

Our Lord's Prayer for His People's Sanctification

A Sermon

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"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."—[John 17:17](#).

OUR LORD JESUS prayed much for his people while he was here on earth. He made Peter the special subject of his intercession when he knew that he was in extraordinary danger. The midnight wrestlings of the Son of man were for his people. In the sacred record, however, much more space is taken up by our Lord's intercessions as he nears the end of his labors. After the closing supper, his public preaching work being ended, and nothing remaining to be done but to die, he gave himself wholly unto prayer. He was not again to instruct the multitude, nor to heal the sick, and in the interval which remained, before he should lay down his life, he girded himself for special intercession. He poured out his soul in life before he poured it out unto death.

In this wonderful prayer, our Lord, as our great High Priest, appears to enter upon that perpetual office of intercession which he is now exercising at the right hand of the Father. Our Lord ever seemed, in the eagerness of his love, to be anticipating his work. Before he was set apart for his life-work, by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon him, he must needs be about his Father's business; before he finally suffered at the hands of cruel men, he had a baptism to be baptized with, and he was straitened till it was accomplished; before he actually died, he was covered with a bloody sweat, and was exceeding sorrowful even unto death; and in this case, before he in person entered within the veil, he made intercession for us. He never tarries when the good of his people calls for him. His love hath wings as well as feet: it is true of him evermore, "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind." O beloved, what a friend we have in Jesus! so willing, so speedy to do for us all that we need. Oh that we could imitate him in this, and be quick of understanding to perceive our line of service, and eager of heart to enter upon it.

This chapter, which ought to be universally known as the Lord's Prayer, may be called the holy of holies of the word of God. Here we are admitted to that secret place where the Son of God speaks with the Father in closest fellowship of love. Here we look into the heart of Jesus, as he sets out in order his desires and requests before his Father on our behalf. Here inspiration lifts her veil, and we behold truth face to face. Our text lies somewhere near the middle of the prayer; it is the heart of it. Our Lord's desire for the sanctification of his people pervades the whole prayer; but it is gathered up, declared, and intensified in the one sentence that I have read to you: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." How invaluable

must the blessing of sanctification be when our Lord, in the highest reach of his intercession, cries: "Sanctify them!" In sight of his passion, on the night before his death, our Savior lifts his eyes to the great Father, and cries in his most plaintive tones, "Father, sanctify them." The place whereon we stand is holy ground, and the subject whereof we speak demands our solemn thought. Come, Holy Spirit, and teach us the full meaning of this prayer for holiness!

First, I call your attention to *what it is the Savior asks*—"sanctify them;" and then, *for whom he asks it*—it is for those whom his Father had given him. Thirdly, we shall note *of whom he asks it*: he asks this sanctification of God the Father himself, for he alone it is who can sanctify his people. Lastly, we will enquire *how is this blessing to be wrought?*—"Sanctify them through thy truth;" and our Lord adds an explanatory sentence, which was a confession of his own faith towards the word of the Lord, and an instruction to our faith in the same matter. "Thy word is truth."

I. At the beginning, then, consider WHAT HE ASKED. What is this inestimable blessing which our Savior so earnestly requests at the Father's hand? He first prays, "Holy Father, keep them;" and again, "Keep them from the evil;" but this negative blessing of preservation from evil is not enough: he seeks for them positive holiness, and therefore he cries, "sanctify them." The word is one of considerable range of meaning: I am not able to follow it through all its shades, but one or two must suffice.

It means, first, *dedicate them to thy service*; for such must be the meaning of the word further down, when we read, "For their sakes I sanctify myself." In the Lord's case it cannot mean purification from sin, because our Savior was undefiled; his nature was unblemished by sin, and his actions were unspotted. No eye of man, nor glance of fiend, could discover fault in him, and the search of God only resulted in the declaration that in him God was well pleased. Our Lord's sanctification was his consecration to the fulfillment of the Divine purpose, his absorption in the will of the Father. "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." In this sense our interceding Lord asks that all his people may by the Father be ordained and consecrated unto holy service. The prayer means, "Father, consecrate them to thine own self; let them be temples for thine indwelling, instruments for thy use." Under Jewish law the tribe of Levi was chosen out of the twelve, and ordained to the service of the Lord, instead of the firstborn, of whom the Lord had said, "All the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself." ([Numbers 8:17](#).) Out of the tribe of Levi one family was taken and dedicated to the priesthood. Aaron and his sons are said to have been sanctified. ([Leviticus 8:30](#).) A certain tent was sanctified to the service of God, and hence it became a sanctuary; and the vessels that were therein, whether they were greater, like the altar, and the holy table, and the ark of the covenant, or whether they were of less degree, like the bowls and the snuff-dishes of the candlestick, were all dedicated or sanctified. ([Numbers 7:1](#).) None of these things could be used for any other purpose than the service of Jehovah. In his courts there was a holy fire, a holy

