

The sermon

Intro

Sometimes we get the idea that Christianity is all about the don'ts. The Ten Commandments are full of don'ts. Don't worship other gods. Don't make carved images. Don't use God's name in vain. Don't do any work on the Sabbath. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't lie. Don't covet your neighbor's property.

Don'ts are biblical. But the don'ts need to be balanced with the do's. What do I mean?

The Pharisees hated Jesus because he didn't keep their don'ts. No healing on the Sabbath. No dining with sinners.

In the 20th century, the holiness movement emphasized the don'ts: no alcoholic beverages, no tobacco, no dancing, no card games, no gambling, no theater, no going to the movies, no make-up, no short dresses, etc.

Is this all we want to be known for? Is God concerned about more than what we're not? Does God want us to become something that's beautiful and attractive to a fallen world?

Christianity is avoiding compromising situations, running from temptation, putting sin to death, no longer walking like the Gentiles do, putting off the old self. On the other hand, Christianity is working out our salvation with fear and trembling, being transformed by the renewal of the mind, putting on the new self, being doers of the word, becoming the fruits of the Spirit, moving towards completeness/maturity, acquiring character and virtue.

Christianity is avoiding sin. But Christianity isn't just avoiding sin. Christianity's about what not to be. But Christianity's also about what to be. The Christian life is both fleeing. And pursuing.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: Flee from evil (2:19-22)

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." – 2:19

The situation's awful. False teachers have sowed lies in the church. The conversation's dominated by the baseless, godless empty talk. Zero substance. Division ensues as some hold the line and others go along with the lies. Some are departing from the gospel.

But all hope isn't lost. God has a seal of ownership. God knows who belongs to him, who is and isn't born again. God isn't duped. God isn't confused. God sees. And God's people must "***depart from iniquity***" = wrong, unjust behavior.

Yes, the Christian life is, in part, departing, deserting, fleeing, running away from what God calls sin. The don'ts.

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. – 2:20

The picture is a wealthy person's home. In that home there are a variety of **vessels** = containers. Some vessels were used for water and wine (honorable use). Others were used for garbage, urine, and feces (dishonorable use). In modern terms, some vessels contain flour and sugar, others contain used diapers.

Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. – 2:21

So sin (“*iniquity*”) is like garbage and human refuse. Filthy, disgusting, repulsive, something you discard, something you don’t want to touch. We need to clean ourselves from sin like I need to clean my hands after doing diaper duty. We flee from what we find disgusting.

The idea is the person who “*cleanses himself from what is dishonorable*” = sin becomes “*a vessel for honorable use*” = becomes “*useful to the master of the house*” = God.

“*set apart as holy*” is the verb for sanctification = to be made holy. I take this as practical holiness. The person who eliminates sin (= stopped doing it), becomes a useful vessel in God’s hands, made “*ready*” or prepared “*for every good work.*” Fruitful living follows turning from sin.

To recap, we Christians need to turn away from sin. In doing so, we become practically holy and useful to God, capable of doing the various good works he has for us.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. – **Ephesians 2:10**

Note this: good works follow conversion. Good works are the fruit of salvation, not the grounds of salvation. We don’t do good works to become accepted by God. We do good works because we’ve already been accepted by God. Good works flow from a new heart indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

“*So flee youthful passions*” – 2:22

Timothy knows God. Timothy’s “*ready for every good work.*” If he wasn’t, Paul wouldn’t have placed him over the Ephesian church. And Timothy still has sin in his heart to flee from. Cleansed, sanctified people who are doing good works still need to be fleeing from sin. The battle with sin never ends in this life.

Paul’s stereotyping youth

“*youthful passions*” is a stereotype. Youth and sin go together. “*passions*” = lusts = sinful desires. Because young people haven’t yet acquired wisdom, they don’t see life the right way. So they want the wrong things. Things like sexual immorality, popularity, peer approval, drugs, drinking parties, revenge, likes on social media, etc.

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him. – **Proverbs 22:15**

The Bible says we come into the world as fools. In God’s design, folly is driven out of children by their parents. “*the rod*” = a part of a tree; a thin stick or branch used to administer a small amount of pain without causing lasting injury.

