

THE WORD OF GOD
AND
THE LIFE OF HOLINESS

by

Wilbur M. Smith, D.D.

ZONDERVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE GRAND RAPIDS MICHIGAN

CHAPTER THREE -

THE SANCTIFYING POWER OF THE WORD

WE ARE THINKING TOGETHER of the place of the Word of GOD in the life of holiness. Let us consider a word from the lips of our Lord, on the sanctifying power of the Word of GOD, from His high priestly prayer in John 17.

This is the only place in which CHRIST ever spoke of sanctification. He did say that the Temple sanctifies the gift, and so on, but in relation to men and women this is the only time that He ever actually used the word; and He used it in a prayer, His last great prayer to His FATHER for us - "**Sanctify through thy truth; Thy word is truth**" (John 17:17). In the passage, "**Be ye holy, for I am holy**," the Greek word for "holy" is the adjective of which this word "sanctify" is the verb. So we can really say that our Lord prayed: "Make them holy in Thy truth; Thy word is truth."

Now I must confess that I have never seen anything on this text that satisfies me. I went through all the Keswick volumes from 1875, looking for anything pertaining to my subject. While there were in the early days perhaps two messages on this text, the speakers did what some preachers do - took the text and then went into all the world preaching the Gospel! I do not want to do that, but to give this text very careful examination. I would not do so if this were a line from Plato or Aristotle or Virgil, but this is a sentence from the One who has redeemed us, from the One whose name we bear, by whose blood we are cleansed, in whose image we are being continually made, and who will bring us home to GOD in glory. This is the One of whom it is said, in John 10:36, that He had been sanctified by the Father. This is the prayer of our Lord to the FATHER, that we should be sanctified in the truth: "**Thy word is truth.**"

We will consider three things. First, what do we mean by being sanctified, or holy?

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word translated "**to sanctify**" means "*to cut off*," "*to separate*," and thus to dedicate for a solemn purpose. Turn to Leviticus 27, just to get an understanding of this word; because we can be so vague on this matter of sanctification, which some think means we are to give up tobacco and drink, and to eliminate the movies; or to have some hysterics; or to be pious, or something of that sort. Let us begin with v. 14:

"And when a man shall sanctify his house to be holy unto the Lord, then the priest shall

estimate it, whether it be good or bad . . ." v. 16, "And if a man shall sanctify unto the Lord some part of a field of his possession . . ." v. 18, "But if he sanctify his field after the jubilee . . ." v. 26, "Only the firstling of the beasts, which should be the Lord's firstling, no man shall sanctify it; whether it be ox or sheep; it is the Lord's." v. 28, "Notwithstanding no devoted thing ('devoted' means to give up) that a man shall devote unto the Lord of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord."

This means to dedicate or separate a house, a field, a beast, and last, to separate men unto the Lord: that is the first meaning - it belongs to Him. Then that which was common - a field was common, a house was just an ordinary house, the beast was just an ordinary beast - that which was common and is then devoted and yielded to GOD, as a man or a woman, partakes of a new life, that to which the man or woman is dedicated; that is, he is not only separate, but he is living a new kind of life.

I Peter 2:9 gives a definition

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people (separate); that ye should shew forth (which we never did before) the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God."

This is not the lesson to-day, but the passage goes on

"I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims (separated to GOD), abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."

We are separated first, then we partake of a new life; we belong to GOD, then we are to live for GOD.

Let me give a definition from the great Dutch theologian, Bavinck, which is as good as anything I have seen - "*Sanctification is setting apart, and something more. It means that by washing, by sacrifice, by sprinkling with blood, a thing loses its common character (a thing or a man loses its common character - which it possessed in common with other things or men), and has been given a new character, so that it now lives in this new condition.*"

Not only are we separate - that is, positional - but there is also something experimental here. We have the basis for this word in the prayer of our Lord JESUS - "**Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth.**"

Now let us look at the second point of this brief sentence, and that is the need for separation or sanctification, and we will find this in John 17:11, "**I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept . . ."**

Whether we recognize it or not, we need divine protection; and this word, "**keep**" means a divine

Father's watchful care - as a guard. What do you guard? You guard your jewels, if you have any left after the income tax is paid. You guard your barns, your homes, your precious little children. You do not set a guard over the dirt in the backyard - you can get some more; that is common. You do not set a guard over a few bricks or a couple of flowers on the front lawn; you will not sit up all night to watch them. You guard what is precious, and what is in danger of being stolen or taken away.

