

The Cross as Sanctification

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Bible Text: John 17:19; Ephesians 5:25-27

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We read holy Scripture in the 17th chapter of the Gospel according to John. John 17.

1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: 2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. 3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. 4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. 6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. 7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. 8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. 9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. 10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. 11 And now 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. 12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. 20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21 That they all may

be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. 24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. 26 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

We read the word of God this far.

My text this evening is the 19th verse of the chapter we read, John 17.

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

At this time of the year, beloved, the church pays attention to the suffering and death of Jesus in a special way. We call this the time of Passion remembering the passion or suffering of Jesus that culminated in his death by crucifixion. Often our ministers profitably will preach a series of sermons devoted to the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. The words of our text tonight, with the entire 17th chapter of John, was the original Passion sermon and that sermon was preached by the one who suffered and died himself, our Savior, Jesus Christ. The entire 17th chapter of John is devoted to the impending suffering and death of the Savior. Jesus spoke these words the night of his capture in the garden of Gethsemane where he had wrestled with God concerning his crucifixion and therefore the night before his suffering culminated in his crucifixion and death.

Now, I am well aware that strictly speaking, our text and the 17th chapter of the Gospel according to John are not a sermon but a prayer. Nevertheless, Jesus prayed this prayer publicly in the presence of eleven of his disciples and in this prayer he taught the meaning and the purpose of his death the following death. Besides, the words of his prayer have been written down in Scripture and therefore are Jesus' own explanation of his death to us, his church.

One thing we learn from Jesus' own description of his suffering and death is that that suffering and death are good, something to be celebrated by the church with great joy as we do tonight. There is nothing in the entire 17th chapter of the Gospel according to John of grief and gloom. From beginning to end, Jesus' own reflection on and instruction about his suffering and death are victory, eternal life, joy and salvation. That suffering would mean pain and death for Jesus but even for Jesus, that suffering and death would earn an culminate in his being glorified by the Father. His suffering was the way to victory and glory and for us, those about whom he speaks in the chapter as those who were given to

him by the Father before the foundation of the world and those about whom the Lord says in our text that it was for our sakes that he died, the suffering of Jesus Christ accomplished our salvation from sin and death.

We regard his suffering and death therefore as good, and the particular good that comes to us from the death of Jesus Christ according to our text, is our sanctification. The text proclaims our sanctification as the great benefit to us of the Passion of Jesus Christ. "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." Jesus here is referring to and describing his death. "I sanctify myself," refers to his death; refers to what is going on in his death; refers to what he does by his death. He sanctified himself in order that we might be sanctified through the truth and that's the word of God to us tonight. It's a word about the cross but the cross as sanctification.

Notice with me from the text, first, the sanctification of others, including you and me. Second, the sanctification of himself, that is, the sanctification of the suffering and dying Savior himself. And then, third, our sanctification through the truth. The cross as sanctification: the sanctification of others; the sanctification of himself; and sanctification through the truth.

The purpose of the death of Jesus Christ was the sanctification of others. Jesus died for others, in the words of the text, "for their sakes," and his purpose in dying for these others whom he, himself, describes in the 17th chapter as those human beings whom the Father had given him out of the world from eternity, that is, those whom God has elected, the purpose of Jesus in dying for them was their, own sanctification. This may well surprise us, that is, that the purpose of the death of Jesus was our sanctification. Not our justification, but our sanctification. Not the forgiveness of our sins, but the deliverance of us from the power of sin. Not our peace, but our purity. Not the deliverance of us from the punishment of sin, but the deliverance of us from the power of sin.

How often do you and I think of the cross of Jesus Christ as accomplishing our sanctification? How often is the cross preached among us as our sanctification? But this was the view that Jesus, himself, took of his cross and this is the understanding of his cross that he willed his disciples and us to have. This does not imply, of course, that the cross did not also have as its purpose our justification or the forgiveness of our sins. Certainly, justification was a purpose of Christ in his suffering and dying but our justification was not the only purpose of his death, neither was it the ultimate purpose of his death. Another purpose, the ultimate purpose of his dying was our sanctification.

