

Sanctified from the world

I have given them your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. Jn 17:14-19

Recently I read this afresh and thought that there was something important that I had not seen before; especially the verse, 'And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth'. I sought the Lord for wisdom and meditated on it for a few days, but it was only as I was speaking on the passage in church that more light opened up to me. This in itself is an important principle; that is, we get understanding in the fellowship of the body of Christ. That is where grace is; that is where we are equipped.¹ What we need is faith to lay hold of this truth.

In this simple paper I want to get to a few simple principles that I believe Jesus is expounding here.

First it is vital to read the context of Jesus' earlier statements made in his final discourse with the disciples in Jerusalem at the Passover. Jesus' prayer in Olivet is the application of these statements and promises made in intercession to God to work them out. All that Jesus earlier promised them, especially the ministry of the Spirit to each one of them and us, is the subject of Jesus' prayer. It is his praying that enables us to receive all that he promised. To get a clearer picture of what Jesus is praying for, read the earlier statements about what he promised (Jn c13-16).

So, Jesus promised his people a number of things in his Olivet discourse and his prayer is the petitioning of the Father that these promises will be fulfilled. One of the greatest obstacles to Christians in working out these things is a wrong association with the world. Consequently, it is a high priority for the Lord that his true disciples are kept free from the world; hence this aspect of his prayer.

It is a valid question to ask if supposed Christians who have no experience of the things Jesus talked about are really Christians at all. Jesus' prayers are always answered. If Jesus prayed that his true disciples would be kept from the world, sanctified by the truth, then there is the danger that worldly 'Christians' are not Christians at all.

This, on its own, is a serious matter today since it is undeniable that a huge number, perhaps the majority of professing believers, are far too entangled in the world for their own good. This is one reason why the modern church is in such a mess. Could it be that vast numbers of churchgoers are really not believers at all? It is a sobering thought, but one I will not pursue here.

¹ Notice the corollary of this. Those who deliberately avoid fellowship in the body will not receive grace or revelation, but will fester. Those who are thrown out of the church in discipline will receive no grace or revelation. However, those who love the body but cannot get to it for various reasons (e.g. sickness or lack of true churches locally) will be honoured by God. The means of grace are in the body.

Christians are not of the world

Twice Jesus says here that Christians are not of the world: ‘they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world ... They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.’ Christians do not need to be taken out of the world [‘I do not pray that you should take them out of the world’], they are in the world but not of it. This is vital: genuine believers are not of this world.

Now a test for genuine disciples is whether the world finds Christians awkward, out-of-place, mysterious, and not quite right. Christians should not be completely at home with worldly people and worldly people should not be entirely at ease with Christians. They are from different worlds. If the churches and Christians are fully identifiable with the world then they are lost; something is very wrong.

Churches are not comfortable places for sinners

The world has hated them because they are not of the world.

Neither should sinners in the world be perfectly at home and comfortable in church meetings. The struggle of many churches in recent decades to achieve this is a serious mistake. The church is the temple of the living God and is a holy place. For a sinner to enter into a holy place there ought to be great trepidation and fear that God will find him out in his sins. Sinners cannot approach God without being terrified.

The fact that many seeker-sensitive churches have made churches more comfortable and amenable to sinners is proof that they have abandoned any understanding of the doctrine of sin. Sinners are comfortable in these churches because they are not holy and there is no threat to sinners.

You cannot fellowship with God without holiness. You cannot have holiness without the condemnation of sin. You cannot, therefore, engage with sinners without conviction of sins. Indeed, there is no hope for sinners unless the whole question of sin is not only raised but also answered in redemption.

The world is not a comfortable place for Christians

Genuine believers do not find the world amenable and secure. The more a true Christian gets involved with the world, the more distressed he becomes. The reason for this is that the world is the realm of sin and rebellion to God.

Believers are prone to sin, due to having an old nature, but they find that when they give in to sin it gives no lasting satisfaction and leads to futility. They find that the temptation is more enticing than the commission of sin and that satisfying temptation does not lead to lasting pleasure, peace, fulfilment or joy. Instead, sinning leads to momentary pleasure that quickly flies away; distress, emptiness, sadness and guilt. Fellowship with the world does not satisfy a genuine believer but ultimately makes him anxious, distressed, depressed and guilty, necessitating that he gets right with God.