I am not talking about salvation; GOD keeps guard of His own, and not one shall perish. Our Lord went on to pray - "**I have given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world**" - you and me - "**even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldst take them out of the world . . .**" (v. 14).

Now let us look at the second point of this brief sentence, and that is the need for separation or sanctification, and we will find this in John 17:11, "**I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept . . .**"

Whether we recognize it or not, we need divine protection; and this word, "**keep**" means a divine Father's watchful care - as a guard. What do you guard? You guard your jewels, if you have any left after the income tax is paid. You guard your barns, your homes, your precious little children. You do not set a guard over the dirt in the backyard - you can get some more; that is common. You do not set a guard over a few bricks or a couple of flowers on the front lawn; you will not sit up all night to watch them. You guard what is precious, and what is in danger of being stolen or taken away.

I am not talking about salvation; GOD keeps guard of His own, and not one shall perish. Our Lord went on to pray - "**I have given them Thy word; and the world hated them, because they are not of the world**" - you and me - "**even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them from the world . . .**" (v. 14).

We are still here in the world. Sometimes we wish we were not; but He said, "**I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil . . . As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world**" (vv. 15-18).

We have two enemies of our souls - the world and the devil; and both of them would attack us, both of them would drag us into their environment, into their principles, into their way of living, into their sinfulness. We are in the world, and whether we are aware of it or not, the Lord said you and I need protection from the world and from the devil. He talks about it to the FATHER more than He talks about any other thing. He talks about His own in the world - "They hated me, and will hate them; I pray that thou wilt keep them"; then He says, "**Sanctify them through thy truth; Thy word is truth.**"

What does that mean? I should have thought He would have said, "Sanctify them in holy living," not "**through thy truth.**"

Turn to another passage to get the meaning of this - in John 8:42 - **"If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word."** Then this, an awful sentence: **"ye are of your father, the devil. . ."** - the evil one; put a "d" in the front of "evil" and you have "devil" - **"and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."**

I cannot read these awful words without being reminded of something I heard over thirty years ago. I heard Dr. Griffith-Thomas speaking in Philadelphia on the work of Satan. I remember his prayer before those 2,000 people, that the devil himself might not paralyze his tongue as he came to expose the works of the evil one.

"And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not . . . And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" That is one of the greatest questions of all time. **"He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."**

"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil [the evil one]." He **"abode not in the truth, . . . He is a liar, and the father of it."**

How are we to be kept from the liar who is the father of lies? We can only be kept from him by the truth. And faced with delusion and diabolical strategy, how are we to be delivered from the errors of the wicked one, except by the truth of GOD! Now, we are marked off, we belong to the Lord JESUS; and CHRIST, aware of the allurement and fascination, and pressure and power of the world and of Satan. JESUS said to the Father, **"Sanctify them through thy truth: Thy word is truth."**

I want to lay stress on this need. In Revelation 12:9 there is a phrase which has come upon me with new and awful significance in the last few weeks. Satan is given five titles, and then he is called **"the deceiver of the whole world."** This means even of Oxford and Cambridge, and Harvard and Yale, and the Sorbonne; this means wicked men and wise men: He **"deceiveth the whole world."**

I do not know about your vocabulary here, but I am sure it is the same as with us. In the last two years only have you had this ghastly phrase, "The big lie." The New York Times had a frightening editorial recently, called "The lie in action." It was referring to a demonstration in Paris, when General Ridgeway was visiting that city. I am not defending the General, or my country, or anything else; but the demonstrators had a big placard bearing the words, "Ridgeway, Microbe Killer." They knew that this was a lie.