The apostles understood well what the Lord was teaching here about his crucifixion and therefore we find the same teaching about the cross of Jesus in the apostles and their writings. In Ephesians 5:25 and following we read this about the death of Jesus Christ, "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it," his giving of himself for the church was his death, and now notice the purpose, "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without

blemish." The purpose of Christ's giving himself for the church in his death was the church's sanctification or holiness.

Similar is what the apostle writes about the death of Jesus in Titus 2:14. Titus 2:14 with reference to our Savior, Jesus Christ, he writes, "Who gave himself for us," again, that's the cross, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." The purpose that we be purified as a peculiar people who therefore are zealous of good works is sanctification. The purpose of the cross was our sanctification.

Jesus died with the purpose to make his people holy and that holiness is an actual cleansing of his people from the filth and defilement of sin so that they are clean and pure in love for God that obeys God's commandments. The holiness that is referred to in the text is a real holiness accomplished by a radical change in our hearts and lives.

The purpose of Jesus with his Passion was that a people dead in trespasses and sins, totally depraved, would be delivered from the power of sin; would be delivered from the power of every sin so that sin would no longer rule over us but Jesus Christ would rule over us. The purpose of Jesus Christ with his suffering and dying was that men and women, young people and children who are by nature worldly, thoroughly worldly, worldly through-and-through, one with the world of ungodliness, should be separated from the world of ungodliness. Separated from ungodly men and women. Separated from the ungodly way of life of the world. Separated from the ungodly thinking of the world. Separated from the ungodly behavior of the world. Holiness is separation from the wicked world which we know as the antithesis and that was the purpose of Christ with his suffering and dying.

Repeatedly in John 17 Jesus says of his people that by virtue of his cross they are not of the world as I am not of the world. And in verse 14 of John 17 it says because they are not of the world, the world has hated them as the world has also hated me. There is no friendship there. There is no close relationship of communion there, not if the world hates us for not being of the world. The purpose of Jesus with his suffering and dying was that a people who by nature were rebels against God, prone to violate and trample upon the will of God and taking pleasure in disobeying God's commandments, should become a people who are consecrated to God in love from the heart so that they take delight in the will of God and desire to obey the commandments of God.

Our holiness, our genuine holiness, was the purpose of the death of Jesus Christ. "I sanctify myself so that they may be sanctified through the truth." This sanctification of us is a benefit, beloved, of precious blessing of salvation. That's declared plainly by the words of Jesus in our text. "For their sakes," that is for the benefit of these people, "I sanctify myself with the purpose that they may be sanctified through the truth." Our sanctification was the benefit that Christ aimed at by his suffering and death and, obviously, our holiness in Christ's estimation was a precious blessing because in order that we might have this blessing, he was willing to undergo all of his suffering and finally to suffer the agony of the cross. It is as if the Lord says in our text, "So precious is this

benefit that I will for my people, that I am willing to sanctify myself in the death of the cross."

