

Brain Washing

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Bible Text: Ephesians 5:26; John 17:17

Preached on: Sunday, March 19, 2023

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Our Scripture lesson—I'll put it in context—is from Ephesians 5, and I'll pick it up in verse 21, that's page 1,823.

21 Submit to one another out of reverence [or fear] for Christ [meaning awe of Christ, holding Christ in awe and reverence].
22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

The word of the Lord.

Lord, would you help me to open your word today in a very clear and practical way. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

I changed the topic I was going to preach on today, because I was going to preach on “The sting of death” out of 1 Corinthians 15, in that series on “Christian Liberty.” I'll save that for another time. I was struck because today marks the 41st anniversary of a powerful event in my life.

I had fallen into the trap that many pastors fall into, I had neglected my own personal, edifying Bible study for professional Bible study.

What do I mean by professional Bible study? Well, at various points in my life, I've had to preach three messages a week and that meant that I had to prepare sermons and teachings, and so I began to feel as if I were pumping out of a dry well. There was nothing there. There was less and less there as I focused on my professional obligation to be a teacher and to study the Bible so I could present it to my congregation. Along the way, old sins began to creep into my life, and I began to experience defeat in a very terrible way, and one day, it happened to be March 19, 1982, I said to God, "Lord, I'm tired of living this way. Give me liberty or give me death." Wow! Give me liberty or give me death. Desperate praying gives results. It does. Give me liberty or give me death.

And so as I prayed and I sought the Lord 41 years ago today, "Give me liberty or give me death," an idea came to my mind, and it was to pick up a book and read it, and as I read it, it prescribed reading 10 chapters of the Bible a day, and I said as I read it, "Nobody has time to do that."

And the thought came into my mind, "Well, what do you have time for?" And so, I set about that day, 41 years ago, to read, according to the plan in this book, 10 chapters a day, and in one case it involved alternating 1 Corinthians 13 one day, the love chapter, and Hebrews 11 the next day. So, I read them over and over and over again, and as I followed that plan, things began to change in my life. What I want to describe it as is "brain washing." Brain washing. As a pastor, I've heard unbelievable things in my life, and I need brain washing, but more than that, it is that it is with the word of God that God draws us to himself, sanctifies us more and more.

Turn with me, if you will, back to the gospel of John 17. John 17 and listen to these words of Jesus as he's praying to his Father, page 1,680. John 17 and getting it in context, verse 15,

15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

Jesus could have prayed that we would be taken out of the world, but he didn't. He prayed for protection from Satan and the demons he commands and leaving us in the world. And then he says in verse 16,

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. God's word is what God uses more than any other thing to sanctify us.

What does it mean to be sanctified? Well, it means to be set apart from the world, but it's not in our own imagination like where worldly people wear open-toed shoes. Do you know that there are people that believe that's a sin? Worldly people go to ball games. Do you know there are people that believe that's a sin? Worldly people have a drink of wine. Do you know there are people that believe that's a sin, even though Jesus made alcoholic wine, and that's irrefutable if you look at the Greek text? ("οἶνος: a beverage made from fermented juice of the grape, wine; the word for 'must', or unfermented grape juice, is τρύξις," *BDAG*, p. 701)

There are people that believe this is a sin, and that is a sin. What is it to be sanctified? It's to become more like Jesus. It's to become more like Jesus, and being a professional good man—what a terrible thing—to be a professional good man is not just to be conformed to all the things that people think a preacher ought to be, like not doing this in public and not doing that in public, always being nice even when you don't feel good. To be sanctified is to become more like Jesus, and I realized that as my focus in studying was on preparing lessons, preparing sermons, I was losing touch with the heart of the matter.

And I want you to turn with me back a few chapters in John, to John 5, and this is something that's very important, and that's page 1,655 in the pew Bibles. John 5:39, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think," now the Greek word translated "think" there can be translated "imagine," you suppose, you imagine ("δοκέω: to consider as probable, think, believe, suppose, consider," *BDAG*, p. 254), "that by them you possess eternal life." I want to make it really clear and when I talk about reading the Bible and reading a lot of it on a daily basis, I don't want to fall into the error that Jesus is condemning here. "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think," you imagine, "that by them you possess eternal life."