The corollary of this is that if supposed Christians are able to constantly fellowship with the world without any qualms at all, then there is a strong concern that this person is not a true Christian at all.

Christians are from a different realm

The basic reason why Christians cannot enjoy being part of the world is that in the root of their nature that are from a different realm entirely. The Christian is called to live in the new nature, to abide in Christ and to walk in the Spirit. He is to set his mind on the things above and not on the earth. He is called to look unto Jesus.

The essential change in a converted sinner is that he is born again and has become a new creature in Christ; a heavenly creature, a spiritual person, someone who is not of this world any longer. Believers are those who take this doctrine seriously and live accordingly.

Being sensitive to this they realise that the world of heaven and the world on earth are not just different but they are at war. The flesh is opposed to the Spirit. The old nature confronts the new nature in the battleground of the conscience. The devil (at home on the earth in the aerial realms) is at war with the God of heaven. Heaven is a place of righteousness; the earth a place of sin. The two realms could not be more dissimilar.

It thus becomes eminently clear that a true Christian is not at home in the world because it is foreign to him and threatening. It is unsafe.

Don't over anticipate the kingdom

A further mistake made by many today, particularly Charismatics, is to claim prophecies and promises as being applicable today that are only fulfilled in the future. Thus many seek to build a spiritual utopia on earth today when that can never happen and what they produce is a worldly caricature of God's kingdom.

This world is a place of tribulation for the believer;² it is a vale of sin and trouble. It is a place we are passing through because we are pilgrims here who do not settle down.³ This is because we have a heavenly city⁴ and do not seek to build God's kingdom on this earth because his kingdom is spiritual and heavenly.⁵

Thus, all the promises about God's glory covering the earth and the restoration of all things are only applicable to the period after the Second Coming when heaven is on a renewed, restored earth and the elect dwell on the earth with Christ in the heavenly city.

Thus all attempts to build a restoration church in earthly terms (such as communes or ideas of world domination) are deceits based upon wrong doctrine and twisting Scripture texts. The result is worldly church structures and aspirations in every case.

The world is the ground of sin and Satan

I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one.

Jesus prayed that we should be taken out of the world (not the earth) so that we could be kept from Satan. The world is the stomping ground of the evil one; it is where he rules through the sin of men. He has no rights to ruling the earth, since it belongs to God and all that is in it; however, he rules as a usurper through controlling the sin of men upon the earth.

Thus the enemy makes a system upon the earth that is the sphere of his influence in men. This system controls culture, society, politics and all the life of the people in the world. It is where the characteristics of Satan are expressed in a material realm through sin in men. This is what the Bible calls, 'the world'.

² Jn 16:33, 'In the world you will have tribulation'.

³ 1 Pt 2:11, 'Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims'.

⁴ Heb 11:16, 'they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them'. Heb 12:22, 'you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem'.

⁵ Jn 18:36, 'Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here"'.

The characteristics of the world are usually based upon divine principles twisted into their opposites. God rules by righteousness; earthly rulers govern in unrighteousness, and thus cruelty, oppression, deceit, and harshness. God rules with compassion to the weak; worldly rulers oppress the weak. God is truth; the world is run by lies and deceit. God expects righteous obedience; the world is disobedient and rebellious. God expects humility; worldly men are arrogant and proud.

The example of national governments

If a country seeks to rule by divine principles (even though it is still a part of the world system) it will mitigate the effects of sin but will not eradicate it. Consider a country like England in the Victorian Age which, though there were hypocrisies and contradictions, at least superficially it attempted to follow divine principles. Victoria claimed that the Bible was the foundation of her rule and English law was based upon Biblical statutes. The Christian religion was a key part of education both in the curriculum and the running of it, while the Christian church was a fundamental part of society – even for irreligious people.

Compare that to nations built upon atheism, such as Communist China or Stalin's USSR. Such nations degraded themselves even to the point of killing millions of their own people for dissent.⁶ In God's judgment even the basics of prosperity were damaged: quality of life was extremely poor for millions of people; hunger was a normal part of life for many. Oppression was everywhere, from the gulags of Soviet Russia to the killing of intellectuals in China.

Victorian Britain and Communist China can be taken as two opposite sides of the same coin. One was more altruistic and ethical the other was more demonic and cruel, but both are part of the world system; both are not the righteous government of God.