Children need to be trained that there’s a higher authority (God), God has given commands that are good for us, and that sin has consequences. So we have the rod.

What does this say to young people?

- 1) You need to be suspicious of yourselves.

You may want the wrong things!

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. – **Proverbs 4:23**

- 2) Your heart is the issue.

What do you want most in life? What do you love? What are you passionate about? What you love steers the ship! Another question. Why do I want what I want?

- 3) Is God in the picture?

Is glorifying God part of the equation? Is pleasing God part of the equation? Is love for God part of the equation? Is loving my neighbor part of the equation? Does the Bible make a dent in my passions?

When God isn't revered and trusted, a foolish, reckless, thoughtless life ensues. You may get some of the things you want. But it won't come without self-inflicted consequences and a heart going in the wrong direction.

4) There's hope in Christ.

God forgives failure. Jesus died on the cross so that people with "*youthful passions*" could have their sins forgiven. God doesn't leave us to figure it out on our own. God communicates. Because of the cross, God bears with our failure as we learn. And God gives his Spirit Holy to indwell all who believe. Young believer, have confidence God will move your heart in the right direction.

Young people, God doesn't want to leave you where you are. He wants to make you new. He wants to cleanse you from destructive sin. He wants to shape you into a useful vessel for good works! Is that your desire?

Wrapping it up

Part of the essence of "*youthful passions*" is image rather than character. Man's acceptance rather than God's acceptance. Following your fallen heart rather than truth. Pursuing immediate pleasure rather than what's eternal. Autonomy rather than sweetly submitting to God's good authority.

Paul says flee these things!

Adults, godliness is a heart issue. Christianity isn't just do's and don'ts. It's reshaping our passions. "*youthful passions*" aren't limited to children and teenagers. Adults who fail to be transformed by the renewing of the mind retain "*youthful passions*" in their old age.

The Christian life is a re-ordering of our passions.

Practical question: what passions, what sins am I fleeing from?

Point 2: Pursue godliness (2:22)

and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. – 2:22

"*pursue*" means to follow after someone or something with urgency, in a hurry. The movie or TV scene where the police officer or FBI agent is sprinting after a criminal on the run. Interestingly, it's the same word for persecuting Christians: hostile pursuit of believers.

The idea is there's some things to run away from. And there's some things we need to chase down.

The Christian life isn't aimless. The Christian life isn't apathy. The Christian life isn't going through the motions. The Christian life isn't dull routine. It isn't let go and let God. The Christian life is passionate pursuit!

"*righteousness*" = the opposite of "*iniquity*." That which is just and right. Behavior that lines up with God's word.

Paul's saying pursue obedience.

"*faith*" = trusting God. Trusting God's word. Which really means a firm confidence in God. He is who he says he is. He'll do all he's promised. God always does what's right and best.

When circumstances (broken relationships, finances, health) scream out God isn't sovereign, God isn't wise, God doesn't care, faith says God is sovereign. God is wise. God cares.

When tempted by “*youthful passions*,” faith says God’s approval is more important than man’s approval.

When tempted to lie, cheat, or steal, faith says things will turn out better for me if I obey God’s word.

Paul’s saying pursue trust.

“*love*” = commitment, affection, action. A treasuring of someone or something. As we’ve heard in Sunday school, love includes feeling, but love isn’t limited to feeling. Love endures. Love feels. Love acts.

Paul’s saying pursue love for God. Love for one another. Love for non-Christians.

“*peace*” = harmony, tranquility, absence of turmoil. Whether in our heart or in our relationships. I think that’s the Sunday school lesson this week right?

Paul’s saying pursue the peace of heart that comes through faith. Pursue the personal righteousness that produces relational peace.

“*along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart*” = we pursue Christian virtues in community with believers who are pursuing the same virtues. We find others with the same passions.

How do we get there individually?

Say I want to live righteously.