Look at the next sentence, "These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." We need to understand something. The Bible is important. It's God's infallible word. It's the only truly trustworthy thing that we have in this life in terms of knowing what truth is as over against error, yet we can pack our minds with Bible knowledge and not be seeking Jesus.

What happened to me 41 years ago was I was so distressed with my own depravity and sinfulness that I sought the Lord in a fresh way, very similar to the way that I sought him the night I was converted, September 4, 1964, and that is, I wanted the Lord. I wanted himself. I wanted him to fill me with his Spirit again.

And remember this, that while every Christian has been baptized into the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), that Christians are not always filled with the Holy Spirit. We're only filled with the Holy Spirit to the degree that we are full of Jesus, and we can be filled today and go flat tomorrow. Just like a tire that has a nail in it: we leak. And you read in the book of Acts again and again and again of the believers being filled with the Spirit for special occasions and so on (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9).

So what Jesus is telling us here is that he is to be the object of our trust and **the Bible is the means to that trust**. This is really important and that takes us back, we don't have to turn there yet, to Ephesians 5:26. How does Christ take his bride—and that's you and I, we are the bride of Christ—how does he sanctify his bride? How does he make his bride holy? He does it with “the washing of water through the word,” the word of God, and we learn something there that's very vital, and I want you to turn over to the next chapter in John 6 as we go there, but the point is this: **Water baptism without the word is nothing**. You'd be a whole lot better getting a nice hot shower. Water baptism without the word is nothing. It's the washing of water through the word.

And looking over at John 6, I want you to look at verse 35 and listen to what he says here. John 6:35, page 1,657.

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

I want you to think about it. Look at what Jesus says further down, and he says that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood if we would be saved, and turning over the page, we see that very clearly in verse 54,

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.”

What does that mean? “Do you mean, Jesus, do you mean, Lord Jesus, that we need to grab you there during the feeding of the 5,000, and take a big bite out of your arm?” Is that what he's saying, “You've got to chew me and eat me. You've got to gnaw on me. You've got to drink my blood.” What is

Jesus really saying here? Well, what he's really saying here is this, he's saying in verse 63, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

What's he saying? Is he saying it's a figure of speech? No, he's not. He's saying it's the power of the Holy Spirit that makes the Lord's Supper real. It's the power of the Holy Ghost that makes the Lord's Supper real. "The words," he says, "I've spoken to you are spirit, they are life." Verse 63, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing."

So, what does he mean "you've got to chew my body and drink my blood"? Well, he makes it very plain back in that verse we read, verse 35, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry." What does it mean to eat Christ? What does it mean to eat his flesh? It is to, what? Come to him. "He who comes to me will never go hungry." When you're hungry, you eat. When you come to Jesus, you are eating him in a certain sense.

Then he says, "He who believes in me will never be thirsty." So, what is it to drink his blood? It's to believe in him. In other words, there are mysteries: God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, works in us through his word. Without the word proclaimed, without the word read and studied, not as an end in itself but as a means to Christ, then the Lord's Supper is an empty ritual. You may as well substitute something for the crackers and the juice.

I remember back in 1978, my wife and I sponsored a Vietnamese family. Mr. Hy had been, Chung Van Hy, had been an officer in the Navy of the Republic of Vietnam. He had been trained by the United States Navy and had actually briefly lived in the United States. And so, when we betrayed Vietnam and tucked our tails and ran away—as we have been prone to do ever since World War II—when we did that, you can imagine Mr. Chung was grabbed up fast because he had been an officer in the Navy of the Republic of Vietnam, and he was sent to a reeducation center. I'm sure it was really lovely.

But Mr. Chung had knowledge, other people had gold, and the people that had gold were able to pass on that gold to people so they could get a boat and get out of Vietnam, but they needed someone who was an experienced navigator, someone who knew rivers and waters in the South China Sea, and so Mr. Chung, his wife and two children, were able to sell his knowledge in exchange for a place on that boat for them.

