



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Let's begin with a brief review. Recall in chapter 1 that Paul focused on the *past*, as he reminded Timothy of his spiritual heritage, urging him, “guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you” (2 Timothy 1:14). Paul's perspective shifted to the *present* in chapter 2. He encouraged Timothy in his current pastoral ministry to “be strong” (2:1), “endure suffering” (2:3), and “work hard” (2:15).

The passage we'll study in a moment, 2 Timothy 2:20–26, ends the first half of Paul's letter like the scene of a play just before intermission. After chapter 2, the curtain will open to begin the second half of the letter as Paul looks to the *future* in chapters 3 and 4.

In this final scene of the first half of Paul's letter, Paul displays the high moral character required of Christian leaders. Our modern-day culture minimizes the role of character and, rather, champions competency in leaders, claiming that as long as leaders perform well, their private lives and the way they treat others and especially those closest to them doesn't matter. It's not surprising that scandals and legal battles often embroil leaders. Character is no longer king.

Scripture, however, champions character. If we wish to lead in a Christian manner, we must put character ahead of competency. Our ability—what we *do* in public—is important. But our character—who we *are* in private—is crucial. That's Paul's message to Timothy and to us in the last seven verses of 2 Timothy 2.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Read 2 Timothy 2:20–26 using the *Searching the Scriptures* method of *observation*. Chuck Swindoll writes that observation is “the process of seeing what the Bible actually says. You're not answering questions at this point. You're not adding something through your imagination. You're simply reading the words on the page.”¹

Quotable

*When it comes
to Christian
leadership,
character reigns
supreme.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



What do you see in 2 Timothy 2:20–26? Are there any repeated words or “if-then” conditional phrases? Do you notice any word pictures or analogies? Do any questions come to mind as you read? For example, what is the “wealthy home” in 2:20? What other questions and observations does the text prompt?

This passage sparks lots of questions! In this study, we will tackle three central questions (2:20–22), understand Paul’s positive and negative commands (2:23–24), and then examine Paul’s instructions to leaders about correcting and repenting (2:25–26).



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

To aid your Bible study, we recommend consulting a good commentary such as Chuck Swindoll’s *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* from the Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary series. Also, we recommend reading more than one Bible translation. In this study, we’ll use the New Living Translation and the New American Standard Bible. These and other Bible study resources can be obtained in the Insight for Living Ministries Web store.

Vessels in a Large House (2 Timothy 2:20–22)

Paul’s analogy of “vessels” in a “large house” (2 Timothy 2:20 NASB) prompts three central questions. Use the *Searching the Scriptures* method of *correlation* to compare 2 Timothy 2:20–22 with other verses to shed light on Paul’s meaning.

Correlation is the *Searching the Scriptures* study tool that compares Bible passages to aid our understanding. In this way, we let the Bible explain itself. “You very rarely have to go outside of the Bible to explain anything in the Bible,” observed Bible-teacher Donald Grey Barnhouse.²

Question one: What is the large house?

What is the “foundation stone” of the house (2 Timothy 2:19)?



What does the “household of God” refer to in 1 Timothy 3:14–15?

From these verses, what can you conclude is the large house in 2 Timothy 2:20?

Question two: What are the vessels?

Let’s discover the meaning of the “vessels” (2 Timothy 2:20 NASB). Use the following chart as a guide to understand Paul’s fascinating analogy.

	Vessels of “Honor” (2 Timothy 2:20 NASB)	Vessels of “Dishonor” (2 Timothy 2:20 NASB)
Of what material are the vessels made?		
For what purpose are the vessels used? (The New Living Translation of 2:20 gives a helpful description.)		

Let’s use the context of this passage to dig out its meaning. Remember, a *text* is best understood in its *context*. A few verses earlier in the chapter, Paul mentioned the names of two men who were examples of leaders with low character—vessels of “dishonor” (2:20 NASB).



Read 2 Timothy 2:16–18. What were their names, and what were the consequences of their dishonorable character?

Question three: How can we become vessels of honor?

How can we become vessels of “honor” (2:20 NASB)? Find the answer by reading 2 Timothy 2:21 in the New American Standard Bible. Here you can clearly identify the “if-then” structure. Do you see one condition and the four results? *If* “anyone cleanses himself from these things,” *then* “he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work” (2:21 NASB).

Put this verse in personal terms (use “I” statements). What is Paul telling you to do, and from what “things” do you think Paul is telling you to cleanse?

Contrast Paul’s statement here with his statement in Titus 3:3–7. Who does the cleansing in 2 Timothy 2:21, and who does the cleansing in Titus 3:3–7? What is the purpose of each cleansing?

God cleanses us for salvation through faith. We cleanse ourselves for service through obedience. For a discussion of the difference between these cleansings, read Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, page 214.



How do we obey Paul's command to "keep yourself pure" (2 Timothy 2:21)? The answer is "run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts" (2:22), which can include all sorts of sins that trap immature leaders. Imagine the characteristics of an immature leader, such as impatience or self-promotion (Matthew 20:20–28), and list the pitfalls that you might include under the category of "youthful lusts."

In contrast, what did Paul say to "pursue" (2 Timothy 2:22)?

- _____: doing what's right toward others
- _____: trusting the living God
- _____: seeking the highest good
- _____: cultivating a spirit of rest

When these "gold and silver" qualities shine in human vessels, the Master puts these human vessels to good use in His house—the church. They each have earned the title, "servant of the Lord."

Servants of the Lord (2 Timothy 2:23–26)

The quality inner life of the leader produces quality behaviors, which Paul describes in 2 Timothy 2:23–26.

Positive and Negative Commands

First, Paul listed them in positive and negative terms—dos and don'ts. List the dos and don'ts that you find in 2 Timothy 2:23–24.



Instructions about Correcting and Repentance

Paul also listed a leader's behaviors with regard to correcting those who oppose the truth.

Read 2 Timothy 2:25–26. What did Paul say the leader should do? And what is the best possible outcome in the person who needs correcting?

Paul closed chapter 2 with a rousing symphony of hope: *God changes hearts when people learn the truth!* Hear the soaring strings lift praises to God as the curtain falls on the first half of Paul's letter. Paul led Timothy from his past to his present responsibilities in order to prepare him to step into the future with confidence.

 **Bring It Home**

As we take an intermission and mingle in the lobby, let's reflect on three questions that emerge from this passage before moving to the next. Am I a vessel of honor or dishonor? Do I stop quarrels or start them? Will I model gentleness or harshness?

If any of these questions hit home, take a few moments for silent prayer asking the Lord to change your heart and prepare you for the future He has planned for you.

 **A FINAL PRAYER**

Father, thank You for Your leadership in our lives. You are always trustworthy, always reliable, always acting with integrity. Guide me as I journey from earth to heaven to become a person who is loving, warm, discerning, strong of heart, and gentle as I lead people to the truth. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 71.
2. Donald Grey Barnhouse, as quoted by Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 141.



PAUL'S SWAN SONG

Christian Leadership 101

2 Timothy 2:20–26

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

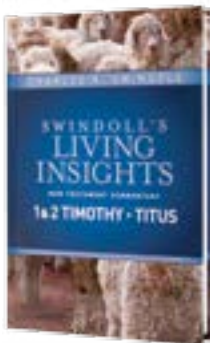
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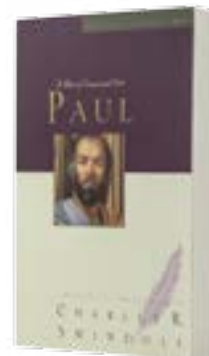
Tools for Digging Deeper



Paul's Swan Song:
A Study of 2 Timothy
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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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