Everything in the world is tainted by sin and serves Satan

We must make no mistake here; there is nothing of true spiritual value in the world for the believer. There may be isolated examples of altruism, philanthropy, heroism and so forth, which rise above the normal level of selfishness, but everything in the world is still sin. The best moral acts of men are still only 'splendid sins'.⁷ The Bible is clear on that.⁸ Genuine good works approved by God are spiritual; they emanate from him and glorify him. Natural man cannot attain to that level of morality.

Thus everything in the world is tainted by sin. It may have a certain level that is elevated above normal base sin, but it is still tainted. Thus a movie which seeks to make a good moral point or which educates on a point of history or principle is far better than a porn film, or one filled with gratuitous death scenes, but both are part of the world. A movie making a good moral point, or one that is historically educational, is neutral for a believer. It does no harm but does no spiritual good either (but being educated is at least helpful).⁹ Other sorts of movies may well be damaging. Ultra-violent films and those with overt

⁶ Stalin is alleged to have killed 20 million people by some, 100 million by others and 6 million is the minimum figure. Mao Ze-Dong (China, 1958-61 and 1966-69, Tibet 1949-50) is said to have killed 49-78 million.

⁷ Coined by Augustine and repeated by Calvin.

⁸ Ps 14:1; Prov 3:33, 12:10, 15:8-9, 26, 21:4; Eccles 7:20; Isa 64:6; Matt 7:18.

⁹ For example, one of my favourite movies is 'Zulu'. It is a fairly historically accurate telling of the battle of Rorke's Drift and is thus educational. It helped me get a GCE in history in the mid-60s. It is also a well directed action movie. There is, of necessity in a war film, some violence, but this is toned down compared to what modern audiences are used to. It also demonstrates passionate heroism and selflessness. I consider this a helpful film.

sexual content will certainly do damage, but so will light dramas that contain strong worldly ethics that have a subliminal effect.¹⁰

So, everything in the world is tainted by sin, but some of it is toned down while other parts are excessive.

What about the really good stuff?

One will ask, what about truly brilliant and inspiring works of art? What about Handel's great religious compositions, Bach's harmonies, Pavarotti's singing, Michaelangelo's frescos? Is not this a touch of divine holiness?

There is no doubt that God gives men talents and gifts; the inspiration for their art work is part of the creation that God gives men along with their personality. Just as God makes a person tall or short, thin or fat, quiet or loud, literary or musical, a poet or a painter, so God gives some people great artistic talents. [This is not grace but an aspect of individual creation under God's sovereignty.] It is then their responsibility to be a good steward of that talent and use it for God's glory. Of course, men fail in this regard. Frequently, really great artists and composers were truly awful characters, such as Caravaggio, Lord Byron, Dylan Thomas, Egon Schiele, Rodin, Benjamin Britten or Wagner.

Such men produced great art as a result of their gifting but it did them no good and their art is not godly – it is just the reflection of a talent God gave them that they misused. Indeed, one can trace the development of society in the reflecting expressions of art and music. The degradation that began in the 20th century (as evidenced morally by two world wars and the futility, violence & debauchery of society) is clearly demonstrated in the waves of modern art: Dadaism, Surrealism, German Expressionism, Cubism, the Bauhaus, Abstract Expressionism, Installation Art, Performance Art, Conceptual Art and Post Modernism.¹¹

Some artists and musicians rise above the degradation of society in general and manage to present works that have value in that they promote goodness, high ideals, morality, kindness and beauty. Such artists and musicians ought to be valued as the best in society; but even these are still sinners. They show what people are capable of in their skill and art; they show what a God-created creature can do when they follow their gift and calling. But they are still splendid sinners who need salvation.

The lie of 'common grace'

Many today are infatuated with the modern doctrine of common grace. This only appeared in the late 19th century in the general downgrade of doctrine and church practice at that time. It is unknown in sound church history before that period.

This doctrine claims, amongst other things, that sinful men can do good works approved by God and that the 'good' men do is inspired by God. In other words that God spiritually gifts sinful men by grace, even though they may never get saved.

¹⁰ For instance the common narrative ethic that heroes must 'follow their heart', even when it causes devastation to others, or when a film treats adultery & abortion as acceptable.

