

**THE SERMONS, LECTURES, AND SONGS OF
SIDNEY EDWARD COX**

II Timothy – Sermon #4

II Timothy 2:19

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure”

Editorial Note: What follows is a sermon that was part of a series that Sidney Cox delivered on the book of II Timothy.

In 1962, Sidney and Violet Cox retired to the Salvation Army retirement home in Detroit, Michigan known as, “The Eventide.” Violet was in failing health and ultimately died in 1967. Sidney continued residency there until a late in life move to Birmingham in 1972.

Certain clues contained throughout this series reveal that it was delivered in 1968, in the aftermath of the death of Sidney’s beloved wife, Violet. It was delivered to the Grace Bible Church of Detroit.

During this period of his life, Sidney was in great demand as a preacher and Bible teacher both within The Salvation Army and churches of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (“CMA”). He had a close relationship with The Salvation Army early in life and developed a close relationship with The Christian and Missionary Alliance late in life. CMA was a wide network of churches throughout the world that shared a common theology and emphasis and was similar in that regard to The Salvation Army. Grace Bible Church was a CMA church

John Douglas Cox, grandson of Sidney Cox. December 29, 2008.

You will be turning please to the familiar section that we have been considering for now quite a number of weeks, the 2nd chapter of II Timothy. May I remind you one or two common place things. We have been studying a book in which there is one central thought and that is, that the Christian life is serious business. You don’t play at being a Christian. The Christian life is serious business.

There are four chapters in this little book, and in the first chapter you find our responsibility for the Christian life. And in the second chapter that we have been considering, the seriousness of it. And you turn to the third chapter of this book, the halfway mark, you find that the preacher becomes the prophet and turns his eyes to the future, and there begins to tell us of things that are happening. He tells us now how we should behave ourselves as children God now. But then he turns his eyes to the future and tells us how we ought to behave ourselves and how we must behave ourselves in view of things that are not now – they are coming in the future. And one of the things that you notice is there are dangers in the future. And so you find this is the emphasis – the responsibility for the Christian life, the seriousness of the Christian life, dangers that surround the Christian life and then finally at the end, the rewards of the Christian life. And that is what you would expect when you turn to one of Paul’s letters because you will find without exception that there is a note of hope, of beauty at the end of every one of them. Whatever he’s been saying all the way through, at the end, the sun shines and there’s the golden glow of God’s grace seen at the end all the way

through. You find it here as well. The last part is not the danger to the Christian life, the rewards of the Christian life.

Now we have been noticing a number of locations as we have been traveling along this pathway of the 2nd chapter of II Timothy. For instance, we noticed a home where sons appeared, and the first thing we see is not a battlefield but a home and a son there. A spiritual home, that's true, but the reflection of it can be seen or should be seen in every natural home. Then we pause at a battlefield and we found a soldier, not on parade, he's in the war. This is a war scene, a battlefield where there are "entanglements." By the way, have you noticed in the reports that have been coming into us from Viet Nam in the last few weeks particularly that there have been more of our men in Viet Nam killed by booby traps than by any other means? Have you noticed that? More of them have died because of "entanglements" than anything else. Not just an enemy with a shotgun. An enemy that plants an entanglement, and more of them have been destroyed because of that than any other reason. We've seen a sports arena where there are rules to be kept and training to be observed and a race to be run and a victory to be won. And we watched that. We saw a field and a farmer. We saw a workman and a workshop and the words with which he worked.

We've been watching these locations and it's been very interesting. It gives variety to it, variety of the Christian life because, if we have eyes to see, we'll probably find ourselves in one or the other, maybe more than one of these locations. These have something to do with us. These are not strange things that we don't know anything about. These are something that we know anything about.

When we come to the scene that is before us today, we find ourselves facing a building. Here is a structure and the wonderful thing about it is, that the structure itself is not emphasized in this particular section of scripture. I'll read it for you in just a moment. But the building stands before us. And we notice, as we have noticed a good many times, that the picture of a building is used many, many times to express God's purpose. For instance, we read, "If this earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."¹ And we see a habitation of God. When you turn to the end of the 2nd chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, you find the same thing – God is building a house and it's a house that is primarily for his dwelling. He invites us to share it. But it is a dwelling place of God by the spirit.

This habitation of God that is there, sometimes you find it as a household. Sometimes you find it as the picture of the church, "On this rock, I will build my church."² And you've got the picture of a building again. When you come to the 46th Psalm, and countless other places, we have the picture of a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God - "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most high. God is in the midst of her!" You see the purpose for which the building is erected, the purpose for which the church is being constructed, the purpose of the habitation, the purpose of the city is not to gather folks into it primarily, that's the second thing. It is to be an adequate dwelling place for God himself. And he invites us to share this "adequate place of dwelling" along with him. Now that's the important point about it all.

