

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	88		Gary L.W. Johnson
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PRESERVATION AND SANCTIFICATION

“In the words which have come to be known as His high-priestly prayer, our Lord said, *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth* [John 17:17]. It was an utterance filled with loving concern for the disciples from whom He would soon be taken. They were to remain in a world of evil, and that they might serve effectively as His witnesses, they must be sanctified. It is to God the Holy Father that Christ prays and, in view of the fact that the disciples are to be kept through the Name of the Father. He prays that they may partake of holiness. This work of holiness or sanctification is to be accomplished in the truth or through the truth. There then follows the remarkable statement, *Thy word is truth*. At first blush it might seem that Christ is speaking of Himself, for He is indeed the Word of God and He is the Truth. Upon second glance, however, it is apparent that this is not what Christ had in mind, for He identifies the Word of God as something distinct from Himself. He had already stated [verse 6] that He had manifested the Name of God to the disciples, and they had kept God’s Word. It was this revelation concerning the Name of God which Christ called the Word of God. Again, in verse 14, the Lord says that He has given to the disciples God’s Word. He declares that He gave the words which God had given unto Him [verse 8]. It would then seem evident that our Lord, in speaking of the Word of God, had in mind something other than Himself. There is, however, a further consideration which makes it clear that Christ in the present verse of the prayer was not identifying Himself as the Word of God. It must never be forgotten that Christ lived His earthly life in the very atmosphere of the Old Testament Scriptures, and even in the present statement concerning the Word of God He seems to be reflecting upon the Old Testament. In Psalm 119:142, we read, . . . *and thy word is the truth*. And again in the same Psalm [verse 160] it is stated, *Thy word is true from the beginning*. Furthermore, in 2 Samuel 7:28 we find the words, *And now, O Lord GOD, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant*. It would appear, then, that in His prayer, our Lord was giving expression to the thought of the Old Testament, and most likely was actually basing the form of His expression upon the longest of the Psalms. This makes it clear that in His prayer He was not alluding to Himself when He mentioned the Word of God. Our Lord does not say, *Thy word is the truth*. He remarks rather, *Thy word is truth*. Earlier in the Gospel of John He had indeed identified Himself as the truth [14:6]. *I am . . . the truth*, were His words. In the present passage, however, when He is not speaking of Himself but of the Word of God, He characterizes that Word as true. Christ is Himself the Truth, and when He speaks of Himself, there is need for Him to employ

the definite article. In the prayer, however, He merely intends to characterize the Word of God as truth. *The Word of God*, we may paraphrase, *is true; it speaks the truth; the message which it offers is a true message. It is the truth.* It is most necessary that Christ make this clear, for He will not always be with His disciples. The time will come when He will be taken from them and they will be constrained to depend upon His Word. That Word, however, is dependable; it is truth. The Word of which He speaks is the message of God; it is information which God has communicated to the world; it is that which God has spoken. The Word of God, which Jesus Christ Himself has spoken, is truth. Christ does not say that this word is a witness to the truth. He does not affirm that it is a pointer thereto or a record of revelation. Rather, it is this Word itself, the message which has come from God and which Christ has given to the disciples, that is truth, and this truth is given to men for a practical purpose. That which is the Word of God, therefore, is truth, and by means thereof men may be sanctified.”¹ John 17:11-19 form the actual intercession of Christ for his own.

I. **PRESERVATION.** “Vs. 12 speaks of the preservation *in your name* as that which Jesus has been doing *while I was with them*, and further describes it with *I guarded them*, probably, in view of vs. 12b (*lost*), to be understood in terms of the image of the shepherd watching over his flock (cf. 10:12, 28, 29). The result has been that *none of them* [the flock] *was lost*, however, much the enemy has been against them. As in 13:10, the exception – Judas – is mentioned and described here as *the son of destruction*, a model of what it means to be *lost*, the fate from which Jesus has protected his own. *That the Scripture might be fulfilled* is not meant in a deterministic sense as making what was once predicted and decided in the name of God necessary. It refers, as does 13:18, to texts like Ps. 41:9 to point out that Jesus knew himself to be one with, and had to go the way of, the threatened people of God in the world to fulfill their God-given task. This appeal to Scripture is striking in the prayer of the Son to the Father (see the comments on vs. 2). But the Evangelist includes it in his reproduction of the prayer as proof to fellow hearers of the prayer that Judas’s lostness, far from being unconnected with Jesus’ mission from the Father, was one of the elements shaping its content.”² Tenney points out that “Two words are used in verses 11 and 12, *kept* and *guarded*. The former means protection by restraint and is frequently used in John of *keeping* commandments or words in the sense of obeying them. The second word appears only twice in the Fourth Gospel. It refers to protection from external peril. Taken together, the words give a picture of complete deliverance from all perils, within and without. Eternal life means a lasting security.”³ Note the stress placed on the *name* of the Father. “The preserving power, however, lies in the name of the Father. As long as men know the Father in truth, they are children. If, however, the name of the Father is confused and darkened to them, if it is distorted in them by the falsehood of the world, degraded and dissolved into the apparent names of other divinities, then they are no more children. In that illumination of the name of Father for them, as it is one with the truth, it happened that they also acknowledged the name of Christ, that they were given to Him.”⁴

II. **SANCTIFICATION.** In order to properly understand what *sanctify them in truth; Your word is truth* means, the immediate context must be examined. “Since they

are to be sent into hostile territory, to reclaim it for its rightful owner, they must be given spiritual protection. Negatively, they must be preserved from the power of the usurper, whose occupied domain they have invaded; positively, they must be *sanctified*. This involves their consecration for the task now entrusted to them; it involves further their inward purification and endowment with all the spiritual resources necessary for carrying out that task. This purification and endowment are the work of the Spirit, but here Jesus declares the instrument of that work to be *the truth* – the truth embodied in the Father’s *word* which Jesus had given to the disciples as he himself had received it from the Father (verses 8, 14). The very message which they are to proclaim in his name will exercise its sanctifying effect on them: that message is the continuation of his message, just as their mission in the world is the extension of his mission. So, the disciples were given to Christ by the Father *out of the world* (verse 6), they therefore no longer *belong to the world* (verses 14, 16), although they remain *in the world* (verse 11) and are not immediately to be taken out of it (verse 15). They not merely remain in it because they can do nothing else: they are positively sent into it as their Master’s agents and messengers. If Jesus does not pray explicitly for the world at this time (verse 9), yet his prayer for the disciples involves hope for the world. God’s electing grace is not exercised in such a way that the non-elect are lost, but rather with the purpose that through the elect the non-elect may receive his blessing.”⁵

CONCLUSION: The great Puritan Thomas Manton underscored the point that this work of preservation and sanctification is *not* something we do for ourselves. “We could defile ourselves, but we cannot cleanse ourselves; as little children defile themselves, but the nurse must make them clean. A sheep can wander of itself, but it is brought home upon the shepherd’s shoulders. *Domine, errare per me potui, redire non potui*. God, that gave us his image at first, must again stamp it on the soul. Who can repair nature depraved but the author of nature? When a watch is out of order we send it to the workman: Eph. 2:10, *We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, that we might walk therein*; Lev. 21:8, *I the Lord that sanctify thee am holy*. It is God’s prerogative. The means cannot without God. It is by the truth, but God is the principal cause. Sanctification is ascribed to many causes. To God the Father, as he decreeth it: Jude 1, *To them that are sanctified by God the Father*. To the Son, as he merited it: Eph. v. 25, 26, *He gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it*. To the Holy Ghost, as he effects it: 2 Thess. 2:13, *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit*. To faith, as it receiveth the grace of God: Acts 15:9, *Purifying their hearts by faith*. To the word, as the instrument of begetting it: John 15:3, *Now ye are clean, through the word which I have spoken unto you*; it is the external means, but all efficacy is of God, and grace is his creature; else what should be the reason why the same word, preached by the same minister, worketh on some and hardeneth others, at least it amendeth them not? Lydia alone is converted, because the Lord *opened her heart*, Acts 16:14. Man’s will doth not put the difference, but God’s grace.”⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ E. J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth: Some Thoughts on The Biblical Doctrine of Inspiration* (Banner of Truth, 1963), p. 261.

² Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 553.

³ M. C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Eerdmans, 1948), p. 246.

⁴ J. P. Lange, *The Life of The Lord Jesus Christ III* (rpt. Zondervan, 1958), p. 187.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Eerdmans, 1983), p. 114.

⁶ *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton X* (rpt. Marantha Publication, 1975), p. 415.