

Sanctification
Market Street Fellowship
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Sanctification

I'm continuing with the study of the book of Ephesians this week. If you remember, last week I quickly covered a lot of verses that had to do with husbands and wives. I had spent three weeks laying the groundwork for that, and then I covered a lot of Scripture at one time. I mentioned at the end of the message last week that, in order to stick with the predominant topic of marriage, I had skipped over a few verses that I may come back and revisit. One of those Scriptures that I rushed past was Ephesians 5:26 where Paul compares a husband's relationship to his wife to Christ's relationship to the church. In this particular verse, Paul says:

Eph 5:25 *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up on its behalf, 26 that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the washing of the water in the Word,*

It just so happens that the Lord has had my heart on this topic for a little while now. The topic I am speaking about is sanctification. I feel like the Lord has been impressing on my heart some realities having to do with the sanctification and glorification of the church. In this verse, Paul says that Christ is working in the church to sanctify us, cleansing us by the washing of the water of the Word. This morning I'm just going to focus on this particular verse, Ephesians 6:25, and this particular reality of sanctification.

I'd like to start this morning simply by reading a few Scriptures. I'll read them all first so that they are fresh in your mind. And then, as I work through this message, we'll revisit most if not all of them again. These are fantastic Scriptures and it would be a good idea to write down these Scripture references and spend some time looking at these this week.

Joh 17:17 *Sanctify them in Your Truth; Your Word is Truth. 18 As You have sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world, 19 and I sanctify Myself for them, that they also may be sanctified in Truth.*

Act 20:32 *And now, brothers, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build up and to give you inheritance among all those being sanctified.*

Act 26:14 *And all of us falling to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me, and saying in the Hebrew dialect, Saul, Saul why do you persecute Me? It is hard for you to kick against the prods. 15 And I said, Who are you, Sir? And He said, I am Jesus whom you persecute; 16 but rise up and stand on your feet, for it is for this reason I appeared to you, to appoint you a servant and a witness both of what you saw, and in what I shall appear to you, 17 having delivered you from the people and the nations, to whom I now send you, 18 to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the authority of Satan to God, in order that they may receive remission of sins, and an inheritance among those being sanctified by faith in Me.*

1Pe 1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He according to His great mercy having regenerated us to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, having been kept in Heaven for you 5 the ones in the power of God being guarded through faith to a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time;*

2Th 2:13 *But we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers, beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth, 14 to which He called you through our gospel, to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

What is sanctification? Sanctification is another common word in the body of Christ, and so maybe I should start, as I often do, by describing what sanctification is NOT. Sanctification is not a process of becoming more like Christ through discipline, effort, or abstaining from so-called unchristian things. It does not involve dedicating yourself to the Lord or to the church. In fact, sanctification is not something that we do. Nor is it something that we avoid doing.

It does, in fact, involve being conformed to the image of Christ. That much is true. Sanctification is a process whereby we are transformed, changed, conformed to the indwelling life of Christ. Most theological textbooks will have this much correct. But it's the *process* itself that so many are confused about. It's **the nature of the process, the way that this happens, the question of HOW...**that is where we are so much in the dark.

Sanctification has to do with separation. Sometimes the words is simply defined as a "setting apart". Consecration is a word that means very close to the same thing. But again, what do we understand about this separation? What are we separated from? How does that separation take place? Paul says in our verse today that we are sanctified by the washing of the water of the world. In other one of the verses we read, Paul said that we are sanctified by the Spirit through faith in the truth. These are describing the exact same thing. But before we get into that, lets first look at the question of what we are separated from.

T. Austin-Sparks writes this: "With the Fall, an entangling with another nature and order took place. It became organic, therefore constitutional". That is a very brief, but accurate summary. We cannot understand sanctification until we understand what it is that we need to be separated from. As a race, we have fallen. Fallen *from* something, indeed. Fallen from the glory of God. Fallen from purpose. **But also fallen INTO something.** Fallen into an entanglement with a nature and order that maintains deep control over our soul, that has complete jurisdiction over our being. It is impossible to accurately depict the nature of this entanglement. Hearing about it does nothing. You have to see it.