¹ II Corinthians 5:1

² Matthew 16:18

Now let me read to you these words. You'll find again as we observed last week that certain of these illustrations that are given underscore the importance of the Christian life, some of them are very brief. The one we have today is not particularly extended. The one that we were considering last week and the week before, is a long, long passage of scripture in which there are many words and many aspects of it. There's more said about words than almost all the rest of the thing put together. Obviously, there is danger there as we observed, and it's taught to us in the word of God. But now, we're facing the picture of a building again. Let me read it to you, and you will notice in verse 19 where it starts. Here is the suggestion of a building, "Nevertheless the foundation of God, standeth sure." Now there you've got the beginning of a building. The important thing about a building my dear, is the foundation, not the decoration. Unless the foundation is there then the decoration will soon pass away, however lovely it may be.

And so we've got the picture of a building rising before our eyes – the foundation "standeth sure." "The Lord knoweth them that are his", because in someway we are involved in this thing that we are talking about, and the word of God is bringing before us. "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Now notice, here is the house before our eyes and before our ears. Notice two things about it. One, "but in a great house." Now that's the first thing we notice, he's not talking about a hovel somewhere or other, he's not talking about an inadequate place. He's talking about a place, a house that is suitable for his dwelling! Now there's something in it this time, and while the strange thing – it may seem strange to us, that the house itself isn't described in any other way, except it has a foundation and it is a great house. It's what's in it where the emphasis is at this particular time because we find that in this house there are vessels. And some of them are gold and silver, and some of them are wood and earthenware.

Now that's the picture that's before us – a great house, and we consider its greatness and for the moment that's all. But we are told to look carefully at that which is within. Now whether the thing is within, spoken of as a vessel, or whether it's the house itself, both are marked by one thing that distinguishes them from anything else – this house is alive. Its foundation is not something – someone. Its foundation is not a thing that is not alive, it's someone who is alive – the chief cornerstone is not something - someone. That which makes up the building, the lively stones of which we are a part, are alive – they are lively stones in the building of God, a living foundation, a living cornerstone, living stones that are used in the construction of this building where God himself shall dwell.

Now in exactly the same way, when you talk about utensils in the home, the vessels that are in the home, they likewise are alive, not something. All the utensils in your home my dear are dead. But the utensils in this home, the vessels in this house are alive. They are not something - someone. Someone who is described as a vessel in the house of God, and we are not there accidentally. Not at all. We are there to carry out the purpose of the owner and builder of the house. Now again, something is startling because the utensils in the house, the vessels, are again described as other things have been described to us all the way along, in a contrasting way. What was said about words, by the way? What two kinds of words do we find before us, that the workman is working with? The "profitable" word on the one side – if you like, the "golden" word on the one side. The "unprofitable" word on the other, and you will find the contrast again. Here we are in the house but some are gold and silver and some are wood and earthenware.

Now you don't need me to preach a sermon about that, do you? Because you will find that in every church no matter where you go. I could take you to Dallas, Texas and accompany you to a church with 17,000 members in it. I can take you to one quite near with 15 members. But wherever you look, it's almost inevitable that there's a distinction, no matter where you go. Gold and silver, the words here. Not my words, the words here. Wood and earthenware – both of them useful, both of them necessary, both of them within the house, this is not something that's outside of the house, they're all within, but some for gold and silver service, if you like, and some wood and earthenware. Now when you talk about a vessel being “alive” you are not merely talking in terms of the material of which it is constructed. When this word talks about a “golden vessel”, it's not merely talking about something that happens to be made of valuable metal. There is something more in this distinction. It is distinctions of character rather than of material of which it is made. The vessels in the household of God are there not in their various places, not because of a distinguishing characteristic of which it is constructed, but because there is an essential ingredient in it that can only be described as gold. And something lacking that can only be described as wood and earthenware.

Now my dear, a wooden vessel will hold just as much as a golden vessel. It's not a matter of utility at all. Not at all. Then what is the difference? What? What is the difference between wood and earthenware and gold and silver? It's not a matter of usefulness. It is not a matter of correct construction. A wooden vessel may be as carefully formed as a golden one. But there is one thing a wooden vessel can never do. It can never reflect the face of the owner. No one ever looks into a wooden mirror. But you can look into a golden one. And it's not a matter at all my dear of just common place usefulness. It's a matter of reflection. That in us, as the vessels in the household of God, he may be able to see in us the reflection of his face.

