

2 Timothy 2:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.

Analysis

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. Paul introduces household metaphor to explain the mixed nature of visible church. "In a great house" (en megalē oikia, ἐν μεγάλῃ οἰκίᾳ) refers to wealthy estate with many servants, tools, containers. "Vessels" (skeuē, σκεύη) means implements, containers, tools—anything used in household operations. These vary in material and purpose.

Some vessels are "of gold and of silver" (chrysa kai argyra, χρυσᾶ καὶ ἀργυρᾶ)—precious metals used for honored purposes: serving meals to important guests, religious ceremonies, display. Others are "of wood and of earth" (xylina kai ostrakina, ξύλινα καὶ ὀστράκινα)—common materials used for menial tasks: garbage, sewage, everyday chores. The distinction isn't inherent worth but designated use: "some to honour, and some to dishonour" (kai ha men eis timēn ha de eis atimian, καὶ ἃ μὲν εἰς τιμὴν ἃ δὲ εἰς ἀτιμίαν).

Applied ecclesially, the visible church contains both true believers (gold/silver vessels) and false professors (wooden/clay vessels). Not everyone professing Christianity is genuinely saved. Some serve honorable purposes in God's plan; others serve as negative examples or warnings. The passage anticipates v. 21's application: believers should pursue purification to be vessels unto honor.

Historical Context

Wealthy Roman households contained hundreds of items: gold plates for banquets, silver cups for wine, wooden buckets for water, clay chamberpots for waste. Material determined use—no one served dinner guests using chamberpots or stored sewage in gold vessels. The metaphor was immediately clear: function follows form. Similarly, in God's household (the church), different members serve different purposes. Some bring honor; others (like Hymenaeus and Philetus) bring dishonor. The metaphor doesn't teach fatalism but illustrates mixed reality in visible church before final judgment separates wheat from tares (Matthew 13:24-30).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. Do you recognize that the visible church contains both genuine believers and false professors, and does this reality affect your discernment?
2. What kind of 'vessel' are you in God's household—one used for honorable purposes that glorify Him or one that brings dishonor?
3. How can you pursue purification and sanctification to become increasingly useful for the Master's honorable purposes?

Interlinear Text

Ἐν	μεγάλῃ	δὲ	οἰκίᾳ	οὐκ	ἔστιν	μόνον	σκεύη	χρυσᾶ
in	a great	But	house	not	there are	only	vessels	of gold
G1722	G3173	G1161	G3614	G3756	G2076	G3440	G4632	G5552
καὶ	ἀργυρᾶ	ἀλλὰ	καὶ	ξύλινα	καὶ	ὀστράκινα	καὶ	ἃ
also	of silver	but	also	of wood	also	of earth	also	some
G2532	G693	G235	G2532	G3585	G2532	G3749	G2532	G3739
μὲν	εἰς	τιμὴν	ἃ	δὲ	εἰς	ἀτιμίαν·		
G3303	to	honour	some	But	to	dishonour		
	G1519	G5092	G3739	G1161	G1519	G819		

Additional Cross-References

1 Timothy 3:15 (Parallel theme): But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

1 Peter 2:5 (Parallel theme): Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:9 (Parallel theme): For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

Lamentations 4:2 (Parallel theme): The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!

Ezra 6:5 (Parallel theme): And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God.

Ephesians 2:22 (Parallel theme): In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 4:7 (Parallel theme): But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Ezra 1:6 (Parallel theme): And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

Daniel 5:2 (Parallel theme): Belshazzar, whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein.

Exodus 27:3 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt make his pans to receive his ashes, and his shovels, and his basons, and his fleshhooks, and his firepans: all the vessels thereof thou shalt make of brass.