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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
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JOHN 17 v 17

"Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word
is truth"

This chapter has been called the holy of holies, the holiest of all in the gospels; the holiest, sweetest, most intimate manifestation of Christ's love and care for His Church. In this chapter the instruction and security and protection and glory and ultimate heaven, belonging to the Church, we have set forth. What an amazing mercy for any poor, sinful descendant of Adam to have an interest in such words as Christ here utters. Terrible to belong to that company, that world, for which Christ did not pray. To have an interest in His intercession is heaven ultimately.

The word "prayer" used in this chapter by Christ is not the same word that is elsewhere used with regard to the praying of the people of God. The latter expresses an infinitely inferior addressing a Superior beseeching and asking; seeking mercy; coming to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. So the publican prayed - "God be merciful to me a sinner". So the dying thief prayed - "Lord remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom". And so Christ instructed the manner of prayer which all His people should follow - "After this manner pray ye. Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name". The word "prayer" used here, Christ's word, or concerning Him, is another word which has this in it, the address of One who is equal to the Person addressed; quite another word. So when we read here that Jesus prayed, and so on, think of Him as being God, addressing His eternal Father. Though in the covenant, God's servant, sent by Him, still in His divine Person He was God; He is God, and so He speaks with authority. You have it in this Word, in this Chapter, "I will". "Father I will that them also which Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am". This is not the word of a suppliant, an inferior addressing a superior, but the word of an equal. Yet, though equal, He was the servant of His Father, and so He prays His

Father to keep these given ones. Keep them - He said I care for them; I commit them to Thee - while they are in the world. "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth." If we have an interest in this prayer heaven is ours surely. The world, with its hatred of God, its persecuting spirit, with all its difficulties, will not keep us out. I pray Thee to keep them from the evil.

Sanctification is a very great word. In the beginning it means, setting apart. Setting persons or things apart from other persons and things, for God. So Israel was sanctified, being separated from all other peoples. So the ground on which Moses stood was sanctified, that is, it was holy because God was there. "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." You will find, if God has taken hold of you, or does take hold of you, there will be this setting apart. You will have to leave the world. God and the world will not have possession of a person at the same time. One, even God, will be first, and will enforce His claim by the sweet power of efficacious grace. Sanctification differs from justification. Justification is a law term, called a forensic term. It is the declaration of a person being just. A guilty person is pronounced just by God by the blood of Christ. "Being justified by His blood". And that sentence affects the person but does not in itself change his mind. It just is a sentence, a divine sentence passed upon a person, but it is very closely allied to sanctification, though it is different, and everyone who receives the sentence of justification in his conscience is surely sanctified. A person who receives that blessed sentence will not, at that moment, live in sin. Sanctification is the work of the Holy Ghost, distinctly attributed to Him. Peter thus speaks to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, and so they were on the side of Christ; begotten unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ. This work therefore is an internal work, a work in the heart, in the conscience, in the affections, in the understanding, and in the walk. Wherever this gracious operation of the Spirit is there is

holiness. "Holy brethren" we read in the Hebrews "partakers of the heavenly calling". These were Christian Jews, called away from their legal standing to the gospel, called away from their carnal ordinances, into the sweet liberty of Jesus Christ. They were holy brethren set apart for God and called, as were the disciples. "Follow Me"; and they had to leave their father and their ships and all the things. "We have left all and followed Thee" said Peter to Christ.

Now this blessed work of sanctification I would like, as enabled, a little to set before you this morning, and may the Lord help me to speak so as to glorify Him, and if He does, may you receive the word.

The beginning of sanctification - when is it? How is it? It is being born again, born of the Spirit, and the Apostle writing to the Galatian churches said - "If we live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit". No-one lives in the Spirit who is not born again; no. Think of it; if you are not born again you are not living in the Spirit. You are sowing to the flesh and of the flesh you will reap corruption. But if you are born again, then what Paul writes to Titus is true of you - "After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost". It is the implantation of a divine principle. It is the gift to a sinner of eternal life actually, a life that, though beginning in him, will never die. The word that Christ speaks is spirit and life; the flesh profiteth nothing. That is, it profiteth nothing in the ways of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." You cannot mix them; you can never make them one. They are always different; their nature is different. Therefore they are two. That is the beginning of sanctification. No-one partaking of this regeneration can live in the world as he did before it came to him. The spirit of the world God removes as to its dominion. The ways of the world are left as to the pleasures that were found in them. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Old things are passed away and behold all things are become new". Is that true of you? Can you remember a change? I do not say were you stopped as the Apostle Paul, when Saul of Tarsus, was stopped, but has there come a change? Can

you say - "Whereas I was blind now I see". I was blind to my state before God as a sinner; now I see it. I was blind to the nature of God, to His just anger; now I see Him, I see it. I was blind to the law and all its claims on me; now I see it and them. I was blind to my condemnation; now I see it, I feel it. Blind to all the dispositions of my heart and did not know that they were Godless; now I see them to be so. O happy man who is thus sanctified.