bread, and a holy oil. The holy anointing oil, for instance, was reserved for sacred uses. "Upon man's flesh it shall not be poured;" and again, "Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people." These sanctified things were reserved for holy purposes, and any other use of them was strictly forbidden. Bullocks and lambs and sheep and turtle-doves, and so forth, were given by devout offerers, brought to the holy place, and dedicated unto God; henceforth they belonged to God, and must be presented at his altar. This is one part of the meaning of our Lord's prayer. He would have each of us consecrated unto the Lord, designated and ordained for divine purposes. We are not the world's, else might we be ambitious; we are not Satan's, else might we be covetous; we are not our own, else might we be selfish. We are bought with a price, and hence we are his by whom the price is paid. We belong to Jesus, and he presents us to his Father, and begs him to accept us and sanctify us to his own purposes. Do we not most heartily concur in this dedication? Do we not cry, "Father, sanctify us to thy service?" I am sure we do if we have realized our redeemed condition.

Beloved brethren, if the sprinkling of the blood, of which we spake last Sabbath-day, has really taken effect upon us, we belong, from this time forth, unto him that died for us, and rose again. We regard ourselves as God's men, the liveried servants of the great King—that livery the robe of righteousness. We were as sheep going astray, but we have now returned unto the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls; and henceforth we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. If any should ask, "To whom belondest thou?" we answer, "I belong to Christ." If any enquire, "What is thine occupation?" we reply with Jonah, "I fear God." We are not now at our own disposal, neither can we hire ourselves out to inferior objects, mercenary aims, or selfish ambitions; for we are engaged by solemn contract to the service of our God. We have lifted up our hand unto the Lord, and we cannot draw back. Neither do we wish to withdraw from the delightful compact and covenant; we desire to keep it even unto the end. We seek no liberty to sin, nor license for self; rather do we cry, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Sanctify us, O Lord. Let us know, and let all the world know, that we are thine, because we belong to Christ."

In addition to this, those who belonged to God, and were dedicated to his service, were *set apart and separated from others*. There was a special service for the setting-apart of priests; certain rites were performed at the sanctifying of dedicated places and vessels. You remember with what solemn service the Tabernacle was set up, and with what pomp of devotion the Temple itself was set apart for the divine service. The Sabbath-day, which the Lord hath sanctified, is set apart from the rest of time. To man it is a *dies non*, because it is the Lord's-day. The Lord would have those who are dedicated to him to be separated from the rest of mankind. For this purpose he brought Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, and Israel out of Egypt. "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." The Lord saith of his chosen, "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my

praise." Before long this secret purpose is followed by the open call: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate; touch not the unclean thing, and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." The church of Christ is to be a chaste virgin, wholly set apart for the Lord Christ: his own words concerning his people are these, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

By the election of grace from before the foundation of the world this distinction commences, and the names are written in heaven. Thereupon follows a redemption peculiar and special, as it is written; "These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb." This redemption is followed by effectual calling wherein men are made to come forth from the old world into the kingdom of Christ. This is attended with regeneration, in which they receive a new life, and so become as much distinguished from their fellow-men as the living are from the dead. This separating work is further carried on in what is commonly known as sanctification, whereby the man of God is removed farther and farther from all fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and is changed from glory unto glory, into an ever-growing likeness of his Lord, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled separate from sinners."

