

October 25, 2015  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
Community Baptist Church  
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Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as we prepare to study John 17:17-19.

1. What does “sanctify” mean other than to set apart?
2. Is there such a thing as absolute truth? If so, who has it?
3. How does Christ’s sending His followers into the world compare to God the Father sending Him into the world?
4. How did Christ consecrate Himself in behalf of His people?
5. What should happen to people when they read and study the Bible?

### **GOD’S PLAN FOR COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH John 17:17-19**

At first blush, the title of this sermon seems arrogant or presumptuous or just plain foolish. But I am as sincere as I can be in choosing these words to introduce this sermon. I have been the pastor of this assembly of believers for thirty years. Time has passed so quickly. But in that time, I have learned many important lessons.

I have learned to stay put and finish the job God called me to do. This is not always easy when the “call” to the gospel ministry really eclipses human comprehension. How can I explain to mere humans what it is like for God to pick out a particular person to spend his life shaping and molding us humans to be more like Christ? How

can I explain such an idea to someone when it is difficult for me to grasp all that is involved?

I am content to identify with Jeremiah, who was sometimes baffled about his calling to be a spokesman for God. God told him, “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.*” Then I said, “*Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.*” But the LORD said to me, “*Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.*” Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, “*Behold, I have put my words in your mouth*” (Jeremiah 1:5-9).

I am just as certain that I prepared for this task where God intended me to prepare and how God intended for me to prepare. And I am fully convinced that I have ministered to and with the very people God intended me to minister to where God intended me to minister. It has been a joy to watch people become more like Christ over the years. However, I would be less than truthful to imply that I have always enjoyed the task God gave me. At times I have not. At times I have not appreciated the city where God placed me to serve Him. And there have certainly been many times when I have been a bit confused about the direction this assembly should pursue.

That is not to conclude that I have doubted God’s revealed plan for the Church universal in Scripture. I have been fully convinced of that from the first day on the job. But there have been times when I have considered what people expect, what peers are doing, what the famous preachers do, and how the big, important ministries operate. Those are times when I get my eyes off from God’s plan for Community Baptist Church and briefly entertain the notion that it is important to measure up to and be acceptable to faltering, fellow humans.

Now back to the controversy stirred by the title of this sermon. What is God’s plan for this assembly, and how can I be sure it is the correct one? Jesus Christ, our Savior, King, Redeemer, Creator, and Judge requested very plainly in our text that God the Father would make His followers unique, distinct in this world, through His Word,

the Bible. When I have been plagued by doubts, I have always come back to this truth, “Sanctify God’s people with God’s Word.” When I have been accused of being out of touch or too much like a teacher or irrelevant or not evangelistic, I come back to this truth, “Preach the Word, because that is God’s plan.” When people have told me that I am an able or gifted preacher, in my heart I respond, “Pay no attention to that, just keep unpacking the Bible.”

For thirty years I have tried to consistently and systematically unpack the truth of the Bible so that we all can know what God our Creator and Judge intends for us to know. In the process, I have become convinced that this is the most important work in eternity. As I stand before God one day to give an account for the work, I do not expect to hear God ask, “Were you popular? Were you well liked? Did you build a well-known work? Did the world accept you?” I do expect to hear one question from God. “Did you faithfully unfold My self-revelation, the message of the Bible, to people so that I could make them more like Myself?” That is God’s plan for Community Baptist Church.

### **God Makes Us Holy Through the Truth.**

God the Son requested the Father to make us, His followers, holy. His request was, *Sanctify them in the truth (v.17a)*. That is not a secret, deeply theological matter. It is simply a request for God to make us like Himself. But doesn’t everyone one in this culture know that to use the word “holy” is a good way to alienate most people? Many of us have been told this. It is true that “holy” does sound like a deeply theological word. It even sounds a bit puritanical. It sounds like something normal folks do not want to do or be. Okay, at least that last statement is exactly right.