This sanctification reaches the will; it reaches the will. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power". When a man says in his heart, I choose, if I may but be right, I choose the Saviour whom I dimly see or but slightly know. No man is saved according to his will, as he is a sinful man, yet he is saved according to his will, as he is a regenerate man. Holiness is the choice of a regenerated person. Holiness becomes God's house, and the sinner born again and led by the Spirit says, with some understanding - One thing have I desired; that will I seek after. I desire salvation; I will seek it. I desire justification; I will seek it. I desire pardon; I will seek it. I desire Christ to be my Saviour; I will seek Him. There is that work of the Holy Ghost in the heart of one born again.

This sanctification reaches the understanding. We have no understanding naturally of God or of His things. The world by wisdom knows not God. No philosophy, no intellect, however acute, however piercing, however far reaching, can understand one single letter of spiritual truth. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." The teaching of the Lord Jesus to Nicodemus was this "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God", has no understanding in the nature of the kingdom of God. What can a man understand of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's interpretation of it? A stone, cut out of the mountain without hands, falling on that image, breaking the feet mixed of iron and clay. Then the whole image smashed, made into dust, and driven away as the wind drives chaff away. When the Holy Ghost opens the understanding of a child of God he sees Christ in that stone. He sees the world in that image. He sees the kingdom in himself, and that stone has fallen on that kingdom and broken it. That is sanctification. That is a great work accomplished in the heart and

the man understands several things which before he had no conception of. He understands God, insofar as God has made Himself known. He understands, therefore, that he is a sinner in the sight of God. He understands the law, in a measure, because it comes to him, demands perfection, and curses imperfection in him. "Cursed is the man that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them". And thus a man has an understanding sanctified. He sees God. O, I wish the Lord would show all of you this, that there is a God in heaven, holy, holy, holy; that you might fall before Him as even lost, utterly lost. A man understands then, as it is opened to him, the gospel. He understands Christ in a little measure. "We know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding". We did not get it; we could not cultivate it. He "hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children keep yourselves from idols". The affections are sanctified. "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth". They are happy moments when a child of God has given to him a real love for Christ, for the Father in Him, and for the Holy Spirit; a love to holiness. I believe that one attraction that heaven has for the people of God is this, that they will there have no sin, do no sin; that they will never be plagued with abominable thoughts; that they will never be plagued with a slipping away from God; they will never be plagued with irreverence. Now is it not great for God to come and carry your affections up to heaven? You can say, heaven is in my thoughts; I pray for it. Heaven is a holy place; I love that holiness. God is holy and I would fain be holy. His ways are holy and I would fain walk in them with holy affections. This is sanctification of the affections. It reaches the body. Do not exclaim, in a moment, that I am going to preach perfection in the flesh. I am not. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh". But what saith the Word of God concerning the body of a saint? Well, the Epistle to the Romans says this - "I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Again, he says, in another Epistle - I pray God that your whole spirit and soul and body be sanctified. How is the body sanctified? When you leave the world, when you leave worldly company into which your business may have thrown you for a time. When you discern the Lord's body when you meet

with His saints. When you are enabled, even at one single meal, to do as Paul says - Whether we eat or whether we drink do all to the glory of God. Does not that affect your body? May the Lord help us in this.