Those who are sanctified in this sense have ceased to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers; they have ceased to run with the multitude to do evil; they are not conformed to this present evil world; they are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth. The more assuredly this is true of them the better. There are some, in these apostate days, who think that the church cannot do better than to come down to the world to learn her ways, follow her maxims, and acquire her "culture." In fact, the notion is that the world is to be conquered by our conforming to it. This is as contrary to Scripture as the light is to the darkness. The more distinct the line between him that feareth God and him that feareth him not, the better all round. It will be a black day when the sun itself is turned into darkness. When the salt has lost its savor, and no longer opposes putrefaction, the world will rot with a vengeance. That text is still true, "Ye are of God, little children, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one." The seed of the woman knows no terms with the serpent brood but continual war. Our Lord saith that in this matter he came not to send peace on the earth, but a sword. "Because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." If the church seeks to cultivate the friendship of the world, she has this message from the Holy Ghost by the pen of the apostle James: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." He charges all who would please the world with the black and filthy crime of spiritual adultery. The heart which ought to be given to Christ and purity must not wander forth wantonly to woo the defiled and polluted things of this present evil world. Separation from the world is Christ's prayer for us.

Put these two things together, dedication to God and separation unto him, and you are nearing the meaning of the prayer. But, mark you, it is not all separation that is meant; for, as I told you in the reading there are some who "separate themselves," and yet are sensual, not having the Spirit. Separation for separation's sake savours rather of Babel than of Jerusalem. It is one thing to separate from the world, and another thing to be separate from the church. Where we believe that there is living faith in Jesus, and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, we are not called to division, but to unity. For actual and manifest sin we must separate ourselves from offender—; but we err if we carry on this separation where it is not authorized by the word of God. The Corinthians and Galatians were far from being perfect in life, and they had made many mistakes in doctrine, yea, even upon vital points; but inasmuch as they were truly in Christ, Paul did not command any to come out of those churches, and to be separate therefrom; but he exhorted them to prove each man his own work, and he labored to bring them all back to the one and only gospel, and to a clearer knowledge of it. We are to be faithful to truth; but we are not to be of a contentious spirit, separating ourselves from those who are living members of the one and indivisible body of Christ. To promote the unity of the church, by creating new divisions, is not wise. Cultivate at once the love of the truth and the love of the brethren. The body of Christ will not be perfected by being rent. Truth should be the companion of love. If we heartily love even those who are in some measure in error, but who possess the life of God in their souls, we shall be the more likely to set them right. Separation from the world is a solemn duty, indeed it is the hard point, the crux and burden of our religion. It is not easy to be filled with love to men and yet for God's sake, and even for their own sake, to be separated from them. The Lord teach us this.

At the same time, this word "sanctification" means what is commonly understood by it, namely, *the making of the people of God holy*. "Sanctify them," that is, work in them a pure and holy character. "Lord, make thy people holy," should be our daily prayer. I want you to notice that this word here used in the Greek is not that which is rendered "Purify;" but it has another shade of meaning. Had it meant "purify," it would hardly have been used in reference to our Lord as it is in the next verse.

It has a higher meaning than that. O brethren, if you are called Christians, there must be no room for doubt as to the fact that you are purged from the common sins and ordinary transgressions of mankind, else are you manifestly liars unto God, and deceivers of your own souls. They that are not moral, they that are not honest, they that are not kind, they that are not truthful, are far from the kingdom. How can these be the children of God who are not even decent children of men? Thus we judge, and rightly judge, that the life of God cannot be in that man's soul who abides wilfully in any known sin, and takes pleasure therein. No; purification is not all. We will take it for granted that you who profess to be Christians have escaped from the foul pollution of lust and falsehood; if you have not done so, humble

yourselves before God, and be ashamed; for you need the very beginnings of grace. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh." But sanctification is something more than mere morality and respectability; it is not only deliverance from the common sins of men, but also from the hardness, deadness, and carnality of nature: it is deliverance from that which is of the flesh at its very best, and admittance into that which is spiritual and divine. That which is carnal cometh not into communion with the spiritual kingdom or Christ: we need that the spiritual nature should rise above that which is merely natural. This is our prayer—Lord, spiritualize us; elevate us; make us to dwell in communion with God; make us to know him whom flesh and blood cannot reveal or discern. May the Spirit of the living God have full sovereignty over us and perfect in us the will of the Lord, for this is to be sanctified.

Sanctification is a higher word than purification; for it includes that word and vastly more: it is not sufficient to be negatively clean; we need to be adorned with all the virtues. If ye be merely moral, how does your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees? If ye pay your lawful debts, give alms to the poor, and observe the rites of your religion, what do ye more than others whom ye yourselves reckon to be in error?

