

Cleansing for service...
A series on Sanctification: part 2 (E. Radmacher)

1. Having described the Father's concerned care for all believers in the prior verse (John 15:2), Jesus addresses His men in particular. In John 15:3 He tells them that the process of "cleansing" has been completed by His Father through the instruction they have received from Him. The direct implication is that they are therefore "fruiting" branches, and that their "season" of fruitfulness is upon them. Does the word "cleansing" used here in the context of: a) cleansing from the penalty of sin (justification) or b) cleansing and purifying our minds for service (sanctification)?

Jesus' use of *kathairō* seems purposefully to have both a horticultural and religious sense, meaning both "to prune" and "to purify." (1) This is similar to the command in Ephesians 5:25-27 for husbands to love their wives like Christ loved the church. In that command the analogy is developed that Jesus "cleansed" the church by washing her with the "word" in order to present her to Himself as "holy and blameless." Similarly, Jesus affirms that He has "purified" the disciples through His instruction. When Jesus says He has cleansed them with the words He has spoken to them, He must be reminding them of all that He has said in chapters thirteen and fourteen, especially the tremendous teachings of chapter fourteen.

God uses His Word to purge those things from our lives that keep us, and others, from bearing fruit. Even so, that is not the focal point of what Jesus is saying. Rather, He is saying that the disciples have prepared for fruitfulness, something which will be defined more fully later, by the action of the Father as He has used Jesus' teaching to "purify" them in the sense of making them fit for service.

The cleansing to which Jesus alludes should not be seen as the believer's cleansing from the penalty of sin that occurs at the time of the new birth (cf. John 13:10). This is not justification truth. Rather, this cleansing is a sanctification truth. This is 1 John 1:9 forgiveness and confession. This, again, is seen in the nature of the purpose of the cleansing. The cleansing to which Jesus refers has prepared them for service, not for heaven. Believing in the Jesus of the Bible give us heaven-a gift of life-but the process of disciple making prepares us for service-the stewardship of that life.

Again, this interpretation fits the context best since service is in view and is, by nature of its being commanded by Christ, something a believer may or may not do. Those who would see this as justification cleansing would hear Jesus saying, "You are all saved (v. 3). And you will demonstrate that salvation by bearing fruit (v. 4)." Rather, we should notice how these words parallel so well what Jesus did to them in John 13:4-17. He confronted their sinful attitudes and prepared them for service with a model (i.e., show and tell).

Contrary to seeing this as the cleansing from the penalty of sin that occurs at our justification-salvation, this verse likely has the concept of Old Testament ceremonial cleansing in view. When a priest entered into his period of service in the temple, he began first by going through the process of becoming ceremonially clean before the Lord. This included washings as well as offering certain sacrifices for his sin. When he had completed the cleansing process, he was qualified to serve. This is what Jesus is picturing here more than the idea of God purging specific sins from someone's life.

At the beginning of this discourse the disciples were still egotistical and self-centered, not ready to serve. Jesus had washed their feet and given them an example of humble service to follow. But, regardless of their immature attitudes, the disciples had indeed been set apart to serve God and were now acceptable to Him. So, though the foot washing was not a spiritually cleansing ceremony, Jesus may be alluding to it here as a parallel to the priest' washing as he entered the temple to serve. This may also help us understand the significance of what Jesus is going to say in verse sixteen. As the priests were chosen by God to serve in God's program, so too, the disciples were chosen by Jesus. And, as the priests had first to be made fit to serve by being "cleansed" before entering into service, so too the disciples were "cleansed" by Jesus' instruction, including His washing their feet.

Cleansing for service...

A series on Sanctification: part 2 (E. Radmacher) (page 2)

2. How is this concept applied?

The best explanation is by way of example. A very special event comes to mind that occurred in January of 1989. A dear friend, Lorelei Dedini had a serious recurrence of the breast cancer that had gone into remission five years before. Her doctors told her that she had six months to a year to live. But what had really troubled her was the statement of some of her Christian friends, who had prayed for her, that God was going to heal her.

"How do they know that," she said. "God didn't tell me that."