"Sanctify them through Thy truth". And again He sanctifies His people by afflictions. How often, if we are at ease, do we get away from God, think upon the world, our interests in it, and get, it may be, drunken and surfeited with care, and the Lord sees this. And the heart may have said I will go after these things. Then says the Lord, I will hedge your way up with thorns. And if He sees you are determined to break through the thorns, as of old it was said by some - "But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouthfor then we had plenty....." (Jeremiah 44 v 15 to 19) - I say, if He sees that determination of carnality in you, He says, I will build a wall of hewn stones around her that she shall not find her paths. Then He says "I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness" and "give her her vineyards from thence." And when His dealings are in your conscience, and your afflictions, and He, favouring you with an open vision (1 Samuel 3 v 1), what then? Why, you turn again to Him. You follow that Scripture - "Let us go up to the mountain of the house of the Lord; He will teach us of His ways." And you will follow Him in Hosea, where it is written - "Come and let us return unto the Lord" (Chapter 6 v 1) There is a real sanctification in your heart by God's dealings with you in afflicting you. This should make us very watchful as to how we are in our afflictions; when we are afflicted. You will fret, you will mourn, you will feel your emptiness. You will feel that this and that God has taken away, and why did He do it, and all that kind of thing, which has in it the very nature of rebellion, though you might not be conscious of rebellion. Then He comes with some sweet touch of His gracious power and what do you do? You fall flat before Him in submission to His holy will.

"Sanctify them", set them apart, bring them to Thy footstool, keep them there. Bring them into Thy ways and keep them walking in them. Bring them into the gospel and cause them to follow it and cleave to it. "Sanctify them through Thy truth". Are you at all sanctified? The word "saint" is given to the people of God in the

Scripture, and "holy brethren" they are called. We may be afraid of the word "saint". I have been afraid of it. It is much abused but it is Scriptural. If the Lord has laid hold of you - and He has laid hold of some of you - and gathered you to Himself, gathered you to His holy throne, made you worshippers of Himself in spirit and in truth, then you are saints; sanctified people. I will give you one evidence which you write as against yourself. The evidence is this - you are pained, wounded, weakened, grieved and defiled often, by sin, and you can say, honestly, at times to the Lord - "The good that I would I do not"; I am a sinner. "The evil that I would not that do I"; I am a fallen person. Go to the world, go to the most moral person you can know; ask him if that is his experience. No, he will say, if he is honest. Just by the way, let me put a word here. Morality is not sanctification. A man, living for a time in a most worldly fashion, has some sense of the evil of it, and he reforms; he becomes a moral man, spotless in his conduct among men. Everybody may admire him, but that has no more to do with sanctification than has a clean new suit of clothing a real relationship to a corpse. My brethren, sanctification is God's work. Morality is man's honour, but it is not grace.

The means of this - "through Thy truth". What is truth? In this case it is the whole glorious gospel of Christ. You have had dropped into your hearts some blessed Scripture which has healed a wound or reproved a sin. In either case, in both cases, there was sanctification. If it came as a sweet healing part of the gospel, O how humbled, how broken, how melted, how repentant, how comfortable that passage made you. It just put you by the side of Christ; it just put you into Him, as it were, and put Him into you, and you and He were one. "Thy truth". If a sin were reproved by some passage in your conscience, what was the effect? It lost its charms; it lost its hold. You were filled with repentance. You crept before the Lord a poor penitent, empty, foolish, weak person, receiving from Him grace upon grace. "Sanctify them through Thy truth". Some revelation of God came to you. What did it do? It made you a worshipper of Him, and smashed any idol you might have been having in your heart. It made you a worshipper of God. A manifestation of the Lord Jesus was given to you. What was the effect? You embraced Him. "I held Him" said one who was sanctified by His presence, "and would not let Him go".

"Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth". This Book is truth. The gospel is a truth. The Epistles are true. Revelation is true. The whole of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is true. You read it, some of the histories of the Scripture, of wicked men and of wicked nations, and of God's dealings with them. Even truth in that form, as inspired, will sanctify you. How? It will cause you to say - "Gather not my soul with sinners nor my life with bloody men". One day in the Lord's courts will then be in your affections better than a thousand in the world. You will separate yourself from ungracious people and they may say, O, how proud he has become. It is not pride; it is humble gratitude and holy grace working in the soul. "Thy Word is truth". Therefore, hold fast, as God may help you, anything by which Christ has sanctified you unto Himself. Cleave to Him in all the things that you have from Himself which lead you to Himself. This prayer answered in the people of God is for the glory of God. There is a glory which Christ had in eternity. There is a glory which is given to Him, different. That glory He gives to His people. "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them". That gift is by the work of the Holy Ghost by which men receiving it are sanctified, and they are made meet, in that way, for the Master's use. O, think of it, earthen vessels filled with heavenly treasure. Sinners blessed with grace, sanctified unto God and for His honour and glory even in this world.

Now I leave it, praying that God would put this great doctrine of sanctification into our hearts and cause us to be a people for His honour and glory.

AMEN.