Children of God should exhibit the love of God, they should be filled with zeal for his glory, they should live generous, unselfish lives, they should walk with God, and commune with the Most High. Ours should be a purpose and an aim far higher than the best of the unregenerate can understand. We ought to reach unto a life and a kingdom of which the mass of mankind know nothing, and care less. Now, I am afraid that this spiritual sense of the prayer is one that is often forgotten. Oh that God's Holy Spirit might make us to know it by experimentally feeling it in ourselves! May "Holiness to the Lord" be written across the brow of our consecrated humanity!

Beloved, this prayer of our Lord is most necessary, for without sanctification how can we be saved, since it is written, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord?" How can we be saved from sin if sin has still dominion over us? If we are not living holy, godly, spiritual lives, how can we say that we are redeemed from the power of evil?

Without sanctification we shall be unfit for service. Our Lord Jesus contemplated the sending of each one of us into the world even as the Father sent him into the world; but how can he give a mission to unsanctified men and women? Must not the vessels of the Lord be clean?

Without sanctification we cannot enjoy the innermost sweets of our holy faith. The unsanctified are full of doubts and fears; and what wonder? The unsanctified often say of the outward exercise of religion, "What a weariness it is!" and no wonder, for they know not the internal joys of it, having never learned to delight themselves in God. If they walk not in the light of the Lord's countenance, how can they know the heaven below which comes of true godliness? Oh, it is a prayer that needs to be prayed for me, for you, for this church, and for the whole church of God! "Father, sanctify them through thy truth."

II. Now I want you to notice, in the second place, FOR WHOM THIS PRAYER WAS OFFERED. It was not offered for the world outside. It would not be a suitable prayer for those who are dead in sin. Our Lord referred to the company of men and women who were already saved, of whom he said that they had kept God's Word: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." They were therefore sanctified already in the sense of being consecrated and set apart for holy purposes; and they were also sanctified in a measure already in the sense of being made holy in character; for the immediate disciples of our Lord, with all their errors and deficiencies, were holy men. It was for the apostles that Jesus thus prayed; so that we may be sure that the most eminent saints need still to have this prayer offered for them: "Sanctify them through thy truth." Though, my sisters, you may be Deborahs, worthy to be called mothers in Israel, yet you need to be made more holy. Though, my brethren, you may be true fathers in God, of whom the Scripture saith truly that we have "not many," yet you still need that Jesus should pray for you: "Sanctify them through thy truth."

These chosen ones were sanctified, but only to a degree. Justification is perfect the moment it is received, but sanctification is a matter of growth. He that is justified, is justified once for all by the perfect work of Jesus, but he that is sanctified by Christ Jesus must grow up in all things into him who is the Head. To make us holy is a life work, and for it we should seek the divine operation every hour; for "he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God." We would rise to the utmost pitch of holy living, and never content ourselves with present attainments. Those who are most pure and honorable have yet their shortcomings and errors to mourn over. When the Lord turns the light strong upon us, we soon see the spots upon our raiment; it is indeed when we walk in the light as God is in the light that we see most our need of the cleansing blood of Jesus. If we have done well, to God be the glory of it; but we might have done better. If we have loved much, to God's grace be the praise; but we ought to have loved more. If we have believed, and believed steadfastly, we ought to have believed to a far higher degree in our Almighty Friend. We are still below our capacities; there is a something yet beyond us. O ye sanctified ones, it is for you that Jesus prays that the Father may still sanctify you.

I want you to notice more particularly that these believers for whom our Lord prayed were to be the preachers and teachers of their own and succeeding generations. These were the handful of seed-corn out of which would grow the church of the future, whose harvest would gladden all lands. To prepare them to be sent out as Christ's missionaries they must be sanctified. How shall a holy God send out unholy messengers? An unsanctified minister is an unsent minister. An unholy missionary is a pest to the tribe he visits; an unholy teacher in a school is an injury rather than a blessing to the class he conducts. Only in proportion as you are sanctified unto God can you hope for the power of the Holy Spirit to rest on you, and to work with you, so as to bring others to the Savior's feet. How much may each of us have been hampered and hindered by want of holiness! God will not use unclean in-

struments; nay, he will not even have his holy vessels borne by unclean hands. "To the wicked, God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" A whole host may be defeated because of one Achan in the camp; and this is our constant fear. Holiness is an essential qualification to a man's fitness for being used of the Lord God for the extension of his kingdom; hence our Lord's prayer for his apostles and other workers: "Holy Father, sanctify them."

