

Sanctify Them in the Truth

The "Other" Lord's Prayer

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Father, we thank you as we turn now to the Scriptures and this wonderful high priestly prayer as we enter into the innermost thoughts of the mind of the Lord Jesus in this inner sanctum. We ask for your blessing, help us to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest and all for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please be seated.

Now turn with me to John 17. This is the fourth of five expositions of this chapter. We pick it up today at verse 16 and we'll be reading a little further than the bulletin suggests. Verse 16,

16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. 20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Well, we are looking together at what one author and theologian in the 17th century called the great high priestly prayer, and we are entering in here to the prayer life of the Lord Jesus but not just the prayer life of the Lord Jesus in the presence of the disciples in the Upper Room but I want to suggest to you that this is the kind of prayer that Jesus continues to pray in his work as the great High Priest, in his work that is alluded to in Hebrews that he ever lives to intercede for us.

What does he intercede, what does he pray for, what does he desire for you and for me? One of the great themes of this passage which sets it in a particular context is that he is leaving them. "I am no longer in the world," verse 11, "but they are in the world and I am coming to you, Holy Father." He is leaving this world. He is going into the presence of his heavenly Father. But he's leaving the disciples in the world and in the world there is trouble, in the world there are trials, in the world there is the evil one. "I am no longer in the world but you are," Jesus is saying. You and I are still in the world. The last verse of

chapter 16, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." In the world you will have tribulation. It's a great theme of Matthew 16 at Caesarea Philippi, "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

Now we pick up something, he says in verse 21, "that they may all be one," and we'll take a look at this more extensively next week, but what does that unity mean? What kind of oneness, that they may be one? I put it to you that it's not denominational unity that Jesus is thinking about. I don't think it would have made any sense whatsoever to the disciples in the Upper Room, and for that matter, it wouldn't have made much sense in the first 1,500 years of the history of the church. No, I don't think Jesus is praying here that Baptists and Presbyterians and Methodists and Episcopalians would all come together to form one church. I don't think that's his intent at all. We live in a country where there is free speech, I think. We're entitled to have our opinions and that means that Baptists are entitled to their opinion about baptism, and Presbyterians are entitled to their opinion about baptism, and both of them are using principles, biblical principles to arrive at that point. We may disagree with one another and therefore different denominations is somewhat inevitable when you have that, but I think that Jesus here is thinking about a different kind of unity, unity in doctrine, unity in the truth.

Sanctify them in the truth that they may be one; your word is truth. And it raises the entire issue of objective truth, that there is something that is true and there is something that is false, there is something that we might call, with Francis Schaeffer, true truth, God-revealed truth. If you want to know what somebody actually believes, listen to them praying. You can ask them a bunch of doctrinal questions but you're more likely to get a better answer if you just listen to them praying because when they pray, the most basic things, the most basic realities that they believe and affirm will emerge. God has always been in the process of revealing truth. At the very beginning of creation in Genesis 1, he speaks, he opens his mouth and reveals something of himself and something of the nature of reality and of creation. And Jesus here in this prayer is concerned about truth and unity in the truth.

How do I know what is true? Well, everything that Jesus said is true. And what did Jesus say? That God's word cannot be broken. What does he say in this prayer? "Your word is truth." What is he thinking about? Well, he's thinking about the revealed word of God. He's thinking about the Scriptures, that all Scripture is God-breathed, that holy men of old wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Jesus took a minor law out of the Deuteronomic code and said to the disciples, "Your word cannot be broken." God's word, it cannot be torn apart. It's very important for the church to be united in the truth. When you begin to question it and doubt it and pick it apart and select only those things that you personally agree with, it's a pathway to danger, it's a pathway to apostasy.

It's very important as we were thinking this morning with these new members. How do I go about choosing a church? What church should I go to? You need to go to a church where the truth is expounded, where the truth is upheld, because only the truth will save you. And too often I hear these days of folk whose churches have changed and drifted.

They've become woke about something or another, whatever happens to be trendy. You need to look for a church where the word of God is expounded.

"I have given them your word," he says in verse 14, "your word is truth." Look at the world today. The world today cannot define what a woman is. It's pathetic. It's horrifying. If there's no such thing as truth, just my truth and your truth, there is nothing that is objective. The highest legal office in the land cannot define what a woman is, it cannot define gender, there's no such thing as mother. Next thing we know, we'll be canceling Mother's Day and it'll be Birthing-Person's Day. A woman with a considerable amount of education, been through some of the best universities of this country, and asked can men have babies and, "Yes," she said. It's because there's no such thing as truth anymore. We have drifted from the definition, the most basic definition of what truth is.

These are just examples of how contemporary this prayer is, "Sanctify them in the truth," but if that's going to do you any good, you've got to know what the truth is, you've got to believe in the truth. Who has the right to say what is true? Who has the right to say what is false? You see people say today, "There is no such thing as truth except the statement that there is no such thing as truth." It's a paradox in itself. It doesn't make any sense. If you ask people today, "Who has the right to say what truth is?" They'll say, "The majority. It's every person for himself. And what's true for me may not be true for you."

