

Set Apart for Christ's Service

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, John 17 at verse 15. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake, I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. We finished at verse 16 last time. So we're looking at verses 17 to 19 this evening. Now we saw the prayer of verse 15 there.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. And these following verses 17 to 19 really give a context to that. Because we're going to see that the prayer for the disciples to be kept by the Father is specific to the circumstances that they will be set in in the world.

As they are sent forth by Jesus into the world. Because this is really dealing with the disciples' mission, gospel mission to the world. And therefore, the prayer that they be kept is obviously important and relevant in relation to that.

[1 : 1 4] Because they are going to experience such a lot of really hard persecuting opposition. And therefore, as they take the gospel into the world, having been sent by the Lord and commissioned by the Lord.

Therefore, the Father is being asked by Jesus that they would be kept in relation to their being sent and going into the world.

And all the way through these verses 17 to 19, we'll find that there is a close correspondence between Jesus himself having been sent by the Father into the world and his sending of the disciples into the world.

As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And that's important as well that we keep sight of the correspondence that's there without taking it into too much detail.

And yet there is an important detail or two that we need to take account of. Let me first of all deal with this word sanctify. Because if we can just clear the ground as to what that means, then that will lead us into the other parts of these verses.

[2 : 2 3] Sanctify them in the truth. And then he mentions there, for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Sanctify, I'm sure you know this already, means both to set apart and also to make holy. We are sanctified in the sense of set apart to God.

God sets us apart for himself. You know that there were certain inanimate objects in the Old Testament. For example, the vessels in the sanctuary or in the temple that were referred to as being sanctified.

So sanctified really in that sense of it means being set apart by God for a specific, for a holy use, to be gods and to belong to God. But the other part or the other aspect of the meaning of sanctify is to make holy.

We think about us being made holy, progressing in holiness as we would want to be. And that's by the work of the Holy Spirit within us. We'll see the Holy Spirit referred to tonight as well.

[3 : 2 9] Now, the word that's used here is the same word in each instance. Although in one case it's translated there, consecrate in relation to Jesus. But it's exactly the same word as is translated sanctify in the other instances here in these verses.

So because it's the same word that's used, it's an important aspect of interpreting the Bible or just getting to the meaning of verses. That whatever the one word is used within the space of one verse or two verses, we would actually give it the same meaning.

So whether it's used here of the disciples being sanctified by the Father or of Jesus sanctifying himself, it's best to keep the same translation.

And the word sanctify in this case would be set apart. And if you take that meaning, it runs something like this. Set them apart in the truth.

Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake, I set myself apart that they also may be set apart in the truth.

[4 : 39] In our case, being set apart is something that makes or that comes before the being made holy.

The first part of God's work of sanctification is setting us apart. The work of making us holy follows on from that. But here we are taking it tonight that the word in this context really means being set apart.

That specifically is the word in its meaning here. And in John's gospel, it's very interesting that whenever he uses this word, it is always in relation to mission.

Either the mission of Jesus from the Father into the world or also here joined to that. There is the mission of the disciples as Jesus sends them into the world.

So the word sanctify, set apart, has a very, very specific connection in John with the church's mission, with actually going into the world with gospel mission and all that's involved in that, as well as Jesus' own mission or task or work in the world for his people.

[5 : 49] So that's the meaning of sanctify in this context. Secondly, let's look at how it's actually sanctified to serve. It means, as we said, to be set apart, but it's in relation to serving God and therefore in being sent into the world to be the servants of God.

First of all, notice the Father sent the Son or consecrated the Son into the world. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

In other words, the Father set the Son specifically apart for this mission so that he would come into the servant of the Father in the sense in which we usually think of that in the working out of our salvation.

He came and was sent for a specific mission, a specific work. That was something that was begun in eternity within the very depths of the Trinity. You could say the Son was commissioned by the Father in eternity to carry out this work, which was carried out, as we would say, in time or in the space of this world of time and sense.

So the Son was sent by the Father, set apart, if you like, by the Father, and then sent into this work of mission especially.