Do you regard that work of God in your life of sanctification as a benefit? Do I regard holiness which is the result of this sanctifying work of God as a precious benefit? There is reason to believe sometimes that we do not share Jesus' estimation of the blessing or benefit of sanctification. A strange attitude appears sometimes among some in the church and peculiar questions are raised sometimes by members of the church that indicate a lack of appreciation for the benefit of holiness and for the saving work of sanctification. Sometimes in the church there is found this attitude and this question: must I indeed give up this dear sin in which I am walking and which I am enjoying? Whether that be drinking one's self drunk regularly, or amusing one's self by watching pornography on the internet, or harboring some resentment or hatred for a brother or a sister in the church, must I give up this dear sin? Oh, I prize justification, the forgiveness of my sins and I have a desire one day to be saved everlastingly in heaven, but must I break with these sins in which I am walking? Or there is sometimes the attitude shown by such questions as these: am I to break so completely with the world of the ungodly? May I not have fellowship with this ungodly friend? May I not entertain myself with the ungodliness of the world's violence and sensuality and antichristianity in television programs or the movies perhaps that I play in the privacy of my own house? Oh, I prize and desire justification but with regard to sanctification, I'm rather cold with respect to that benefit of salvation. And must I really devote myself to God so that I dedicate the entire Sabbath day to him, attend diligently the house of God twice when that is possible, and devote the rest of the day to spiritual activities? Is that required of me? And with regard to the other six days of the week, all of the rest of my life, must I also devote all of my life to the glory of God rather than to myself, to the piling up of wealth, to the attainment of earthly fame, to the achievement of some position of power? This attitude and such questions as these, beloved, display that those who have this attitude and those who ask questions like this regard holiness as an evil to be endured rather than as a blessing to be enjoyed and that attitude can never understand Jesus' description of his own suffering and death. "In order that my people may be sanctified, I sanctify myself. I go to the cross of Calvary."

So precious is the benefit of holiness of life, but holiness is a benefit, a priceless, precious blessing of salvation, not inferior to the blessing of justification or the forgiveness of sins. To be ruled by the power of sin is slavery with all of the wretchedness that slavery involves, ultimately the ruin of the slave. Sanctification sets you at liberty to be God's free man or God's free woman, which is to be truly and really human. Worldliness of life is shameful, ignoble and ugly, and that's true whether this worldliness is a life of drunkenness and drugs, of sensuality and immoral partying, or the worldliness of devoting one's life to the obtaining of wealth and power and prestige. Sanctification liberates you from that shame and ignobility and ugliness and gives you honor, the glory of separation from that world and from the life of that world to live the beautiful life of God.

And with regard to living for yourself or I of living to myself, that life is foolish and futile. The life of living to one's self ends in a short time in the grave. Death and the grave

pronounce its sentence upon every life of a human that is lived solely for oneself. Vanity of vanities, it was all vanity, and death then ushers one into the judgment of God upon one who has lived for himself as though he were God rather than to live for God who is truly God. How different is the earthly life that is lived not for self but for God and his glory. That life does not end in the grave. That life ends with the reward of everlasting life and glory in the resurrection of the dead and the rule with Jesus Christ over all things forever.

Sanctification like justification is salvation and that salvation comes to us from the cross of Jesus Christ in as much as the cross of Jesus Christ was Jesus' sanctification of himself. There is that relationship, according to the text, between Jesus' sanctification of himself and our being sanctified and receiving the gift of holiness. That's plain from the text itself. "For their sakes," said Jesus, "I sanctify myself so that they may be sanctified." Our sanctification depends upon his sanctification and that relationship of dependency of our sanctification upon his, is emphasized in the text by the little word "also." We read, "I sanctify myself that they also might be sanctified. First I sanctify myself and then as the consequence of my sanctification of myself, as the benefit of my sanctification of myself, they also may and will be sanctified." But when Jesus speaks of his sanctifying of himself, he is referring to his cross and death. Our benefit of sanctification flows to us from the cross of Jesus as his sanctifying of himself.

Surely, one thing is obvious of this description of his death by Jesus, and that is that in his crucifixion and death he was not merely a passive victim of his enemies, whether Judas or the Jewish leaders or Pontius Pilate or Satan himself, but that in his crucifixion and death Jesus was active. The cross was his own decision. Willingly he went to the cross. And in the six hours of his crucifixion, he was not hanging passively and limply there at the mercy of his foes, but he was active. He was intensely active every moment and his activity was that he was sanctifying himself.