Man has always been a soul. That soul was breathed into our earthen vessel on the day he was created. Genesis says that God "blew his breath into man's nostrils and man became a living soul". That soul, as you well know, was created to be the habitation for the living God, the perfect and only environment for the glory of God to dwell. If you can handle the weakness of this analogy, that soul was a little bit like a sponge, that had in itself the capacity to absorb into itself, bear in itself, hold and carry, pure, clean water. And when that sponge fell from glory, it didn't just fall **out** of a bucket of water. It fell **into** a swamp of sewage and sickness that saturated every crevice and pore. This is something of the nature of man's fall. That is a picture of man's entanglement with all that is contrary to God.

Jesus once said "You are those that justify yourselves before men, but the things that are highly esteemed in the eyes of man are detestable in the sight of God." (Luke 16:15) That word "detestable" has always frightened me. It's such a strong word. But not too strong when the Light of His life shows us what we are.

Despite our objections to the contrary and our utter blindness to the reality, our soul is born twisted and knotted up in a nature and order that now constrains all that we think, want, and do. It is a nature and order that is without God, and therefore without glory. It is the profound and overpowering relationship that Paul the apostle calls "slavery to sin". This is the effect of the lie that we believed.

Sanctification has to do with the solution, the reversing of this situation. First of all it has to do with the objective fact of what was accomplished at the cross. In the cross of Jesus Christ the first was separated from the second, death was separated from life, Adam was separated from Christ. Having gone into the sickness and blackness of fallen humanity, having born it's guilt and shame before God, having taken it out of God's sight, out of God's camp, like the scapegoat of old, Jesus was lifted up out from the earth. It's like He was projected out of the earth, vomited up from the belly of the earth because He was too righteous to be held, too perfect to remain there. He needed to die there, but He could not remain there. The earth could not hold Him. Having put away sin from the sight of God, Christ had no more business with that realm and order and kind.

And so He left. He separated Himself from that realm and nature and order. This is the glory of the ascension. He ascended so that He might fill all things. He ascended bringing many sons to glory. He ascended so that He would forever be separated from the first man and first creation....**and so that WE could be separated in Him.**

This is what was on the mind of the Lord Jesus the night before He went to the cross. This is what He spoke to His Father about in the presence of His disciples. "Father, I desire that those who you have given me be with me where I am". And then he said this, "For this reason I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in me". For this reason I am separated from that death, that they might be separated in me. For this reason I have come up from among the dead, that I might be to them the Resurrection and the Life. For this reason I have put away the first, that I may appear to them in the second, without reference to sin, unto salvation.

Can you see the nature of sanctification here. In a moment I will talk about the process of sanctification. But the process is only the soul's possession and appropriation of this objective reality. The nature of sanctification has to do with *separation*. **It has to do with leaving something so far behind that it is forgotten and meaningless.** Indeed, the former things no longer even come to mind. They are separated as far as the east is from the west.

Christ, before he became a man, was already separated from the fallen nature and order of man. But He came to make a door. He made a door through His death. His death is offered to us as our door. Our door is His death. And if we will walk into that death and embrace all that that death means, then we will find Jacob's ladder on the other side. A ladder that reaches into the heavens. A ladder that takes us in Him to where He is. I am in the Father, you are in Me, I am in you.

The Lord Jesus Christ cut between these realms and realities with a sharp sword and the division will never heal. It is permanent and immovable. And now, all that God has and God wants and God has relationship with is on the side that is represented by Christ. Oh I

realize that God has relationship with believers who still have earthen bodies. But those bodies do not define the location and habitation and inheritance of the soul. For you and I, for us RIGHT NOW, we are raised up and seated with Christ in the heavens. We have been sanctified as a matter of fact. As a matter of God's view. **And yet there remains the inward disentanglement with the order and nature that God has disassociated with.**

We are in Christ. There is no question about that. **But we are in Christ as those who, by nature, are part of what God has forsaken.** We are in Christ, we are in heaven, but we are there as those who begin our journey exclusively conscious of the WRONG REALM. So there is the fact of our being translated out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. **And then there is the inward separation, the soul's disentanglement, with what God has abandoned.** There is the fact of having left Egypt, and then there is the experience of Egypt leaving our hearts. There is the fact of Ishmael being sent out of Abraham's sight, and then there is the experience of knowing Isaac as the only son.