¹¹ The supposed 'art' of Tracey Emin (e.g. a soiled bed and dirty clothes) is a true reflection of the vacuous, emptiness of modern London society. The sliced preserved animals of Damien Hirst reflect the current young morbid fascination with death and gratuitous violence.

This doctrine is a lie and pure heresy. There is no grace that does not come from the cross and the grace from the cross is directed purely to the elect to bring them to salvation.¹²

Thus there is nothing in the world that is spiritual, heavenly, or godly. The only thing on this earth that God approves of is his own called-out people in Christ. Even the world of nature (that did not sin) is damaged by the fall of man, by sin, and longs for escape in a renewed earth (Rm 8:19-22).

If the world is the ground of sin and Satan, then the church should have nothing to do with it.

The church is a hidden thing from the world; the world does not understand it just as it did not comprehend Christ when he appeared. The church is so alien to the world that it is a mystery to it. Thus the church is the steward of this mystery, the Gospel (Rm 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 3:3, 9, 6:19; Col 1:26). The world does not understand the mystery of Christ and the Gospel of godliness.

If the world cannot understand this mystery, then why on earth should church leaders seek to adopt worldly ideas, methods and practices in the vain hope of marketing the Gospel better? We cannot list these notions here (but have done so in many other places) but, for example, all 'Seeker-Sensitive' practices fall into this category. This makes every Seeker-Sensitive church unchristian by simple definition. It also makes the famous writers of these churches (some of the most popular Christian authors today) heretics in the fundamentals of their teaching.

But apart from outright worldly structures in Seeker-Sensitive churches, most modern churches (to some degree or other) place themselves in a partnership with worldly ideas. We cannot list all these but some examples would be:

- Hierarchical leadership.
- Authoritarian leadership.
- Multiple managers in church leadership.
- Women leaders.
- Clergy versus laity.
- The use of advertising for Christian meetings.
- Having an individual name for a church.
- Being in a denomination.
- Using instrumental music.
- Applying hypnotic measures in worship.
- Following principles of occult mysticism in worship.
- Seeking to promote your church through the use of modern media (e.g. television).

We can say, immediately, that none of these has any Scriptural precedent and thus they are all iniquitous. They are examples of following worldly ideas instead of God.

If these notions are following the world, then by definition they are also following sin and Satan. Thus many features of modern churches are satanic in origin. This is simple logic.

The need for sanctification by the truth

Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

¹² For more information on this matter see the author's paper, 'Common Grace'.

Because the church is from a different realm, a heavenly realm, then it must be separate from the earthly realm. Sanctification means separation, and particularly separation from that which defiles. The problem with the world is that it corrupts and defiles us. Thus being separate from it is vital.

Make no mistake: separation from the world and its forms is essential.

Not escape from material things

Now we cannot escape being actually on the earth and we are not called out of the material world that we live in. The key is that we must not be part of the moral world of sin and all its forms. As Jesus said,

I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one.

This means that the practices of asceticism and monasticism are wrong. That is not the sort of separation Jesus was talking about.

Legalism wrong

Another mistake is to make a set of man-made regulations that usurp the place of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. We must walk by the Spirit and not by the ideas of men. Thus some denominations outlaw movies, dancing, television and so forth. Now modern movies dancing clubs and television all have their temptations and dangers, but the elemental principles of such things are neutral. Movies can be edifying or bad; television can be noble or base; dancing can be innocent (as in celebratory dancing at a wedding, something Jesus attended) or lewd. Forbidding all dancing would, for instance, mean that ladies who attend dancing fitness classes to lose weight would have to stop – but this would be a sin against their body. They are dancing to control their body and improve it - a good thing.

Some forms of music are edifying while others are clearly demonic, but it is not easy to simply classify these. Thus people who say that all rock music is of the devil are misguided. Some rock music is bad and some is acceptable, like everything else. People who think that innocuous sounding music, like light entertainment songs, is safe are fools. Light entertainment (variety for example) was filled with sexual innuendoes.¹³

Neither can you make broad-brush decisions such as saying that classical music is safe but pop music is evil. Many classical composers were inspired by evil subjects, such as fornication, astrology, the occult, homosexuality etc. and many were evil men; some were murderers.¹⁴

Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind as guided by the Holy Spirit.