The New York Times observed what a terrible age this is, when men will go out in the streets and fight, not for something they believe in, even though they know it to be wrong, but for what they know to be a lie.

This is exactly what the Apostle Paul meant in II Thessalonians, when he said the Lord would send a spirit of delusion upon those who love not the truth, and they would believe a lie. I do not

know if it troubles you, but it troubles me. We talk about "resting in the Word." I hope I can rest in the Word, too. But I would like to know to-day why one billion people in thirty years come under the power of an atheistic communism, and only a few trickle into the Kingdom of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, and to the Gospel of truth. I wonder why?

I do not want anyone to say to me it is the devil, because I have a Lord who is greater than the devil; He is Sovereign and Lord, and it is a mystery to me why millions and millions believe a lie, and only so few are coming in to the truth in CHRIST. Now with millions coming under this delusion, if ever in the Christian Church we needed this message - we need it to-day - "Sanctify My people - separate them from this spirit of the world."

Now let me come to the means; we have seen the meaning of it, and the need of it: now the means.

"Sanctify them through thy truth: Thy word is truth." In v. 8 our Lord says, **"For I have given unto them, the words which thou gavest me."** I wonder when He received these words? **"And they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me . . . I have given them thy word"** (v. 14). So the Word of GOD is communicated to us through the Lord JESUS. **"Sanctify them through thy truth: Thy word is truth."**

Now you have about six times in the Scriptures this phrase, **"the word of truth"** - in James 1:18; II Timothy 2:15; Colossians 1:5; Ephesians 1:13; Psalm 119:43. **"Thy word is truth," "the word of truth."** I ask you, the truth about what? Here one could spend hours. I think the first cardinal fact is the truth concerning the Lord JESUS, and concerning His FATHER, and the HOLY SPIRIT.

About two years ago my wife and I were in a lovely town in Northern California, called Carmel-by-the-sea - a place for artists and musicians, beside the ocean, and with very nice country in which we could be quiet; it is rather pagan, but not wicked.

During the week I saw some posters with the title of a lecture, *"Christian Science, the fulfillment of prophecy and promise."* Now, I said to myself, That is my field, prophecy; and I have just forgotten what prophecy there is concerning Christian Science - I could name a couple, but they were not in their minds! So I went to hear this lecture. There were about 500 people present, and they were the nicest-looking people you ever saw, and as intelligent as any audience you will ever face in America. The man lectured for an hour, and he said that the promise of JESUS that He would send the COMFORTER, the HOLY SPIRIT, was fulfilled in the coming of Mary Baker Eddy; and that Christian Science is the Third Person of the Godhead. He said that when the Lord told the parable of the woman sweeping the house and finding the lost coin, He was speaking of Mary Baker Eddy sweeping the Church of dogma and finding the truth which was Christian Science.

He took up about eight New Testament passages; he was quoting the Bible, and he made it tell what it did not tell. He said that this man JESUS had to put us all on the same level. What I am getting at is, that when you get into that area and believe that, you are no longer separated unto GOD the **"Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."** **"Sanctify them through thy truth; Thy word is**

truth." And in this day, when there are so many compromises and a weakening of our Christian faith and a loss of confidence in the Word of GOD, beloved, there never was a time when it was more necessary to draw the line of demarcation and speak out the truth that separated us unto GOD.

Let me give another illustration from one of our own Professors. I have quoted this before, and he wrote me a letter recently and said, "It is so hard to express oneself; I find difficulty" - he has three doctorate degrees, and by that time he ought to be able to express himself! He is Professor of World Religion - whatever that might be - at one of our Universities that has 14,000 students. He said, "A large part of the educational path to-day within the Christian fold is to guide people in such a way that they no longer feel it necessary to read the Christian "Scriptures." You teach that to 14,000 young people and you are going to have trouble on your hands!