The fact of what God has done is finished and cannot be contended with. God has taken the sponge soaked with mud and permanently deposited it into an ocean of pure living water. It is there forever. It will never be anywhere else. But still there is the filth and sludge that has saturated its every pore. And that mud is not your bad habits or your bad language or your bad behavior. That mud is what you have called your life. That mud is everything that you have ever been and known and wanted. That mud is both what you desired and why you desired it. It is you, the self-life that your soul has always called "me". That mud is the residue of a nature and order that you associate with yourself. And so there needs to be something drastic done about this. There needs to be a thorough purging and erasing and mortifying of all that is not water in this ocean of living water.

And that brings us to the question of how this works. What is the process of sanctification? What is the method? What kind of soap could actually cleanse the human conscience? That is what Hebrews calls this process – the cleansing of the conscious. Not simply resolving a guilty conscious, but actually permanently altering what you are conscious of. Removing from you your consciousness what lies behind the cross. Cleansing your conscience so that it corresponds to what God sees and knows. So what has the power to expunge an entire false life and reality from our heart? Only one thing. **Only the living Word of God. Only the Truth. It is truth that washes us from all that is a lie. It is truth that removes from us what has no place in God.**

But what is Truth? Pontius Pilate asked that question two thousand years ago. Jesus didn't answer him because the answer to that question is not found in words. Jesus didn't answer Pilate because Pilate was looking at Truth and couldn't see it...and no words were going to solve that problem. We need to settle this issue in our hearts. Truth can be described by words. Truth can be described by the pages of your Bible. But words cannot contain the truth. And making application of words to *your* life is powerless and pointless. True words will never sanctify your soul.

Truth is the soul's apprehension of Christ our life. Truth is the person and place and life and reality of Christ known by the Spirit. Truth has to do with inwardly possessing the finished work of Christ by revelation. Truth involves the reality of where Christ lives, what Christ is, how Christ sees. And if we will only let the Spirit of God show us *this* truth, then we will occupy and abide in Christ. We will be set apart, separated unto, sanctified in the Truth. "Father, sanctify them in the Truth. Your Word is Truth. For this reason I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in the Truth."

Sanctification is where the Spirit of Truth guides us into all truth, and separates us from everything else. Do you know that for you who are born again, everything other than the Truth is a lie? Have you faced into that yet. Have you faced the fact that once you are born of the truth, ignorance of the truth is an acceptance of and an agreement with the lie? People have said to me before, "what's the big deal about Christians not knowing the Truth. We're all going to heaven one day anyway...and I'm sure we'll figure it out then". Besides the obvious problems with theology there, the question overlooks a very serious point. **To refuse the Truth is to prefer the Lie. Ignorance is not bliss. Ignorance is death. Ignorance is contrariness to the person and purpose of God. Ignorance for a Christian is a love-affair with the Lie.** And if we will not grow up in the truth, ignorance is just another face of rebellion. "No thank you God, I'll take my inheritance here on the other side of the Jordan". God replies, "There is no inheritance there, except for the one in your imagination that is established in opposition to me".

That is why we must follow the Lord fully like Joshua and Caleb. We must follow the Lord with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength...and let Him show us what is real, let Him show us the Land. You cannot stop along the way. I mean, of course you CAN, but to stop along the way is to cling to something that is not even real. It is to prefer ignorance over Truth. To reject reality in favor of a deadly fantasy.

Like Abraham so long ago, the Spirit of truth leads us into a land that must be revealed. "Abraham, leave your country, kindred, and father's house, and go unto a land that I WILL SHOW YOU". Sanctification is where the Spirit of Truth escorts us into this heavenly land and all that we have called country, kindred, and father's house is forgotten and forsaken. Everything that was part of what we were, where we were, and that to which we belonged...none of it had anything to do with Abraham's inheritance. It wasn't true of Him any longer. And all of it had to be washed away from his soul in order for him to see and receive the inheritance.

Abraham could possess nothing through a natural inheritance. He could possess nothing by natural effort or natural vision or natural association. He tried to bring his father. He tried to bring his relative Lot. He tried to create the seed of promise through Ishmael. But God would not let Abraham inherit something of the earth. God had set him apart for a heavenly inheritance.

So when Abraham first arrived at the land there was nothing. There were arguments with locals and a famine that sent him fleeing to Egypt. There was nothing in that land for him to according to *sight*. With his natural eyes there was nothing there for him to possess. And so we hear the Lord's call to him again and again – "Lift up your eyes Abraham and look. Lift up your eyes. You will not, indeed you cannot, see My inheritance if your eyes are looking down here. It is a heavenly land. It is a heavenly inheritance. You cannot inherit my promise unless you are set apart from all that was previous. You will not experience my inheritance until you are separated unto it, until you are sanctified by faith.