What is important is not to be influenced by sin or led into sin.

An example

Many young children today are players of various sorts of video games. Now a hand-held Nintendo may be a useful tool to help a child undergo a long car journey, especially if the game is a brain-teaser of some sort. However, most video game playing is of a far different sort.

The majority of new games involve violent scenarios, such as war or crime fighting, in which the viewer is subjected to the extreme gratuitous violence that is repeated and

¹³ For example George Formby's 'When I'm Cleaning Windows' was about a sexual pervert voyeur.

¹⁴ For example Gesualdo murdered his wife, who was his cousin.

repeated. In addition there are battles against alien foes and zombies where the violence includes multiple decapitations and disembowelling. Kids today watch such games for hour after hour.

Now there is good evidence that such repetitive viewing of violent images does lasting psychological damage. Indeed, it stands to reason that this is true. Furthermore, training of American soldiers actually uses such war games to make soldiers amoral in battle. It is no surprise that problems with war veterans in the U.S. include very high levels of suicide,¹⁵ depression, psychological damage and violent crime.¹⁶

I believe that the numbing effect of these games to violent acts is the reason that many teenagers have adopted seriously high levels of violence on the streets. I have actually seen CCTV evidence of London teenagers attack a defenceless old man at a bus stop where they even stamped on his head repeatedly when he was on the floor. We could list other violent attacks, especially on old ladies, that were disgusting in the level of unnecessary violence. These games cause kids to become inured to the concept of violence.

Thus one could draw the principle that, with very few exceptions, most video games are worldly, and even dangerous, and that Christian kids ought not to watch them. The idea of a video game is not evil, it is neutral and could be used as a force for good, but worldly influences, that are ultimately satanic, result in most games being deeply wicked.

Church issues

While personal issues regarding worldliness must be determined by the individual, and this may vary from person to person, church issues must be guided by church leaders in consultation with the whole church and this should be constant, being determined by Biblical principles and commands.

We could develop, in detail, what is Biblical church practice here but we have done this in many papers and won't repeat ourselves.¹⁷ I simply want to give some examples to show how worldly thinking damages churches.

Examples of godly church practice

Church practice must not only comply with the direct commands of God but must also obey clear principles and precedents established by the apostles. A command of God is that we love one another, therefore, scope must be given for the church to accomplish this; primarily by avoiding formalism. An apostolic precedent is that the church only met in homes and never used rented (or purchased) large buildings; thus churches were small and based upon community. This precedent complies with the former command. A clear principle is that we break bread every Sunday as a memorial to the Lord's death on the cross, thus centring the meeting on the atonement and thanksgiving. This also fits in with a small family meeting in a home.

This is how we establish good Biblical practice, by the conformity of our obedience to God's direct commands, NT principles and apostolic precedents. On the contrary, worldly thinking takes us away from Biblical principles and makes human wisdom the foundation of our practice.

¹⁵ More soldiers have died from suicide on returning home than died in Afghanistan.

¹⁶ For a good movie depicting this see the film, 'The Valley of Elah', with Tommy Lee Jones in great form.

¹⁷ See, for example, 'The Upside-Down Church'.

Examples of worldly thinking in church practice

It is vital that the church avoids following the wisdom of the world in church practice. The following are some examples of this thinking.

- Establishing the leadership according to worldly management systems.
- Establishing the leadership according to worldly monarchical systems.
- Establishing the leadership according to worldly governmental systems.
- Authoritarian (dominating) leadership.
- Using modern technology to the detriment of fellowship. [For example using overhead screens which distract people in worship and teaching.]
- Using drama, light shows and dance in the meeting.
- Focusing heavily on a 'worship' band to provide loud musical accompaniment.
- Using subdued lighting to provide an atmosphere.
- Using market research in order to develop the church according to the needs of local sinners.
- Taking ideas from false religions. [For example the Fourth Dimension visualisation teaching of David Yonggi Cho, stolen from Soka Gakkai Buddhism.]
- Taking ideas from false sects. [E.g. Word Faith teaching adapted from New Thought, Christian Science and the Mind Sciences.]