Now my dear, you don't need me to preach about that either, do you? You don't need me to talk about that, because the greatest asset that God can possibly wrap up in any life is some faint reflection of himself. Now you've heard it over and over again, and so have I. You've heard people say, “You know, you could just see Jesus in that face. You could just see Jesus looking out of those eyes.” I lived with a face like that for 53 years. I saw that in eyes for a long time. I know what I'm talking about. I've wondered many a many a many a time, and I wanted to bury myself sometime as I have thought of how little she saw of it in me. We haven't got anything to brag about, have we in that way? When folks are looking around for some faint reflection of the Lord Jesus, and sometimes they don't see any too much of it in us, do they? But you know, that's what God's after. That's what God's after. He's wanting us to be in a place where we reflect his glory, where he can be seen in us. Now that's what the word of God is saying to us, and if we'll listen, it's saying to us loudly. That's what God wants of each one of us, and the measure of our individual life, and the measure of our church life, our collective life, is not the measure of what we do, important as that is, but it is how much of Jesus can be seen in each one of us. Is the reflection of his face seen in us?

There's the last line of a song, I used to sing it years ago. But the last line of it is something like this, “For how will the world know Jesus if it can not see Jesus in you.” Did you hear it? You'd better. You had better.

Now my dear, here's the thing that comes and sits right down beside us. The gold and silver level is not something that God decides for certain ones. You see it in every congregation, but that isn't a

decision of God. God decides and wants all of us up there. But the decision as to where we are and what we are - now hold yourself steady now, depends on us. Now watch it, because I wouldn't make that statement if the word of God wasn't underneath it. Now you keep that in mind, that if a Christian is on the wood and earthenware level, this passage of scripture tells us he is there because he prefers to be there. He could be somewhere else, but he prefers to be down on this level.

Now my dear, before we go any further with that, and we will in a moment, before we go any further with that, what is it that would keep anybody down on the wood and earthenware level, rather than the gold and silver level? What is it that keeps folks down here when God wants them to be up there? What is it? Well now, we've run into various illustrations of that all the way along. Entanglements, weights, weeds – all kinds of figures that are used to describe something that keeps us down here when God wants us to be up there. What is it in this case? What is the word that is used in this case? It is something that is unclean to which the life attaches itself and refuses to let it go and that keeps us down on the low level, and don't forget my dear, that what ever the entanglement is, and some of these entanglements can be very beautiful, and very attractive, and very useful and sometimes, very religious. But anything that keeps us on the lower level, when God wants us on the higher level, that whatever it is, is unclean! Uncleanness my dear in the scripture is not a word that is used entirely of something that is nasty and smelly. Not at all. It is used more often than not, of something that in itself is quite beautiful and quite lovely and quite apparently necessary. But if it keeps us here when God wants us there, that marks it as unclean, no matter what it is.

Now the point about it is this – what do we do about that, or do we do anything? Do we expect that God is going to reach down there and relieve us of our chosen uncleanness? Is he going to do that? The answer my dear is, no. He isn't. He's going to expect you to do it. And now for the scripture for it. Here's the word. "If a man" and this applies to any man, verse 21, "If a man therefore purge himself", something that we do, we do the purging, God expects us to do the thing we can do. We choose this, he expects us to choose something else. The purging, what is purging, by the way? It is the separating of the clean from the unclean. That's all. A purging thing, or a purging act is merely the act of separating the clean from the unclean. That's all.

Now, uncleanness - what do we do about it? Just take it to God, whining to him, asking him to do something about something for which we are responsible? No! Not at all. What kind of automatons would we be if God dealt with us that way? God expects us to rid ourselves of these things that hold us down on the low level, and when he finds somebody who is willing to do that, he provides immediately the necessary strength and wisdom in order to do it. But what is necessary first is our willingness to do it. Now let's get scripture again, because my dear that is the crux of the matter so far as so many Christian lives are concerned – the unwillingness to do the will of God. Now it isn't a question merely of, "he that doeth the will of God abideth forever"³, that is gloriously true. But let me remind you of something else, that the word of God teaches us this, that "He that willeth to do his will, he shall know the doctrine."⁴ He doesn't spend his time anymore arguing about why he should stay down on the low level. When the will of God takes over and captures our will, and we are willing to do the will of God, then the problem connected with our low level living is gone altogether.

³ I John 2:17.

⁴ John 7:17.

That's the point that's here before us this morning – this serious thing of willing to do the will of God. Not just doing it, willing to do it, so that we want to do the will of God and understand why. “He that doeth the will, he that willeth to do the will of God, he shall know.”

You know the basic difference, or problem with folks who are in a bewildered condition so far as knowing what to do and how to follow in the will of God. The basic thing is not that they do not understand the doctrine. It is a basic unwillingness to walk in the will of God. The only people who really understand the doctrine are those that have willed to walk in the will of God, “And they shall know the doctrine.” Knowing the doctrine is not the problem, the problem is walking in the will of God, and you can find that's the basic difficulty no matter where you look. And you'll find yourself surrounded by folks who are in utter bewilderment if you could get through the fog and back to the basic thing you would find some point where the will of God is refused. You know that's the thing that's here before us this morning, and God wants us to be gold and silver....

(audio ends).