[7 : 14] And then he refers to the Son setting the disciples apart. He's here saying that they might be sanctified in truth.

Sanctify them in your truth. Your word is truth. He's praying that the disciples will be set apart as the Son was set apart by the Father, so that the Father will set the disciples apart as Jesus will send them into the world as his missionaries.

And that's why Jesus was sent into the world, but also why the disciples are sent by Jesus into the world. It's specifically to actually bear fruit in terms of mission work, in terms of bringing the gospel into that world, which, of course, is going to be so hostile to them.

Now, that still remains, as you well know, a very basic purpose, why we are disciples, what it means to be disciples of Jesus, of God.

And chapter 15, there you remember how Jesus, there in chapter 15, referred to the disciples bearing fruit. Where he says in verse 16, You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you.

[8 : 39] Something very similar to being set apart. I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should.

And it seems very clear from that, that the choice of Jesus, of these disciples, and appointing them is with the specific purpose of bearing fruit.

But it's not just bearing fruit for their own satisfaction, for their own growth in holiness, but it's bearing fruit specifically for their fruit to abide. It really comes to pretty much the same thing, if not identical.

And there's such a lot in that verse itself. You didn't choose me, it wasn't you yourselves, did not choose to be my disciples.

I chose you. That's where I chose you out of the world. But you notice, it doesn't leave it there. I chose you and I appointed you. It's not just a matter of a specific choice.

[9 : 41] It's also an actual appointment or a setting apart of them. And that was with a view to them bearing the kind of fruit that would remain the fruit of a ministry in the gospel.

So that's why they need to actually remember that they're going into a world that will hate them. As we read in chapter 15 a short time ago, don't be surprised if the world hates you.

Because if that is the case, he said, you know that it hated me before it hated you. And if you were of the world, the world would love you as its own.

But because I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. There's an inevitable hostility built into the interaction between Jesus' disciples as they take the gospel into the world and the world's response.

And of course, that doesn't mean that in every instance the world will remain utterly hostile. There will thankfully be individuals such as we ourselves who are taken out of our hostility by the grace of God, by the work of his spirit and made into disciples.

[10 : 50] Just like he was saying to these disciples. And not only will they know the hatred of the world, but that's why he's also saying to the Father to keep them from the evil one.

In verse 15, I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. He is committed to his disciples going into the world.

He doesn't want the Father to take them out of that situation when the going gets really tough. But he is praying that they will be kept by him from the evil one. So the disciples are set apart for this specific work.

Jesus was set apart for the work that he himself had to do. But there's also an emphasis here on the son setting himself apart. When he says, for their sake, I set myself apart so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

The son, Jesus, for the same reason that the Father sent him, sets himself apart.

[12 : 05] He is as committed to the work that the Father gave him to do as the Father was committed to sending him to do the work.

In other words, you have this marvelous combination in both the Father and the Son in being committed to the work that Jesus came to do.

But remember, that's especially, the work that Jesus came to do, this great mission that he was on, the scope of that mission, is really pretty much to do with his death and resurrection and return to the Father.

And everything that led up to his death, of course, as well. But these are the critical points of the mission of Jesus as sent by the Father into the world. His death and resurrection and return to the Father.

That's the scope of his mission. And here is the most amazing thing that you're seeing. That is what the Father commissioned him for. But that is what the Son himself consecrated or set himself apart for.

[13 : 09] Don't you love tonight your Father and Jesus, your Savior, because of the mutual commitment on their part to coming into the world to do this work and to accomplish it?

Don't you love the Father's commitment to sending the Son to this death and resurrection and his return? Don't you love the Son because of his total commitment to do this and to engage in this for the likes of you and I?

Don't you love the Son. What a wonderful consecration. What a wonderful setting apart that is of the Son by the Father, but also of the Son himself.

The marvel of our redemption as it's based on, as it's founded on, as it's grounded in the persons of the Trinity in the work that Jesus came to do.

So there's the sanctified, as we've said, that's in the sense of being set apart. Jesus was set apart for a specific work.

[14 : 19] The Son sets the disciples apart for the work of gospel ministry into the world. And the Son set himself apart to finish that work that the Father gave him to do and that he took upon himself to do.