And there's the problem for us with regard to this description of the death of Jesus. That we are sanctified is readily understandable to us all for we are unclean and filthy because of our depravity and our sinfulness. We need to be cleansed. We need to be purified. We need to be sanctified. But Jesus, he was the one man who was without sin, who had no depraved nature, who was pure, spotlessly pure throughout his entire life. That he sanctified himself is a difficulty for us therefore. He was innocent. He was free from all the defilement of sin and all his adversaries had to acknowledge that as they condemned him and brought him to the cross. The Jewish leaders could find no fault in him and therefore they had to resort to driving false witnesses to testify against him. Pontius Pilate who condemned him said not once, not twice, but three times, "I find no fault in this man." And even Judas, the betrayer, cried out after his treacherous act, "I have betrayed the innocent blood."

That spotless purity of Jesus qualified him to die the sanctifying death of the cross, because he, himself, had no sin, he could die in the place of sinners and that death was a sanctifying of himself. It was that in two important respects. The question is: how could he sanctify himself by his death? And the answer in the first place is: by consecrating

himself to God, his Father, in doing the will of the Father for him, which was that he die for the salvation of his people, and particularly the will of the Father was that he save his people by making them holy.

Holiness is supremely and fundamentally the consecration of one's self to God in love. Jesus consecrated himself to God in love in all his suffering, and especially in his dying. The will of God for Jesus Christ was that he suffer and die the wrath of God in the place of the people whom God had given to him, and that Jesus did willingly. Oh, that required of him self-denial. That required of him the renunciation of his own will. That called for hard struggle in the soul of Jesus as he expressed himself in Gethsemane and he prayed that amazing prayer, "Father, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not my will, not my will but thy will be done." That's holiness, beloved, the consecration of one's self to God in love for God so that you do God's will regardless what the cost is for you, yourself, and no matter how that will of God conflicts with your own will.

That's what holiness was for Jesus, he consecrated himself. In that respect, we can learn something about this for our own lives. There are members of the church who by their own weakness and folly find themselves snared by some sin, the world calls it addiction, and what it is, in fact, is a powerful grip upon the member of the church by some iniquity. It may be that one is dominated by the desire to drink too much. It may be that one by his own foolishness has become enslaved to drugs. It may be that one has fallen deeply and snarled up his life in pornography. It may be the harboring of a burning resentment against one's neighbor. Then, as it were, that member of the church comes to his or her senses and perhaps even seeks the counsel of the pastor for deliverance from this bondage to sin. He or she realizes that what he or she is doing is wicked, feels the destructive consequences of that sin for himself and for others, and has a certain desire to be freed; has a desire, in the language of the text, to be sanctified with regard to that iniquity. He makes up his mind that he's going to fight against this bondage and to strive to be delivered from it, but the result is failure and then he or she may even say, "It's hopeless for me. Sin has such an enslaving power in my life that I can't possibly be delivered from this sin." And the mistake that that member of the church is making is that he forgets that holiness is not merely avoiding some destructive sin and holiness is not merely keeping some rules of good behavior, but holiness of life supremely and fundamentally is consecration of one's self to God and that must live in the consciousness of the church member as he struggles against whatever sin has temporarily enslaved him, and as he desires to be liberated, it must all be for God's sake. It must be a matter to him or to her of devoting himself in love to God and by the power of the Holy Spirit, that motivation, that understanding of his spiritual struggle can and will bring him to victory and liberate him from the sin into which he has fallen. Christ sanctified himself by devoting himself in his suffering to God.

The second way in which the cross was Christ's sanctification of himself was that by his death he washed away all his sins and cleansed himself of all his depravity and shameful defilement of sin. Does someone object that this Christ had no depravity and had no sin? You are correct with regard to him, himself personally, but what you overlook is that willingly he made himself responsible for all of the depravity and all of the sins of all of

those whom the Father had given to him. Oh, that was a massive load of filth on Calvary on the shoulders, upon the soul of Jesus Christ our representative.