See if you can see this reality in the following story.

Gen 13:5 *And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6 And the land was not able to bear them, that they might live together. For their substance was great, so that they could not live together. 7 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite lived then in the land. 8 And Abram said to Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are*

men, brothers. 9 Is not the whole land before you? I pray you, separate yourself from me. If you go to the left, then I will go to the right. Or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left. 10 And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the circuit of Jordan, that it was all well watered (before Jehovah destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah,) like the garden of Jehovah, like the land of Egypt as you come to Zoar. 11 And Lot chose all the circuit of Jordan for himself. And Lot journeyed east; and they separated themselves from one another. 12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan, and Lot lived in the cities of the circuit and pitched his tent toward Sodom. 13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before Jehovah, exceedingly so. 14 And after Lot was separated from him, Jehovah said to Abram, Lift up your eyes now and look from the place where you are northward and southward, and eastward and westward. 15 For all the land which you see I will give to you, and to your seed forever.

Here is Abraham being sanctified by faith, in type and shadow. Set apart, separated from what he had brought with him so that he could see what lied before Him. Forgetting what was behind and possessing what faith could see. Now we bring this into its new covenant counterpart. Remember the words of Christ to Paul on the road to Damascus. See if you can hear this same reality, this same story in the words of Jesus to Paul.

Acts 26:15 ...I am Jesus whom you persecute; 16 but rise up and stand on your feet, for it is for this reason I appeared to you, to appoint you a servant and a witness both of what you saw, and in what I shall appear to you, 17 having delivered you from the people and the nations, to whom I now send you, 18 to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the authority of Satan to God, in order that they may receive remission of sins, and an inheritance among those being sanctified by faith in Me.

And remember Paul's words to the church in Ephesus as he left them for the ship.

Act 20:32 And now, brothers, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build up and to give you inheritance among all those being sanctified.

This is the very first thing that Jesus Christ says to Paul. "Paul," He says, "there is an inheritance. It is the true possessing of the heavenly land. It has to do with coming to live where I am, to see as I see, experience all that I am and have. But like your forefather Abraham, this inheritance is not possessed by sight. I'm sending you to help lift up people's eyes. I'm sending you to proclaim this inheritance for those who will be sanctified by faith in me". Paul, what things that were gain to you, you will count them loss. But faith will possess a better land. Faith will possess a heavenly country and you will find yourself to be a citizen of heaven.

Do you see this reality of being sanctified by faith? Or sanctified in the Truth? Can you see that it is the truth that sets you apart in your heavenly country. It is the truth that strips the earth from your heart and makes you a heavenly being. The Truth of Christ revealed by the Spirit Himself. This is what caused the apostles to live in the heavens even though their vessel was bound to the earth. This is how Christ could abide in His Father even though he walked through the cities of Israel. This is how Paul was content in any natural circumstance. Content to live on in the body, content to have his earthen body taken from him. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain". Can you understand that it is the soul's apprehension of Truth that possesses your inheritance? All that is Christ is yours to inherit. And yet nothing that Christ is can be accessed and possessed and inherited without faith. You are set apart unto the universe of Christ when Truth washes away one man, and reveals Another.

I don't suppose that I am communicating very well how big of a deal this is. This is it. This is everything. Jesus says to His Father, "Father, everything I have is theirs. Everything I am is theirs. My glory is theirs. My love is theirs. My inheritance is theirs to share. Indeed they are co-heirs with me. Father, I don't pray that they be taken out of the world. That is not what they need. I only pray that they be sanctified in the truth."

So many in the church are sadly waiting to be taken out of the world to experience the inheritance. So many have projected into the future the present realities that are possessed by faith. Because sight cannot access them now, we assume that sight will access them later. But this is a lie. Sight will never access Christ. Faith will access Him now and forever. Faith will access and experience the glory of Jesus Christ.

Let me just read again to you the last Scripture from the list that we read earlier.

2Th 2:13 *But we ought to thank God always concerning you, brothers, beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the truth, 14 to which He called you through our gospel, to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We'll stop with this for today. I skipped my favorite verse from the list – the one from 1st Peter chapter 1. It would be too much to get into this week, so I'll probably try to continue with this next week. Amen.