

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	89		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	John 17:6-19		
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PRESERVATION - CONSECRATION

This section, from verse 6 to verse 19, contains our Lord's prayer for the Apostles; and a most wonderful prayer it is. He begins by stating what he had done for them, what the Father himself had done for them, and also what they, by the grace of God, had been able to do. And then, having thus shown their unspeakable *preciousness*, he proceeds to plead for them: "I for them pray." After noticing, in our last exercise, *the objects* of this prayer, or the persons that he prays for, namely, believers as distinct from the unbelieving world; and also *the grounds*, on which he pleads – namely, the *relation* in which they stood to him and the Father, and the *fact* that he was glorified in them – we took up the first of the two *special* petitions: "Holy Father, keep in thine own name those whom thou hast given me." But from the prayer, *Keep them*, which is rather negative, and which refers to their own salvation, Jesus passes on to the second petition, *Sanctify* (verse 17), or rather, *consecrate them*; which is more of a positive character, and which refers to their mission into the world. To prepare the way for this request, he reiterates the words, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (verse 16). If they were not of the world, even as he was not of the world, although they were left for a time in it – hence their need of divine consecration, in order to the fulfillment of their mission. The word which is here rendered *sanctify* properly signifies to *set apart*, to *consecrate* to a religious use. It is by no means synonymous with another word usually rendered to purify, to cleanse. Whenever any person or thing was set apart, under the Old Testament, to the service of God, that person or thing was said to be sanctified or consecrated. (Exod. 29:1-36, 40:13; Lev. 22:2-3; Matt. 23:17.). And just in express allusion to this, Jesus here prays that they may be set apart or consecrated to the service of God. It is true indeed that, as a matter of *fact*, the Lord does cleanse his people from the moral defilement of sin; but the sole idea conveyed to us by this word is that of separation or consecration to a religious use. That this is the exact meaning of the word is sufficiently obvious from the fact that the same word is applied in verse 19 to the Lord Jesus himself. In asking, then, that he would consecrate them, Jesus desires that their whole talents, strength, and life, should be devoted to this great work of the salvation of souls. This is a high idea of Christian holiness; and here it is viewed as about to be realized, specially under the form of the Christian ministry. And besides, *the means* of consecration are specially pointed out: *Through thy truth* – God's revealed truth as the medium – a statement of the highest practical importance (15:3; Col. 1:5; Eph. 1:13).¹

I. **Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth.** Here is the *positive* side of the request. It is as if Jesus said, “Not only keep them from the evil one, but also consecrate them in the truth. Keep them from the one, and confirm them in the other.” In the original the adjective *holy* (in the expression *Holy Father*, verse 11) and the verb *to sanctify* are derived from the same root. Hence, by combining these two ideas one might translate: “*Holy Father, make them holy in the truth.*” More fully stated, the verb here employed means *to set apart from the world by actual sanctification of life, so that in heart and mind, in thought, words, and deeds, one begins to live more and more in accordance with the law of God.* This sanctification can take place only if the entire personality is desirous of being governed by the truth; i.e., by God’s redemptive revelation in Christ, as the ultimate standard of life and doctrine. This truth is embodied in Christ, in him alone. He is *the truth* (see on 14:6). However, *the word* of the Father, which had been given to the disciples, must be the source of truth for these men when Jesus is no longer personally with them. That word is truth. It is wholly infallible. Without it the work of sanctification is entirely impossible. Jesus requests, therefore, that the Father may cause these men, in an ever increasing degree, to love *that word*, and to live according to the truth of God revealed in *this message* which *they* had received from him, and which *he*, in turn, had received from the Father.² Calvin highlights the importance of Scripture in this work of sanctification and warns that “fanatics chatter emptily about sanctification but pass over God’s truth, by which He consecrates us to Himself. Again, as there are others who talk a lot of nonsense about the truth and yet neglect the Word, Christ expressly says that the truth by which God sanctifies His sons exists nowhere but in the Word.”³ Along similar lines, Sinclair Ferguson writes, “The Spirit does not bypass our minds and work directly on our emotions or affections. It would be both bad theology and poor psychology to think so. Rather he addresses our minds through the word of God, simply because we are created as rational, thinking beings. How and what we think determines how we feel, will, and live. There is more to it than that, of course, but never less. As we have already seen, we are transformed through the renewing of our minds, and this involves the creation of a new mindset. But what is this new mindset? Paul provides several clues. In Romans chapter 6, Paul says that two things are true of Christian believers:

- a. Jesus Christ dwells in them.
- b. Sin continues to dwell in them.

So long as these are both true, so long will we need to go on putting sin to death. Growing in holiness, enjoying closer fellowship with God, brings with it an ongoing and very painful revelation of layers of sin that have been subtly hidden in our hearts but rarely if ever exposed. The term Paul uses here (*deeds* of the body) occurs outside the New Testament in reference to acts of subtle intrigue. It is well chosen. Sin lies hidden within the deep folds of our hearts, in the dark recesses of our ambitions, desires, and aspirations, and even in our gifts – no, if Isaiah’s confession is anything to do by, *especially* in our areas of giftedness. It is so subtle it is capable of hiding from us until the Spirit uses God’s word and superintends his providences to penetrate our consciences. Only then do we see the twistedness

that needs to be untangled, and patterns of mind and spirit that need to be confessed and abandoned. Only then do we fully realize that we *need* to go on putting sin to death. Otherwise as Paul hints here, we will be in danger of sin putting us to death. For *if you live according to the flesh you will die.*"⁴

CONCLUSION: D. A. Carson points out that in John's Gospel sanctification is always done in connection to a mission. "This can only mean that the means Jesus expects his Father to use as he sanctifies his Son's followers is *the truth*. The Father will immerse Jesus' followers in the revelation of himself in his Son; he will sanctify them by sending the Paraclete to guide them into all truth (15:13). Jesus' followers will be *set apart* from the world, reserved for God's service, insofar as they think and live in conformity with the truth, the *word* of revelation (v. 6) supremely mediated through Christ (himself the truth, 14:6, and the Word incarnate, 1:1, 14) – the revelation now embodied in the pages of this book. In practical terms, no-one can be *sanctified* or set apart for the Lord's use without learning to think God's thoughts after him, without learning to live in conformity with the *word* he has graciously given. By contrast, the heart of *worldliness*, of what makes the world the world (1:9), is fundamental suppression or denial of the truth, profound rejection of God's gracious *word*, his self-disclosure in Christ. As Jesus was *sanctified* and sent into the world (10:36), so the purpose of the *sanctification* of his followers is that they are sent, by Jesus himself, into the world."⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ I have adopted this section from the Old Scottish preacher, Charles Ross, cf. his book *The Inner Sanctuary: An Exposition of John 13-17* (rpt. The Banner of Truth, 1967), pp. 219-221.

² Wm. Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John: New Testament Commentary* (Baker Book House, 1988), p. 361.

³ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: The Gospel According to St. John* trans. T. H. L. Parker (Eerdmans, 1961), p. 145.

⁴ Sinclair Ferguson, *Devoted to God: Blueprints for Sanctification* (Banner of Truth, 2016), p. 141.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According To John* (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 566.