The most basic meaning of the word holy (*hagiozo*) could be an adjective for God. He is distinct from all His creation because creation is infected with sin. He is above all that we can think or imagine because our wisdom is bounded by the knowledge and experience of this world, the fallen creation. That is what holy is like. Therefore, because this is God’s nature, His created beings that did not fall into sin (holy angels) shout “Holy” a lot. Isaiah saw that *one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;*

*the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isaiah 6:3)*. John saw in God’s throne room in heaven *four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Revelation 4:8)*.

Jesus prayed that God the Father would make His followers like that. Wow! How can that idea fit in real life? Jesus prayed that we who follow Him will be set apart from the norm or from the crowd. He desires for God to make us distinct, obviously non-conforming. Most of all, sanctify means to be becoming like our Savior.

How can that happen to us mere humans? We are sinful by nature. We are God’s enemies by nature. We are of our father the devil by nature. What could possibly turn us around to shape us in the character of God?

At the same time our Savior asked the Heavenly Father to make us distinct from a sinful world, He also requested that truth will be exalted. That’s a key. In human history truth has always been a topic of debate. The classic illustration of the dilemma was a governor named Pilate. In about the year 30, he was stuck in utter confusion about what to do with the innocent man Jesus. If he did not pacify the crowd that clamored for Jesus’ blood, they could get him fired by Rome. If he pacified the crowd, he would go against his conscience, his wife’s warning and the real truth. In that quandary, he expressed the human opinion of truth well when he seemed to smirk at Jesus, “What is truth?” Jesus had just told Pilate that He came to reveal the truth and everyone who is of the truth listens to Him. That is truth.

Jesus made it clear that truth is more concrete and less debatable than human history indicates. Indeed it is. Two men in the old west had an argument. To settle the matter, they went to a judge for arbitration. The plaintiff made his case. He was very eloquent and persuasive in his reasoning. When he finished, the judge nodded in approval and said, “That’s right, that’s right.” On hearing this, the defendant jumped up and said, “Wait a second, judge, you haven’t even heard my side of the case yet.” So the judge told the defendant to state his case. And he, too, was very persuasive and eloquent. When he finished, the judge said, “That’s right, that’s right.” When the clerk of court heard this, he jumped up and said, “Judge, they both can’t be right.” The judge looked at the clerk of court and said, “That’s

right, that's right." That is where the foolish conclusion that truth is relative leads.

We live in a world that has concluded that truth is whatever the individual says it is. What is true for you may not be true for me and vice versa. The only thing it appears most people can agree on in this debate is that the Bible is not true. God's plan for Community Baptist Church is to conclude that truth is absolute because God's Word defines truth.

Therefore, the means for us becoming distinct is through knowing and doing God's Word. Jesus prayed that we will be sanctified by truth and then affirmed, *your word is truth (v.17b)*. The astonishing nature of the Bible is stated when we read that God has breathed out His Word. Most people are aware that the passage of Scripture by which God has motivated me in ministry is 2 Timothy 3:16-17: *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work*. That means that all Scripture is the expression of God's character and person. Scripture reveals to us the righteous nature of our Creator in whose image He made us. Therefore, Scripture reveals the God-approved standard of righteousness. Therefore, also, Scripture is the standard of absolute truth. All opinions, conclusions, plans and purposes must be measured against the standard of perfect truth. Whatever human wisdom concludes that is contrary to the clear teaching and the principles of Scripture is in error or is unrighteousness.

Because it is truth, it is profitable to us. We profit from four specific applications of the Bible. First, we profit from teaching. This means that the Bible informs us. It removes our ignorance about God, His plans, and His purposes. It removes our ignorance and errant opinions about ourselves. Second, the Bible is profitable for reproof. The Bible reveals where and why we are wrong in our thinking and actions. The Bible reveals the danger of being wrong. Third, the Bible is profitable for correction. This third work of the Bible is to straighten us up. Its teaching takes the crooks and turns out of our character. Fourth, the Bible is profitable for discipline in righteousness. First the Bible reveals righteousness, and then the

Bible's lessons and messages goad us to walk in line with that standard.