Examples of worldly sin in church practice

- Encouraging mystical and hypnotic experiences.
- Excessive subjectivity leading to lack of personal control and accountability.
- Commanding the abandonment of self-control. [*'Don't think; drink!'*]
- Behaving in a disorderly manner. [E.g. shouting, screaming, laughing uncontrollably, gyrating, pogoing, making animal noises, shaking uncontrollably, running round the room, falling over. Etc.]
- Being violent. [E.g. hitting someone in order to exorcise a demon.]
- Shouting at people from the platform.
- Using occult techniques and practices. [E.g. visualisation, inner healing, kundalini yoga techniques, mysticism, hypnotism, passing on power by touch, personal directive prophecy etc.]
- False prophecy.

All these things are sin by definition because they arise from disobedience to clear Scriptures. For example, behaving in a disorderly manner contravenes, 'Let all things be done decently and in order', (1 Cor 14:40). False prophecy contravenes many Biblical texts including Deut 13:1-5, 18:20-22; Jer 14:14-15, 23:13-16; Matt 7:15-17.

The example of Jesus

I am not of the world.

If we are confused about how to live in this world but not be of it then we can all study the example of Jesus. He is the perfect model to follow and shows us how to balance these issues.

Note that he did not avoid drinking wine, so it is wrong to tell Christians that they must be teetotallers. He did not avoid parties, and even provided wine for a celebration, but his behaviour was decorous. He ate with sinners but was not afraid to rebuke them during dinner. So going to a dinner party with unbelievers is not a sin. There is no evidence that the Lord ate or drank to excess, but there is much evidence that he was often hungry and thirsty.

He saw no conflict with serving the government (wicked and an occupying force as it was) and paying unjust taxes, unless it contradicted his obedience to God. Those who seek to avoid paying unjust taxes through the courts will find no support from the Lord.

He gave personal respect to civil magistrates but contended against religious leaders. However, he was not afraid to condemn immoral politics and voice an opinion on the ruler, whom he called 'a fox'.¹⁸

He associated with sinful men, but primarily to call them to repentance.

He lived simply, with few material possessions and had no home of his own. His background was from a poor family in a dishonourable region. However, when he made friends with affluent people he was not afraid to let them help him and support his ministry, though he himself did not handle money.¹⁹

He walked everywhere and did not seek to get a horse or a donkey. When he required an ass's colt to fulfil prophecy, he borrowed one. Christian leaders who claim to require fleets of limousines, multiple mansions and so on find no support from Jesus.

Jesus appears to have never travelled out of Palestine and spent most of his time in Galilee. He could easily have journeyed to foreign lands but chose not to. His focus was on his mission and he did not need to venture away from Israel.

He tended to side with the poor in social issues and was popular with the masses but offended the intellectual elite. However, he was gentle to those from the elite who came to him for help.²⁰

He provided for his mother at the end (his father was dead) and was loved by his brothers, who all came to faith.

We could spend more time on this but these pointers give sufficient examples. By studying the life of the Lord in detail we can learn directly from his choices but also derive the principles on which he lived. From these we can draw principles for ourselves.

The essential factor: 'Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth'.

Here Christ shows us that we are set apart from the world by truth and this truth is the word of God. Christ is reiterating what OT prophets said:

The word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth. Ps 33:4

The entirety of your word is truth. Ps 119:160

The word of God comes to us by the Spirit who takes what we read in Scripture and applies it to our hearts. In this process the heart is enlarged and our conscience trained. It is by using the word (which he inspired and which he leads us into) that the Holy Spirit achieves the work of sanctification in us – that is, making us more like Christ and less like Adam.

The more we understand the truth of God's word, the more it is applied by the Spirit to change our character. Being set apart from the world is leading a life of continual repentance – being changed to be more like God.

¹⁸ Meaning a wicked and crafty man; Lk 13:32.

¹⁹ Lazarus, Martha and Mary had money; when Jesus was nearby he resided with them. Judas held the communal money box.

²⁰ Such as Nicodemus.

The big modern mistake is to separate the work of the Spirit from the word he inspired. The Spirit always works in saints on the basis of the word and uses Scripture to edify us. If we ignore Scripture then we hinder the Spirit.

It is the work of sanctification which teaches us to be apart from the world. The more we are set apart to God the more we are also set apart from the world. We cannot have a foot in both camps or we will be unstable in everything we do (Jm 1:8). If we want to grow to be like Christ then we must deny the world. To deny the world we must understand Scripture.

