empower you toward repentance and fresh trust in Christ? Take time and pray for desire over the promises found in v.21. Hover over the possibilities of this verse until your desire is strong for them. Yearn to be pleasing the Jesus Christ (cf. 2:3,4). Hunger for the reality of being useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

- ❖ Who will you do this with?

Ask for help. Get accountability. Know that we can not fight battles of this nature alone (cf. v.22b).

- ❖ When will you start?

A: Now!