But there's one other thing before we finish. Notice there's not just sanctify in the sense of set apart and sanctified for service, but thirdly sanctified in the truth.

Sanctify them, Jesus is saying to the Father. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. And then he says, for their sake, I sanctify myself that they also may be sanctified, set apart in the truth. Of course, Jesus himself is the truth in the personified sense. He came into the world, the Son of God, by the incarnation. There is the revelation of God.

As he said himself, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. He came to bring us from the Father's heart what God was like, what God is like, especially in regard to our redemption or salvation.

[15 : 29] And that is in the Son. It's been revealed in Jesus as this wonderful gospel begins. In the beginning was the word. Who would expect that that one word, the word, would be so rich in meaning as it is applied to Jesus the Son?

Because it means communication. The communication from God is in the person of his Son. And that, of course, has been committed to writing in the sense in which we have the scriptures. It's the same as Jesus came to reveal God. And that's been encapsulated now, engrossed in the scriptures, the Old and New Testament.

And as you take it in its combination as the written word of scripture, the written word of God, you regard that as the truth. That's all the source of your information as to what the truth is.

It's there. It's there. And you don't go outside of that to actually get a definition of the truth of God. It's there. It's in Jesus. And it's there in the written word.

[16 : 40] And it's important that we also take that on board. Because when we think of our mission to the world as God's disciples, it's never detached from the truth of God.

Set them apart in the truth. I'm setting myself apart, he said, so that they might be set apart in the truth. In other words, when you begin to think of our mission to the world, our gospel mission, our evangelism, our reaching out, our witness, our testimony to God as a church.

It cannot be detached from our conformity to God's truth. The more we conform to God's truth, the more we are fitted into this process that Jesus is speaking of, being sanctified in the truth, being set apart in the truth.

That's really where we have to be grounded. That's why it's so, so important to maintain our view of scripture that we have.

Because whenever you leave that and whenever you start to doubt that, whenever you begin to give in your mind some space to the idea that perhaps actually this really is not all reliable.

[18 : 01] And that some of the historical passages are not really things you could verify. Once you start actually taking these sort of ideas into your mind, you're beginning to just, as it were, take away some of what the truth itself is to you and what it must be to you.

And you're beginning to just scrape away some of the detail as to what the truth consists of. So here he's saying, sanctify them in the truth.

And in relation to that, it also is not just the word in Jesus and the word written. He also mentions the Holy Spirit in a very important way.

To go back to chapter 15, this is something that's very closely related to being set apart or sanctified in the truth. Chapter 15, and there at verse 26.

When the helper, that's the Holy Spirit comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

[19 : 15] And you also will bear witness because you've been with me from the beginning. In other words, the witnessing the testimony of the church in the gospel and through the gospel has its roots in the Holy Spirit, being the Spirit of truth, who bears witness to Jesus to us.

And he also brings that, he brings that not only into our own experience, but actually his ministry is the ministry that enables us to go with this word into the world.

If you go to chapter 16, there you find verses 13 and 14, again, talking of the coming of the Spirit. When the Spirit of truth, notice he's again called the Spirit of truth.

When he comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak. And he will declare to you the things that are to come.

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. So there you have the work of the Holy Spirit conjoined to us being set apart for God and the ministry that we have in terms of being disciples of Christ in the world.

[20 : 34] All of these wonderfully important truths are inseparably joined together in that. The setting apart by Jesus of his disciples, just as the setting apart of the Son was by the Father.

And as well as that, the leadership, the guidance, the teaching of the Holy Spirit in relation to our own lives and our lives as disciples in the world as well.

There's one other thing, going back to the correspondence that we mentioned between Jesus and our being sent as his disciples into the world. Go back again to the way it's put there in verse 18. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. There's a closely related passage there also later on in John's Gospel where Jesus appeared after the resurrection in chapter 20. And very similar words there. And it's interesting the kind of emphasis in them as well. Jesus said to them, verse 21 of chapter 20, Peace be with you.