The result of these four works is change. When the Bible does its work in our hearts, mere humans who once were God's enemies are equipped and able to do work that brings glory to God. Why would so-called teachers and preachers of the "Church" waste their time talking to assemblies about popular ideas? Such human-centered philosophies make us more like fellow humans but do not equip us for doing work that glorifies God. Popular trends certainly do not prepare us to meet the Eternal Judge. But submitting to this fourfold work of God's Word will change us.

John Stott in *Authentic Christianity* noted: "We need to repent of the haughty way in which we sometimes stand in judgment upon Scripture and must learn to sit humbly under its judgments instead. If we come to Scripture with our minds made up, expecting to hear from it only an echo of our own thoughts and never the thunderclap of God's, then indeed he will not speak to us and we shall only be confirmed in our own prejudices. We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior."

### **God Sends Us into the World.**

As Jesus prayed for us, He referred to His coming into this world. He prayed, *As you sent me into the world (v.18a)*. We need to realize that it was the triune God who sent God the Son into the world. This is a necessary conclusion because God the Son came into the world with all the authority of God. The verb translated sent is the well-known word *apostello*. It means to send with authority. It referred to the action of a superior, like a king, who commissioned someone to take his message or to represent him.

Jesus demonstrated that kind of authority from the Heavenly Father. He revealed it in word. The people were astonished at His teaching, concluding that He had to be sent from God. He revealed it in works. He did miracles that only God can do. He appealed to these evidences of His divine authority when He asked people to believe Him.

And with all that authority of God in hand, God the Son came to a world that is opposed to Him. No picture illustrates this better than Jesus' story about the vineyard owner who sent his son to men who had taken over his vineyard (Mat. 21:33-40). It is the story of Christ. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit created this "vineyard" called the world. It was perfect in creation. Satan has usurped authority over it for a time. The Father sent the Son as His authoritative representative. Worldlings motivated by Satan killed Him. That was all God's plan as the Son came into the world to win salvation for us sinners.

In the same way God sent Christ into the world, so God the Son has already sent us into the world. He prayed, *so I have sent them into the world (v.18b)*. Our Savior has commissioned us to do His work. His words, *so I have sent them*, mean that Christ sends us His followers with the same kind of authority by which the Father sent the Son into the world. Because that is true, when we speak the Word of God, we speak with the authority of God. Human approval is not necessary. Positive response is not even necessary to affirm the message of the Bible. The follower of Christ owns Christ's authority to speak for Him. Obviously, that authority only covers our speaking His Word.

Because Christ sent us out like God sent Him out, we also ought to speak like Christ spoke. Even within the immediate context of this prayer, Jesus affirmed, *"I have given them the words that You gave Me" (John 17:8)*. He said, *"I have given them Your word" (John 17:14)*. This affirmation is in accord with the same kind of thing Jesus told people who resisted Him. He told them, *"I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him" (John 8:26)*.

Jesus has sent us out with His authority to represent Him. Therefore, it is important for us to know the Bible, talk about the Bible, and illustrate the Bible in life.

We do this in life because our Savior's work must be carried out in the world. We know from repeated statements in the Bible that the Church is in the world but not of the world. Because that is true, part of our work in the world is to build up the people who meet with this assembly for regular preaching and teaching. We often resort to Paul's instruction to the church in Ephesus for guidance about our

typical work as an assembly. He wrote that Christ *gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Ephesians 4:11-14)*.

In the larger scope, this is taking place in the world, not in heaven. But we are not being built up to keep the testimony within the assembly. God's plan for Community Baptist Church is that He put us here to impact the world. That should be a rather simple task. The world will notice people who live among them *with a unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God*, as we are according to the Ephesian instruction. Sometimes the people who rub elbows with us will be convicted of sin while we reason with them from Scripture. Sometimes they will be convicted of sin as the Holy Spirit works through our testimonies. Sometimes God begins to draw them to Christ through our good works.

We err to think that we can take Christian doctrine we learn in the assembly and force the world to live according to it. The world still generally hates Christ, hates His truth, and will hate those who bring it. Nevertheless, God's plan for Community Baptist Church is to learn about Him in our meetings, and go to show Him to the world. The world might be quick to embrace religion, but they never embrace God's truth apart from God's miracle of regeneration in their lives.