Well, we looked at the Word and prayed and I said, "Now, I would listen to your doctor and make plans. If God chooses to heal you, well and good. But it appears that you may have a short amount of time to do some strategic things."

Several weeks later the Dedini's took my wife and me to a lovely dinner in Saratoga. Sitting across from me, Lorelei rejoiced, "God is so good."

Strange words from a lovely lady dying at forty-seven? "Tell me about it," I responded.

"Well, some people get taken so suddenly. God has given me time. There are things that we needed to straighten out." And she went on to spell some of them out. "God is so good," she repeated.

Shortly thereafter, I had occasion to take Lorelei with me to a preaching engagement in Los Altos. The wonderful sixty-voice youth choir was singing a rather jubilant and rocking rendition of "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." Lorelei elbowed me in the side and said, "Get a load of this. They're singing it and I'm doing it." When they finished, I had her step up to the pulpit with me. She was wearing a bonnet on her head because of the devastating work the chemotherapy had done to her lovely head of hair.

She began her testimony of the power of God's Word turning to the youth choir, "You have been singing it and I am doing it," and then continued to the whole audience. I shall never forget the scene at the altar after the service. In forty years of ministry, I have never had so many people come forward with responses. One stands out. A psychiatrist gave her his card and asked her to make an appointment.

"Oh, thank you doctor. But I don't need an appointment." She said.

"I know you don't. But I do," he replied.

When I would fly through San Jose every couple of weeks or so, I would call on Lorelei and her husband Dominic. On one occasion I remember holding her chest X-rays up against the patio door light and saying, "Lorelei, I believe you are going to see Jesus before I do, and when you do, tell Him I am coming, too." We smiled.

Several weeks later, I called from the airport, and Dominic answered, "Are you coming over? I will get her ready. " Upon entering, I heard her weakened voice say, "It's the Word! It's the Word! That's what you said and it's true." She grabbed my arm as I got close to her emaciated body still radiating Christ's love as she was almost "finally home."

Lorelei wrote her own funeral service that was held before a full crowd at Calvary Church. As a result of the funeral service, a good friend was led to Christ by her husband, Dominic.

Cleansing for service...
A series on Sanctification: part 2 (E. Radmacher) (page 3)

This kind of miracle in the lives of believers is replicated over and over again when we dare to take seriously the power of the Word of God. "Now you are clean," Jesus said, "through the Word which I have spoken unto you." God's Word purges those things from our lives that keep us from bearing fruit.

References:

1. Richard, "Expressions of Double Meaning and Their Function in the Gospel of John.," 102.

The literary arrangement of the Gospel of John is in 5 parts:

Prologue (John 1:1-18)

The Word who created the world became flesh in order to reveal God and give life to those who believe in Him.

Jesus' Ministry to the Nation (John 1:19-12:50)

John's testimony and Jesus' signs and public discourses reveal that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that one may experience an abundant, unending and refreshing, life by believing in Him.

Jesus' Ministry to His Apostles (John 13-17)

Jesus further revealed the Father to His disciples as He comforted and encouraged them in His final words and prayer.

Jesus' Passion and Resurrection (John 18-21)

Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested, tried, and crucified, dying and raising from the dead, thereby demonstrating that He is the Son of God and producing joy and faith in those who witnessed His resurrection.

Epilogue (John 21)

Jesus restored Peter to leadership by the Sea of Tiberias.

Take a moment to read the whole book of John with this outline, and see if it helps you understand the Gospel of John better!

This article was adapted from [The Disciplemaker: What Matters Most to Jesus](#) by Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher (Salem: Charis Press, ©2001) and used by permission from its authors. Jesus speaks to His believing, though frail, disciples with a message that goes beyond justification, to one of discipleship (sanctification). This post-justification work of God is the concern of Jesus as He teaches His disciples in His final hours before His sacrifice on the cross. These last words take on special significance as Jesus seeks to instruct His disciples who are about to be scattered and even betray Him. In spite of this knowledge Jesus knows that He must provide comfort, direction, and prayer to guide them to be the kind of men who would one day be pillars of the Church, and evangelists to the ends of the Roman Empire. Drs. Derickson and Radmacher provide for the reader a masterful study of these wonderful chapters in John.

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2. How is this concept applied?