And so, they were eventually picked up, and I heard about the Vietnamese boat people who needed to have someone sponsor them to come to the United States, so Sandy and I sponsored Mr. Chung.

Now Mr. Chung was a Buddhist and, you know, our sharing with other people, the Scripture tells us that as we have opportunity, we should be good to all people: Buddhists, Muslims, atheists, agnostics, what have you. We should do good to all people but especially to those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). Now when Mr. Chung arrived at our home with his wife and their two children, they had the clothes on their back and flip flops. That's all they had. So, I was able to find a place for them to live free of charge and find a job for Mr. Chung.

Now they were eager to show their appreciation to us, so they began to attend our church. One day I went to see Mr. Chung, and I explained to him that the Lord's Supper is only for people who are trusting in Christ—Not for everybody—it's only for people who are trusting in Christ. Now Mr. Chung, who was a very intelligent man, did some reasoning. He stopped coming to our Sunday night, once a month fellowship supper because obviously they don't want us to eat that nice roast beef and vegetables and lovely desserts, that's the good stuff, but he continued to come on Sunday morning for the cheap crackers and juice.

The point I'm making here is that the Lord's Supper, without the word, is just crackers and juice. It does nothing.

The same thing is true of water baptism. It's the washing with water **through the word** (Ephesians 5:26).

So, here's the deal. It's very important that we understand this as believers, that it's the Bible, and it's hearing the Bible proclaimed, and it's studying the Bible for ourselves that will change our lives. That's what's important.

So, what is it when we come to the Lord's Supper? We have to trust in Jesus, and we have to come to him. Without coming to Jesus, it does you no good. Far better is the meal we're going to eat this morning after church, but Mr. Chung, using human reason and being a Buddhist and not understanding the ways of the Bible, assumed I was telling him that they really weren't welcome at our once a month fellowship supper.

So, it's the word. It's the word. It's the word. It's not just the word of promise, but it's the preaching of the word, and that's why it is so important that we are Bible students, and not just Bible students, as I say, as an end in itself, but as a means to an end: That's the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, on that day 41 years ago, really burned out, really having nothing to give, feeling as if I were pumping out of a dry well, I sought the Lord through the tool that he had appointed.

You know, we talk about the means of grace. I'd rather refer to them as the tools for connecting with Jesus. The tools for connecting with Jesus. What are the tools for connecting with Jesus? Well, I just mentioned several of them. One tool is the Lord's Supper.

We use the word "sacrament" because it has a reference to several things. It's a mystery. It's a mystery how Christ himself meets with us in that meal. If Christ doesn't meet with us in the meal, it's just crackers and juice. So, we must seek the Lord Jesus when we take the Lord's Supper. And water baptism is a meaningless thing without the proclamation of the word. It's the washing of water with the word—that's what Paul is saying that the husband must deal with his wife the way that Christ deals with the church. That's what's so important (Ephesians 5:26).

So, I am not commending to you—you've got to go out and read 10 chapters a day. For me, at that point in my life, that's what I needed.

In the course of time, I began to modify that some. One of the things that happened is as I read the English Bible, every other day Hebrews 11 and every other day 1 Corinthians 13, I'm slowly memorizing it so I thought, "I'm going to try reading 1 Corinthians 13 in Greek." And so, I did. Wow, that's pretty neat. I finally have read 1 Corinthians 13 in a single sitting in Greek. And then later I tackled Hebrews 11. And then one day, some years later, I decided—well, you know, I invested money in getting an education, I decided to take Greek by correspondence before I ever went off to college because somebody asked me a question I couldn't answer, and I've always wanted to dig things out for myself. And so, I decided that I'd been given a stewardship, so I set about to read through the Greek New Testament, and so every year I read through the New Testament in Greek. And then I added Hebrew to that, and in doing that, I cut my 10 chapters a day down to four chapters a day, which enables me to read through the Bible in less than one year and to re-read certain things. I re-read the Psalms, so I read the Psalms twice, and I re-read the four gospels twice.