[21 : 44] As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit.

Difficulties there, I don't want to go into just now. But the connection really is the Holy Spirit. In order to them being sent out and commissioned and there actually in anticipation of them going out into the world as his disciples, just as you have in chapter 17, the Holy Spirit figures centrally and prominently in that.

But what does he mean, as you sent me into the world, so I have sent you? What exactly does as and so mean in that context?

Is it just simply a general reference to the Son having been sent into the world and now the Son is sending the disciples into the world?

Is it just at that level of generality or is there something more? Well, I think there's something more. And there's something more really involves the kind of thing you find in the Son's own experience and consecration and setting apart of himself that forms the pattern for us in being set apart for him.

[23 : 05] Because the Son's willing obedience is really essentially the pattern for us in our being sent by him and our being willing to go for him into the world.

Think of chapter 13, for example, there, the food washing incident. But you find it there at verse 4, when he had come to, knowing all that the Father had given all things into his hand and that he was going, he had come from God and was going back to God, he rose from supper and laid aside his outer garments and taking a towel, he tied it round his waist.

Now, we've seen that on other occasions, that that's really an outward representation of Jesus the servant. That is setting out how he had come to wash feet, to be of service to his people, in other words, spiritually especially.

But there's the pattern for our obedience as his disciples. This is how he came. This is part of how he came from the Father, what the Father required of him.

And so, as he was sent, even so he's sending us with the same commitment to actually being servants for him and unto him.

[24 : 29] You have the same in that same chapter 13, verses 14 and 15, where again, In other words, Jesus, in his coming and his being sent by the Father, he put our needs ahead of his own comforts.

He humbled himself in order that we ultimately would be exalted. This is exactly the same as you find in different words in that great chapter of Paul's and second, in the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

It's very well known to you. I'll just finish by reading some verses from it, because this is exactly what Jesus was praying for in John 17 there. Philippians 2 and verses 3 to 8, first of all, where Paul is saying, Do nothing from rivalry or deceit or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind in you, for among yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of a cross.

So there you see the same pattern, and that's the pattern, the same pattern as John 17, as you have sent me into the world, even so I am sending them.

[26 : 22] In like manner, I am sending them. And Philippians 2, as you know, goes on in verse 12 and verses 14 to 16 especially.

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as

lights in the world, holding fast.

Or you could take it as holding forth the word of life. That is discipleship. That is what it means to have been set apart by Jesus, to be his witnesses, sent into the world, so as to bear testimony to him, and so as to be set apart for him and for his service and for his glory.

Set apart, set apart to serve, set apart in the truth. Lord of God, we thank you for the wonderful teaching of your word.

Although we find it so challenging when we see ourselves, O Lord, and know that in ourselves we come so far short of being as willing, as obedient as we are required to be, especially when we come to consider the pattern that you set us in your own being sent by the Father into the world, and your willing taking up of that obedient service.

[28 : 03] We thank you, Lord, that despite all our imperfections, your perfection remains intact and always will. We thank you that that is the perfection upon which we tonight are accepted, and that we would stand upon as we seek not only our own standing in your presence, but also our relation to the world around us.

Help us, Lord, we pray, to understand more fully the connections between our being sent as your disciples into the world with the gospel, and you're being sent into the world from the Father on that foundational work of redemption.

We thank you for all the assistance that we receive, especially from the leadership of your Spirit.

Lord, we pray that your Spirit will continue to bear testimony in our hearts, and that you would bear testimony through us also by his ministry.

We pray especially, Lord, in these days of confinement and difficulty and challenge, that we may nevertheless know that you are leading us, that you are conducting us, that you are going before us, that you are working in us, that you have indeed commissioned us to bear fruit and appointed us so that our fruit might remain.

We ask your blessing, as we heard, for the congregation we belong to, for our neighbourhoods and for all those that we have contact with in these times. Lord, help us, we pray, to be consistent in our own private lives and of public witness, and grant that in all our relationships we may value the binding effect of your Spirit and your truth as we seek to live on us, your people.

[29 : 45] Hear us then, we pray now, and pardon our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen.