

Exegesis

Vs. 17 – Jesus prays, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” In verse 11, Jesus asks his “Holy Father” to “keep” the apostles so that they would “be one” as God and his Son are one. Then, in verse 16, the Lord petitioned that the disciples be kept from “the evil [one].” And now, the Lord makes his *third* request on behalf of his present followers: “sanctify [the apostles] through thy truth.” The Greek term for “sanctify” is **ἁγιάζω** (*hagiázō*), and it refers to the act of separating something and dedicating it to God (e.g., the Sabbath—cf. Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:8; the name of God—cf. Mat. 6:9).¹ But as is the case with things, so people can also be sanctified whereby they are set apart for God (e.g., the Levitical Priesthood—cf. Ex. 28:41; Jeremiah—cf. Jer. 1:5). And for something or someone to be consecrated to God means to be wholly dedicated to God for some divine purpose. In the believer's case, they must be totally devoted to the Lord. So much so that they cannot even claim ownership of their own bodies. The Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and, as such, their conduct is of the utmost importance (cf. 1 Cor. 6:18-20; 1 Pet. 1:13-16).

And the means by which the apostles are set apart is “through [God’s] truth: thy word is truth.” In other words, obeying Jesus Christ, truth incarnate (cf. 14:6), and being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of Truth” (16:13), makes a person sanctified by God’s word—i.e., truth in written form.² A life that is not in conformity to the truths of scripture is a life that is unholy, unsanctified, and unfruitful. The Lord said, “Ye are clean through the *word* [emphasis added] which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (15:3-4). The more we are immersed in God's holy word, the more holy we become, and the more we progress in our sanctification (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). After all, if sanctification is anything, it is *separation* (not isolation; see notes vs. 14-16) from the world and *dedication* to God the Father.³

Vs. 18 – “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. In 10:36, Jesus said, “The Father hath sanctified [me], and sent [me] into the world.” The Son of God was set apart by the Father and sent into the world to do the “works” of the Father (10:37). He did not do whatever he wanted to do; he only did the things that God wanted him

¹ Morris (1995), p. 646, quoting Marsh, “The word ‘sanctify’ is not the same as ‘purify’; the disciples have already been declared ‘clean’ (13:10; 15:1). To be sanctified is to be made ready for a specific task, and the prayer seeks the endowment of the disciples for their apostolic mission.”

² Morris (1995), p. 647, “And the divine revelation is eminently trustworthy. It is not only true, but truth.”

³ Kruse (2017), p. 399-400, “Stated negatively, God’s word separated them *from* [author’s emphasis] the world. Stated positively, it set them apart *for* [author’s emphasis] God.”

to do. Likewise, just as God sent Jesus "into the world" so is the Lord sending the apostles "into the world." The Father was the Son's sender, and the Son was the disciples' sender. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son..." has become "For Christ so loved the world, that he sent his many disciples...."⁴ Just as Jesus did not serve himself but God while he was on the earth, the disciple serves the will of Christ, not their own, while they are in the world. Those who've been sanctified by truth and set apart *from the world* have also been sent by the Truth and positioned *in the world* to serve as the official ambassadors of truth *to the world* (cf. 15:26-27). These words anticipate the apostles' commissioning in 20:21.⁵ The believer is no aimless wanderer.⁶ As the Son embodied the mission his Father gave him, they ought to embody the commission given to them by the Son.

Vs. 19 – “And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.” Unlike the apostles, who could not sanctify themselves but needed to be "sanctified through the truth," Jesus says he sanctified himself "for their sakes." This is not to say that Jesus had to be "sanctified" in the sense that he needed to be made holy. If that were so, he could hardly do that himself, as the sinful cannot purge their own sins. Instead, "sanctify" refers to the Lord's self-sacrifice (cf. 10:18) on the cross, whereby he set himself apart to atone for humanity's sins.⁷ This point is made repeatedly throughout John's account (6:51; 10:11, 15; 11:50-52; 15:13; 18:14) and one that is highlighted throughout the rest of the N.T. (Mar. 14:24; Lu. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). In fact, this consecration language, as Jesus uses here, is reminiscent of the O.T. sacrificial system where animals were "set apart"—i.e., consecrated—to die for the sins of Israel (e.g., Deut. 15:19, 21).⁸ Even the prophet Isaiah foresaw the day when the Messiah would bear “our griefs,” carry “our sorrows,” be “wounded for our transgressions [and] bruised for our iniquities,” eventually concluding, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (cf. Isa. 53:4-6). Thus, strictly speaking, the cross was not Christ's but *ours*. We should've paid the penalty for our own sins. Yet, compelled by boundless mercy, unfettered grace, and immeasurable love, God took our place, the sinless for the sinful. And in Christ sanctifying himself in this way, the writer of Hebrews explains, “We are sanctified

⁴ Carson (1991), p. 567.

⁵ Köstenberger (2008), p. 496.

⁶ Morris (1995), p. 647.

⁷ Ibid, p. 648, quoting Lüthi, “He serves as Mediator between Heaven and earth. He sanctifies Himself by placing Himself completely at His Father's service and saying, ‘Not my will, but thine, be done.’ His path of duty leads through the Cross and the grave to Resurrection, up to the right hand of the Father, from whence He shall come again. This absolute, voluntary filial obedience is the secret of Christ's self-sanctification. That is what He means when he stands alone before the Father and vows to Him, ‘I sanctify myself.’”

⁸ Carson (1991), p. 567.

through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). In other words, "by His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). Thus, this is "the truth" that Jesus spoke of: the apostles have been *sanctified* by Christ's sacrifice and, as such, they've also been *set apart* as a witness to the world.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 74 | John 17:17-19

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

Today, Jesus prays, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” This is the final petition he makes for his current disciples before he moves to those who will come later. And in praying this, the Lord isn’t asking the Father to purify the apostles. They’ve already been made “clean” through Christ’s word (cf. Jn. 15:3). Instead, the Son of God wants the Father to set them apart for some divine purpose. He wanted his followers to be used and sent by God the same way he was.

The believer is no aimless wanderer. As the Son embodied the mission given to him by the Father, so should we embody the commission given to us by the Son. A life dedicated to the gospel is not dull, tedious, or stagnant; it is intense, exciting, and purposeful.

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