Examine that load of depravity and sin that he took upon himself. You will see there the adultery and the murder of David. You will see in that load the blasphemous denial of him by his own disciple Peter. And you will see your own depravity, the sinful thoughts and vile desires that you and I are well aware of, the words that treated God casually if not blasphemy in a rage, and the deeds, the shameful deeds that we committed in our youth, and not only in our youth. Never was there such depravity. Never was there such uncleanness in one place as though one man was responsible for them as on that hill outside of Jerusalem in the crucified Jesus Christ, and the stench of that filth went up into the nostrils of the holy God in heaven and drew forth his burning wrath against that filth upon the crucified Savior, and the Savior actively took that wrath upon himself to pay for the sins that he had made himself responsible for, and drop by drop he poured out his precious blood to cleanse that filth, that uncleanness from himself for the sake of his people, and after six hours suffering the payment for our sins and shedding his blood to redeem us from those sins, he had cleansed himself of all of the sins for which he had made himself responsible so that when he cried out, "It is finished!" part of the meaning was, "I have sanctified myself fully. Nothing of the depravity, none of the sins of any of my people remains any longer to be paid for, to be atoned. All are cleansed. All are washed away."

Because the death of Jesus was this substitutionary suffering of the punishment of our sins in our place, his cross accomplished this: that sin simply has no right any longer to rule in us. The world no longer has a right to dominate and enslave us. There is no longer any right of the power of sin in us to cause us to live for ourselves rather than to live to God. Now we have the right to be dominated by the Spirit of Christ. Now we have the right to be separated from the world. Now we have the right to live a profitable life, an honorable life, a beautiful life of living unto God.

Everyone for whom Christ died will be sanctified. The death was effective. He sanctified himself with the purpose that all those for whom he died would be sanctified. This is certain. It may happen with one in his infancy. It may happen with another as with the thief on the cross in the last moments of his or her life. But all of those for whom Christ died will be made holy and in that way, we will also be assured that Christ died for us according to the eternal election of God.

Christ did not die for everyone. He tells us in John 17 he dies only for those whom the Father has given him out of the world, and for their sakes he sanctified himself by his death on the cross. You know that you are one of those for whom Christ died in the way of your being sanctified and one who is not sanctified, one who goes on impenitently living under the bondage of sin, has no reason to believe that Christ died for him so long as he goes on in that unholy life. Those whom Christ died for will also be sanctified and that's because Jesus Christ, himself, will sanctify those for whom he died.

You notice the text says he sanctified himself but we must be sanctified, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Having suffered and died and then risen again from the dead, Jesus Christ receives the Spirit from God so that on the basis of his cross he may impart to those for whom he died this great benefit that he obtained by his death, namely sanctifying us and making us holy. Christ does this now through the truth, the text says. The truth is the word of God and that word of God is the Scriptures as that Scripture is proclaimed, and at the heart of that truth or word of God is the word of the cross, not only as justification but also as sanctification. By that preaching of the word of the cross, Jesus sanctifies his people and makes us holy.

That must be your confidence and mine when we struggle, especially with some powerful sin in our own life. Every pastor has had this experience, I am sure, but sooner or later the member of the church will come to the minister for counsel with some particular sin against which he or she is not making any progress whatsoever and will cry out in despair, "It's hopeless for me! There's no deliverance for me! I must live in this bondage all the rest of my life!" Woe to the pastor who agrees, no matter how hopeless it may seem also to him. There is no sin that is more powerful than the sanctifying work of Jesus Christ through the truth and the cross is Jesus sanctifying of himself, assures everyone who believes in Christ that he can and will conquer his or her besetting sin, be liberated from it to live in holiness of life to God and the motive, the powerful motive for this struggle for Christ worked sanctification in us by making us active and causing us to struggle against sin, the powerful motive is gratitude. This Savior was willing to sanctify himself with regard to all my filth and shame. For him, for his sake, we will live in thankful love, obeying the commandments of his Father. Amen.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, give us to know the cross of Jesus Christ in its sin-conquering and removing, cleansing power. May we not live therefore in the haunting shame of even vile sins that we have committed in the past but live in the peace and joy that Christ has cleansed them all and that they are gone. Grant to us by the Spirit to live in the power of the holiness of Jesus Christ, useful, beautiful, God-glorifying lives for Jesus' sake. Amen.