Furthermore, our Lord Jesus Christ was about to pray "that they all might be one;" and for this desirable result holiness is needed. Why are we not one? Sin is the great dividing element. The perfectly holy would be perfectly united. The more saintly men are, the more they love their Lord and one another; and thus they come into closer union with each other. Our errors and our sins are roots of bitterness which spring up and trouble us, and many are defiled. Our infirmities of judgment are aggravated by our imperfections of character, and our walking at a distance from our God; and these breed coldness and lukewarmness, out of which grow disunion and division, sects and heresies. If we were all abiding in Christ to the full, we should abide in union with each other and with God, and our Lord's great prayer for the unity of his church would be fulfilled.

Moreover, our Lord finished his most comprehensive prayer by a petition that we might all be with him—with him where he is, that we may behold his glory. Full sanctification is essential to this. Shall the unsanctified dwell with Christ in heaven? Shall unholy eyes behold his glory? It cannot be. How can we participate in the splendor and triumphs of the exalted head if we are not members of his body? and how can a holy head have impure and dishonest members? No, brethren, we must be holy, for Christ is holy. Uprightness of walk and cleanness of heart are absolutely requisite for the purposes of Christian life, whether here or hereafter. Those who live in sin are the servants of sin; only those who are renewed by the Holy Ghost unto truth, and holiness, and love, can hope to be partakers of holy joys and heavenly bliss.

III. I am compelled by shortness of time to be brief upon each point; but I must dwell for a little upon the third subject of consideration, which is this—TO WHOM THIS PRAYER IS DIRECTED. "Sanctify them through thy truth." No one can sanctify a soul but Almighty God, the great Father of spirits. He who made us must also make us holy, or we shall never attain that character. Our dear Savior calls the great God "*Holy Father*" in this prayer, and it is the part of the holy God to create holiness; while a holy *Father* can only be the Father of holy children, for like begets like. To you that believe in Jesus he gives power to become the sons of God, and a part of that power lies in becoming holy according to the manner and character of our Father who is in heaven. As we are holy, so do we bear the image of that Lord from heaven who, as the second man, is the firstborn to whom the many brethren are conformed. The holy Father in heaven will own those as his children upon

earth who are holy. The very nature of God should encourage us in our prayers for holiness; for he will not be slow to work in us to will and to do according to his perfect will.

Beloved, this sanctification is a work of God from its earliest stage. We go astray of ourselves, but we never return to the great Shepherd apart from his divine drawings. Regeneration, in which sanctification begins, is wholly the work of the Spirit of God. Our first discovery of wrong, and our first pang of penitence, are the work of divine grace. Every thought of holiness, and every desire after purity, must come from the Lord alone, for we are by nature wedded to iniquity. So also the ultimate conquest of sin in us, and the making us perfectly like to our Lord, must be entirely the work of the Lord God, who makes all things new, since we have no power to carry on so great a work of ourselves. This is a creation; can we create? This is a resurrection; can we raise the dead? Our degenerate nature can rot into a still direr putrefaction, but it can never return to purity or sweeten itself into perfection; this is of God and God alone. Sanctification is as much the work of God as the making of the heavens and the earth. Who is sufficient for these things? We go not even a step in sanctification in our own strength; whatever we think we advance of ourselves is but a fictitious progress which will lead to bitter disappointment. Real sanctification is entirely from first to last the work of the Spirit of the blessed God, whom the Father hath sent forth that he might sanctify his chosen ones. See, then, what a great thing sanctification is, and how necessary it is that our Lord should pray unto his Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth."

The truth alone will not sanctify a man. We may maintain an orthodox creed, and it is highly important that we should do so, but if it does not touch our heart and influence our character, what is the value of our orthodoxy? It is not the doctrine which of itself sanctifies, but the Father sanctifies by means of the doctrine. The truth is the element in which we are made to live in order to holiness. Falsehood leads to sin, truth leads to holiness; but there is a lying spirit, and there is also the Spirit of truth, and by these the error and the truth are used as means to an end. Truth must be applied with spiritual power to the mind, the conscience, and the heart, or else a man may receive the truth, and yet hold it in unrighteousness. I believe this to be the crowning work of God in man, that his people should be perfectly delivered from evil. He elected them that they might be a peculiar people, zealous for good works; he ransomed them that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify them unto himself; he effectually calls them to a high and holy vocation, even to virtue and true holiness.