It's very important and fundamental that the church ask the question, "What is truth?" And to answer it, "The truth is the Bible, it's the Scriptures, it's the word of God." Truth is the Creeds that are based upon the Bible. Truth is the Confessions that are based upon the Bible. Truth is the Liturgy that is based upon the Bible. It was one of the fundamental questions asked at the time of the Reformation and post-Reformation, "What is the mark of the church?" And one of the answers to that question was, "One of the marks of the church is the right preaching of the word of God." And where you don't have right preaching and teaching, where the word of God isn't believed as the truth of God, you don't have a church, whatever else it is. It may be a social community but it's not a church.

One of the fundamental things that you have to ask yourself and it's the responsibility of the elders to make sure that the answer is correct, what you look for when you look for a church, not just what does it offer and what programs do they have for my children and teenagers and seniors and so on, those are very important but there's something far more important than that, is it orthodox? Is it based on the truth? Has it drifted from the truth? I've talked to quite a number of people over the last year and a half or so, and they suddenly realized that their churches were no longer preaching the truth. They had drifted. They had compromised. They'd gone into the ways and foibles of the world.

There's a narrative that's been at work in modern America for over a century that truth is a matter of social negotiation. Ideas are merely instruments, tools, whose truthfulness will be determined by whether or not they meet the particular needs of the present time. It's pragmatism, what may be true today will not be true tomorrow. The question is not is it true anymore, the question now is, is it meaningful? Does it help me with my particular

agenda? And this deconstruction of the truth has been taking place all around us. That explains why we are where we are in 2022, and never has the church been at odds so much with the culture as it is now. Yes, the church and the culture have always been at odds but I think we're at a place that is almost entirely unique. We are seeing the death of Christian civilization that has been in place for 1,500-1,600 years but it has died. It has gone. It has been abandoned. It is no longer shaping the contours of our culture.

And Jesus is saying here in his prayer, "I'm going to leave you in the world. I'm going out of the world but you are going to be in the world, and in this world there will be tribulation and trial and difficulty." And we'd better get ready for it. It's a war of ideas and it's a war about the very basic essential definition of what is true and what is false, the fundamental importance of truth, and we must have a grasp of it, and we must have a confidence in it, and we must confess it. "I believe the Bible to be the word of God. I believe the Scriptures to be inerrant. I believe the Scriptures to be infallible. That when the Bible speaks, God is speaking." That's our fundamental conviction and without it there is only drifting, there is only pragmatism, and in the end the death of the church.

Jesus is saying something here that is absolutely fundamental as he thinks about his disciples, but it's also something that he thinks about you and me in 2022. "I want you to know the truth. I want you to love the truth. I want you to confess the truth." Yes, you do it winsomely, you do it meekly, you do it like Jesus did it, but you uphold that and without it we will never survive. Jesus is praying for you to enable you to survive and to survive well and to survive strong, but you must believe the truth.

But then, secondly, he says something else, that truth sanctifies, doctrine sanctifies, the truth of God sanctifies. Now this word "sanctify," there is no verb form in English of holy so we don't have a form that says to holify, but in Greek the word "holy" and "sanctification" are one and the same. One is a noun and one is a verb. And for that matter, the word "saint" belongs to the same group. Remember when Paul writes to the Corinthians and Corinth, for sure, is a troubled church, it's a difficult church. No minister wants to be called to the church in Corinth. It's full of trouble, terrible things, unspeakable things were going on in the church at Corinth, but seemingly were not going on in other churches in Asia Minor. How does he write to them, because he has some harsh things to say to them? He begins by saying to them, "To the church at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." It's amazing. They are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be the holy ones, literally.

We're all saints if we love Jesus this morning, every one of us. Don't be bedraggled by what is holiness and Rome says about saints, and certain individuals who 150-200 years afterwards are raised into sainthood. That's not the biblical perspective at all. Every Christian is a saint. Every Christian is a holy one. Every Christian has been set apart in Jesus Christ. We are sanctified in Jesus Christ. There's a sense in which that sanctification, that setting apart has already taken place.

The basic idea here is to be different, to be set apart for a holy use. There were instruments, pots and pans in the book of Leviticus used in the Levitical sacrificial

system that were holy. That means to say they were set apart for a very specific use and that's what Paul is saying about the Corinthians. These Corinthian Christians, they were set apart, they were different, the Holy Spirit had come and quickened them and regenerated them and given them a new heart and a new mind and a new will and new affections. They were a new creation in Jesus Christ. They were not what they once were.

But Jesus is praying for ongoing sanctification. "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth." He wants you to grow in holiness. He wants you to become more and more sanctified and some of you have a long way to go, the Holy Spirit has more to do in some of you than others, and how is that going to take place? How am I going to be sanctified? And what does it essentially mean? It means to be like Jesus, to be Christ-like, to be shaped and honed more and more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ, make me more like Jesus. It's a call to mortify sin. It's a call to put on the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. It's a call to meditate on the future life. Sanctify them in thy truth; thy word is truth.

So one very quick and basic application here because how is Jesus' prayer going to be fulfilled? We've got to spend time in the truth. We've got to spend time in the word. We've got to read it every day and study it and meditate on it, and attend Bible studies, and attend Sunday school, and attend church where the word of God is proclaimed because that's how you're going to be sanctified, that's how you're going to grow in grace, that's how you're going to fulfill the prayer of Jesus. He prayed it 2,000 years ago but he's praying it right now for you and for me and we must not let him down.

Father, we thank you, thank you for your word, thank you for this extraordinary prayer. Sanctify us through the word; your word is truth. And hear us, we pray, in Jesus' name.