We are responsible for the testimony; God is responsible for the results. God has provided us with everything that is necessary for this kind of work in the world.

### **God Sanctified Himself for Our Benefit.**

This is a somewhat shocking statement. But we do read here that God the Son set Himself to do the Father's will. He prayed, *And for their sake I consecrate myself (v.19a)*. We are forced to wonder, "How was God making Himself holy?" This sounds like heresy.

Jesus Christ, God the Son, is fully God. Being co-equal with God, it is impossible that He sinned or came up short in any way. Because He never missed the divine standard of righteousness, how could anyone conclude that He sanctified Himself?

The ESV translation helps us out here by using the word *consecrate*. The Greek word translated *consecrate* is the same word translated *holy* or *sanctified* in most of the places it occurs in almost all English translations. As the action applied to God the Son at this juncture in His ministry, *consecrate* is a better interpretation. Okay, but even then, how could God the Son become more consecrated?

Let's briefly review the purpose and mission of Christ. As God, He laid aside His glory and came to earth as one of us (Phil. 2:5). As the representative of the Trinity, His purpose was to live perfectly under the law, be arrested, tortured, executed, buried, rise again and ascend back to the Father in heaven. As one of us (fully man) that would be a horrifying ministry. Try to imagine living every single day in perfect accord with the law. That is horrifying enough to us. Now try to imagine being arrested, tortured, and lied about. And the whole time speaking nothing in your defense. We don't even want to imagine the agony and trauma of the cross! And worst of all, to be abandoned by God the Father while he bore our sins.

Jesus Christ the God man, moments before the soldiers came to take Him away, set Himself aside from normal feelings and desires. In these last moments, He dedicated Himself anew to finish the task of redemption.

Our Savior dedicated Himself to our redemption. How easy it would have been for God the Son to decide that sin was our choice, and we ought to face the consequences. But for the sake of the disciples, God the Son set His heart on finishing the task. For the sake of talkative, proud, and impulsive Peter. For the sake of doubting Thomas. For the sake of Simon the Zealot who longed for political uprising. For the sake of ten of these eleven men who would run away from Him and hide.

Most of all, for our sake Jesus consciously, purposely set Himself outside the parameters of normal, human expectations. That is what holy looks like. Our Savior entrenched Himself in deeper holiness in order that I might be given free salvation. Just how valuable is His consecration to us?

God the Son's holiness demands our holiness. Jesus prayed, *that they also may be sanctified in truth (v.19b)*. Oh! As Jesus consecrated Himself, so we are to be consecrated. We have no reason not to be. Our Savior has provided everything necessary to make us holy. That is the story of the Bible. "What would Jesus do?" is incredibly plain. The reading, meditating, teaching, and preaching of the Bible equips us to every work that God calls good. Good works accomplished in a sinful world are distinct or unique. Because the world is the norm, a life that reflects the character of God will obviously be a life that is set outside the normal boundaries.

That is what Christ accomplished for us on the cross. He provided the means for us to have sins forgiven. Theologians call the initial forgiving of sins positional sanctification. Jesus also provided the means for us to be becoming more like Him. Theologians call that progressive sanctification. He provided the means for us to one day be just like Him. Theologians call that perfect sanctification. The Bible identifies the boundaries in which all of those works take place.

Therefore, our Savior has every right to expect us to follow His example of dedicating ourselves to the same end – being sanctified in truth. Peter challenged us to that end like this. *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:14-19)*.

"Holy" is not a deeply theological term. "Holy" is not a scary lifestyle practiced only by ancient Puritans of ages long ago. "Holy" is not radical, anti-social living. Holy is God. Holy is being unique, distinct, consecrated. God gave us the Bible to show us what unique is, why unique is necessary, how we become unique, and to challenge us to live uniquely in order to reveal our gracious Savior to the whole world. That is God's plan for Community Baptist Church. It has been for the past 30 years. It will be for the next 30 years or for as long as

God keeps this assembly in existence. Let's praise God for His amazing plan.