Every work of the Spirit of God upon the new nature aims at the purification, the consecration, the perfecting of those whom God in love has taken to be his own. Yea, more; all the events of Providence around us work towards that one end: for this our joys and our sorrows, for this our pains of body and griefs of heart, for this our losses and our crosses—all these are sacred medicines by which we are cured of the disease of nature, and prepared for the enjoyment of perfect spiritual health. All that befalls us on our road to heaven is meant

to fit us for our journey's end. Our way through the wilderness is meant to try us, and to prove us, that our evils may be discovered, repented of, and overcome, and that thus we may be without fault before the throne at the last. We are being educated for the skies, meetened for the assembly of the perfect. It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we are struggling up towards it; and we know that when Jesus shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. We are rising; by hard wrestling, and long watching, and patient waiting, we are rising into holiness. These tribulations thresh our wheat and get the chaff away, these afflictions consume our dross and tin to make the gold more pure. All things work together for good to them that love God; and the net result of them all will be the presenting of the chosen unto God, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

Thus I have reminded you that the prayer for sanctification is offered to the divine Father, and this leads us to look out of ourselves and wholly, to our God. Do not set about the work of sanctification yourselves, as if you could perform it alone. Do not imagine that holiness will necessarily follow because you listen to an earnest preacher, or unite in sacred worship. My brethren, God himself must work within you; the Holy Ghost must inhabit you; and this can only come to you by faith in the Lord Jesus. Believe in him for your sanctification, even as you have believed for your pardon and justification. He alone can bestow sanctification upon you; for this is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

IV. This is a great subject, and I have but short time; so I have, in the last place, to notice with much brevity HOW SANCTIFICATION IS TO BE WROUGHT IN BELIEVERS, "Sanctify them *through thy truth*: thy word is truth." Beloved, observe how God has joined holiness and truth together. There has been a tendency of late to divide truth of doctrine from truth of precept. Men say that Christianity is a life and not a creed: this is a part truth, and very near akin to a lie. Christianity is a life which grows out of truth. Jesus Christ is the way and the truth as well as the life, and he is not properly received except he is accepted in that threefold character.

No holy life will be produced in us by the belief of falsehood. Sanctification in visible character comes out of edification in the inner faith of the heart, or otherwise it is a mere shell. Good works are the fruit of true faith, and true faith is a sincere belief of the truth. Every truth leads towards holiness; every error of doctrine, directly or indirectly, leads to sin. A twist of the understanding will inevitably bring a contortion of the life sooner or later. The straight line of truth drawn on the heart will produce a direct course of gracious walking in the life. Do not imagine that you can live on spiritual carrion and yet be in fine moral health, or that you can drink down poisonous error and yet lift up a face without spot before God. Even God himself only sanctifies us by the truth. Only that teaching will sanctify you which is taken from God's word, that teaching which is not true, nor the truth of God, cannot sanctify you. Error may puff you up, it may even make you think that you are sanctified; but there is a very serious difference between boasting of sanctification and being sanctified,

and a very grave difference between setting up to be superior to others and being really accepted before God. Believe me, God works sanctification in us by the truth, and by nothing else.

But what is the truth? There is the point. Is the truth that which I imagine to be revealed to me by some private communication? Am I to fancy that I enjoy some special revelation, and am I to order my life by voices, dreams, and impressions? Brethren, fall not into this common delusion. God's word to us is in Holy Scripture. All the truth that sanctifies men is in God's Word. Do not listen to those who cry, "Lo here!" and "Lo there!" I am plucked by the sleeve almost every day by crazy persons and pretenders who have revelations. One man tells me that God has sent a message to me by him; and I reply, "No, sir, the Lord knows where I dwell, and he is so near to me that he would not need to send to me by you." Another man announces in God's name a dogma which, on the face of it, is a lie against the Holy Ghost. He says the Spirit of God told him so-and-so; but we know that the Holy Ghost never contradicts himself. If your imaginary revelation is not according to this Word, it has no weight with us; and if it is according to this Word, it is no new thing. Brethren, this Bible is enough if the Lord does but use it, and quicken it by his Spirit in our hearts. Truth is neither your opinion, nor mine; your message, nor mine. Jesus says, "Thy word is truth." That which sanctifies men is not only truth, but it is the particular truth which is revealed in God's Word—"Thy word is truth." What a blessing it is that all the truth that is necessary to sanctify us is revealed in the Word of God, so that we have not to expend our energies upon discovering truth, but may, to our far greater profit, use revealed truth for its divine ends and purposes! There will be no more revelations; no more are needed. The canon is fixed and complete, and he that adds to it shall have added to him the plagues that are written in this Book. What need of more when here is enough for every practical purpose? "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

