

Flee the [evil] desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2.22.

You wouldn't think it at first, but in this passage from 2 Tim there's so much great teaching which the world and the Church needs to hear. You will recall the basic idea behind this letter. St Paul, the old, experienced apostle, is writing to young, unsure Timothy, 'timid Timothy', to encourage him to stand up to trouble-makers in this congregation at Ephesus. The trouble-makers are people like Hymenaeus and Philetus who are unsettling the congregation with false teaching - see 2.17-18... Timothy should have the moral courage to confront these people with God's Word, v15... Truth is important.

Now here in the next passage Paul speaks of a big house with household gadgets. In your own homes you might have a 40" plasma TV screen which you tell all your neighbours about and lavatory brushes which, well, enough said! By a 'large house' Paul is referring to the Church, and the noble and ignoble household instruments are true and false teaching. Timothy and the congregation are to keep away from false teaching, vv20-1...

In v22 Paul tells Timothy to shun 'youthful passions'. (I'm not sure that the NIV 'evil desires of youth' is right. Young people do not have a monopoly of evil desires, and the word 'evil' does not occur in the Gk. It's much more likely that Paul is referring to such things as the arrogance and black-and-whiteness of youth. I shudder to recall how sure I was of things when I was 30 years younger, how insensitive to the feelings and failures of others. Everything was so clear to me then!) Anyway, Timothy is to shun youthful passions and

pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace in the company of fellow believers, v22... He is to keep away from those who delight in trivia and false teaching, v23...

Can you see what is emerging here? Paul is reminding us of how important it is that we keep the right company. We all know about peer pressure. Are we really aware of what or who is influencing us? So it's vital that we put ourselves in the right place, and if we are in the *wrong* place, we should get out. You know, we're all tempted, and usually we are not strong enough to resist. If drink is your weakness, move away from it. If it's a woman or a man, then move away. Sometimes we are simply not strong enough. All we can do is to get ourselves out of the way. What is that is filling our children's minds? There are some evil people out there who know only too well that children's minds are highly impressionable. You should be aware of what is coming at them from their computer screens, their ipods, the TV.

What is influencing them and forming their minds? What is influencing *you*? Is your mind formed more by the consumerist culture around you every day than by the Word of God? Is Jesus really get a look-in in your life? How much is *Christ* shaping your life-style? The tragedy is that our society is falling apart because our minds are full of garbage.

I spoke earlier of 'youthful passions'. Most young people are not bad, but they don't see past their nose. They want to be happy and to be happy now. They're not bothered about long-term goals; they want stuff now. It's easy to take advantage of people like that, and get rich at their expense.

It's vital for our own health and the health of our society that we have the right values and priorities. To have those, we need to fill our minds with right thoughts. To do that, we need to come under the right influences. That is not happening. Parents, and teachers, and Sunday School Teachers; Brownie and Cub leaders are trying their best, but the opinion formers, advertisers, media tycoons are more powerful.

Sadly the churches are not always doing their bit. We're too frightened to speak up. Did you hear the heart-breaking words of the widow of Garry Newlove who was kicked to death by three lads high on drink and drugs? Why, she pleaded, is not more being done to stop this terrible drink culture? Interestingly, she didn't mention the church. I think we are so utterly useless that it didn't enter her head that the Church should be expected to speak out against alcohol, drugs, and this wretched culture of incontinence and indiscipline. And yet it's in our Bible, and the churches certainly used to thunder against these evils. Do you know what? We are so frightened to be ill-thought of, that it is now left to the Muslims to denounce alcohol, immodesty and immorality. Shame on us! We're too bothered about trendy causes.

One of the reasons is that our western church leaders have come under the wrong influences. The 18thC Enlightenment has made Christians unsure of the Bible. Recently I was at a service of induction of a new minister. One of our Moderators was preaching. She wanted to tell us how God was all-inclusive. This is the latest trendy theme, and the Bible has to be twisted to make it say that. She based her sermon on

Acts 10.34-5. Turn to p1104. God shews no favouritism and accepts men from every nation. Isn't that proof that God is all-inclusive? But she *didn't* go on to give the complete verse which entirely contradicts her argument; God 'accepts men from every nation *who fear him and do what is right*'. Well that excludes quite a lot of people!

I could give a hundred such examples of false teaching derived from false readings of the scriptures. My point is that the churches are *not* the godly influence we need today because of false teaching. If believers are not hearing the scriptural gospel from the pulpit, they should change church.

Of course, it's very easy to become arrogant and self-righteous. How should fundamentalists and liberals speak to each other? How do we debate with atheists? Are we trying to defeat heretics or win people for Christ? Well, as usual Paul is ahead of us here. Look at 2 *Tim*2.24-25a ... A Christian leader should not be quarrelsome, or out to win, but kind, not lashing out (NIV 'resentful'). As a church leader I feel very challenged by these few verse. Notice also that intriguing verse which says that repentance is *God-given*, v25b...

We've all got to make choice about where we put ourselves, what company we choose, who we are going to listen to, what we want to influence us. If we don't *consciously* choose, we shall just drift; and it will be the devil who slowly but surely forms our minds, v26... So I urge you *deliberately* to put yourself in another place. You can do that by reading your Bible and thus hearing another voice. *Then* you will know how to pursue *only* what is *Christ-honouring*.