Now understanding God's word is not academic and neither is it fact finding. Understanding Scripture means being established in doctrine. The more you understand Scripture, the more you develop in doctrine. Doctrine is simply the teachings of the Bible systematised for use in life.

The doctrine which you learned. Rm 16:17

The good doctrine which you have carefully followed. 1 Tim 4:6

Give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 1 Tim 4:13

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. 1 Tim 4:16

The doctrine which accords with godliness. 1 Tim 6:3

All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine. 2 Tim 3:16

Speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine. Titus 2:1

To face the issues of life you need to understand what the Bible teaches you about those particular issues. This is doctrine. Those who understand doctrine well are those who are able to live victoriously because they know what to do in life's crises. Those who do not understand doctrine will be pushed about by Satan following every wind of demonic teaching (Eph 4:14).

When a false teaching comes along (as it does every day in these dark times) how can you know how to see its evil ramifications and know how to withstand it? Only by having good doctrine first. You cannot avoid false teaching if you do not first have good teaching. Only those who study Scripture and understand its teaching will be able to stand against false prophets – and the world today is full of these.

Only those who understand truth, who understand doctrine, who study God's word, will be able to withstand the temptation of the world.

Now there is good news here. You do not need to be a theological professor to understand basic Bible doctrine to deal with most situations. Martin Luther trained ploughboys (typical of uneducated classes) in the early days of the Reformation in Saxony and catechised them pretty quickly. In a matter of weeks and months they were able to dispute with priests in the town squares and win. Learning basic Bible doctrine is not an arduous task but hardly any modern leaders bother to catechise disciples these days, and so they are left easy picking for deceit.

A basic catechism is a start, which all can enjoy quickly, but Bible training should then continue as a life long joy and resource. Those who do this are prepared to be set apart from the world and live a heavenly life.

Conclusion

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

Jesus is saying here that the purpose for his incarnation, mission and death, the sanctifying of himself, is to produce a sanctified people; a people set apart by truth. That which sets us apart is the truth in Christ. If we do not have the truth then we are not sanctified in Christ.

Firstly, this implies that all those people who deny the authority of Scripture, who demean the printed Biblical word of God, cannot be sanctified people; cannot be true Christians. How can those who prefer their own speculative, emotional, subjective feelings (the essence of false prophecy in the OT) and ignore or throw out the printed word of God as old fashioned and 'dusty', be in awe of the God of heaven? God holds his word above all his name²¹ but these charlatans throw it in the dustbin. They cannot be genuine believers but are blasphemers.

Every human being that denies or condemns the written word of God will suffer condemnation and judgment at the Last Day.

Secondly, the Lord wants us to be set apart by truth. This means an active, continual commitment to understand, appreciate and obey the word of God to the best of our ability in grace. It is no good saying that you follow Christ as 'the Word' but ignore the written word because the Bible is merely an expression of Christ the Living Word. What is in the written word is the written expression of the mind of Christ given by the Spirit to inspired men who wrote it down for our benefit. Scripture is the very inner thoughts of Christ.

We have the mind of Christ. 1 Cor 2:16

If Christ's own words command us to study Scripture, then anyone who denies the authority of the Bible is disobedient to Christ.²²

Only by being set apart through following truth can we avoid being trapped in the world. When we don't follow truth we get caught up in the world.

For example, many churches deliberately avoid Scripture teaching about church life. Instead of meeting in a home in small numbers under a team of elders, they gather in large numbers in a purchased, dedicated building. To deal with this serious mistake they have to make many more: taking money from the saints to keep the building up which is disobedience; establishing tiers of unbiblical leaders; developing a clergy laity split which ruins spiritual body ministry – and so on. The initial disobeying of God's word leads to getting deeper and deeper into worldly systems until there is little left of anything heavenly.

We must be set apart by the truth of God's word.

WE CANNOT AVOID THE WORLD IF WE AVOID THE DIRECTIONS OF SCRIPTURE.

For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ... We preach Christ crucified ... Christ the power of God and the wisdom

²¹ 'You have magnified your word above all your name.' (Ps 138:2).

²² For example, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.' (Lk 4:4).

of God. ... The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 1 Cor 1:19-25

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2012
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>