This being so, the truth which it is needful for us to receive is evidently fixed. You cannot change Holy Scripture. You may arrive more and more accurately at the original text; but for all practical purposes the text we have is correct enough, and our old Authorized Version is a sound one. Scripture itself cannot be broken; we cannot take from it nor add to it. The Lord has never re-written nor revised his Word, nor will he ever do so. *Our* teachings are full of errors, but the Spirit mistaketh not. We have the "Retractions": of Augustine, but there are no retractions with prophets and apostles. The faith has been delivered once for all to the saints, and it standeth fast for ever. "Thy word is truth." The Scripture alone is absolute truth, essential truth, decisive truth, authoritative truth, undiluted truth, eternal, everlasting truth. Truth given us in the word of God is that which is to sanctify all believers to the end of time: God will use it to that end.

Learn, then, my brothers, how earnestly you ought to search the Scriptures! See, my sisters, how studiously you should read this Book of God! If this is the truth, and the truth

with which God sanctifies us, let us learn it, hold it, and stand fast in it. To him that gave us the Book let us pledge ourselves never to depart from his testimonies. To us, at any rate, God's word is truth. "But they argue differently in the schools!" Let them argue. "But oratory with its flowery speech speaketh otherwise!" Let it speak: words are but air and tongues but clay. O God, "thy word is truth." "But philosophers have contradicted it!" Let them contradict it. Who are they? God's word is truth: we will go no farther while the world stands. But then let us be equally firm in our conviction that we do not know the truth aright unless it makes us holy. We do not hold truth in a true way unless it leads us to a true life. If you use the back of a knife it will not cut: truth hath its handle and its blade; see that you use it properly. You can make pure water kill a man; you must use every good thing aright or it will not be good. The truth, when fully used, will daily destroy sin, nourish grace, suggest noble desires, and urge to holy acts. O sirs, I do pray that we may by our lives adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. Some do not so. I say this to our shame and to my own hourly sorrow.

The one point of failure to be most deeply regretted would be a failure in the holiness of our church members. If you yourselves act as others do, what witness do you bear? If your families are not graciously ordered; if your business is not conducted upon principles of the strictest integrity; if your speech is questionable as to purity or truthfulness; if your lives are open to serious rebuke—how can God accept you or send a blessing on the Church to which you belong? It is all falsehood and deceit to talk about your being the people of God when even men of the world shame you. Your faith in the Lord Jesus must operate upon your lives to make you faithful and true, it must check you here, and excite you there; it must keep you back from this, and drive you on to that; it must constantly operate upon thought and speech and act, or else you know nothing of its saving power. How can I speak more distinctly and emphatically? Do not come to me with your experiences, and your convictions, and your professions, unless you sanctify the name of God in your lives. O brethren, we had better quit our professions if we do not live up to them. In the name of him who breathed this prayer just before his face was encrimsoned with the bloody sweat, let us cry mightily unto the Father, "Sanctify us through thy truth, thy Word is truth." As a people, we have stuck unto the Word of the Lord, but are we practically obeying it? We have determined as a congregation to keep the old ways; and I, for one, as the minister, am solemnly bound to the old faith. Oh that we might commend it by our holiness! Nothing is truth to me but this one Book, this infallibly inspired writing of the Spirit of God. It is incumbent upon us to show the hallowed influence of this Book. The vows of God are on us, that by our godly lives we should show forth his praises who has brought us out of darkness into his marvellous light. This Bible is our treasure. We prize each leaf of it. Let us bind it in the best fashion, in the best morocco of a clear, intelligent faith; then let us put a golden clasp upon it, and gild its edges by a life of love, and truth, and purity, and zeal. Thus shall we commend the volume to those who have never looked within its pages. Brethren, the

sacred roll, with its seven seals, must not be held in hands defiled and polluted; but with clean hands and pure heart we must hold it forth and publish it among men. God help us so to do for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John 17.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—107 (Song I.), 649, 645.