So that's my plan now. I'm not trying to put a guilt trip on you, all I'm saying is this: I wanted to preach about brain washing because every single person here needs brain washing. Why do you need brain washing? Because there's so much stuff that just gets into our minds all the time. Think about just the radio. Then think about television and all the stuff with television, all

the things with movies, music videos. What we hear, what we read, the world is constantly pumping green slime from hell into our minds, and you and I need a good brain washing, and so where do we get that brain washing? It comes from the Bible.

So, this is my challenge to you in light of my experience 41 years ago. It was a revolutionary experience and it changed how I do.

I'll tell you how I prepare sermons. Because I try to soak my soul with the Bible, I always have messages and, for me, it's simply a matter of organizing what God has been teaching me in the course of years, months, and weeks. So, I see things and I begin to develop it in my mind, but what am I doing?

What I'm doing is I'm preaching to myself. If I don't preach to myself, if I don't feed on Christ, then what I've got is dry bones, and I can't feed you dry bones. I had to feed my own soul. And so, I was very grateful, and, by the way, our denomination used to have a magazine called *Reflections*, and the story of what happened to me, I wrote, and they put in there, and I happened to link the pictures of that in Facebook, but the point is that God renewed me by the washing of water with the word (Ephesians 5:26).

Where is it with you? Are you living a defeated life today? The way to get victory is to get into the book and read the Bible, but read it with prayer, read it saying, "Lord Jesus, I need you. I need you. I don't simply need intellectual knowledge," though certainly that's good. "I need you, Lord Jesus. Change me. Change me. Make me more like you because the more that I see of Jesus, the more I realize how far I still have to go."

So, may I challenge you to be a Bible reader?

And if you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ, let me make an appeal to you now. Reading the Bible is certainly better than reading other things, reading the Bible is certainly a much better use of your time than other things that you do, but merely reading the Bible, doesn't do you any real good unless you're seeking the Lord Jesus.

To read the Bible without seeking Jesus is like having the Bible as an amulet in your briefcase, purse, or glove compartment of your car, like a superstitious idol.

"You mean that I can make the Bible an idol?" Yes. If you make the Bible an end in itself rather than as a means to an end, you've made it into an idol. You don't want to do that. You want to come to Jesus through the Bible just like you want to come to Jesus through the waters of baptism, just like you

want to come to Jesus through the Lord's Supper, just like you want to come to Jesus as you fellowship with other people.

Have you ever come to a point in your life, as I share with you now, where you came to grips with the fact that you are not good enough to go to heaven, and realizing how many times you try to change your way of life—no matter how hard you try you just fall flat on your face again and again and again?

You're like the way I was when I was in high school. I was overwhelmed with guilt, so one night after my parents were asleep, I took a Bible my mother had bought for me, I took a pair of pliers, and I removed the little brass cross off of that Bible, and I went back to the kitchen, and I heated that thing red hot, and then I stuck it in the middle of my chest, on my sternum, and it burned a hole in my skin, and the mark of that is still here today.

What did that do for me? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Inflicting pain on yourself, hoping that somehow or another it's going to make you more like Jesus is just foolishness. Foolishness.

But I like to remember that mark because it's saying to me, it's not my suffering, but it's Christ's suffering for me.

So, if you ever come to that point where you've said, "Lord Jesus, I need you. I want you. I'm asking you to come into my heart, to come into my life today and change me and save me and, Lord, give me the grace to turn from my sins—even though in this life it's never perfect—to turn from my sins and embrace you as you are offered to me in the gospel."

And if you've done that, would you contact me and let me know? I would like to send you literature. You can contact me through Trinity Evangelical Presbyterian Church here in Texarkana, Texas.

May we pray.

Lord, we pray that you would help us to be people who seek you with earnestness, with a desire to know you, Lord, with a desire to be changed, with a desire to be set free, Lord, with a desire to have our sins washed away, once and for all time, by the blood you shed on the cross.

Lord, I pray that none of us who hear this message would reject it but would draw us effectually, even as you say in the sixth chapter of John, "No man can come to me except my Father who sent me draw him and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44).

Lord Jesus, would you draw people to yourself today?

In Jesus' name. Amen.