Matthew 6:33 speaks of seeking first “*his righteousness*” (God’s righteousness). So I meditate on the many ways God is righteous. I think how God was right to send the flood and the plagues on Egypt. I think of how God was right to send the Israelites to exile in Babylon. I think of how God will be doing right when he punishes sinners in hell. I think of God’s righteousness in the cross. How he won’t just sweep our sin under the carpet and pretend it never happened. How he laid our sins on Jesus. How God’s mercy is just. The sinner goes free, but their sin was punished.

How God is right to command us to worship him only, tell the truth, be content with his providence, be faithful to our spouse. I want to get my heart in a place where I agree with God.

- 1) Righteousness is pursued by learning what righteousness is.

Read your Bible. Attend church gatherings where teaching happens. Read good Christian books.

- 2) Righteousness is pursued by memorizing what I’ve learned.
- 3) Righteousness is pursued by self-examination.

Measuring my conduct against God’s word.

- 4) Righteousness is pursued by confessing my areas of failure to God.

Be specific, not generic! Specific failures can be noted in a journal.

- 5) Righteousness is pursued by asking for God’s help to be what I’m failing to be.
- 6) Righteousness is pursued by resting in God’s mercy.

God’s won’t forsake me when I fail.

- 7) Righteousness is pursued by confidence that God can effect heart change in me.
- 8) Righteousness is pursued by an ongoing, sober alertness.

I’m alert to where my heart is, what the situation is, the righteous response to this situation.

How do we get there communally?

Say we want to pursue peace as a church. We might attend a Sunday school class where we can figure out/talk about peace together. We figure out what creates peace. We figure out what disrupts peace. Together, we ask God's help to do the things that create peace. And we ask his help to resist the temptation to do the things that kill peace. With everyone on board, we're free to respectfully challenge someone who's behavior is disrupting the peace. When respectfully corrected, we're humble enough to say, you're right. I wasn't thinking about that.

It's learning together. Agreeing together. Praying together. Bearing with one another. Correcting one another. Receiving correction well. And together turning from the things that prevent peace.

Spiritual ambitions

I want to emphasize this: we need spiritual goals.

The Christian life isn't apathy. It isn't staying the same. It isn't mere survival. It isn't aimless. It's pursuit. It's wanting more. It's godly passions!

None of us can say, I'm bored. I have nothing to live for. I should be satisfied with where I'm at. There's no area of my life that's in need of God's transforming work. There's always the pursuit of "*righteousness, faith, love, and peace.*" The fruit of the Spirit. Wisdom. Humility. Etc.

Spiritual goals move us forward. No goals = no aim, no progress. Tom Brady won seven Super Bowls. He achieved success. Unprecedented success. But he wasn't satisfied. Goals remained. More Super Bowls. So he kept pursuing.

Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards, famous for sparking revival during the First Great Awakening with his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," wrote 70 resolutions when he was 19-20.

"Resolved, whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back till I come to the original cause; and then both carefully endeavor to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the original of it."

"Resolved, when I fear misfortunes and adversities, to examine whether I have done my duty, and resolve to do it; and let it be just as Providence orders it. I will, as far as I can, be concerned about nothing but my duty and my sin."

"Resolved, after afflictions to inquire what I am the better for them, what good I have got by them, and what I might have got by them."

"Resolved, if I ever shall fall and grow dull, so as to neglect to keep any part of these resolutions, to repent of all I can remember, when I come to myself again."

Mission statement

What are we after as a church? Are we just going through the motions?

"We exist to glorify God by building a community that is growing in Christlikeness and making new disciples."

We exist to make progress in character, spiritual depth, Christlikeness, so that our Christianity is attractive (salt) to the world.

Practical question: what godly virtues am I being led to pursue today? What spiritual goals should I have?

Community question: what should we be pursuing together as a church?

Conclusion

Jesus died on the cross to rescue people enslaved to sinful passions from themselves. To turn sinners into people zealous to do God's will.

Jesus promised, "*Whoever believes in me, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*" Do you want to be rescued from "youthful passions"? Turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. Tell us if you believe.

Christian, guard your heart by fleeing from evil. Pursue godliness with all your heart. With one another.