In a day like this, we need to saturate ourselves more with the Word of God than we ever have in our lives. This is the time when our ears must be open to the Word of GOD. **"Sanctify them in through thy truth; Thy word is truth."**

The reason we need this word is because our experiences can pass away, and the teaching of men can lose its significance, and times can change; but, beloved, this is the norm: **"Thy word is settled in heaven."** H. G. Wells, Bob Ingersoll, and Thomas Paine cried for a new Bible; they never had one, and there will not be one. There is only one revealed Word of GOD, and this is it; and when our Lord was on His knees, about to go to Calvary, He cried to the Father to **"Sanctify them through thy truth; Thy word is truth."** If we belong to GOD, we need GOD's truth; if we are to be separated unto GOD, we need GOD's Word; and there is no policy, no music and no art, nor any ritual in the world that can ever be a substitute for the Word of GOD. **"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth."**

We are losing our contact with this Book, and we must get back to it. In the old days the Methodists took two books to church, the Bible and the hymnbook. Now the Methodists take one book, the hymnbook. I think a lot of people are doing what I heard Robert Lee talk about one time. He was our great Southern orator, and President of the World Baptist Association. He said that when he was a young minister he was itinerating in the mountains of Tennessee, and one night he had to stop at a log cabin where there were twelve children. After supper he said, "Before we go to bed we should have family prayer and read the Bible; will you get a Bible?"

The mother said, "Sonny, go out in the living-room and get the Bible." The boy returned and said, "Mother, it is not there." "Sylvia, go upstairs to the bedroom and bring down the Bible." And again the reply came, "It is not there." "That is funny; where is the Bible?" After several of the children had sought in different directions, one chipped in with a word of knowledge and said, "It is in the toolbox in the wood shed."

And the Bible was found there, along with liniments and things used for beasts and lambs. The Book that could save their souls and that came from GOD, was in the wood shed in a toolbox; and that is what modern man is doing with the Word of GOD - and some Christians, too.

We are keeping this Book closed or locked in a wood shed or some other place; and without it

we shall not have the sanctified life that we need for this desperate age.

Dr. Robert Speer some years ago was going to China as the Head of our Foreign Missions' Board. He was discussing something with the young ministers, and said to one, "Would you mind bringing up your Bible from the state room?" And the young man said, "I am sorry, but we are not supposed to have much luggage in the state room, so I left my Bible in the baggage in the hold." Robert Speer said, "Young man, I am the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. If the Bible means no more to you than that, the first ship to go home from China is the ship you are going to take."

If that man needed that Bible in China, beloved, we need it in London, Liverpool, and New York: **"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth."**

This probably has not yet come to you, but it has come to our country, and I am shocked and disturbed. In a lot of churches, some famous and with great traditions, I am discovering with great alarm that the Sunday morning programme, when it is handed to me, includes an invocation, two anthems, Te Deums, and an offering, but no place for the reading of the Word of GOD.

I always say, "we will have a place for the Word of GOD, and if the sermon is no good, the Word of GOD will be." **"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth."**

Look again at v. 19, **"And for their sakes"** that is, for you and me - **"I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in the truth."** **"For their sakes. . ."; "that they also might be . . ."** - you can put any word in there you want. Just what are you going to be? The Lord said, **"I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified"** and you and I are going to have a tremendous influence over the sanctified or unsanctified lives of other people.

People will draw from us the inspiration of this hour; and they are never going to be lifted any higher than you and I are lifted. **"For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified."**

What did one of the speakers say about Bishop Taylor Smith, "of blessed memory" - and then he supported some arguments by giving details of his wonderful life. Bishop Taylor Smith has been dead some years, and the influence of his holy life is still here. That is a wonderful way to live. Of course, you know the story of his early days when he got saved.

It took all night, but he dedicated every single part of his whole body to GOD for ever. He told this to a friend of mine: "I even asked the Lord for a holy voice, and He gave it to me." I will tell you what I heard in America. He was at dinner; in the home of Dr. Houghton, the President of the Moody Bible Institute; about twelve of us were there, and when the Bishop left, a friend said to me, "I feel as though I had been in the presence of the Lord JESUS." What a way to live!

"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth."

~ end of chapter 3 ~